Volume 21 Number 2
Summer 2025

The Journal of Northeast Asian History

NORTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY FOUNDATION

The Journal of Northeast Asian History

Volume 21 Number 2
Summer 2025

NORTHEAST ASIAN
HISTORY FOUNDATION

Editorial Board

Contents

Special Issue:

Paths to Historical Reconciliation: Choices for Europe and Asia

Article

Book Review

About the Journal
The Journal of Northeast Asian History (JNAH) is a peer-reviewed biannual open-access journal published by the Northeast Asian History Foundation. It aims to elucidate the contexts and current situations of historically contentious topics in the Northeast Asian region across all periods. The journal seeks to test diverse methodologies, including interdisciplinary and transnational approaches, textual and inter-textual interpretations, and media and visual analyses. By publishing high-quality academic papers, book reviews, and research trend reports in English, JNAH provides a platform for international dialogue among scholars in the humanities and social sciences while fostering exchanges with policymakers and practitioners. Dedicated to promoting academic and practical discussions, the journal contributes to a deeper understanding of Northeast Asia's past, present, and future.

Special Issue

Paths to Historical Reconciliation: Choices for Europe and Asia

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 9-12
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.001

Special Issue Introduction: Comparing Historical Reconciliation in Europe and Asia

Walter HATCH

Walter HATCH is Professor Emeritus of Government at Colby College.
Email: wfhatch@colby.edu

This special issue of JNAH emerges from a November 2024 forum in Seoul hosted by the Northeast Asia History Foundation. Like the forum's participants, we try here to understand how states respond to the difficult legacies of the past.

For better and often for worse, history helps shape the present. We often move in ways that scholars call "path-dependent"-pursuing strategies and patterns that are well-worn, familiar. But we are not slaves to the past; we sometimes are able to break free and chart new directions.

The 2024 NAHF forum examined the prospects for interstate reconciliation in both Europe and Asia. Here we feature three manuscripts, each evaluated by reviewers, that expand on that theme.

Walter Hatch, professor emeritus of government at Colby College in the U.S., explains why Germany has been far more successful than Japan in reconciling with neighbors each country brutalized in the past. While other observers point to words of contrition, he instead credits deeds of cooperation.

The article, which draws on his 2023 book, *Ghosts in the Neighborhood*, compares Germany's relations with France and Poland to Japan's relations with South Korea and China. He finds that Germany did not apologize more for its past misdeeds; rather, it engaged more actively in regional institutions-including the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization-that allowed it to show it had become a trustworthy partner. By contrast, Japan participated weakly, if at all, in regional institutions in Asia, and thus failed to demonstrate a credible commitment to cooperation. This was not entirely Japan's fault. It was, Hatch claims, constrained by its bilateral security alliance with the United States.

Falk Pingel, former deputy director of the George Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research and Education in Germany, narrows the lens to the Balkans, where ethnic conflicts and wars of independence erupted with the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He uses his own experience as head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, plus various case studies, to track progress toward reconciliation in places like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Without the backing of

public institutions and civil society groups, Pingel concludes, programs to achieve rapprochement will ultimately fall short.

For example, the article documents painstaking efforts by outsiders, especially Pingel's own institute, to promote the writing and distribution of history textbooks that avoid nationalist grievances and sensitively treat other parties to regional conflict. In the end, though, multiculturalism and self-reflection remain thin.

In a final case, Pingel moves beyond the Balkans to examine Cyprus, the Mediterranean island divided along ethno-nationalist lines with a Turkish-led north and a Greek-led south. The European Union, which accepted Cyprus as a member in 2004, has tried to promote cultural harmony and national unity–but to no avail. Each side continues to view the other with suspicion if not outright contempt.

Nguyen Cong Tung, assistant professor of political science and international relations at Tongji University in China, delivers a manuscript that appears, at first glance, to be an outlier. It focuses on a single regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), not explicitly on the project of interstate reconciliation. But Nguyen's piece actually fits nicely in the overall puzzle as it examines how the colonial past in Southeast Asia has shaped the trajectory of this vital organization.

ASEAN, he writes, is a "security community of colonized states," with the sole exception of Thailand. This mostly shared history means the organization can be characterized by three traits: lingering distrust of any moves that might undermine the national sovereignty and autonomy of member-states; inherent flexibility in organization and policy; and a group in the making, meaning that it is gradually acquiring a sense of solidarity and collective identity.

Nguyen applies his analysis of ASEAN to two related cases: the organization's response to maritime disputes in the South China Sea, and its response to the superpower rivalry between the United States and China. On the former, he notes that ASEAN members are divided on how to resolve competing claims over areas like the Paracel or the Spratly islands. They tend to distrust outside powers like China, which asserts

ownership over most of the South China Sea, but also other member states; they issue sometimes vague joint statements that reflect flexibility; at the same time, though, they have begun to make moves (endorsing, for example, a declaration of conduct and a code of conduct in the South China Sea) that demonstrate its emerging collective identity. On the latter, Nguyen notes that ASEAN members have kept some distance from both the U.S. and China, declining to align solidly with either power, while issuing joint statements that show the organization, as a regional body, increasingly strives to assert a collective vision.

In his conclusion, Nguyen suggests that the European Union is a "security community of the colonizer states," which might explain why it is, unlike ASEAN, built on the pooling of sovereignty, quasi-supranational institutions, and an established identity. This is posited but not fully articulated-perhaps a subject for future research.

Each of the articles in this special issue uses history as a causal variable to explain a localized outcome-whether it be levels of reconciliation (Hatch, comparing Northeast Asia and Europe; and Pingel, examining southeastern Europe) or characteristics of regionalism (Nguyen). None of these articles attempts to tell an "objective" or "truthful" story about the past. We acknowledge that history is contested, even fraught with competing "lessons," but that confronting it openly and deeply can help all of us-scholars and non-academics alike-better understand our contemporary moment.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 13-39
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.002

Deeds of Cooperation over Words of Contrition:

How Germany achieved reconciliation with neighbors while Japan did not

Walter HATCH

Abstract

Germany has managed to achieve reconciliation with European neighbors it brutalized in the past, while Japan remains mired in tense relations with neighbors it once invaded or colonized in Northeast Asia. Why? I study paired cases: relations between Germany and France, along with those between Japan and South Korea (Cold War allies now enjoying similarly high levels of economic development); and relations between Germany and Poland, along with those between Japan and China (Cold War rivals with different levels of development). Based on the case study results, I reject the conventional wisdom, which suggests that Germany apologized sufficiently while Japan has not. Instead, I argue that Germany showed a credible commitment to cooperate with its neighbors by nesting itself in regional institutions of economic and security collaboration. Japan has demonstrated no such commitment, in part due to the constraints of its bilateral alliance with the United States.

Keywords

reconciliation, memory, contrition, cooperation, institutions

Walter HATCH is Professor Emeritus of Government at Colby College.
Email: wfhatch@colby.edu

Both Japan and Germany behaved very poorly in the past–stealing nearby lands or annexing them outright, violently conquering and abusing neighbors. But Germany today is less haunted by the ghosts of its past. Unlike Japan, which is despised by many citizens in the rest of Northeast Asia, it appears to have achieved reconciliation, more or less, with other countries in Europe.

How do we explain these different outcomes?

The most common answer is that Germany has apologized to its neighbors while Japan has not. Those who adopt this position tend to focus on culture, suggesting that contrition comes more naturally to Germans than Japanese. I reject this conventional wisdom, and offer an alternative based on the power of deeds (institution–building) rather than words. Germany, I argue, has achieved reconciliation by demonstrating a credible commitment to cooperation. Unlike Japan, hindered by a bilateral alliance with the United States that renders it a subordinate power, it has nested itself in strong, regional institutions, principally the European Union (EU) but also the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), allowing it to show neighbors that it can be trusted.

In 2023, University of Michigan Press published my latest book, Ghosts in the *Neighborhood: Why Japan is Haunted by its Past and Germany is Not.*[1] It examines the effect of three variables (apologies, economic interdependence, and political cooperation) on interstate relations in two pairs of cases: Germany–France and Japan–South Korea; plus Germany–Poland and Japan–China. Case selection is always challenging. I chose these because they represent brutalizing, lopsided conflict between two distinct nations over a long period of time. Germany–France and Japan–South Korea are examined as one pair of cases because they share important commonalities: They became allies in the Cold War and have attained similarly high levels of economic development. Likewise, Germany–Poland and Japan–China are examined as another pair for their commonalities: They were rivals in the Cold War with

---

[1] The book is open access. See here: https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/0c483m75k

different levels of economic development. In this way, my methodology relies on Mill's (1848, 455) method of difference, isolating causal factors that help explain different outcomes by controlling for other factors that do not.

This paper is based on that book, but dramatically abbreviated. For example, I do not explore the effect of economic interdependence, except to note here that it does not explain different levels of reconciliation. Japan and China, for example, are especially close trading partners that nonetheless continue to have a strained relationship.[2]

I also skip here an extended analysis of an important follow-up question: Why is Europe characterized by a relatively high level of multilateralism, which has helped Germany achieve reconciliation with its neighbors, while Asia is characterized instead by U.S.-led bilateralism and a noodle soup of relatively weak, mini-lateral organizations. The short answer (spelled out in chapter 7 of my book) is that the United States enjoyed overwhelming power in East Asia, until recently, and generally did not identify with Asian counterparts as kindred spirits or equal partners. While U.S. leaders viewed Europeans as brothers and sisters in a joint project of maintaining and advancing "Western civilization," they tended to look down on Asians as inferior and untrustworthy. So they built a hub-and-spokes pattern of relationships across the Pacific. (Izumikawa 2020) that they could dominate[3]

In this paper, I outline the theory and logic behind the leading explanations (apologies versus political cooperation) used to solve the puzzle of Germany's relative success and Japan's relative failure in achiev-

---

[2] In 2023, China–Japan trade rose to $266.4 billion, making them the leading bilateral trading partners in the world. China was the number one destination for Japanese exports that year.

[3] A smart reviewer wonders if the hub-and-spokes pattern with the U.S. at the center constitutes an "institution," thus undermining my claim that East Asia has not enjoyed political cooperation. I don't think so. That pattern is an informal one-the sum of two bilateral ties. Dominated by the U.S., the informal triangle has relieved Japan and South Korea of the responsibility to collaborate directly with one another. The reviewer also asks about a proposed Northeast Asia Treaty Organization, a corollary to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But a NEATO was never seriously pursued.

ing reconciliation with neighbors brutalized in the past. I then use four case studies to test these competing hypotheses before acknowledging caveats and wrapping up with concluding thoughts.

LEADING EXPLANATIONS

When I talk with intelligent lay people about my research question, they invariably offer some version of the same answer: The Japanese are "different"–insular, not cosmopolitan, maybe even more racist than Germans. Those familiar with the work of Ruth Benedict (1946), the anthropologist commissioned by the U.S. to elucidate Japanese culture for Occupation authorities, even though she never visited the country, routinely invoke her distinction between Japan's "shame culture," ostensibly a function of Shinto, and the West's "guilt culture," influenced by Christianity. If you are saddled with shame, writes Benedict, you care only about your reputation; but if you are haunted by guilt, you seek to repair relations.

I also heard this line of thinking from a prominent historian. Rudolf von Thadden was not only a German intellectual but an adviser to the German chancellor who had longstanding personal ties to both Poland and France. Before he died in 2015, I had the opportunity to interview him (von Thadden, interview by author, April 22, 2006). Von Thadden highlighted cultural or even spiritual orientation. Japan, he told me, cannot escape its own bloody history with China and Korea as easily as Germany did with both Poland and France because East Asia is not Christian, and thus lacks not only the political prerequisites but also the necessary moral foundation. "Reconciliation requires a belief in forgiveness."

The underlying belief is that Japan is culturally deficient.

Thomas Berger (2012) advances this hypothesis in a more sophisticated way that still manages to draw from the Bible. He concludes that Germany was a "model penitent," while Japan was a "model impenitent." For a variety of reasons, he argues, the former managed to apolo-

gize while the latter did not.[4]

Likewise, Greg Rienzi (2015) suggests that Japan should follow Germany's example by getting down on its knees. It should stop insisting on its own righteousness and instead show contrition. "While Japan has largely forgone reconciliation, Germany has used its policy to claim a moral high ground and become a trusted power."[5]

I dispute not only the grand (and perhaps racist) notion that Japan is a cultural dwarf, compared to Germany; I also reject the empirical claim that Japan has not apologized for its past misbehavior. Japanese apologies are well documented by Yamazaki (2006), as well as others. I will share some of this evidence in my case studies.

Rather than words of contrition, I argue that Japan has fallen short on deeds of cooperation. It has not regained the trust of its neighbors because it has not nested itself in regional institutions that lengthen the shadow of the future by creating norms of collaboration. Game theory helps illustrate how this works. In a single game, such as the prisoners' dilemma, players are inclined to act selfishly because they know that another player will take advantage of any unilateral move to drop one's guard and "play nice" (cooperate). But in an iterated game, Axelrod and Hamilton (1981) have shown that players learn how to "play nice" and cooperate over time, and without a central authority. They acquire stable expectations, which in turn foster durable rules and patterns of behavior (institutions) that facilitate information-sharing and trust.

This analysis is complicated, of course, by the reality of traumatic history. States subjected to extreme or protracted violence or humiliation are unlikely to take a chance and collaborate in the present with a state that has victimized them in the past. But they can. What's necessary is a

---

[4] There are many other sophisticated analyses suggesting that Japan has not been sufficiently apologetic. See, for example, Alexis Dudden (2008). She notes that the U.S. never fully apologized for the atrocities (such as My Lai) it committed in Vietnam, but fails to note that Hanoi doesn't seem to care anymore. It has moved on.

[5] Rienzi here is channeling Lily Gardner Feldman, who has argued in different publications and interviews that Japan should take a lesson from Germany, which she claims is a master apologist. See, for example, Feldman (2014).

credible commitment to cooperation by the former perpetrator. Such a commitment becomes credible when it is difficult or costly to reverse. When a former perpetrator-state not only pledges to cooperate over time, but actually makes that pledge credible by embedding itself in a broader set of rules and patterns of behavior (institutions), it eventually gains the trust of even a former victim state.

As we shall see, Germany gained the trust of its past victims in Europe by embedding itself in European and trans-Atlantic institutions that promoted economic and military collaboration. With the Treaty of Paris in 1951 and NATO in 1955, and later with the Treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Nice (2001), Germany demonstrated a credible commitment to cooperation with its neighbors. Japan, by contrast, has done no such thing. While it has economic partnership agreements with several countries in Southeast Asia, and it has participated in some collaborative efforts, such as the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), with South Korea and China, it has not invested much political capital in building strong regional institutions (Gao 2025).[6] Tokyo's major commitment has been to the United States, which insists on fealty through the bilateral security alliance.

GERMANY-FRANCE

If our definition of "Germany" includes Prussia, the leading republic in the pre-unification confederation, this European powerhouse invaded France three times over a century-in 1870, 1914, and finally 1940. German troops were especially brutal during World War I, crushing French resistance and murdering civilians in towns like Bandonviller, Nomeny, Fresnois-la Montagne, and Senlis.

During the interwar years, the French came to detest the Germans. History textbooks described them as bloodthirsty militarists, "veritable

---

[6] This could change, of course, especially with an "America First" regime back in the White House.

barbarians … despicable, detestable and dangerous" (Siegel 2002, 781).[7] These hard feelings only hardened further after World War II, when (for example) Nazi stormtroopers machine-gunned or burned 642 residents of Oradour-sur-Glane. At the end of the war, General Charles DeGaulle became head of the provisional government and proclaimed that he would block the re-establishment of a centralized Reich that had served as "the instrument of Bismarck, William II and Hitler."[8]

But that hostility didn't last. Grosser (1967, 6), then the leading scholar of Franco-German relations, writes that, at the end of WWII, the French looked out and saw "no enemy but Germany;" just a decade and a

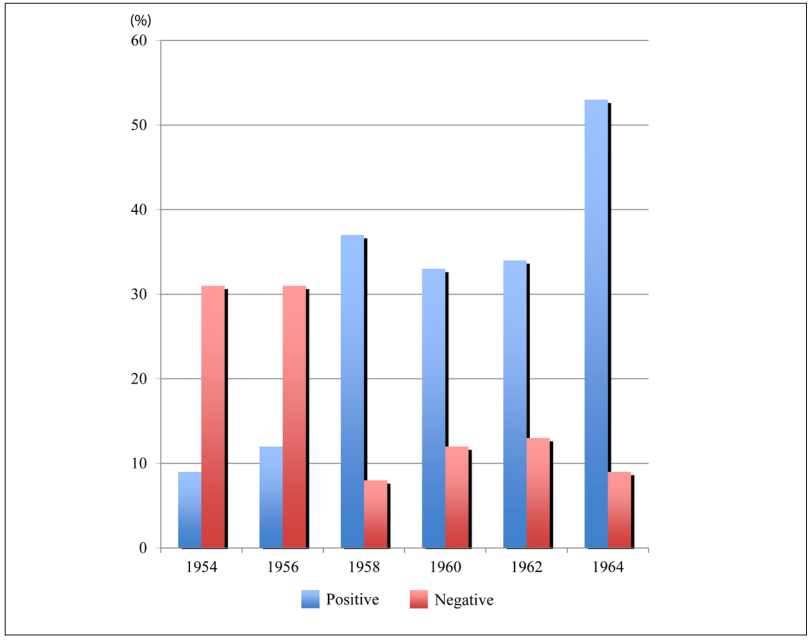


Figure 1. French Views of West Germany
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/8c97ks955?locale=en#info)

---

[7] "Conférences pédagogiques du canton de Montpon: Registre des procès-verbaux, 1880-1925," *Archives departmementales de la Dordogne* (ADD) 4/T/107, quoted in Siegel (2002, 781).

[8] Speech at Bar-le-Duc, July 28, 1946, quoted in Gildea (2002, 66).

half later, he writes, they saw "no friend but Germany." Figure 1 shows the remarkable transformation in French public opinion.

By 1958, French views of Germany went from being overwhelmingly negative to overwhelmingly positive. What drove this change?

In this case, the conventional wisdom cannot even begin to answer the question. During his tenure as chancellor (1949–1963), Konrad Adenauer offered no apologies for German militarism. Indeed, like most Germans, he had little interest in dwelling on the past, choosing instead to focus on the country's effort to re-industrialize.[9] Germany eventually did discover its past–but that came much later, in the 1970s, when the younger generation of Social Democrats came to power.

Something else was happening in the 1950s, and that something was European multilateral cooperation, especially on trade and investment. In 1951, Germany promised to work with France to co-develop the Ruhr Valley and build a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the precursor to what eventually became the European Union (EU). Then, in 1955, it agreed to French conditions on its entry into NATO (no German nukes, long-range missiles, or battleships). In 1957, it led efforts to forge even closer ties by creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and collaborate on the construction and operation of peaceful nuclear reactors through the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

Regional institutions made the difference. They served as the "glue" to cement Franco-German ties and foster rapprochement, according to Nicolas Jabko, a French political scientist affiliated with Johns Hopkins University and Sciences Po (interview by author, July 8, 2009). Claire Demesmay, a French scholar at the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin, says the two countries today live in a "post-reconciliation time" (interview by author, September 2, 2009). War between the two powers is now unimaginable, thanks to the regional institutions they have forged together.

---

[9] Adenauer encouraged fellow Germans to "put the past behind us." Quoted in Herf (1997, 271).

JAPAN–SOUTH KOREA

When Japan established a protectorate over the Korean peninsula in 1905, and then annexed it outright in 1910, it didn't just try to extract economic gains. It ruled directly and brutally, replacing Korean officials, censoring the media and violently suppressing dissent. Japanese merchants moved into major cities, while Japanese farmers took over agricultural land. And the new overlords tried to "Japanize" Korean society, insisting on the use of their own language in public schools and pressing families to adopt Japanese names.

With the outbreak of the Pacific War, colonial rule became even more arbitrary and cruel. Japan deported two million Koreans, forcing them to work in Japan–based factories.[10] And the Japanese military conscripted thousands of Korean men, requiring them to serve on the front lines, while luring, deceiving, and even coercing as many as 100,000 Korean women into sexual slavery at so–called "comfort stations" (or military brothels).[11]

Japan's defeat in 1945 brought an end to its empire but not the start of goodwill. Although they were politically aligned during the Cold War, Japan and South Korea negotiated for 14 years before reaching a normalization treaty, and they have continued to squabble over myriad issues, especially history. Fierce resentment toward Japan lingers. Why?

The conventional wisdom is that Japan has failed to acknowledge and atone for its past misdeeds. But this claim is not supported by evidence. Over time, Japanese leaders, including the emperor, have issued increasingly strong and sincere apologies to Koreans. Instead of merely expressing "regret" for unspecified misdeeds, as Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburo did in 1965, Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi openly apologized in 1992 for the "unbearable suffering and grief" inflicted upon the

---

10 From Kim, Sang–hyon, Chae–il Hanguk–in (Korean Residents in Japan), Dankuk Research Institute Press, 1969, p. 38. Quoted in Lee (1990, 64)

11 Historians estimate that there were as many as 200,000 "comfort women" throughout Japanese–occupied Asia, and that about half of them were Korean.

peninsula during colonial rule, and for the "inexcusable treatment" of Korean women who served as sex slaves for the Japanese military during World War II (Wakamiya 1998, 194). As the decade ripened, other leaders issued even stronger statements of contrition. One might expect this rhetorical evolution to warm hearts in Korea; indeed, Yamazaki (2006, 38) tells us that, to be effective, apologies must be heartfelt and specific. In fact, though, Korean views of Japan turned more negative just as Japanese apologies grew "better." See Figure 2.

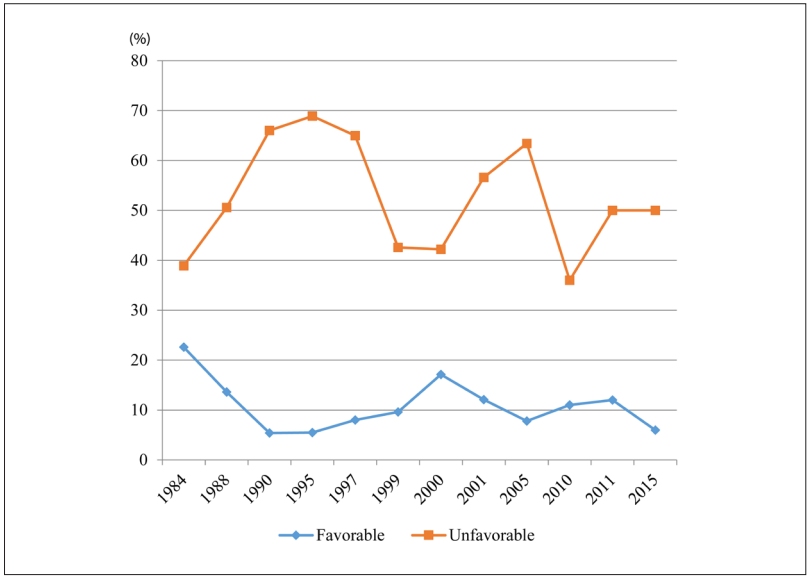


Figure 2. Korean Views of Japan
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/xk81jp02h?locale=en)

A better explanation for this ongoing hostility is that Japan failed to show any real commitment to cooperation during this period. It deepened its relationship with the United States, but not with its Asian neighbors, including South Korea. Although Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio called in 2009 for an East Asian Community, modeled on the European Union, his proposal went nowhere (Hatoyama 2009).

The otherwise stubborn status quo did shift a little in 2015 and 2016, when Japan forged two significant agreements with South Korea. Under the first, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo agreed that his government would provide compensation to Korean "comfort women." Under the second, Tokyo agreed to share defense information with Seoul (Heginbotham and Samuels 2018). These concessions did move the dial–for a time. See Figure 3.

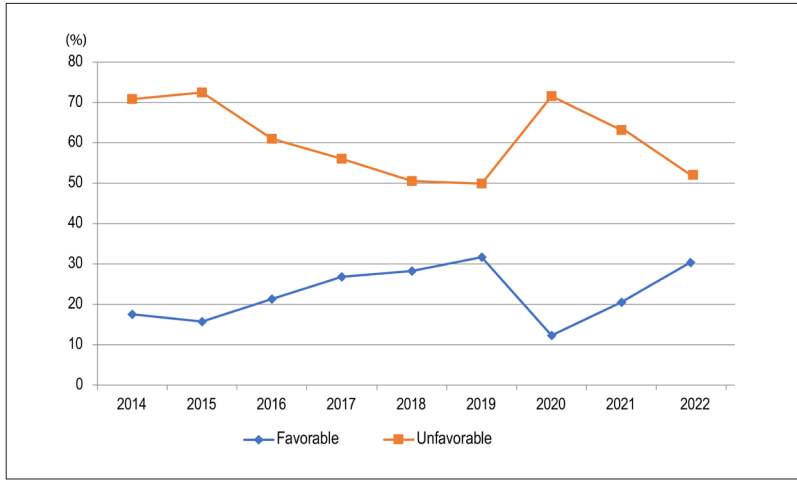


Figure 3. Korean Views of Japan
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/v692t8717?locale=en)

In 2017, a center–left president, Moon Jae–in, claimed the Blue House, and slowly began to raise doubts about the two pacts. Korean public opinion soon soured again (Park 2024).

GERMANY–POLAND

Prussia, the leader of the German confederation before unification, carved up Poland three times during the 18th century. It conspired with

imperial Austria and imperial Russia to grab valuable land, pushed out the Polish gentry, and treated remaining residents as "slovenly trash," likening them to Native Americans facing "civilization" or extinction at the hands of white settlers (Ritter 1968, 180). This engendered bitter resentment, which only worsened over time.

In 1939, Nazi Germany invaded its eastern neighbor in what Poles came to call the Fourth Partition. In just the first month of the invasion, stormtroopers massacred the residents of more than 30 Polish towns and villages. In the end, they killed one out of every five Polish citizens during their occupation. And in 1944, after Poland staged a quixotic uprising, Hitler ordered the complete destruction of Warsaw, where only a quarter of the buildings survived his fury (Kulski 1976).

It shouldn't be surprising, then, to learn that Poles viewed Germany rather darkly in the early 1990s, when Soviet-backed communism collapsed in that country and public opinion suddenly mattered. What warrants explanation is the significant uptick in views toward Germany in the second decade of the 21st century. See Figure 4.

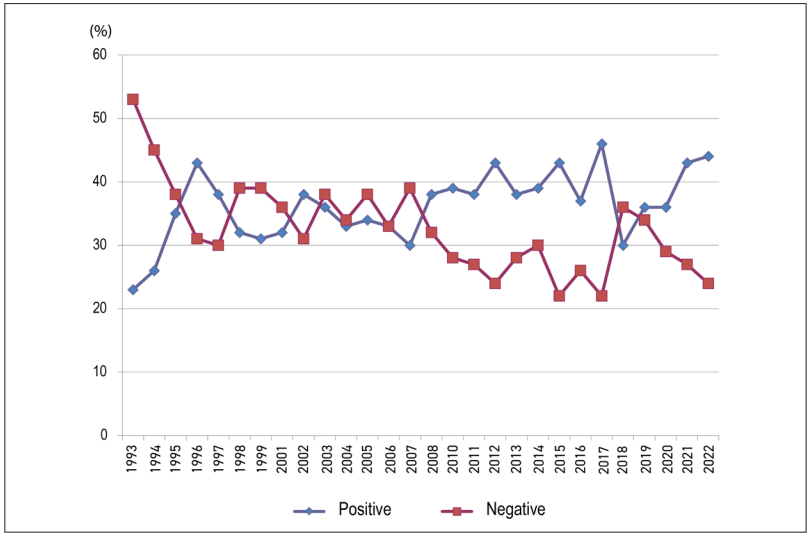


Figure 4. Polish Views of Germany
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/k3569711n?locale=en)

Germany did display some contrition after Poland emerged from communist rule. In 1994, German president Roman Herzog apologized to the Poles–with minimal effect. A year later, only 35% of Poles expressed a positive view of Germany. When the Social Democrats returned to power in 1998, they rededicated themselves to a project of contrition. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder not only delivered two dramatic statements of apology to Poland, he teamed up with German industry in 2000 to create a foundation to compensate European individuals, including Poles, who had been victims of forced labor (Renner 2015). But, as the poll results show, this did not move the needle.

German chancellor Angela Merkel did, of course, travel to Gdansk in 2009 to apologize for her country's invasion of Poland 70 years earlier. But her speech was not pivotal. A year earlier, Poles already had come to have relatively positive feelings about Germany–a polling bump that remained high for a fairly long time. What made the difference?

Poles deeply appreciated German support for Poland's entry into the EU and NATO–a gesture that first emerged in the mid–1990s, but became undeniable in the mid–2000s, after Germany pushed for Polish inclusion in NATO and then the EU. Freudenstein (1998, 53), a German scholar, agrees: "Germany's role as Poland's advocate within NATO and the EU has had profound positive effects on its image in Poland." Dariusz Rosati, a former Polish foreign minister, says German deeds were more helpful than German words: "They took very real, very tangible steps to close the door on the past. They welcomed us into European institutions, made us a genuine partner in the peace–building process" (interview by author, April 23, 2012).

JAPAN–CHINA

Japan invaded China twice, first in 1894 and then again in 1937. Before invading the second time, it carved out its own puppet regime in Manchuria. As they clamored for international acclaim, the Japanese looked down upon the Chinese as barbaric, as backwards, as unworthy of any-

thing but low status in the hierarchy of civilizations (Hatch 2010, 383–384). This helps us understand the brutality of Japanese war crimes in China, which include the slaughter of civilians in Nanjing and the medical or biowarfare experiments carried out on live patients in Harbin.

It's no wonder that the Chinese reviled Japan for so many years. But still today?

As with their early apologies to Korea, Japanese apologies for invasion and war crimes in China were initially rather weak. In 1972, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei expressed "regret" for the "inconvenience" (*meiwaku*) caused by Japanese militarism in China. Although this statement sounds superficial today, it was received graciously. The Chinese premier hailed the "friendship between our great nations," blamed Japanese militarism (rather than Japan more broadly) for any bad blood between the countries, and once again renounced any claim to war reparations (Tian 1997, 103–4).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese leaders continued to cautiously, not generously, dole out contrition. Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, for example, told a United Nations gathering in 1985 that Japan "regrets the unleashing of rampant ultranationalism and militarism." He did not mention China, and did not apologize specifically for invading its neighbor or for committing atrocities (Yamazaki 2006, 141). Likewise, Emperor Akihito, visiting Beijing in 1992, stopped short of an explicit apology, expressing only regret for the "great suffering" that the imperial army had "inflicted" on the Chinese people. But this tepid tone of contrition did not undermine Sino–Japanese relations. Jiang (1989) reports that 53.6 percent of Chinese respondents in a rare poll had a favorable view of Japan, compared to 38.6 percent who had an unfavorable view. Chinese writers such as Feng (1992) and Xiao (1992) portrayed Japan in a positive light, noting that it served as a useful model for economic development, Deng Xiaoping's top goal. Rozman (2002) and Ross (2013) describe this period as the calm before the storm that battered Sino–Japanese relations.

It was in the mid–1990s that Japan dramatically improved the quality of its apologies. Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro used specific

language at a 1993 press conference, condemning Japan's "mistaken" war of "aggression" against China. Less than a year later, he went further and sincerely apologized for these "acts of aggression … which have caused unbearable suffering and sorrow" (Yamazaki 2006, 74–5, 148). This groundbreaking apology was followed, and surpassed, almost immediately by another. In August 1995, the 50th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi expressed his "deep remorse" and offered a "heartfelt apology" for his country's aggression against China. The Murayama statement became the gold standard, repeated by nearly every prime minister who followed him. Even Koizumi Jun'ichiro, perhaps the Japanese leader most despised by Beijing, drew on the statement in 2001 when he visited China and placed a wreath on the statue of a Chinese soldier outside an anti–Japanese war museum.

But these supposedly improved Japanese apologies did not move the needle toward reconciliation. Chinese leaders in the last decade of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century hectored their Japanese counterparts more loudly than before. And Chinese respondents became more negative in their views toward Japan, according to polling conducted by a Beijing–based think tank. See Figure 5.

One thing missing during those days was any major commitment by Tokyo to cooperate more closely with its neighbors, including China. Northeast Asia was then a region remarkably bereft of formal ties promoting economic integration or security collaboration. This was not, however, due to lack of effort. In 1990, Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia proposed an East Asian Economic Group (EAEG) that would include China, Japan, and South Korea, along with Southeast Asian nations, and that would strive to foster greater trade and investment across the region. But the U.S. pressured Japan to withdraw from the EAEG, calling it "exclusionary." (The group did, of course, exclude the United States, which is not geographically a member of East Asia.) In 1997, Japan called for an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) to bail out financially strapped economies in the region. Once again, though, the U.S. protested; it feared that the AMF would undermine the International Monetary

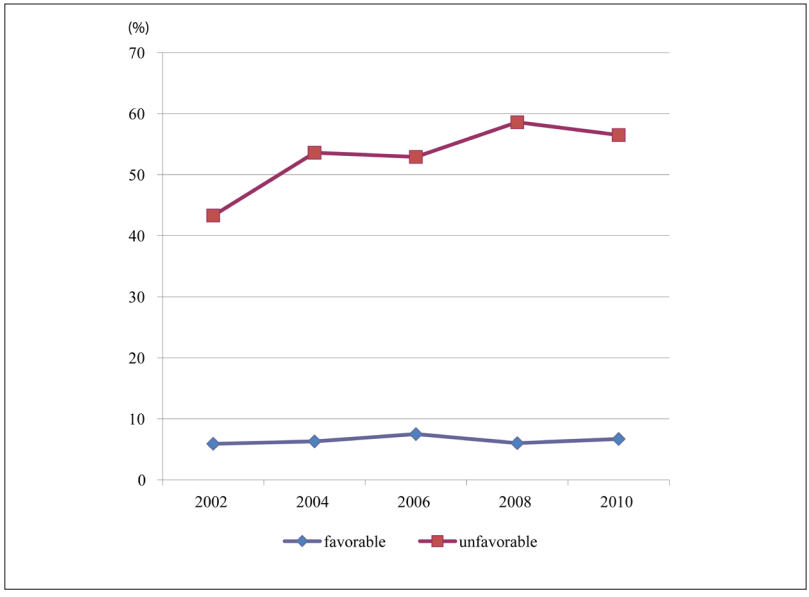


Figure 5. Chinese Views of Japan
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/6969z3403?locale=en)

Fund (IMF), a global but Washington-based organization that the U.S. controls. And once again, Japan backed out.[12] Finally, in 2002, China pushed for an East Asia Summit (EAS) that would include the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), plus the three major states in Northeast Asia (China, Japan, and South Korea). Over time, prodded one more time by the U.S. and its closest allies in the region, the organization expanded–first to 16 members (the original 13 plus Australia, New Zealand and India, all aligned then with the United States, not China) and eventually to an unwieldly 18 members (including the U.S. and Russia). EAS became another ineffective if not entirely moribund regional organization.

Writing at the time, Ma (2006, 32) highlights the problem: "North-

---

[12] This diplomatic history is summarized in Hatch (2023, 115–6).

east Asia countries have been aware of the importance of regional cooperation; however, they have differed both in their attitudes on how to achieve it and on the extent of their participation. The situation has resulted in the lack of a multilateral consultation mechanism which can provide an overall framework for regional cooperation, a factor which has prevented multilateral cooperation from moving forward."

Even bilaterally, cooperation was slim in those days; Japanese and Chinese leaders barely talked with one another. There was only one bilateral summit meeting between 1999 and 2006, and that was at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathering in Shanghai (2001).

Polling by China Daily shows a slight warming trend between 2013 and 2020. What was happening then? Well, it certainly was not "better" or more sincere apologies. In 2015, Prime Minister Abe signaled his impatience with what he viewed as endless calls for Japanese contrition: "We must not let our children, grandchildren, and even future generations to come, who have nothing to do with (World War II) be predestined to apologize" (New York Times, August 14, 2015).

No, what was happening more often was dialogue and cooperation. Japan and China began moving forward with a joint initiative to raise living standards along the Mekong River–especially in Cambodia and Laos, where both governments have supplied substantial foreign aid. And in 2018, Abe forged several important agreements with President Xi Jinping at a summit meeting in Beijing. The two leaders agreed, for example, to renew an expired plan to swap currencies, creating a reserve pool of $30 billion to help their own companies facing trade-related complications and rescue Asian economies facing financial stress. They signed a pact to establish the "China-Japan Innovation Cooperation Mechanism" to promote joint research on advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence. Japan also signaled it would join China's "Belt and Road Initiative," collaborating on infrastructure projects such as a high-speed railway connecting Thailand's major airports (Hatch 2023, 110-11).

These agreements were widely discussed in the Chinese media, and they probably led to some short-term improvement in Sino-Japanese relations. See Figure 6.

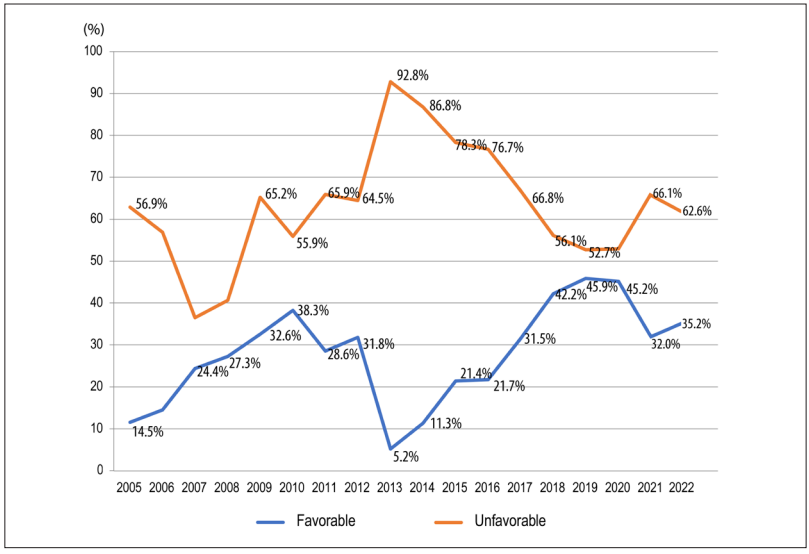


Figure 6. Chinese Views of Japan
Source: Author (https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/file_sets/j098zd49b?locale=en)

CAVEATS

One might object that I have overlooked particular actions (or the lack thereof) that call into question the quality or sincerity of Japanese apologies. What about, for example, the "pilgrimages" by politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo? Or revisionist history textbooks authorized by the government? Or the reckless remarks made periodically by Japanese nationalists? Finally, what about the claim that Japan, unlike Germany, has not paid reparations to victims of its past brutality? Let me address these in order.

Yasukuni became controversial in 1978, when the Shinto priests who run the shrine decided to add 14 war criminals to the long list of dead soldiers enshrined there. Prime Minister Nakasone, the first prime minister to make the trek after that decision, triggered a backlash from critics in South Korea and China who viewed his 1985 "pilgrimage" as

tacit support for imperial atrocities. With some notable exceptions, subsequent Japanese leaders stayed away. But ultra-nationalists like Koizumi and Abe had made campaign pledges to a right-wing veterans' group (Izokukai) to visit Yasukuni and pay respect to the war dead (Mochizuki 2010).

Defenders of this practice note that Yasukuni is the closest thing in Japan to a national cemetery for fallen soldiers, but in this case is privately owned and operated–a fact that limits the government's ability to determine who is honored there. One might call it a Japanese version of Arlington National Cemetery, the burial ground for American soldiers–including almost 500 who fought for an insurrection, the Confederacy, which wanted to maintain the practice of human bondage. On Memorial Day each year, U.S. presidents traditionally have sent a funeral wreath to the Confederate monument in Arlington cemetery (McGreevy 2005).

Likewise, in 1985, former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, joined by U.S. President Ronald Reagan, visited a war cemetery in Bitburg that included the remains of nearly 50 members of the Waffen-SS, Hitler's most loyal military force. The visit upset Jews around the world, but apparently did not undermine West Germany's relations with Poland or France (Eder 2016).

Although history textbooks in Japan have long been the object of scrutiny, their most vociferous critics were, at least at first, Japanese. For decades, the domestic Left viewed those textbooks, unfavorably, as excessively nationalist. In 1975, the Tokyo Higher Court criticized the Ministry of Education for censoring books written by leftist historian Ienaga Saburo that highlighted many of the military government's violent misadventures. This forced the ministry to change its procedures for reviewing and authorizing books (Mitani 2008, 85). In 1982, critics in South Korea and China erupted in anger over Japanese history textbooks that appeared to whitewash Japan's earlier war crimes. Those books were not nearly as bad (or revisionist) as media reports in Tokyo first indicated, according to Rose (1998, 80-94). But the damage was done; the world, especially the rest of Northeast Asia, was on alert.

When I lived in Japan in the 1990s, I carefully read my son and

daughter's junior high school history textbooks. I actually was impressed. Compared to my own junior high school experience reading about American history with slavery and Jim Crow, and imperialism in Latin America and the Philippines, for example, I thought my kids were getting a relatively honest appraisal of Japan's ugly past. They were learning about the brutal colonization of Korea, the puppet state in Manchuria, the invasion of the rest of China.

The next decade was more contentious, as right-wing nationalists in Japan demanded an opportunity to develop their own version of history. In 2001, a group of conservative historians–the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (known in Japan by the abbreviated name, Tsukurukai)–wrote a new book for junior high schoolers and won authorization from the government. Japanese society was inflamed, but so was Korea and China.

The most salient fact here is that this ultra-nationalist textbook was read by very few junior high school students in Japan. Although the Ministry of Education has the power to authorize textbooks, it does not have the power to compel Japanese schools to adopt them. In the end, only 0.04% of schools adopted the book for their students (Mitani 2008, 85).

West Germany had its own struggle with textbooks. In the 1950s and early 1960s, German students were encouraged to focus on their country's own victimization in the wake of World War II, and–when pressed to look further back–highlight the positive: Goethe, Bach, Schopenhauer, and so on (Olick 2016). This is not unlike Japan's own historiography from that era.

It was in the mid and late 1960s, when a new and more progressive generation entered the workforce, that German educators began pushing their students to learn about their country's ugly past, according to Puaca (2011). Even so, they focused almost entirely on the Holocaust, ignoring the multiple of conquests of France and partitions of Poland. This was more than a decade ahead of Japan's own reckoning with the past, but it followed a similar pattern: nationalist self-protection followed by more honest historiography.

One cannot deny that Japanese nationalists have engaged repeated-

ly in, well, denialism. For example, in 1994, Justice Minister Nagano Shigeto referred to the Nanjing Massacre as a "fabrication." In the same year, Sakurai Shin, director of the Environmental Agency, claimed that Japan never engaged in "aggression," embracing revisionist historiography that it was trying instead to liberate East Asia from Western colonialism. This was repeated in a 2008 essay penned by Tamogami Toshio, chief of staff for Japan's Air Self-Defense Force, who argued that Japan was never an imperialist power. But here is what is critical to recall: In all such cases, the revisionists (or deniers) were forced to resign.

Finally, let's discuss reparations. Although West Germany did not compensate France for its three invasions, a unified Germany led by Social Democrats did agree to pay Polish victims of forced labor during World War II. In 2000, under the "Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future" Foundation funded by government and industry, about a half-million Poles received a total of nearly 1 billion euros (Around this time, conservatives in the Bundestag began making their own demands for recognition of the financial and real estate losses incurred by Germans expelled from what became West Poland at the end of World War II. Hatch 2023, 81).

This does not come close to matching the compensation Japan paid to victimized neighbors. Under the 1965 Normalization Treaty, the Republic of Korea received $300 million in grants, $200 million in low interest loans, and $300 million in commercial loans to settle claims of Japanese misbehavior. These payments were technically not "reparations," and Korean civil society organizations continued to press for more money. As noted previously, the Abe administration agreed in 2015 to compensate Korean victims of the Japanese military's sex slavery program. Likewise, under a 1972 treaty, China gave up the right to any formal compensation in exchange for diplomatic recognition from Japan. In lieu of formal reparations, however, the Japanese began to pay Official Development Assistance (ODA, or foreign aid) to China, underwriting its economic development campaign in the form of massive yen loans for infrastructure, manufacturing plants, and technical guidance … to the tune of about $1 billion a year in the early 1990s (Hatch 2023, 103-5).

CONCLUSION

Even with the caveats, our case studies paint a rather clear picture: Deeds trump words in fostering interstate reconciliation. Germany never apologized to France for a series of brutal invasions, but the two states reached a rapprochement in the late 1950s and early 1960s after Bonn committed itself to European integration (the ECSC and the EEC, which eventually became the EU) and trans-Atlantic security cooperation (NATO). Japanese apologies to the Republic of Korea for its brutal colonization became more sincere and specific in the 1990s, but Korean views of Japan became more and more negative at the same time. There was, though, a short period of better relations in the late teens–a result of limited cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul. German apologies to Poland didn't shift Polish opinion nearly as much as Bonn/Berlin's efforts to usher its eastern neighbor into NATO and the EU. Chinese views of Japan became worse in the early 21st century–just as Japanese apologies became "better." A temporary warming of Sino-Japanese relations flowed from increased bilateral cooperation, not from any new statements of contrition.

My analysis suggests that Japan should follow Germany's lead by nesting itself in strong regional institutions that demonstrate to its neighbors that it can be a trustworthy partner. But the United States, by insisting on playing a dominant role in the emerging web of economic and political networks in Asia, has limited Japan's ability to make such credible commitments to cooperation. The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, now in its 73rd year, renders Japan a semi-sovereign nation under American guardianship, if not complete domination. In an ongoing research project, I explore these constraints on Japanese foreign policy toward the rest of Asia, especially China.

Ironically, the contemporary geopolitical moment might disrupt this pattern, creating an opportunity for Asian cooperation. More than in his first term (2017-2020), U.S. President Donald Trump is now pushing isolationist and unilateral policies on trade and defense that could cause Japan to question America's commitment to the alliance. Japanese leaders have indicated they want to strengthen bilateral ties, but they may end

up looking elsewhere–maybe even in Tokyo's own backyard–for stable relations (Kushida 2025).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Axelrod, Robert, and William D. Hamilton. 1981. “The Evolution of Cooperation.” *Science* 211 (4489): 1390–1396.

Benedict, Ruth. 1946. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Houghton Mifflin.

Berger, Thomas U. 2012. *War, Guilt, and World Politics after World War II.* Cambridge University Press.

Dudden, Alexis. 2008. *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States.* Columbia University Press.

Eder, Jacob S. 2016. *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s*. Oxford University Press.

Feldman, Lily Gardner. 2014. “Reconciliation Means Having to Say You’re Sorry.” *Foreign Policy*, April 2. https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/02/reconciliation-means-having-to-say-youre-sorry/.

Feng, Zhaokui. 2006. “Geopolitical Causes of Sino-Japanese Tension.” *China Daily*, February 24.

Freudenstein, Roland. 1998. “Poland, Germany and the EU.” *International Affairs* 74 (1): 41–54.

Gao, Ming. 2025. “Trump’s Return Drives Closer Cooperation in East Asia.” *East Asia Forum*, June 4. https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/06/04/trumps-return-drives-closer-cooperation-in-east-asia/.

Gildea, Robert. 2002. “Myth, Memory and Policy in France since 1945.” In *Memory & Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, edited by Jan-Werner Müller. Cambridge University Press.

Grosser, Alfred. 1967. *French Foreign Policy under de Gaull*e. Translated by Lois Ames Pattison. Little, Brown & Colbert.

Hatch, Walter F. 2023. *Ghosts in the Neighborhood: Why Japan Is Haunted by Its Past and Germany Is Not*. University of Michigan Press.

Hatch, Walter F. 2010. “Turning Western, Turning Asian: A Study of Japanese Identity from a Gramscian Perspective.” *The Pacific Review* 23 (3): 377–406.

Hatoyama, Yukio. 2009. “Speech by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama at the APEC Meeting in Singapore.” November 15. Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200911/15singapore_e.html.

Heginbotham, Eric, and Richard Samuels. 2018. “With Friends Like These: Japan–ROK Cooperation and U.S. Policy.” *The Asan Forum*, March 1. https://theasanforum.org/with-friends-like-these-japan-rok-cooperation-and-u-s-policy/.

Herf, Jeffrey. 1997. *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*. Harvard University Press.

Izumikawa, Yasuhiro. 2020. “Network Connections and the Emergence of the Hub-and-Spokes Alliance System in East Asia.” *International Security* 45 (2): 7–50.

Kulski, W.W. 1976. *Germany and Poland: From War to Peaceful Relations*. Syracuse University Press.

Kushida, Kenji E. 2025. “Japan, Trump, and the Tariffs: Negotiation as Security Strategy.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. April. https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/04/japan-trump-tariffs-negotiation-security-trade.

Lee, Jung-hoon. 1990. “Korean-Japanese Relations: The Past, Present and Future.” *Korea Observer* 21 (2): 159–178.

Ma, Ying. 2006. “Search for a Peace Community: Regional Cooperation in Northeast Asia.” *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 20 (1): 27–45.

McGreevy, Andrew. 2005. “Arlington National Cemetery and Yasukuni Jinja: History, Memory and the Sacred.” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, August 3. https://apjjf.org/andrew-m-mcgreevy/1786/article.

Mill, John Stuart. 1848. *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy.* John W. Parker.

Mitani, Hiroshi. 2008. “The History Textbook Issue in Japan and East Asia: Institutional Framework, Controversies and International Efforts for Common Histories.” In *East Asia’s Haunted Present: Historical Memories and the Resurgence of Nationalism*, edited by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and Kazuhiko Togo. Praeger Security International.

Mochizuki, Mike M. 2010. “The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum: Japan’s Contested

Identity and Memory." In *Northeast Asia's Difficult Past*, edited by Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz. Palgrave Macmillan.

Olick, Jeffrey C. 2016. *Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method*. University of Chicago Press.

Park, Hwee-rhak. 2024. "What Made Korea-Japan Security Cooperation Retreat During the Moon Jae-in Administration." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 11 (1): 94-121.

Puaca, Brian M. n.d. "Teaching Trauma and Responsibility: World War II in West German History Textbooks." *New German Critique* 38 (1): 135-153.

Renner, Judith. 2015. "Germany-Poland: The Ritualization of Apology." In *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations*, edited by Christopher Daase. Routledge.

Rienzi, Greg. 2015. "Other Nations Could Learn from Germany's Efforts to Reconcile after WWII." *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, Summer. https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2015/summer/germany-japan-reconciliation/.

Ritter, Gerhard. 1968. *Frederick the Great: A Historical Profile*. University of California Press.

Rose, Caroline. 1998. *Interpreting History in Sino-Japanese Relations*. Routledge Curzon.

Ross, Robert S. 2013. "Managing a Changing Relationship: China's Japan Policy in the 1990s." Strategic Studies Institute, CreateSpace Independent Publishing.

Rozman, Gilbert. 2002. "China's Changing Images of Japan, 1989-2001: The Struggle to Balance Partnership and Rivalry." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 2: 95-129.

Siegel, Mona. 2002. *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914-1940*. Cambridge University Press.

Siegel, Mona. 2002. "'History Is the Opposite of Forgetting': The Limits of Memory and the Lessons of History in Interwar France." *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (December): 770-800.

Soble, Jonathan. 2015. "Shinzo Abe Echoes Japan's Past World War II Apologies but Adds None." *The New York Times*. August 14. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/15/world/asia/shinzo-abe-japan-premier-world-war-ii-apology.html.

Tian, Huan. 1997. *Zhanhou Zhongri Guanxi Wenxianji (Documents on Postwar Sino-Japanese Relations)*, Vol. 2: 1971-1995. Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.

Wakamiya, Yoshibumi. 1998. *The Postwar Conservative View of Asia: How the Political Right Has Delayed Japan's Coming to Terms with Its History of Aggression in Asia*. LTCB International Library Foundation.

Xiao, Yong. 1992. "Riben de jinyan yu zhongguo de gaige" (Japan's Experience and China's Reform). *Riben Xuekan* 5.

Yamazaki, Jane W. 2006. *Japanese Apologies for World War II: A Rhetorical Study*. Routledge.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 41-84
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.003

Attempts at Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe:
Honest efforts, but without lasting success

Falk PINGEL

Abstract

This article concentrates on the post-war situation in the countries emerging from the former socialist Yugoslavia. It also briefly deals with developments in other countries of Southeastern Europe where confrontations between different ethnicities with different languages, religious denominations and political orientations have also triggered protracted conflicts. These are less in the focus of public debate and research activities, although most of them are not yet resolved satisfactorily. The purpose of the study is to evaluate different ways of coming to terms with a violent-or "negative"-past which is difficult to remember and does not fit into the normal glorifying ceremonies of national remembrance.* The end of the Yugoslavian wars has brought political peace but if "inner peace" within and between the societies of the former warring parties has been reached is still questionable.

* The term "negative past" has been coined by the German historian and former director of the Nazi concentration camp memorial in Buchenwald/Thuringia, Volkhard Knigge. The past is called "negative," because people often have the feeling that remembering a past loaden with memories of crimes, severe injustice and pain hinder them to develop a positive image of themselves or of the society in whose name these deeds have been done. In contrast, Knigge and others hold that responsible "working through" the past helps to regain self-consciousness and trust in society (Knigge and Frei 2002).

Falk PINGEL is a former Deputy Director of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. Email: fpingel@gmx.de

The Yugoslavian wars (1991–1995, 1998/99) and their aftermath–Wars that have divided the common state and keep the societies of the successor states still apart

To understand the entangled conflict situation in the space of the former socialist Yugoslavia we have to look back at the wars that were triggered by the movements for separation from the Yugoslavian Federation and the longing for independence. For the type of warfare and the shape of the peace conditions explain to a considerable extent why within and between some of the new countries stable conditions could not be established and inner peace has not yet be achieved. The Yugoslavian wars followed a pattern of warfare which gained in importance after the dissolution of the Soviet empire and of the bipolar world system at the end of the 20th century: from wars between countries to wars within countries. "One commonality among these conflicts is that warring forces target civilian populations, particularly women and children … Indiscriminate and episodic violence occurs at random and affects people at a neighbourhood level … the collaboration of paramilitary with military units produces acts of violence and cruelty that are designed not only to kill but to terrorize and destroy the basis of community life" (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 567). "Thus, human suffering at a communal level is a shared feature of contemporary conflict" (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 577).

The wars of transition often resumed and tried to finally "resolve" conflicts that had been suppressed during the Cold–War period. The warring parties revived frontline positions from former wars, particularly from the Second World War and its aftermath but also from the time of the Ottoman empire. These far–reaching lines of historical traditions and traumas had been covered over during Tito's rule but were now reactivated to provide historical justification for the sudden outbreak of violence between the peoples of Yugoslavia (Höpken 2014).

The former "Republics" of Yugoslavia became independent countries from 1991 on. The different colours mark territories with an ethnic majority according to the census of 1991. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yugoslavia_ethnic_map.jpg

Seven countries emerged from socialist Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo,[1] Montenegro, Macedonia. Only Macedonia and Montenegro gained independence without military

---

[1] The status of Kosovo is still controversial; it is diplomatically recognised by more than 100 states but not by Serbia.

intervention or support from the Serbian or Yugoslavian army respectively, the latter being to a great extend under Serbian control during the time of Yugoslavia's dismemberment.

What special conditions allowed these two countries to reach independence in a peaceful way? In Macedonia, the Serbs were only a small minority besides Albanians, Turks and Romanies. Therefore, Serbia had only limited political interest in this multifaceted region and tolerated Macedonia's separation from Yugoslavia in 1991. It was Macedonia's complicated inner structure, not its relation to Serbia, which led to outbreaks of violence inside of Macedonia at the end of the century. Montenegro found a middle way between unity with or separation from Serbia. It formally maintained the union, but did not support Serbia's war against the successor states and took a neutral position in this regard, which was acceptable for the Serbian government. Only after the Kosovo war, a majority of Montenegrins spoke out in favour of separation from Serbia, which was realized in a peaceful way in 2006. At this time, Serbia had neither the power nor the will to withstand this decision, all the more so as Montenegro is a small, economically poor country with a heavily mixed population (e.g. ca. 45% Montenegrins, ca. 29% Serbs according to the census of 2011, and Albanians, Bosnians, Romanies). It strove for EU membership, which was not a political preference for Serbia at this time.

However, when Slovenia, as the first of the Yugoslavian Republics, declared independence in June 1991, the Yugoslavian army intervened.[2] The latter had however underestimated the fighting strength and determination of the Slovenian army, politicians and population. The Serbian leadership submitted to internationally supported peace negotiations after some weeks of fighting because it did not want to be dragged into a long war over Slovenia which was inhabited to ca. 90 per cent by Slovenians and was traditionally seen as culturally oriented to Western Europe and less amenable to an overall Pan–Slavic idea.

Slovenia's independence could even be seen as a relief enabling the

---

[2] About the military and political history of the Yugoslav wars, see Baker (2015).

government in Belgrade to concentrate its forces on the upcoming conflict with Croatia which meanwhile had also declared independence. The political-military situation here was different from that in and towards Slovenia. Here, one part of the country-the Krajina-was populated by a strong Serb majority which felt much more attached to Serbia than to an independent Croatia.[3] Serb paramilitary troops in the Krajina were supported by the Yugoslavian army under the pretext that Serbia had to protect the rights, well-being and political aspirations of the Serb population in Croatia. The fierce and costly batteles (Grandis and Leutloff 2003) only came to a temporary halt after the Yugoslavian army had conquered the Krajina. International political intervention helped to negotiate a ceasefire. Yet, clashes between the warring parties continued and peace was not in sight. The Serbian military superiority had forced Croatia to accept a cease-fire, but Croatia was not willing to also cease its political claim to the Krajina. The impact of the military defeat was not strong enough to dissolve exclusive identity concepts of national belonging, ethnic affiliation and religious conviction. Neither side showed the will for working out a compromise guaranteeing the rights of both Croatians and Serbs, to live together in the Krajina (Bjelajac and Žunec 2009).

These features of the conflict not only repeated themselves but intensified to the extreme in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The former Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina displayed the most complicated picture: a Croat majority lived in a strip on the Mediterranean coast representing about 18% of the population, whereas the northern region was mostly populated by Serbs representing ca. 32% of the population; the Bosniaks – often also labelled "Muslims" – made up ca. 38% living mostly in the centre around the capital Sarajevo. Though the three ethnicities-Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks-have their majority regions, al-

---

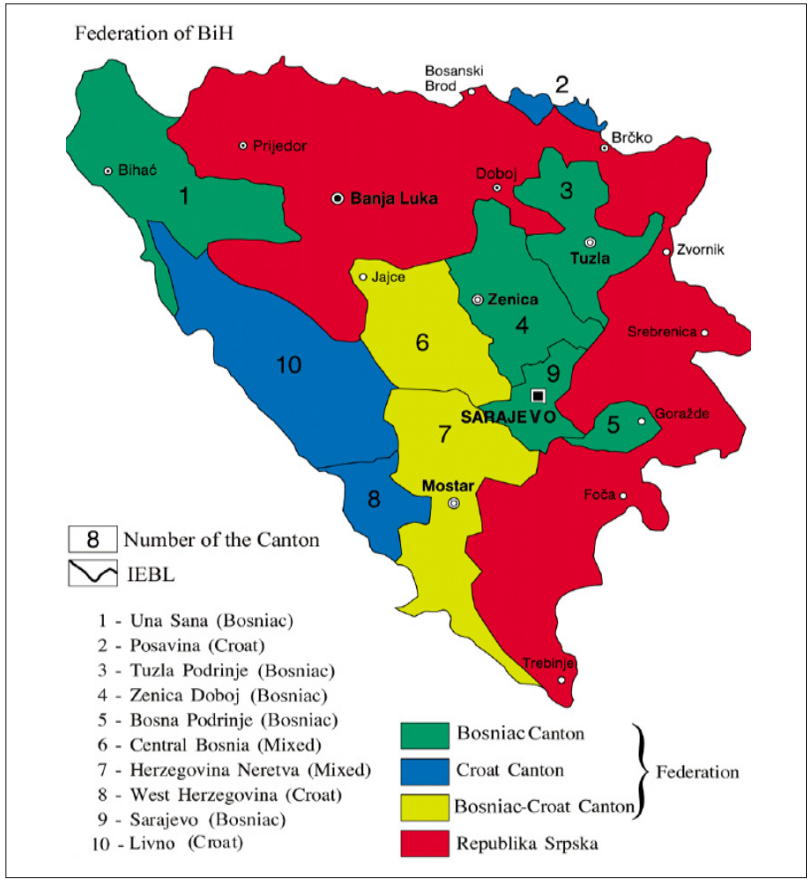
[3] In order to show clearly the respective citizenship, Serbians in Serbia are called Serbians; as members of another state or state-like entity such as BaH, they are called Serbs; correspondingly, I use the terms Croatians, if they are citizens of Croatia, and Croats, if they belong to the respective minority in other countries. The inhabitants of BaH without reference to any ethnical qualifications are called Bosnians.

most every community is home of people from all the three ethnicities. Nevertheless, Croats and Serbs strove to establish their own political entities with a clear majority population. The Croats wanted to have either an autonomous status within an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina (BaH) or join Croatia, whereas the Serbs were not willing to live under Bosniak–Croat domination and formed their own Serb Republic in January 1992 hoping for a political union with Serbia. However, the realization of these claims would have meant the dismemberment of BaH leaving the Bosniaks in a sector that would hardly be self–sustainable and would be under constant threat from their bigger neighbours Serbia and Croatia. Serb paramilitary forces supported by the still existing Yugoslavian army were the first to attack Bosniaks in Sarajevo and other places. All the three sides now took the risk of a cruel war fighting against their former neighbours and friends with whom they had lived together in one state and in one community for decades. Now, the three sides became entangled in a mutual war. International attempts at mediation promoted mainly by the US government failed because no solution could be found that guaranteed the sovereignty of BaH on the one hand and, on the other hand, fulfilled the claims of Serbs and Croats for their own territories or even union with Croatia and Serbia respectively. In the long run, the failure of reaching compromises even intensified warfare, led to expulsions of minority populations on a big scale often triggered by massacres against civilians.

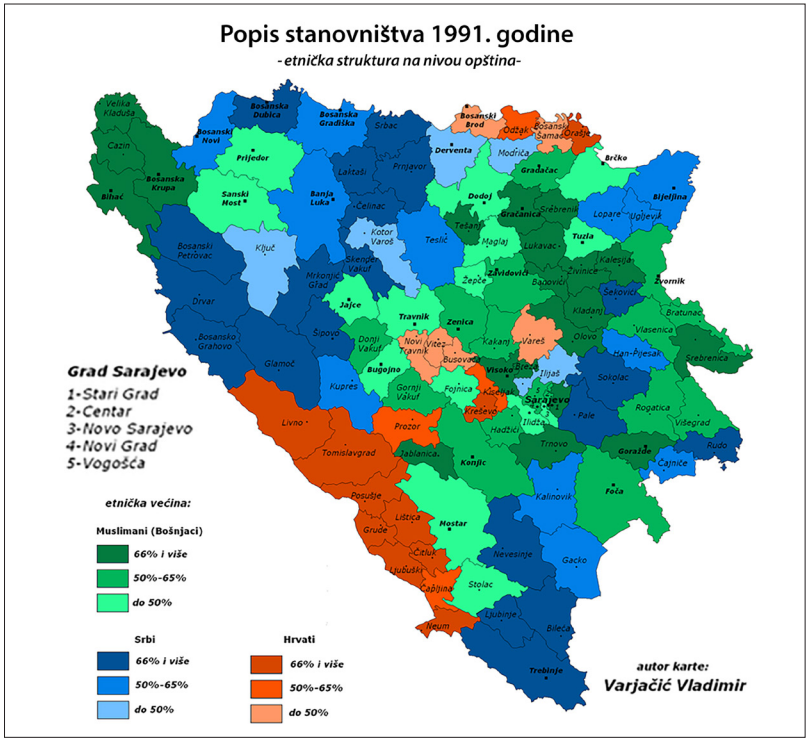
Above all, it was a war for territories, but the conflict had also a religious component, affected private lives and deepened the abyss between the ethnicities. For Serbs were mostly Christian Orthodox, Croats Catholic and Bosniaks Muslims. Many of the mixed marriages concluded in Yugoslavian time were forced or felt the need to divorce as they were no longer accepted by their community.

The war had one decisive caesura that brought the fighting to a peak but also brought all sides to the negotiating table finally. The initiative came again from outside, namely the International Community led by the US government, which convinced the government of Croatia to join forces with the BaH government in Sarajevo in 1994. This coalition

enabled the Croatian army to concentrate their forces on attacking Serbian troops and to get back the Krajina. Under heavy military attack, most of the Serbs left the Krajina or were expelled. Facing more and more pressure from the International Community, the Serbs in BaH tried to enlarge their militarily controlled area at all costs in order to improve their negotiating power when it should come to peace talks. They took control

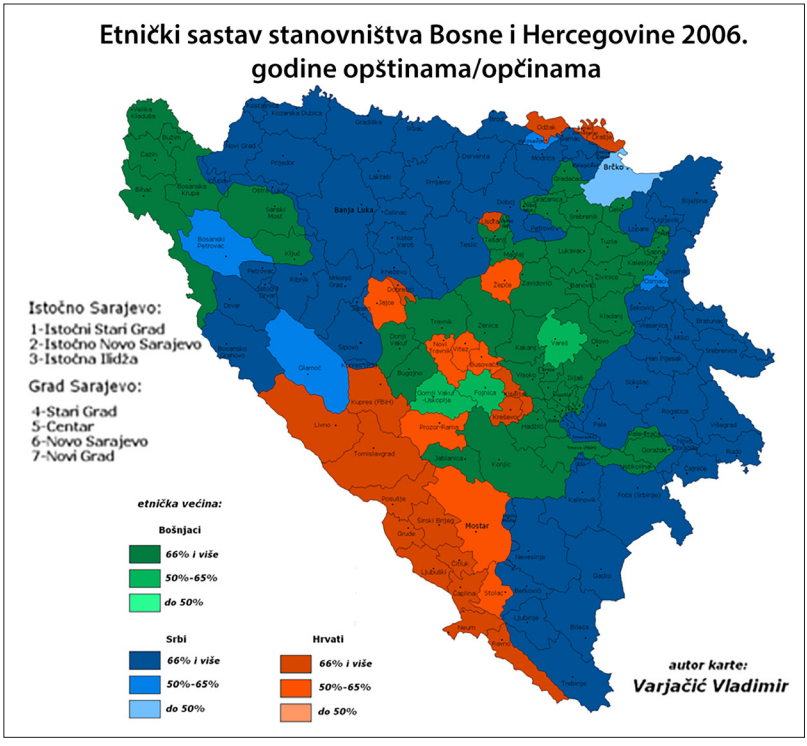


The political structure of BaH is still more simple than the ethnic composition of its population. It is an illusionary political model to harmonize both. Source: https://reliefweb.int/map/bosnia-and-herzegovina/federation-bosnia-and-herzegovina



Ethnic map of BaH according to the census of 1991. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/53/DemoBIH1991.png

of so-called safe areas under the protection of UN troops where many Bosniaks who lived in Serb-dominated regions had taken refuge. Some of these areas were surrounded by Serb military. Serb troops now expelled and massacred thousands of Bosniak civilians to gain a more monoethnic Serb-dominated territory. One of these actions taking place near the community of Srebrenica was later classified as genocide by the Hague International Court (Calic 2009; Allcock 2009). Under the fire from two sides and forced to withdraw the Serbian troops from the Krajina, threatened by US military intervention, the President of Serbia, Milošević, saw his own position and the well-being of his country Serbia



Ethnic map of BaH 2006. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina#/media/File:DemoBIH2006a.png.

endangered and pressed the Bosnian Serbs to consent to peace talks under the guidance of the USA.

The Peace Accords of Dayton hammered out in a conference lasting several weeks in the autumn of 1995 confirmed the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisting of two "entities," the "Serb Republic" (RS) and the "Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina," the latter comprising ten "Cantons" (communities) with either a Croat or Bosniak (and in one case even a Serb) majority. The two entities and the ten Cantons have their own governments in addition to the central, overarching government and the Presidency–this complicated state structure was the prize

for peace. The country's constitution is part of the Dayton Accords and in so far protected against changes that would harm the peace agreement. The constitution defines the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as "constituent peoples" of the country (Gavric and Richter 2010).

The war has changed the ethnic composition of the country's regions: many of the formerly mixed areas transformed into political units dominated by one ethnicity, however without creating totally homogeneous areas.

As a result of the war, Croatia could secure its borders and considerably diminished its Serb population. It was the first of the former Yugoslav entities to join the EU. The remaining Serbs in Croatia, like other minorities, are now protected by the EU and UN minority legislation. Though discrimination und prejudices still exist, violent clashes of a larger scale are no longer to be expected. It can be said that the country is pacified and politically consolidated. However, reconciliation measures, whether within Croatia or with neighbouring countries, were not considered necessary on a larger and institutional scale. Although the spectrum of judgements and opinions is broad in historiography and history textbooks, the governments tend to introduce more nationalistic tendencies in the last decade (Koren and Baranović 2009). The public still sees Serbia as the culprit and aggressor in what is now called "the homeland war" meaning it was a just, defensive war–and the same can be said about the Serbian attitude towards the Croatian warfare (MacDonald 2002; Radonic 2010).

The "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" consisting now of Serbia proper and Montenegro had to get over the loss of BaH and Croatia where it was unable to achieve its goals in Krajina. However, it could hold its proper territory till the upcoming war with Kosovo.

The wars that dragged on over a period of five years had fostered mistrust and tendencies to cut oneself off from communication with members of the "other" communities.[4] The minds of the generations edu-

---

[4] Grandits and Gosztonyi (2003) draw attention to opposing trends of behaviour on a local level.

The rebuilt churches and mosques in Mostar serve as symbols of the collective memory defining an exclusive cultural space (cultural territorialism). The church tower now is higher than before the war. On top of the mountain behind the church, a cross has been erected which can be seen from everywhere and overlooks the whole river plain on which Mostar is located.

cated in socialist Yugoslavia were largely shaped through the then official ideology of "brotherhood and unity." However, the brutal violence of the wars destroyed trust in interethnic relations almost completely.[5] This was particularly felt in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the three ethnicities are part of a unified state, but one can hardly say that they also form a unified society.

The acts of violence had created hatred, divided families, separated communities, led to expulsion of population and changes of ownership that could not simply be stopped or even reversed after the end of the war. A return to pre-war living conditions was not possible.[6] This was the reason why the war transformed into a fight for cultural uniqueness

---

[5] Basic (2004) delivers exciting stories from soldiers: What did they think, how did they react in war, how did they conceive their war experiences?

[6] D'Alessio (2009) has described life and social atmosphere in the divided town of Mostar in an exemplary way. For a theoretical approach, see Blagojević (2009).

and difference after the Dayton Peace agreement. To give an example: When I was heading the OSCE[7] Education Department in 2003–eight years after the war!–I had to organise the conferences of the country's twelve ministers of education[8] taking place regularly and alternately in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and the Croat part of Mostar so representing the political centres of the three ethnicities. When I proposed that we use this opportunity to visit cultural monuments of these cities to get familiar with the variety of cultural expressions in the country, the ministers rejected the proposal and one of them bluntly declared that they are not interested in the respective other ethnicities' cultural manifestations because these are not worth a visit.

The enforced peace: No victors, only victims

The war over Bosnia and Herzegovina did not produce clear victors or losers. It came to a halt before one of the warring sides militarily collapsed or triumphed. Peace was brokered by international military and diplomatic intervention without which the fighting would not have stopped. During the peace negotiations in Dayton, USA, the leading broker, the representatives of the US government, had repeatedly threatened the parties with further military intervention or an abrupt end of negotiations which would have meant the continuation of war. The former warring parties had either to accept the territorial compromises and the stipulations of the Peace Accords regulating the social and political relations between the peoples of BaH or lose the support of the International Com-

---

7 The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is–as part of the International Community–responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords, amongst others, in the field of education.

8 They represent the ten Cantons, the RS and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the Education Minister of the Federation, also the central government's Minister of Civil Affairs is invested with a coordinating function in education; also a representative of the special district of Brcko took part in the conferences. Brcko was a mixed Bosniak–Serb Canton administrated first directly by the International Community, now by both entities as a "condominium."

munity. The bulk of proposals dealing with the internal and external relations between the former warring parties came from international brokers and were often related to overarching international treaties such as the incorporation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights into the constitution of BaH. The local players mainly were interested in securing as much territory and privileges for their own ethnicity as possible. They accepted the multi-cultural principles of a future living together in the post-Yugoslavian states only formally, under political pressure, and did not acknowledge them whole-heartedly or with understanding. They hardly took the initiative to shape the future relations between the peoples in a humanistic, open-minded, forward-looking way.[9]

The Kosovo-War: Putting an end to the Yugoslav wars?

The last war over the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia was fought over Kosovo in the years 1998/1999. In socialist Yugoslavia, Kosovo had been part of the Republic of Serbia enjoying the special status of an autonomous region until 1980. Many Serbians and Serbs in Kosovo felt and feel almost mythically attached to the Kosovo, where they think their forefathers had defended Europe against the "Muslim threat" in the late Middle Ages when Southeastern Europe came under the Ottoman domination (Spasic 2015; Djokic 2009). Although Serbs constituted a relatively small minority amongst others (ca. 10% before Yugoslavia's dismemberment, today ca. 5-7% of Kosovo's population), the Serbian historical myth and mission stood against all endeavours of the Albanian speaking majority population to achieve independence like the other post-Yugoslavian states did. Ongoing clashes between the Serbian army and Kosovo-Albanian paramilitary troops as well as the Kosovo Liberation Army in the 1990s developed into open war and massacres

[9] Holbrooke (1999) who headed the American delegation offers the most impressive and detailed description of the road to peace; see also Bildt (1998).

committed on both sides, expulsion and dislocation of Albanians and Serbs (Gow 2009). Peace talks initiated by the International Community came close to agreements but were torpedoed in the last phase. Only after NATO military invention including the bombing of Belgrade, President Milošević was ready for a withdrawal of Serbian troops and agreed to the establishment of a UN-administration (UNMIK) and the stationing of UN troops (KFOR) in Kosovo.[10] Kosovo's autonomy status was renewed, so that it formally remained part of the Republic of Serbia (and Montenegro at this time, i.e. 1999). Ongoing tensions between the Albanian and the reduced Serb population groups led to the destruction of cultural Serb monuments and attacks on Serb villages. One cannot state that the region is pacified. Practically, the country has a bipolar structure. Most of the communities are more or less homogenous with a clear Albanian or Serb majority. The education system is divided (Kostovicova 2005). Only after years of international negotiations, UNMIK operations practically came to an end and, in 2008, Kosovo declared its independence which is meanwhile recognized by more than half of the UN member states but not by Serbia. As the political status of Kosovo could not finally be clarified between the UN, Kosovo and Serbia during the UN administration, UNMIK's mandate formally is still in force. Yet, the Kosovo government feels free to regulate internal issues at will and does not show serious inclination to engage in steps towards transitional justice. Even first timid contacts between the ministry of education and the Georg Eckert Institute intended to revise history textbooks and curricula were obstructed on so-called administrative reasons. Critical textbook analyses conducted by experts of the Institute were simply rejected by Albanian experts. The meetings did not provide starting points for a sustainable project on textbook revision and educational reform. The education system remains divided between the two population groups. Mystical identifications with space and ethnicity often form the heart of the narrative and are not appropriate to overcome the politico-cultural divide

---

[10] Petritsch and Pichler (2005) offer detailed insight into this difficult process.

between the two ethnicities (Lichnofsky et al. 2017). As Kostovica (2009, 209) summarizes in her textbook analysis: "In sum, both the Serbs and the Albanians emerge in their respective geography and history textbooks as the embattled defenders of their territory, always at the mercy of the 'other.' For the Albanians, the Serbs are exclusively associated with massacres and expulsions; for the Serbs, the Albanians are brutes referred to in derogatory terms … possible counterarguments based on opposing facts are omitted or sidelined." Such extreme descriptions of each other only mellow down slowly but as long as the inner conflict and divisions last, they will not disappear.

According to the official interpretation, Serbia was not directly militarily involved in the Bosnian war. Therefore the Bosnian war is neither commemorated in official ceremonies nor depicted on war monuments (Kandić 2007) whereas the war against Croatia is seen as a defensive campaign and is remembered in the traditional heroic way. However, after the Kosovo war and all the more so after Milošević had lost the Presidential election, Serbia saw itself compelled to adopt a more moderate position instead of its former dominant, self-opinionated habitus. The wars of the 1990s were interpreted as "liberation wars" focussing on the fighting over Krajina and Kosovo as well as the NATO air strikes against Serbia in 1999 (Humanitarian Law Center 2021). They were included into a commemoration line comprising other well-known fights for Serbia's independence such as the 1389 Battle of Kosovo and other anti-Ottoman uprisings particularly in the 19th century as well as the First and Second World War. Besides the propagated official memory policy less state-controlled remembrance activities developed: "Some steps toward digital memory activism, visible, accessible and participatory for everyone, have been taken ... the noticeable turn towards online platforms for purposes of online commemoration and advocacy, and the growing use of hashtags by memory activists in their memory work" (Humanitarian Law Center 2021, 35; Fridman 2019).

This overview of the situation in the former Yugoslav region shows that the implementation of transitional justice and reconciliation needs the backing of local administration and political organs. If the initiatives

mainly come from outside, sustainable effects are hardly to be expected, all the more so as local civil society institutions were almost not existent in the immediate post-war years and play a limited role up today. If official policy is not in line with reform efforts from outside, and if even a considerable part of the population regards them with scepticism, the impact of such activities remains restricted. A good example proving this has been the Joint History Project of the Thessaloniki based "Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe" (CDRSEE). This project has developed source-based teaching material about the history of Southeastern Europe and trained about 1.000 teachers, who came particularly from the former Yugoslavian region, to use this material in classroom. After some years of training, the Centre evaluated the project's impact and outcome. Almost all teachers who participated in the seminars stated that they use the material with lasting success but that they could not convince a notable number of their colleagues who had not participated in the project to teach the material as well.[11] Thus, the project was successful for the participants only but had not the intended ripple effect. I think that teachers in China, South Korea and Japan may have made similar experiences when they taught extra-curricular teaching materials on the history of East Asia developed by multilateral groups of researchers and teachers.

Nevertheless, I do not want to say that reconciliation projects are not useful. The more of them are being performed, the more teachers and scholars adopt innovative teaching content and methodological approaches. It remains open at which point they will represent a critical mass posing an alternative that can no longer be denied by colleagues or school authorities. We learned from our projects conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute that some of the participants could join teams of authors who developed alternative teaching devices or were accepted by the ministries as curriculum experts or textbook authors so that positive effects can be

---

[11] Oral reports at the CDRSEE conference "History Education fostering European Integration," Thessaloniki, 20-21 November 2010.

noted in the longer run.

All these cases show that reconciliation efforts can only achieve a major impact if they are carried out by public institutions and/or supported by official policy. They need a favourable domestic political climate. If these conditions are not given, they may nevertheless serve as a basis for subsequent activities with a wider impact when a political climate change and more openness for mutual acknowledgement is in sight.

Transitional justice as a means to overcome the ethnic divide: Textbook revision, commemoration, trials, with particular reference to BaH

Textbook Revision

The shortcomings of the peace process and the lasting impact of the war were particularly felt in the field of education. As a consequence of the ethnicized and compartmentalized political structure education became provincialized (Moll 2013). The RS, Herzegovina and many of the Cantons developed their own curricula and partly even textbooks. Until today, they stress differences rather than commonalities in ethnic, cultural and religious features. At the end of the 1990s, the International Community, which had to oversee the implementation of the Dayton Accords, became aware that pupils in BaH were exposed to formulations that disparage the other communities, neglect their cultural achievements and accuse them of massacres committed in past and present (Ramet 2007). Schools and parents strove to create mono-ethnic classes wherever possible. The teaching of history and social sciences did not prepare students to become citizens of a joint BaH but oriented political awareness and identity patterns to their own entity which was for Serbs and Croats closely related to the neighbouring states of Serbia or Croatia respectively. These states represented the main reference points in Croat and Serb textbooks and were sometimes even called “Fatherland” (Karge and Batarilo, 2009).

Only the Bosniaks had no foreign point of reference and started to

develop their own political identity as citizens of BaH. Already during the war, the Bosniak, Croat and Serb dominated territories had developed their own teaching materials strengthening their specific ethnic identity and emphasising differences in language, culture and religion between the three ethnicities. Partly, history textbooks were even imported from neighbouring countries. This violated the Dayton Accords and prompted the International Community to intervene. An agreement between the ministries of education and OSCE hammered out a procedure of textbook approval and revision. It stipulated that no discriminatory language or disparaging formulations should be used that are not tolerable from the point of view of one of the three ethnicities. This procedure changed some formulations but hardly alter the overarching narrative. In contrast, it led to a long process of controversial debate and delayed the printing of new textbooks (Pingel 2009).

To speed the process and make textbook authors and ministry experts familiar with principles of multi-cultural teaching approaches, external NGOs provided support such as the Council of Europe, EUROCLIO and the German Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. They offered numerous seminars bringing together teachers and curriculum experts from BaH and Council of Europe member states. The seminars offered examples of multi-cultural textbooks and of how controversial issues can be seen from different perspectives in teaching material (Carretero 2017). Such approaches were almost unknown to Bosnian teachers, curriculum experts and textbook authors. Participants of seminars conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute developed guidelines on how to write non-discriminatory, multi-perspectival texts. The guidelines recommended for the first time that the wars of the 1990s should be treated in history teaching and textbooks. According to a former resolution of the Council of Europe this topic should be avoided because it seemed to be too controversial and emotionally loaded. However, without treating the wars, the most significant experience of adults and children could not be expressed and clarified in the classroom. The guidelines were meant to serve as a basis for textbook approval and further revision processes. However, although approved by all ministers of

education, implementation of the guidelines became a problem as the Institute had no power to control the use of the guidelines whose legal status remained controversial. Textbook revision had an effect on some textbook authors who now deviated from the traditional, ethnicized, one-sided narrative as long as projects for innovation lasted. Yet, this effect often faded away when the activities of NGOs and the International Community ended or were scaled down (Pingel 2017). The last comprehensive analysis of BaH history textbooks performed in 2018/2019 shows that each side still emphasises its own achievements in culture, politics and economy and neglects or diminishes the qualities of the "other" in this regard (Karge 2019). Until now, the principal narrative has changed only gradually and not systematically, with only a few exceptions. Each side eulogises their own war heroes who are said to have fought a just war. Self-criticism on issues of national significance and pride remains almost unknown. Insofar, textbook revision had only a limited effect on reconciliation. Projects researching the effects of innovative educational approaches in the region show that they need constant support from outside, otherwise they lose impact. The local educational authorities have shown almost no interest on their own to foster controversial thinking and multi-cultural approaches (Pingel 2023). Temporarily, the situation seemed to be more open in Croatia but counter-movements from national conservative groups-also in academia-often worked successfully against innovations in methodology and content (Dimou 2009).

Memory politics

Memory politics can affect mutual recognition, acknowledgement of crimes and foster insight into the suffering of one's own people as well as of the "other." However, it can also be used to produce and disseminate heroic self-images of innocent victims who suffered from the deeds of the opponent. On one's own side you find only righteous fighters and brave victims, on the other side brutal foes. This was more or less the way in which commemoration developed in BaH (Hajdarpašić 2010; Duijzings 2007; Grandits 1998).

Each side claimed to have the most victims to prove the brutality of

Shovels to dig up the graves of victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Photo: Author

the opponents. Only detailed research conducted by local NGOs brought to light the correct figures of deaths which were considerably lower than officially estimated. It is revealing that the authorities were not interested in such research which could lower the blood toll their own ethnicity had to pay. The competition over the number of victims stylizes oneself as the suffering subject and the other as the aggressor. Andersen and Borcak (2022) even speak of a "mnemonic war." Due to this dichotomic approach common official commemoration procedures have not been developed. The focus is on mourning one's own victims, not on mutual understanding. People are often distrustful of the official institutions' ability to bring to light the real story of the war events. A strong minority does not even think that official commemoration will help to come to grips with the brutal past. According to an opinion poll, between 20 to 30% of the population of BaH held that the wars of the 1990s should not be treated at all in order not to reawaken painful memories or even stimulate

Poster for a commemoration ceremony in the centre of Sarajevo showing coffins of the victims of Srebrenica. Photo: Author

feelings of hatred again.[12]

However, a civil society driven movement for an appropriate and worthy culture of remembrance developed particularly within the Bosniak society. Families who had to mourn victims came together to uncover more information about what happened to their beloved ones, who was guilty of the crimes and how the victims could be commemorated. Engaged officials from international organisations supported them. This is how the plan was born to establish a large cemetery close to Srebrenica according to the international model of war cemeteries, and to erect a museum in the old factory building where the refugees were housed under the assumed UN protection. The first commemoration day was celebrated in Srebrenica in July 2000, five years after the catastrophe. In

[12] Opinion poll of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Justice and Truth in BiH–Public Perceptions" of 2005 (Mandić 2007).

An aerial view of the Srebrenica-Potocari Genocide Memorial Center.
Source: ArminxDurgut/PIXSELL

2003, the first 600 corpses were buried in the new cemetery (Duijzings 2007).

For many years, Serb politicians did not take part in the annual day of remembrance. Instead, they officially neglected that Serb troops were involved in genocidal activities. In the post-war years, Bosniak participants in the ceremony had even to fear attacks from Serb local protesters. To make the Srebrenica cemetery a safe place for commemoration, the High Representative of the International Community[13] ordered that the cemetery, which was located on the territory of the Serb Republic, was declared extraterritorial and put under the authority of the central government (and no longer of the government of the Serb Republic). Although meant to provide a safer environment for future commemoration meetings, this measure triggered vehement protests from the Serb side (RS Government 2007; Morrow 2012). In the longer run, the situation eased, and representatives of the RS took part in commemoration ceremonies. The government of the RS even established a Srebrenica commission,

[13] The High Representative represents the International Community in BaH with the right to interfere in legislation which is not in accordance with the Dayton Accords.

which presented its report in 2004. For the first time, the RS publicly admitted that mass crimes had been committed in Srebrenica and other places. However, the International Community remained concerned about widespread ongoing denial of Serb mass-crimes in the public and the media. As a countermeasure, the High Representative again interfered and used his legislative power to interdict the denial of genocide and relativization of crimes in 2021. This certainly was an initiative of goodwill but Hronešová and Hasić 2023 contend that it did not contribute to bring the controversial narratives closer to each other. Instead, it sparked a new heated debate and brought about new tensions between Serbs and Bosniaks questioning not only the historical facts but also the role and legitimacy of the High Representative to direct the memories of the war through official orders. Opinion polls showed that the majority of the Serbs in the RS still denied that the former General Mladić and President Karadžić-both convicted of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)-had committed such crimes (Hronešová and Hasić 2023, 407). Milorad Dodik, the current President of the RS, again denied the Srebrenica genocide and was not punished—like other violators of the law, showing that the law was ineffective in deterring such denials. It still requires initiatives from the civil society such as "The Mother of Srebrenica" to keep the memory of the crimes alive and to help find out the historical truth. In their study about the commemoration of Srebrenica in the RS, Halilovich and Adams (2024) argue that one has to study local commemorative spaces in order to detect alternative memories that do not follow the official narrative disseminated by leading media and propagated by official institutions. However, official memory politics from all sides makes it difficult to uncover the more subjective, divergent memories that are emotionally loaded and marked by personal experiences. In contrast, the Sarajevo Canton Memorial Fund warns against a too diverse array of memorial activities in face of the fragmented culture in BaH and works for a more unified state-directed memory policy as a means to fight denial and negligence of war crimes (Rauch 2023). This debate over commemoration prescribed from above or agitated top-down is going on.

"Don't forget Srebrenica." The Graffitti in English is addressed to the International Community bearing responsibility for keeping the memory of the genocide alive.
Photo: Author (November 2003)

Overpainting of the Srebrenica Graffiti: An indicator of normalisation?
Photo: Author (November 2009)

Memory politics follow political trends and have had their ups and downs in the 30 post-war years. In the decade after the war, a rigid moral and demanding attitude prevailed in demanding the acknowledgment of crimes and show respect to victims in BaH.[14] With material as well as economic reconstruction and normalisation of daily life, this emotional and uncompromising attitude decreased without fading away. It could be revived whenever provocative political comments or actions were taken concerning commemoration issues from either side-and the two interferences of the High Representative were widely seen as such provocations by the Serbs.

Trials

Judicial redress is often seen as an effective means of healing in societies where state-committed crimes occurred. It helps to reestablish personal identities in the families of victims, build new trust in state institutions during the phase of reconstruction and convey a feeling of righteousness providing a secure ground for rebuilding shattered or dissolved social ties (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002). However, the effects are ambivalent if trials are not initiated by one's own institutions but by a third power, be it the former, now victorious enemy or a "neutral" international court. For the former case, the Nuremberg trials carried out by the Allies after the Second World War in Germany are a prime example. They were rejected as unjust "victors' justice" by a great part of the German population. They had only a limited effect on the recognition of crimes in society in general and on the insight into the responsibility of the many institutions that carried out these crimes.[15] Similar reactions could and can be observed in BaH, Serbia and Croatia. Only in the long run, it can be said that international trials contribute to a mind-change within the population of aggressor states.

The UN Security Council established the International Criminal

---

[14] Bugarel et al (2007) develop such a bottom-up approach against the main stream official memory from an anthropological point of view.

[15] Cohen (2004) confirms this not only for the Nuremberg but also for the Tokyo trials.

Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) already in 1993. Investigating the crimes, apprehending and arresting the perpetrators, many of whom had gone into hiding, took a long time. A total of 83 defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from long to life imprisonment. The court could conduct trials against the most important war criminals, the President of Serbia during the wars, Slobodan Milošević, the President of the RS, Radovan Karadžić, and the military leader of the RS, General Ratko Mladić. Milošević died during his trial; therefore no judgment could be pronounced. Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years in prison. In its last judgment, the court sentenced Ratko Mladić to life imprisonment in November 2017.

The trials of the ICTY in the Hague, Netherlands were regarded with scepticism or rejected by the majority of the population in whose name these crimes had been committed. The international trials did not help to bring about a process of mutual recognition, forgiveness or apology (Zgonjanin 2018; Kostić 2018; Orentlicher 2010; Allcock 2009; Cooper 1999).[16] The indictments and trials of the ICTY strengthened feelings of victimization on all sides rather than bridging the gap between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks.

Particularly high-ranking Serbs who had been indicted could hide within their own population for many years. In the post-war years, there were hardly feelings of guilt in the population. It was a breakthrough when the new President of Serbia, Đinđić, extradited the former Serbian president Milošević to the Hague Court in 2001 although Milošević had been indicted already two years before when he was still president. After his almost triumphant appearance in the Dayton negotiations, President Milošević had come under fire because of Serbia's political, if not military engagement in the Bosnian war and under pressure from the ICTY investigating against him for mass crimes and even genocide. Before the Kosovo War, Serbia's official media and politics of history rejected the charges and accusations almost unanimously. Only after he was voted out

---

[16] See also the OSCE reports on war crime tribunals https://www.osce.org/zagreb/66067.

as president, the mood in the Serbian population slowly changed and the new president could wage Milošević's extradition but even then not without heavy pressure from outside, particularly from the US government. The population's attitude to the war crimes remained ambivalent (Ramet 2007b). On the one hand, former convicted war criminals "are … accepted in society," on the other hand "the state representatives depict Serbia as the state most dedicated to regional reconciliation. In this way, Aleksandar Vučić[17] emphasises that Serbia has confessed its crimes and condemned the perpetrators of the crimes committed in its name …" (Humanitarian Law Center 2021, 33).

The national-conservative Tudjman government of Croatia was opposed to cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, and this attitude was in line with public opinion. Only after Tudjman's death in 1999, the new President Stjepan Mesić and the then ruling social-liberal coalition were ready to extradite war criminals to the Hague. However, they did this not without pressure from the EU Commission which threatened the government to otherwise defer Croatia's application for EU membership. Nevertheless, the bulk of the population still met investigations of the Tribunal with "lack of understanding and rejection" (Pervan 2007, 172). To reduce the influence of the international court on the judicial prosecution of Croatian war crimes, the Croatian judiciary itself started to conduct investigations against individual persons who are indicted for having committed war crimes against Serbs. According to opinion polls the majority does not support such trials and sees only Serbia and Serbs as aggressors and war criminals whereas Croatian forces are regarded as a defensive army that could not have done such acts.

Even among the Bosnian population, the Hague Court was regarded ambivalently because it also staged a trial against a Bosniak high ranking fighter who had attacked Serb civilians near Srebrenica and was seen as a brave defender and military hero by most Bosniaks. Often, victims do not accept the impartiality of an international court if the judgement is

---

[17] Current President of Serbia, as of 2025.

against a member of their own group. Fletcher and Weinstein (2002, 602) even contend that the victimized would accuse the court of not understanding the reality of the fighting and suffering they had to endure. The victims construct different layers of experience. Whereas they acknowledge that the court has a correct understanding of the crimes of "the other," they cast doubts on the court's ability to evaluate their own fighting experiences. In the interviews, Fletcher and Weinstein (2002, 602) conducted "…the participants speak about the need for international criminal prosecutions exclusively in terms of accountability for crimes committed against members of the national group with which the speaker identifies." These findings are in line with general studies on international law "which is sceptical of the independent power of international law to affect domestic society and politics" (Waters 2013, 187). NGOs in Croatia and BaH such as Documenta, the Centre for Working through the Past in Zagreb, or the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo tried to make crimes known including those committed by one's own soldiers but their work is often criticized and discriminated against as infringement of national interests.

Several proposals to establishment of a truth commission in the successor states of Yugoslavia did not produce viable results. Thanks to the engagement of the head of the Jewish community in Sarajevo, a draft law on the establishment of a truth commission for BaH could be developed but it did not pass the parliament and did not meet with sufficient public support (MacDonald 2009). The conviction was too deeply anchored in the minds and hearts of the people that they all know the truth of victimisation, suppression and murder, which has been inflicted upon them. That this truth is only partial is still not widely accepted.[18]

Yet, one should not forget that the trials documented war crimes extensively and carefully and so created a firm basis for research and distribution of the historical truth in the longer run. This is, by the way, also

---

[18] Boerhout (2016) delivers many examples for commemoration activities and monuments distancing themselves from or neglecting victims of the "other" side.

one of the remaining merits of the Nuremberg trials. Until today, researchers make use of documents the court has produced and make them available to the public so that the denial of crimes can be easily refuted. This will seemingly also apply to the ICTY.

Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe will be a long process and happen first in smaller groups of engaged and enlightened individuals before it will reach the level of official institutions, influential media and politics.

The immediate post-war years centred around material reconstruction and the return of refugees, which is almost done. A new, viable political structure could be built in Slovenia and Croatia, to a great extent also in Serbia and Montenegro whereas a promising political structure for the future is not yet reached in BaH and Kosovo and only partly in North Macedonia. During the second decade of the 21st century, foremost the International Community strove to help establish a satisfying political balance between the different population groups and rebuild social ties inside and between different ethnic/cultural/religious communities-this is only partly done.

Reconciliation efforts achieve a major, lasting impact if they are carried out by public institutions or supported by official policy. They need a favourable domestic political climate. If these conditions are not given, individual engagement and NGO-projects serve as a basis for subsequent activities with a wider impact when a political climate change and more openness for mutual acknowledgement is in sight.

Ethnic problems not yet resolved in Southeastern Europe

In the following, I will deal with protracted conflicts in Southeastern Europe that have not shown political violence or military clashes in recent years. Yet, they bear the risk that violence may erupt and be reinforced through Russia's aggressive policy that tries to aggravate internal political differences in countries of Southeastern Europe and to weaken their

stability and trust in European cooperation.

One of the former Yugoslavian countries, Macedonia, came into trouble with two of its neighbouring countries. Ethnic–national claims and delineations played a role here. The controversies I refer to can jeopardize the country's application to join the EU and have strained its neighbouring relations. For example, Greece did not accept the country's name when it became independent, because Greece's northern province had the same name "Macedonia" and Greece assumed that the naming of the state Macedonia was related to territorial claims on the Greek northern province (in the Yugoslavian time, Macedonia was called "Socialist Republic of Macedonia" which Greece had tolerated). Though the suspicion seemed to be exaggerated, it was not without reason. Both countries see Alexander the Great as one of their historical heroes and mystify him as part of their national heritage. The first Macedonian history textbook, which appeared after independence, n fact sent an ambiguous message. A map showed regions with a Macedonian majority population including areas situated in Greece. The delineation of ethnic boundaries could create the impression that Macedonia would also lay a political claim on them.

To avoid any misunderstandings, Greece demanded a name change, otherwise it would vote against Macedonia's accession to the EU. Because of the name struggle, Macedonia was called "FYROM" in international relations meaning the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Both governments came to an agreement only after long negotiations during which Greece even imposed an embargo on Macedonia making trade and border crossings for Macedonians difficult. According to the agreement the country bears the name "Republic of North Macedonia" since 2019 (Zivanovic and Marusic 2018). The conciliatory approach approved useful because it opened the way to further reconciliation efforts such as an agreement on a mutual history curriculum and textbook studies (Jordanov 2019).

Although a pragmatic solution could be found in this case, claims of exclusive identities associated with competing historical concepts of nation and ethnicity still linger in the region. A similar unsolved dispute

about history and present puts strain on relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. The dominant Bulgarian narrative contends that Macedonia and Macedonians have been part of Bulgaria since the Middle Ages. Macedonia remained only a geographical concept without a political representation during the time of Ottoman domination. Most of the region became part of Serbia after the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and was incorporated into the Yugoslav Kingdom. Yet, part of the Macedonian population felt more connected to Bulgaria than to the Yugoslav Kingdom. Bulgaria fighting on the German side in the First and Second World Wars had partially occupied the Macedonian region. However, the brutal Bulgarian occupation convinced the Macedonians that the Bulgarians would regard them as a second-class-Bulgarian minority and would not treat them as Bulgarians proper. Macedonia regained a political status as one of the Republics of Socialist Yugoslavia. The official Bulgarian narrative still maintains that Macedonia and Macedonians have separated from Bulgaria and cannot be seen as a distinct people with its own political-cultural history and identity. Bulgarian history textbooks did not even mention Macedonia as an independent country in the years after 1991 (Jordanov 2019). This narrative could not and cannot be accepted by North Macedonia. The bilateral "Agreement of Good Neighborhood" of 2017 was meant to overcome the differences in view of the European integration process. It should deepen mutual trust, foster rapprochement and cultural cooperation. To this aim, a joint multidisciplinary commission for history and other areas was established with a far-reaching mandate in 2021. The commission on which the author served as an advisor should not only compare history textbooks and make recommendations for changes but should deal with politics of memory in a broader sense. It should, for example, discuss whether common memorial days could be established commemorating historical events in which both sides were involved. The Bulgarians who put forward this proposal obviously had the hope that the Bulgarian version would prevail, and the distinct Macedonian interpretation would become marginal. The commission agreed on textbook analyses and joint recommendations, but the latter were not formally adopted. The harmonization of politics of memory was not even

further treated. Seemingly, the Bulgarian members felt under pressure from their government and the public only to consent to a text that questioned the political identity and cultural distinctiveness of the Macedonian people. This position understandably remained unacceptable for the Macedonian side. Therefore, the meetings ended up without a result and Bulgaria's final stance on Macedonia's accession to the EU is still pending (Marusic 2025). The European perspective formed the background for a joint historical commission, but it could not override exclusive national-ethnic concepts upheld by the Bulgarian members of the commission. The Bulgarians misused Macedonia's wish to become a member of the EU as a means to establish an exclusive overarching Bulgarian narrative and political identity.

Another conflict over ethnicity and nationality lingers on at Europe's Southeastern border. I refer here to the Mediterranean isle of Cyprus. The island was inhabited by a Greek majority and Turkish minority for centuries. The British followed the Ottoman domination, took over administrative control in 1878 and declared Cyprus a colony after the First World War in 1925. After the Second World War, the relationship between the two communities became more and more conflictual. A strong movement for unification with Greece developed within the Greek Cypriot community that further fuelled the conflict. The British government wanted to get rid of the problem and granted the island independence in 1960. The power was divided between the two communities according to their share of the population. However, this spurred competition and led even to armed clashes instead of establishing a balance of power. The current conflict line goes back to the year 1974. Greek Cypriot right-wing nationalists sought the support of the autocratic junta in power in Greece at that time, and tried to unite Cyprus with the so-called Greek motherland to realize the junta's "big idea" of a Greater Greece. The unification with Greece met with decisive resistance of the Turkish minority but also a part of the Greek-Cypriot majority community did not support it. Under the pretext to protect the Turkish community in Cyprus, Turkey sent troops to the northern part of the island where most of the Turkish speaking people lived. As a consequence, the island was di-

vided into two parts that are separated by a small security belt, marked by barbed wire fence and controlled by UN troops. Meanwhile, this borderline can be passed from both sides. Yet, neither the Greek Cypriots nor the EU recognize the northern part which is under strong political influence, if not control of Turkey and only recognized by this country. The EU, where Cyprus has been a Although NGO's and iember state since 2004, regards the whole island as EU territory so that one could say that the EU has an unresolved border conflict with the NATO member state Turkey. Both sides, EU as well as Turkey, try to keep the conflict low. However, without the Turkish troops, the Greek population would have most likely put constant pressure on the Turkish population. Up to now all endeavours have failed to resolve the conflict and to unite both parts of the island again. Even the full engagement of the UN and the then Secretary General, Kofi Annan, were of no avail. The Annan plan envisaged a federation with two constituent peoples (not so different from the model applied in BaH). A majority of the Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan in a referendum, but the majority of Greek Cypriots rejected it. The latter felt to be in the better economic and social position than the Turkish part, and may lose more than win through unification.[19] Particularly on their side biased images about the "other"–the Turkish, mostly Muslim population–prevail who are seen as descendants of the Ottoman "occupiers" and "suppressors." Also on the Turkish Cypriot side, the unification plan met with some resistance. The Turkish government had supported immigration from Turkey. The Turkish immigrants are not familiar with the island's history before partition and less interested in unification and living together with the Greek community. Cultural stereotypes are still alive on both sides although NGOs and international organisations such as the Council of Europe have tried with great commitment to bring both sides together. Also here, the foundation of a truth commission was raised but not realized (Kaymak 2007). The Greek Cypriot gov-

[19] Yılmaz (2010) provides a historic overview and an informative description of the many, so far unsuccessful negotiations between the UN, Turkey, Greece and the Cypriot communities; see also Anastasiou (2009).

ernment took steps to a more reconciliatory approach in education, particularly school education. The Minister of Education declared the major aim of the academic year 2008–2009 the "cultivation of a culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and co-operation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with the aim of overcoming occupation and leading to reunification of our country and people" (Makriyianni et al. 2011, 8). Also on the Turkish Cypriot side trends came about to "shift towards a more Turkish-Cypriot centric approach in the lower secondary school history education" instead of putting the weight on Turkish history and follow structure and content of Turkish textbooks to a great extent (Makriyianni et al. 2011, 31). In particular, the local NGO Home for Cooperation has rendered outstanding services and established a meeting point for seminars, encounters, and joint festivals in the UN Buffer Zone between the two parts of the island (Perikleous and Shemilt 2011; Perikleous 2011; Karahasan and Latif 2011). The Council of Europe supports the NGO's work to develop bi-communal teaching devices and to bring teachers and scholars from both sides and other European countries together. As Cyprus and Turkey are members of the Council of Europe, Turkish teachers, textbook authors and researchers took part in these activities so that innovative teaching devices developed in these encounters even radiated to pedagogy in Turkey and led, for example, to the Turkish translation of the UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Revision and Research (Pingel 2003).[20] Yet, such trends are not stable and depend on the overwhelming political climate on both sides. Facing tendencies of Islamization and nationalism today, the Turkish education system becomes less open for this kind of innovation, and Erdogan's siding with the Palestinians in the Gaza war and further militarization of the whole region gives almost no hope that Turkey would be ready to withdraw its troops and foster a reconciliation process as it had done when the referendum was held in 2004. At the time of the referendum, Erdogan was in favour

---

[20] The second edition of the Guidebook (Pingel 2010) has also been translated into Korean language.

of the island's unification because he had the hope that both, united Cyprus and Turkey, would become members of the EU. As this is no longer a viable option, the interest in the unification issue is fading away in the Turkish government as well as among Turkish Cypriots. In the case of Cyprus, reaching EU membership was a driving factor for attempts at unification. When only one part of the island reached that aim–the one that voted against unification–and the other was blocked, interest in unification died away and Europe remains confronted with a protracted conflict.

A concluding look at the broader historical background of the conflicts in Southeastern Europe[21]

The problem to balance out the interests of different ethnicities in Southeastern Europe emerged with the step by step dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of modern nationalism in the 19th century. The ethnicities we have dealt with in this chapter had their distinct places within the society of the Ottoman Empire, which consisted of different "societies" existing side by side even if not always peacefully. They were acknowledged for their cultural and religious rights, had their own communal–political representation and were often given work in governmental institutions. They were acknowledged as inhabitants of a minor status, not on equal footing with the ruling Turks. When the Ottoman polity faltered, the ethnicities developed more self–pride and self–consciousness and adopted Western European nationalism as a politico–ideological tool for the realization of their aspirations to freedom and independence. Some of them, such as the Serbs, achieved this aim forcefully, while others did so through the First World War that brought the Ottoman Empire to an end. Together with a growing sense of distinct national awareness, the ideology of the unity of the South Slav people took root, particularly

---

[21] For a comprehensive history, see Ramet (2006).

in Serbia which saw itself as the master to lead the South Slavs to political unity. With the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire the South Slav people could choose their own political representative institutions and formed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (including Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia), which was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. From its very beginning, the Yugoslavian state was shattered by divergent political conceptions, ranging from a centralized to a highly federalized structure–the first advocated by Serb, tthe latter favoured by Croat politicians. The fierce debates over the political outlook of the state led to violent clashes and changes in the political order of the state as well as the re–distribution of power. The Second World War aggravated the inner divisions to the extreme and connected them with external relations and power politics. The country was divided, and Serbia mainly came under German, Croatia under Italian occupation forming something close to a proper but Catholic–fascist like state under Italian and German surveillance. Partisan movements arose in both parts, fighting the occupiers but also each other. The communist–oriented Tito partisans finally could unite the different resistance groups into one army and expel the occupiers from the country with the help of approaching Soviet troops. Based on the power of the partisan movement, Tito rebuilt a united Yugoslavia under the banner of Socialism. He did not shy away from using force and massacres to get rid of not only fascist but also more liberal or even socialist opponents. His propagated ideology of "brotherhood and unity" should outplay the old politico–ethnic rifts. This succeeded until the end of his government. It became apparent that the old antagonisms were still subliminally present. Already Tito had arranged a constitutional reform in 1974 giving the Republics–and in so far the ethnicities–a greater say. After his death, tendencies for federalization and difference instead of unity became stronger and exploded with the opening of the international order through the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ghosts of the past resurrected and confronted Europe with years of bloody wars and expulsions on a large scale, not known since the aftermath of the Second World War. European states tried to mitigate the violent conflict through diplomatic intervention, but in the end it was the de-

cisiveness of the US government to resort to military intervention in order to give diplomacy more power that successfully brought the warring parties to the negotiating table. The EU awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 could mitigate the conflicts in Southeastern Europe and prevent the outbreak of new open violence within and between the former warring parties, but it was less successful in solving protracted conflicts in its border region.

Concluding statement

This article is based on my personal experiences as an educational consultant to international organisations and as a participant in projects conducted within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in the post-war period. To balance the limitations inherent in this approach, I used a wide array of research on the topic I have dealt with here concentrating on publications in the English language. I approached the region as someone coming from outside with the intention to contribute to peacebuilding after a time of brutal conflict. This intention-realized only to an unsatisfactory degree-provided the perspective for my work, but should not have harmed the impartiality of my presentation and evaluation of the conflict and its aftermath.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allcock, John B. 2009. “The International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia.” In *Confronting Yugoslav Controversies*, edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert. Purdue University Press.

Andersen, Tea Sindbæk, and Fedja Wierød Borcak. 2022. “Memory conflicts and memory grey zones: War memory in Bosnia–Herzegovina between public memory disputes, literary narratives and personal experience.” *Memory Studies*15 (6): 1517–1531.

Anastasiou, Harry. 2009. *The Broken Olive Branch: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and the Quest for Peace in Cyprus: Nationalism versus Europeanization.* Syracuse University Press.

Baker, Catherine. 2015. *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s.* Macmillan International Higher Education.

Basic, Natalija. 2004. *Krieg als Abenteuer. Feindbilder und Gewalt aus der Perspektive ex–jugoslawischer Soldaten 1991–1995* (War as adventure. Adversary images and violence from the perspective of Yugoslavian soldiers 1991–1995). Psychosozial–Verlag.

Bildt, Carl. 1998. *Peace Journal: The struggle for peace in Bosnia.* Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Bjelajac, Mile, and Ozren Žunec. 2009. “The War in Croatia, 1919–1995.” In *Confronting Yugoslav Controversies*, edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert. Purdue University Press.

Blagojević, Bojana. 2009. “Causes of Ethnic Conflict: A Conceptual Framework.” *Journal of Global Change and Governance* 3 (1): 1–25.

Boerhout, Laura. 2016. “Sarajevo’s Market of Memory.” In *Genocide: New Perspectives on its Causes, Courses and Consequences,* edited by Ugor Üngör. Amsterdam University Press.

Bosnia Daily. 2007. “RS Government Criticized High Representative. Serb Leaders Strongly Oppose the Exemption of Srebrenica Memorial.” June 27.

Bougarel, Xavier, and Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings, eds. 2007. *The New Bosnian Mosaic. Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post–War–Society.* Ashgate.

Calic, Marie-Janine. 2009. "Ethnic Cleansing and War Crimes, 1991-1992." In *Confronting Yugoslav Controversies,* edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert. Purdue University Press.

Carretero, Mario. 2017. "The Teaching of Recent and Violent Conflict as Challenges for History Education." In *History Education and Conflict Transformation*, edited by Charis Psaltis, Chara Makriyianni, and Dilek Latif. Springer.

Cohen, David. 2004. "Öffentliche Erinnerung und Kriegsverbrecherprozesse in Asien und Europa" (Public commemoration and war crime trials in Asia and Europe). In *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan* (Memory cultures. Germany, Italy and Japan), edited by Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer and Wolfgang Schwentker. Fischer.

Cooper, Belinda, ed. 1999. *War Crimes: The Legacy of Nuremberg*. TV Books.

D'Alessio, Vanni. 2014. "Divided and Contested Cities in Modern European History. The Example of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina." In *Beyond the Balkans. Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Sabine Rutar. LIT Verlag.

Dimou, Augusta, ed. 2009. *"Transition" and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Djokic, Dejan. 2009. "Whose Myth? Which Nation? The Serbian Kosovo Myth Revisited." In *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages. 19th-21st Century*, edited by János Bak. Fink.

Duijzings, Ger. 2007. "Commemorating Srebrenica: Histories of Violence and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Bosnia." In *The New Bosnian Mosaic*, edited by Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings. Ashgate.

Đureinović, Jelena. 2025. *Memory Politics of the 1990s Wars in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and Challenges of Memory Activism*. Humanitarian Law Center. Accessed May 15. https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Politika_secanja_en.pdf.

Fletcher, Laurel E., and Harvey M. Weinstein. 2002. "Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation." *Human Rights Quarterly* 24(3): 573-639.

Fridman, Orli. 2019. "'Hashtag Memory Activism.' Online Commemorations and Online Memory Activism." December 20. https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/hashtag-memory-activism.

Gavrić, Saša, and Solveig Richter. 2010. “Das politische System Bosnien und Herzegowinas” (The political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina). In *Die politischen Systeme Osteuropas* (The political systems of Eastern Europa), edited by Wolfgang Ismayer. VS Verlag.

Grandits, Hannes and Carolin Leutloff. 2003. “Discourses, Actors, Violence. The Organization of War-escalation in the Krajina-region in Croatia 1990/1991.” In *Potentials of DisOrder. Explaining Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and the Former Yugoslavia*, edited by J. Köhler and C. Zürcher. Manchester University Press.

Grandits, Hannes and Kristóf Gosztonyi. 2003. “Nationalismus und diskrete Versöhnung. Das neue interethnische Zusammenleben im Süden Bosnien-Herzegowinas” (Nationalism and discreet reconciliation. The new inter-ethnic living together in the South of BaH). *Südosteuropa* 52: 198-228.

Grandits, Hannes. 1998. “Über den Gebrauch der Toten der Vergangenheit als Mittel der Deutung der Gegenwart. Betrachtungen zum Krajina-Konflikt 1991-1995” (On the use of the dead of the past as a means to interpret the present. Observations on the Krajina conflict 1991-1995). In *Anthropologie der Gewalt. Chancen und Grenzen der sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung* (Anthropology of violence. Chances and limitations of social science research), edited by J. Koehler and S. Hayer. Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung.

Gow, James. 2009. “The War in Kosovo, 1998-1999.” In *Confronting Yugoslav Controversies*, edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert. Purdue University Press.

Hajdarpašić, Edin. 2010 “‘But My Memory Betrays Me’: National Master Narratives and the Ambiguities of History in BiH.” In *Conflict and Memory: Bridging Past and Future in [South East] Europe,* edited by Wolfgang Petritsch and Vedran Džihić. Nomos.

Halilovich, Hariz, and Ron Adams. 2024. “Local Commemorations, False Heroes, and Hijacked Memories: Post-Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing Politics of Memory in Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Republika Srpska (RS).” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 1-20.

Höpken, Wolfgang. 2014. “Erinnerungskulturen: Vom Zeitalter der Nationalstaatlichkeit bis zum Post-Sozialismus” (Memory cultures. From the age of nation states to post-socialism). In *Handbuch Balkan* (Handbook Balkans), edited by Uwe Hinrichs, Thede Kahl and Petra Himstedt-Vaid. Harrassowitz.

Holbrooke, Richard. 1999. *To End a War*. The Modern Library.

Hronešová, Jessi Barton, and Jasmin Hasić. 2023. "The 2021 Memory Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina–Reconciliation or Polarization?" *Journal of Genocide Research* 26(4): 399–417.

Ingrao, Charles, and Thomas A. Emmert, eds. 2009. *Confronting Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars' Initiative*. Purdue University Press.

Jordanov, Gordan. 2019. *Differences and similarities in primary school history textbooks of neighboring countries: The Case of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and North Macedonia*. Thesis, American College of Thessaloniki.

Kandić, Nataša. 2007. "La Serbia senza momumenti" (Serbia without monuments). In *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post–War Society,* edited by Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings. Ashgate.

Karahasan, Hakan, and Dilek Latif. 2011. "Re–writing History Textbooks– History Education: A Tool for Polarization or Reconciliation?" In *The Future of the Past. Why History Education Matters*, edited by LukasPerikleous and Denis Shemilt. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research.

Karge, Heike. 2019. Analysis *"The Period 1992–1995 in BiH History Teaching Materials" (Textbooks, Curricular and Further Educational Material of the 9th Grade of Primary School)*. Unpublished paper.

Karge, Heike, and Katarina Batarilo. 2009. "Norms and Practises of History Textbook Policy and Production in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *"Transition" and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, edited by Augusta Dimou. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Kaymak, Erol. 2007. "Does Cyprus Need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?." *Cyprus Review* 19 (1): 21–98.

Knigge, Volkhard, and Norbert Frei. 2002. *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*. C.H. Beck.

Koren, Snježana, and Branislava Baranović. 2009. "What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990–2008)." In *"Transition" and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, eidted by Augusta Dimou. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Kostić, Milica. 2018. “Public Opinion Survey in Serbia Sheds Light on ICTY Legacy.” *EJIL:Talk! Blog of the European Journal of International Law*, January 22. https://www.ejiltalk.org/public-opinion-survey-in-serbia-sheds-light-on-icty-legacy/.

Kostovicova, Denisa. 2009. “Albanian Parallel Education System and Its Aftermath: Segregation, Identity and Governance.” In *“Transition” and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe*, edited by Augusta Dimou. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Lichnofsky, Claudia, and Enriketa Pandelejmoni and Darko Leitner-Stojanov, eds. 2017. *Myths and Mythical Spaces. Conditions and Challenges for History Textbooks in Albania and South-Eastern Europe*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

MacDonald, David. 2009. “Living together or Healing Each Other?” In *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars’ Initiative*, edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas Emmert. Purdue University Press.

MacDonald, David. 2002. *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim Centered Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia.* Manchester University Press.

Makriyianni, Chara, and Charis Psaltis and Dilek Latif. 2011. *History Teaching in Cyprus. Facing Mapping, Bridging Diversity: Foundations of a European Discourse on History Education*. Wochenschau Wissenschaft.

Mandić, Elvira. 2007. “Geschichte und Politik in Bosnien-Herzegowina. Aufarbeitung oder Politisierung der Geschichte?“ In *Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: die politische Aktualität historischer Erinnerungen in Mitteleuropa*, edited by Julian Pänke and Gereon Schuch. Nomos.

Marusic, Sinisa Jakov. 2025. “Bulgaria’s blockade of North Macedonia’s EU path is likely to stay in place.” *balkaninsight,* February 4, https://balkaninsight.com/2025/02/04/bulgaria-north-macedonia-dispute-new-governments-old-dividing-lines/.

Moll, Nicolas. 2013. “Fragmented memories in a fragmented country: memory competition and political identity-building in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Nationalities Papers* 41(6): 910-935.

Morrow, Ed. 2012. *How (Not) to Remember. War Crimes, Memorialisation and Reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. MA Thesis University of York.

Orentlicher, Diane F. 2010. *That Someone Guilty be Punished. The Impact of the ICTY in Bosnia*. Open Society Institute.

Pänke, Julian, and Gereon Schuch, eds. 2007. *Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: die politische Aktualität historischer Erinnerungen in Mitteleuropa* (The present of the past: the topicality of remembrance in Central Europe). Nomos.

Pervan, Gordana. 2007."Die Bedeutung des Haager Tribunals für Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Kroatien" (The significance of the Hague Tribunal for coming to terms with the past in Croatia). In *Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: die politische Aktualität historischer Erinnerungen in Mitteleuropa* (The present of the past: the topicality of remembrance in Central Europe), edited by Julian Pänke and Gereon Schuch. Nomos.

Perikleous, Lukas, and Denis Shemilt, eds. 2011. *The Future of the Past. Why History Education Matters*. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research.

Perikleous, Lukas. 2011. "Why Did They Treat Their Children Like This? A Case Study of 9–12 year–old Greek Cypriot Students' Ideas of Historical Empathy." In *The Future of the Past. Why History Education Matters,* edited by Lukas-Perikleous and Denis Shemilt. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research.

Petritsch, Wolfgang, and Robert Pichler. 2005. *Kosovo–Kosova. Der lange Weg zum Frieden* (The long way to peace). Wieser Verlag.

Pingel, Falk. 2023. "Unity in Diversity or Political Separation Driven by Cultural Difference? Textbook Revision in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Negotiating Ethnic Diversity and National Identity in History Education. International and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Helen Ting and Luigi Cajani. Palgrave Macmillan.

Pingel, Falk. 2017. "A Clash of Communication? Intervening in textbook writing and curriculum development in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war of 1992–1995." In *History Teaching in Cyprus. Facing Mapping, Bridging Diversity*, edited by Charis Psaltis, Chara Makriyianni, and Dilek Latif. Springer.

Pingel, Falk. 2010. *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revisio*n (2nd Revision). UNESCO/Georg Eckert Institute.

Pingel, Falk. 2009. "From Ownership to Intervention–or Vice Versa? Textbook Revision in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Transition and the Politics of History Education in Southeastern Europe,* edited by Augusta Dimou. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Pingel, Falk. 2003. *Ders kitaplarnı araştirma ve düzeltme rehberi* (Guidebook on

textbook research and textbook revision). Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı.

Psaltis, Charis, and Mario Carretero and Sabina Čehajić-Clancy, eds. 2017 *History Education and Conflict Transformation. Social psychological theories, history teaching and reconciliation.* Springer.

Radonic, Ljiljana. 2010. *Krieg um die Erinnerung: Kroatische Vergangenheitspolitik zwischen Revisionismus und europäischen Standards* (Memory war: Croatian politics concerning the past between revisionism and European standards). Campus-Verlag.

Ramet, Sabrina P. 2007. "The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame." *Südosteuropa* 55(1): 26-69.

Ramet, Sabrina P. 2007b. "The Denial Syndrome and its Consequences: Serbian Political Culture Since 2000." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40: 41-58.

Ramet, Sabrina P. 2006. *The Three Yugoslavias: State-building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*. Indiana University Press.

Rauch, Teresa. 2023. "The Many Agents of Memoralization." *Balkan Discours,* December 18th https://balkandiskurs.com/en/2023/12/18/the-many-agents-of-memorialization/.

Spasić, Ivana. 2015. "The trauma of Kosovo in Serbian national narratives." In *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering*, edited by Ronald Eyerman, Jeffrey C. Alexander and Elizabeth Butler Breese. Routledge.

Waters, Timothy, ed. 2013. The *Milošević Trial. An Autopsy*. Oxford University Press.

Yılmaz, Muzaffer Ercan. 2010. "Analyzing and Resolving the Cyprus Conflict." *Journal of Cyprus Studies* 39: 77-106.

Zivanovic, Maja, and Sinisa Jakov Marusic. 2018. "Timeline: The Path to Macedonia's 'Name' Deal." *Balkan Insight*, February 4. https://balkaninsight.com/2018/09/29/macedonia-name-deal-timeline-in-pictures-09-28-2018.

Zgonjanin, Andrej. 2018. *Der Umgang mit Kriegsverbrechen im ehemaligen Jugoslawien 1991-1999* (Dealing with war crimes in former Yugoslavia). Pomedia Verlag.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 85-116
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.004

Built on Sand, Not Steel: Colonial Legacies and ASEAN's Struggles for Integration

Nguyen Cong Tung

Abstract

This article investigates how colonial legacies shape integration processes within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Frequently compared to the European Union (EU), ASEAN has made notable progress in economic cooperation over recent decades, but it faces criticism for its fragmentation and limited consensus on high-stakes political issues like the South China Sea disputes, Myanmar's crisis, and US-China rivalry. Additionally, ASEAN's security cooperation remains sporadic, falling short of forming a cohesive security community. This article conceptualizes ASEAN as a "security community of the colonized states," given that nearly all its members were once under Western colonial rule-by powers such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States-during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This article identifies three key characteristics-lingering distrust, inherent flexibility, and being a group still in the making-that shape and influence ASEAN's integration and consensus-building efforts, particularly regarding the South China Sea disputes and US-China rivalry.

Keywords

ASEAN, colonial legacies, integration, South China Sea disputes, US-China rivalry

Nguyen Cong Tung is an Assistant Professor at the School of Political Science and International Relations at Tongji University in Shanghai.
E-mail: drumtung@gmail.com

Introduction

Founded in 1967 and expanded in the 1980s, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has become an increasingly influential player in both regional and international affairs (ASEAN 2025). The organization's economic integration deepened significantly with the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020, where ASEAN was a central driving force alongside other key countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN 2020b). Notably, ASEAN also launched its first formal document, *The Narrative of ASEAN Identity*, at the 37th ASEAN Summit in 2020, emphasizing a collective identity of "a we-feeling" and a sense of belonging among its member states and citizens (ASEAN 2020a).

However, despite these positive developments, ASEAN continues to face significant challenges in achieving consensus on a plethora of high-level political issues such as disputes in the South China Sea, the Mekong River, Myanmar's ongoing civil conflict, and so on. More recently, the organization has struggled with the growing pressure of the US-China rivalry, finding it difficult to adopt a unified stance. For example, following the Trump administration's announcement of reciprocal tariffs in April 2025, ASEAN countries found themselves caught in the crossfire-facing US tariffs while being inundated with redirected Chinese goods. Some states sought to comply with Washington's demands to curb the rerouting of Chinese exports, while China, in turn, has warned against any actions that might undermine its interests, highlighting how ASEAN countries risk being trapped in the escalating trade conflict (Xiao and Liu 2025). For these reasons, ASEAN is frequently compared to the European Union (EU), particularly in terms of integration and cohesion (Plummer 2006).

Particularly, a persistent question in international relations is why ASEAN's level of integration lags behind that of the EU. Scholars have pointed to several factors, including the diverse political regimes of its member states (Rattanasevee 2014), ASEAN's institutional framework (Kim 2011), the independent pursuit of political cohesion and economic

integration (Severino 2007), and the absence of a dominant power to drive deeper integration (Rattanasevee 2014). However, less attention has been given to the historical legacies that may shape ASEAN's integration, particularly the impact of colonialism. This article seeks to address that gap by exploring how the region's colonial and postcolonial legacies, particularly those shaped during the Cold War, have influenced ASEAN's integration. The integration here does not merely imply economic elements, but also includes political relations.

This article argues that the colonial experience, shared by nearly all ASEAN member states except for Thailand, continues to shape interstate relations and the organization's integration efforts. While the colonial histories of Southeast Asian countries are diverse and cannot be easily generalized, this article foregrounds a foundational regional condition: a collective memory of being colonized. Within this framework, ASEAN is conceptualized as a "security community of the colonized states," characterized by three defining traits including lingering distrust, inherent flexibility, and a group still in the making. These traits are not accidental but serve as key mechanisms through which colonial legacies continue to influence ASEAN's political integration.

More specifically, the article contends that ASEAN's often-criticized fragmentation and limited consensus on high-stakes political and security issues, such as the South China Sea disputes or navigating the US-China rivalry, are not signs of institutional weakness, but instead reflect a deliberate strategic posture rooted in the colonial past. This posture is guided by two foundational premises: first, the region's colonial encounters were uneven, with each country shaped by different imperial powers and administrative legacies, making uniformity both difficult and undesirable. Second, its commitment to consensus, non-interference, and sovereign equality reflects a normative response to shared colonial trauma.[1] Rather than a deficit, ASEAN's reluctance toward coercive or inter-

[1] I am grateful to anonymous Reviewer 1 for suggesting the inclusion of these two foundational premises in the article's argument.

ventionist integration is better understood as a post-colonial model of cooperation that values autonomy and mutual respect over hierarchical integration models.

The article is divided into four main sections. The first section elaborates on the concept of a "security community of the colonized states." The second and third sections analyze how three defining characteristics of the "security community of the colonized states" are reflected in two cases of the South China Sea disputes and the ongoing US-China rivalry. The last section summarizes the key findings of this article.

ASEAN as a Security Community of the Colonized States

European colonization of Southeast Asia dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries when European powers competed for dominance over the spice trade, particularly in commodities such as pepper and cinnamon. This period of colonization began with the Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch and Spanish expansion. Spain colonized the Philippines in 1599, while the Dutch, through the Dutch East India Company, took control of Sunda Kelapa (modern-day Jakarta) in 1619 (Osborne 2004; Owen 2005; Ba and Beeson 2008, 17-33). By the 19th century, nearly all Southeast Asian countries had fallen under European rule as colonies or protectorates, with the notable exception of Siam (now Thailand), which later served as a buffer state between British Burma and French Indochina (LePoer 1989; Booth 2007). While the pursuit of wealth and natural resources was a primary motivator, European colonization during this period was also driven by geostrategic rivalries between the major European powers (Owen 2005).

Following the end of World War II, Southeast Asian countries gradually declared their independence. Decolonization proceeded rapidly in the region with countries starting to construct modern states more or less modeled after the Western system (Booth 2007). As newly independent nations, they were vulnerable to external influence, particularly from

their former colonizer states. Simultaneously, colonial legacies–enduring impacts of colonial rule–have continued to shape the political, economic, and social structures of former colonies long after colonial powers have left. In this article, the colonial legacies in Southeast Asia are understood as including both spatial–political boundaries established during colonial rule and enduring conceptual norms such as sovereignty, autonomy, and equality.

Anne Booth (2007, 16–17) argues that these legacies account for the divergent economic and social development strategies adopted by post–independence governments. These strategies, she argues, were largely influenced by the distinct political regimes that emerged following the decolonization process after 1945. Nevertheless, despite limited democratic foundations and strong nationalist sentiment, none of the newly emerging nation–states during decolonization sought to return to precolonial forms of government (Frederik 2018).

During the Cold War, Southeast Asia became a region divided by the global competition between capitalist and communist blocs. This ideological confrontation manifested as a struggle for influence, threatening the fragile sovereignty of newly independent Southeast Asian states from the late 1940s onward. In this context, the US spearheaded the creation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1955, headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand. SEATO was established under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty signed on September 8, 1954, in Manila, the Philippines, as part of the Truman Doctrine's broader strategy to forge anti–communist alliances (Franklin 2006, 1).

Despite its regional name, SEATO primarily consisted of non–Southeast Asian countries, with only the Philippines and Thailand being the actual members from the region. As a more regionally grounded initiative, ASEAN was established in 1967 by then anti–communist states, including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, with the goal of preventing the spread of communism in the region. Initially, ASEAN functioned as an anti–communist coalition, which partly contributed to a tense and polarized regional atmosphere (Acharya 2013, 149–179). However, with the end of the Cold War, ASEAN transitioned

into a period of reconciliation and expansion (Acharya 2013, 180–212).

At its inception, ASEAN's member states united to confront common external threats, particularly the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. However, these anti-communist nations did not have a unified approach to addressing these threats collectively. Instead of forming a single political entity, each state retained its independence and distinct identity. At its core, ASEAN can be understood as a "security community of the colonized states." This security community is pluralistic, as its members preserve their sovereignty and independence. According to Amitav Acharya in his 2009 book *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order,* a pluralistic security community consists of sovereign states in a transnational region whose populations hold a stable expectation of peaceful change. Two key characteristics define such a community: the absence of war among its members and the lack of significant organized preparations for conflict between them (Acharya 2009, 16).

Meanwhile, the term "colonized states" refers to the shared history of colonial subjugation by Western powers experienced by nearly all of ASEAN's founding members. Despite later expansions that included former adversaries such as communist Vietnam, ASEAN retains its identity as a security community of the colonized states, blending its original characteristics with new dynamics. Three key traits, as coined by this article, define this security community and shape ASEAN's integration and internal relations: lingering distrust, inherent flexibility, and its evolving nature as a group still in the making.

The first defining trait is the lingering distrust within ASEAN. This distrust stems from the region's colonial past, where nearly all Southeast Asian countries were subjugated by Western powers. While countries do not have a uniform colonial experience, their shared history and collective memory of colonization have led to a persistent wariness toward the intentions of great powers and mutual suspicion among ASEAN member states. As lesser powers, they often assume that larger nations may harbor harmful intentions or view them as pawns in broader geopolitical games. Vietnamese scholar Pham Quang Minh observed that during the war,

Vietnam often became a pawn in the US–China–Soviet ideological and power struggle, with its interests compromised during great power rapprochement. The lesson for Vietnam is to avoid taking sides and maintain a balance while strengthening its own position (Minh 2015). The historical experience of colonization reminds Southeast Asian countries that when Western powers approached them, their independence was compromised, their territories were lost, and their autonomy was undermined.

As a result, Southeast Asian nations have become highly sensitive to concepts such as independence, sovereignty, autonomy, and equality–principles that, though originally developed in the West, have taken on new meanings in the Global South. For example, the idea of sovereignty emerged in Europe during the religious wars, as part of efforts to transcend the authority of the City of God. It was initially framed as a right for European princes to choose their own form of Christianity. However, in the centuries that followed, sovereignty was largely denied to colonies, with non–Western regions excluded from its benefits. It was only after World War II, during the wave of decolonization, that the concept of sovereignty was extended to former colonies. While the definition of sovereignty has shifted over time, particularly in its application to Christian nations, achieving sovereignty has long represented a significant triumph for non–white, non–Christian communities–especially those in the Global South that had historically been colonized (Shih 2024, 205–206).

The reason Southeast Asian states place great emphasis on these concepts is clear: sovereignty, historically violated by the Western colonizer states, has become especially crucial to protect. Likewise, autonomy, once manipulated or undermined by foreign powers, is now held in even higher regard. The historical experience of colonialism has made safeguarding these principles a priority, as they represent not only political independence but also the preservation of national dignity and self–determination.

While colonial legacies initially instilled this emphasis, the post–1945 decolonization process and the Cold War further reinforced these priorities. Notably, the 1955 Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia, provided a platform for newly independent Asian and African nations to

articulate shared principles–such as respect for sovereignty, non–intervention, peaceful coexistence, and neutrality—many of which echoed the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* outlined in the 1954 Sino–Indian Agreement (Fifield 1958). These ideas directly influenced ASEAN's foundational emphasis on sovereignty and its enduring norm of non–interference. The spirit of Bandung also carried into the formation of the Non–Aligned Movement in 1961, which included several Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, and Cambodia. This movement sought to protect the autonomy of developing nations amid the polarizing pressures of the Cold War (Munro 2025).

As a result, ASEAN countries are particularly vigilant in ensuring respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. Interestingly, despite borrowing these concepts from their former Western colonizer states, Southeast Asian nations now champion them even more fervently. In his 2024 book, *Relations and Roles in China's Internationalism: Rediscovering Confucianism in a Pluriversal World,* Shih Chih–yu argues that sovereignty remains at the core of security issues, and only former colonial powers appear to have successfully achieved de–securitization (Shih 2024, 209). In contrast, a Global South security community—composed of former colonized states–places a strong emphasis on sovereign independence, unlike the security community of former colonizers, such as the EU, which seeks to restrain sovereignty to foster cooperation and integration. For the Global South, sovereignty is seen as essential to maintaining autonomy and addressing historical injustices, rather than something to be limited in the pursuit of regional integration (Shih 2024, 211).

ASEAN's commitment to the principle of non–intervention vividly reflects this sensitivity. The colonial experience has made member states acutely aware of any perceived infringements on their sovereignty or autonomy. This sensitivity was further reinforced by the Cold War's polarized geopolitical environment, which heightened the urgency for Southeast Asian countries to safeguard their independence and autonomy. The emphasis on non–interference, articulated during the 1955 Bandung Conference (Munro 2025), became a foundational norm. As a result, ASEAN

has consistently upheld non—intervention, a principle later enshrined in the *2008 ASEAN Charter* (ASEAN Main Portal 2008). Even in situations where a member state or leader is accused of violating human rights, the principle remains intact, despite international calls for intervention, as evident in the case of Myanmar's civil war since 2021 (UN News 2023). Although this stance may seem counterintuitive, the non-intervention principle actually helps reduce the level of distrust among member states.

Additionally, this lingering distrust fuels the member states' quest for equality, particularly given the power imbalances in international politics and within Southeast Asia itself. Smaller states fear being dominated by larger ones while engaging in international cooperation, making equality an essential principle in ASEAN's framework. To address this, ASEAN has adopted a consensus-based decision-making model (ASEAN Main Portal 2008), where each country, regardless of their size, has an equal vote. This symbolic equality helps counterbalance the structural inequality in the broader international system, ultimately fostering trust among member states.

The second defining characteristic is the inherent flexibility within ASEAN. While ASEAN is a security community, meaning member states cooperate in security and military matters to reduce security dilemmas or deter perceived external threats to their survival, it does not operate like a Western-style alliance. ASEAN countries are cautious about committing to strict security agreements or fixed alliances. For example, Thailand's alliance with the US, established by the 1954 Manila Pact, is not seen by Thailand as holding significant obligations. Instead, it serves more as a symbol of friendship and goodwill, which explains why the US-Thailand relationship has gradually evolved, despite the formal alliance (Shambaugh 2020).

In fact, security and military cooperation among ASEAN member states is relatively limited compared to other forms of cooperation such as trade and investment. This is because entering a security alliance often requires countries to sacrifice some degree of sovereignty and autonomy (Walt 1985)—values that ASEAN members hold in the highest regard. As a result, member states tend to avoid rigid alliances, preferring flexible,

loosely-organized, and symbolic relationships with minimal commitments and institutionalization (Acharya 2009, 63-70).

ASEAN's flexibility is also evident in its "no one-size-fits-all" approach, which often results in a preference for bilateral engagement. The organization has introduced various multi-layered arrangements, adopting different standards to accommodate the unique circumstances of each member state. If a country is unable to implement a particular policy or meet specific criteria, there is no punishments or binding regulations, allowing for a high degree of flexibility in how member states engage with ASEAN initiatives. For example, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) operates with considerable flexibility, as it primarily functions as a consultative body without the authority to impose sanctions for human rights violations (AICHR 2009). Thus, countries like Myanmar have experienced limited pressure from within ASEAN, despite growing international concerns. Moreover, without a strict set of shared values, ASEAN implicitly relies on bilateralism. Since its inception, member states have engaged in numerous bilateral agreements to foster joint ventures, peace initiatives, and anti-terrorism campaigns (Shih 2024, 211). For ASEAN, bilateral meetings-especially face-to-face encounters between leaders-are crucial for building trust and deepening cooperation among member states (Majumdar 2015, 74).

Another key aspect of ASEAN's flexibility is its emphasis on patience, embodied in the "ASEAN Way." This approach is often characterized by a decision-making process that prioritizes extensive consultation and consensus-building among member states (Acharya 2009, 64). It also prioritizes informal, quiet diplomacy and stresses the importance of patience when addressing sensitive issues, even if it results in slow responses to pressing challenges such as the South China Sea disputes. ASEAN believes that sensitive issues can be resolved more effectively through gradual, behind-the-scenes negotiations rather than through public confrontation. In this context, patience is not seen as dangerous or ineffective; immediate solutions are not always necessary (Shih 2025).

The third defining trait-a group still in the making-captures ASEAN's ongoing process of identity building, as it strives to forge a cohe-

sive group identity and a collective self in the wake of colonial fragmentation. This aspiration is reflected in ASEAN's motto: "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" (ASEAN 2025). As a regional organization, ASEAN is often compared to the EU, and the international community–especially Western nations–has high expectations for ASEAN's role in global and regional affairs. Western countries, in particular, tend to view ASEAN as a security community similar to the EU, expecting it to act with a unified approach toward deterring threats and fostering shared prosperity. However, ASEAN's collective preferences are less clear and more unpredictable in its rise and fall (Shih 2025).

Western actors, particularly the EU and the US, often expect ASEAN to take on international and regional interventions, a stance that clashes with ASEAN's core principle of non-intervention. This Western expectation is sometimes described as a form of universalism, but it can also be seen as "disguised colonialism," where Western countries, in an attempt to mask the inhumanity of past colonialism (Shih 2024, 209), impose their own rules, values, and ethical standards on ASEAN. For former colonizer states, a multilateral regime often carries significance only when it is linked to a broader mission, such as promoting peace and human rights to nonmembers. These regimes tend to view their role as not just fostering cooperation among themselves, but also exporting their values and norms (Shih 2024, 211). In response to these external expectations, ASEAN has become somewhat "socialized," learning from and imitating the EU in various ways. ASEAN has gradually started to see itself as a distinct entity with a self-defined role in international and regional affairs (Tan 2017). At times, ASEAN may present a unified and proactive stance on pressing issues, in part to meet these external expectations.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's group identity is not solely shaped by external pressures and expectations; it also stems from its own internal agency. This group identity-building process must be understood in the broader context of Southeast Asia's shared experience of colonization. The collective identity of having been colonized fosters a sense of solidarity among ASEAN nations, despite their cultural and ideological dif-

ferences. A history of collective suffering under colonial rule can create a bond between ASEAN member states and its citizens, and this can reinforce the notion of mutual support within the group (Shih 2025).

ASEAN's ongoing process of identity-building is also evident in its promotion of "ASEAN Centrality" and its leadership in regional initiatives and mechanisms, independent of existing frameworks led by external powers. This focus on centrality is enshrined in the 2008 ASEAN Charter, which states, "ASEAN and its member states shall act in accordance with the centrality of ASEAN in external political, economic, social, and cultural relations" (Chapter 1, Article 2, m) (ASEAN Main Portal 2008). Besides, according to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN Centrality emphasizes that ASEAN should serve as the dominant regional platform for addressing common challenges and engaging with external powers (ASEAN 2021). In doing so, ASEAN positions itself as a hub where major powers come together to resolve regional and global security issues, with ASEAN playing a key role in facilitating these dialogues.

Nevertheless, ASEAN Centrality carries a certain degree of ambiguity and ambivalence. The uncertainty surrounding ASEAN's central role in East Asian regional governance allows for multiple interpretations of the concept, which ASEAN uses strategically to protect its members' interests. This vagueness acts as a political tool, offering the relatively weaker ASEAN countries greater flexibility in navigating complex regional dynamics (Tan 2017, 735). It also provides both ASEAN as a whole and its individual member states more diplomatic maneuverability when confronting external shocks, enabling them to adapt to shifting geopolitical circumstances without being rigidly tied to one approach or framework.

The South China Sea disputes and ASEAN

The South China Sea (SCS), located at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean, holds critical economic and geostrategic significance. Rich in

natural resources, the SCS contains approximately 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and eleven billion barrels of oil in proved and probable reserves, with even more likely undiscovered, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative 2025). Additionally, the SCS is a vital maritime corridor, with an estimated US$3.4 trillion worth of goods transiting through its waters annually, which accounts for over 21 percent of global trade, as per recent *ChinaPower* data (China Power Team 2021). Its waters are particularly crucial for China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, all of which depend heavily on the Strait of Malacca, a narrow waterway connecting the SCS with the Indian Ocean. This strategic chokepoint is a cause for concern due to its vulnerability, given the immense concentration of commercial traffic passing through it (China Power Team 2021).

What further complicates the region is the historical context of sovereignty disputes, which have persisted since at least the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Archival records suggest that Dai Viet (Vietnam) conducted the earliest known occupation of the Paracel Islands in 1816, followed by China's Qing Dynasty in 1909, and Japan in 1938 (Hayton 2022). In the present day, seven claimants–China, Taiwan, and five Southeast Asian nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam)–compete for sovereignty over various islands, reefs, and waters in the SCS. These overlapping claims are considered among Asia's most dangerous flashpoints, fueling tensions between Southeast Asian countries and China (McLaughlin 2023). Simultaneously, the involvement of external powers like the US, Japan, and the EU countries, which have vested strategic interests in the region, further complicates to the situation.

ASEAN's role and stance on the SCS disputes have garnered significant attention, as the disputes primarily involve Southeast Asian nations and China. While ASEAN has consistently sought to prevent the escalation of tensions into armed conflict, as reflected in its joint statements following summits, it has struggled to achieve consensus on key issues. The organization remains divided on how to resolve the disputes, whether to welcome external powers like the US, and the scope of the

Code of Conduct (COC) in the SCS (Grossman 2023; Tung 2024). These challenges can be better understood by examining ASEAN's defining characteristics as a security community shaped by its history of colonization, which influences its cautious approach to the SCS disputes.

Distrust toward major powers, coupled with internal suspicions within ASEAN, continues to divide its member states on how to approach the SCS disputes. Smaller Southeast Asian nations, wary of the influence of larger powers, often prefer a multilateral approach to negotiations, believing they would be disadvantaged in bilateral talks with China (Kipgen 2018; Tung 2024). However, this preference for multilateralism has not gained unanimous support within ASEAN, largely due to lingering suspicions between member states and adherence to the principle of non-intervention. Some Southeast Asian claimants, eager to resolve the issue, actively raise the SCS disputes during ASEAN meetings (Tung 2024). In contrast, non-claimants like Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar show less enthusiasm, as they have no direct conflict or stake in the SCS waters. This divergence makes it difficult to convince non-claimants that resolving the SCS disputes serves the broader interests of ASEAN (Storey 2018). These non-claimant countries can easily justify their stance by pointing to the non-intervention principle, which holds that bilateral disputes should be resolved without external interference.

Distrust of ASEAN's ability as a supranational organization to effectively address territorial disputes also hampers collective action. Member states often prioritize national interests over regional concerns. Cambodia, for example, has been criticized for aligning with China on the SCS disputes. In 2012, when Cambodia chaired ASEAN, the organization failed to issue a joint statement for the first time in its history, largely because Phnom Penh obstructed the Philippines' efforts to condemn China's actions in the SCS (Thul and Grudgings 2012). Cambodia's stance is often viewed as supportive of China, prompting accusations that it acts as a "vassal state," and fueling concerns and suspicions in neighboring Vietnam (Tung 2025). However, Cambodia has countered this criticism by pointing out ASEAN's failure to support it during its territorial dispute with Thailand over the Preah Vihear Temple. In Phnom

Penh's view, if ASEAN did not stand by Cambodia in that instance, it is under no obligation to support other claimants in the SCS disputes.[2]

Taken together, this combination of distrust and adherence to the non-intervention principle prevents ASEAN from adopting a unified stance on the SCS disputes. For instance, ASEAN has remained relatively silent in supporting the Philippines during its tensions with China over the Second Thomas Shoal between 2023 and 2024 (Sanjaya 2024; Tung 2024, 20). As a result, claimants and non-claimants remain divided, and external powers, such as China and the US, have greater opportunity to influence individual ASEAN member states. The ongoing tensions among key players, coupled with the lack of progress toward a resolution, create uncertainty and trigger security dilemmas (Storey 2018). While maintaining non-intervention allows countries to safeguard their sovereignty, it also weakens ASEAN's capacity to act as a cohesive force in regional security. This fragmentation creates a power vacuum that external actors can readily exploit.

Despite not yet achieving a unified stance, ASEAN demonstrates a flexible approach in addressing disputes between its member states and China. This flexibility is evident in the joint statements released after ASEAN Summits. While some member states, particularly claimants, push to include their specific disputes with China in these statements, others resist. As a result, ASEAN often reaches a compromise by using neutral language, expressing "concerns" about actions in the SCS and calling for self-restraint and peaceful dispute resolution, as seen in the "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting Stability in the Maritime Sphere in Southeast Asia" released on December 30, 2023 amid growing tensions between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea (ASEAN Main Portal 2023). By employing such ambiguous wording without directly mentioning China, ASEAN manages to satisfy its member states while avoiding the risk of provoking China. Furthermore, ASEAN does not rush to respond to specific incidents

---

[2] Interview with Cambodian scholars, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 2019.

or take immediate positions on disputes between its members and China. Instead, it shows patience, often waiting for tensions to cool before attempting to mediate or encourage reconciliation between the involved parties.

Simultaneously, this inherent flexibility also extends to ASEAN claimants themselves, who, despite overlapping claims in the SCS, continue to cooperate. For instance, during Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s state visit to Vietnam in January 2024, Manila and Hanoi signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on maritime security and cooperation (Vietnam Plus 2024). In August 2024, a Vietnamese coast guard vessel, CSB-8002, made its first port visit to Manila for a joint drill with the Philippine coast guard, marking a new level of cooperation (Gomez and Calupitan 2024). In return, the Philippine Coast Guard's most advanced offshore patrol vessel, BRP Gabriela Silang, docked in Da Nang, Vietnam for the first time in April 2025, marking another step toward strengthening military ties between Manila and Hanoi (Moaje 2025). Such bilateral collaborations have occurred without objection from non-claimants within ASEAN, further showcasing the organization's adaptability. These actions underscore the ability of ASEAN claimants to set aside their differences temporarily to enhance maritime security, particularly in response to escalating tensions with China.

Additionally, flexibility is apparent in the ongoing discussions around ASEAN's decision-making process. As stated above, ASEAN operates under a consensus-based model, giving each member state an equal vote. However, concerns have arisen regarding the influence of China on certain states' voting behavior. In response, the Philippines and Vietnam have begun exploring "complementary mechanisms" that would introduce more flexibility in handling emerging security issues (Le 2016). One such mechanism is the proposal for a "majority consensus-based decision-making" model (Le 2016). This approach would allow ASEAN to issue joint statements with stronger, clearer language on disputes without requiring unanimous approval. For instance, joint statements could indicate which countries endorse a particular stance by explicitly stating, "ASEAN except country A/B/C," thus preserving flexi-

bility while enabling decisive action (Le 2016).

Moreover, Richard Heydarian, an associate professor at De La Salle University in the Philippines, has advocated for a more focused form of regional cooperation. At an international seminar in Washington, D.C., in 2019, he suggested that Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia–the key ASEAN countries involved in the SCS–form a "mini–lateralism" or "small ASEAN" within the broader ASEAN framework to tackle pressing issues more effectively. He argued that this smaller group should also strengthen ties with external powers such as the US, Japan, India, and Australia to balance China's influence (VOA Vietnamese 2019). While these proposals could potentially reshape ASEAN's decision–making model, they reflect a willingness within ASEAN to adapt to evolving challenges, demonstrating flexibility not only in its actions but also in its mindset.

The final defining trait of ASEAN as a security community that shapes its attitude toward the SCS disputes is its ongoing effort to build a cohesive group identity, a process influenced by its gradual socialization within the international community. Historically criticized as fragmented and lacking cohesion, ASEAN has internalized these external criticisms and sought to reshape its image, moving away from being seen as merely a "talking shop" (Lambe 2022). This shift became evident after 2012, the first year ASEAN failed to issue a joint statement since its founding. Since then, ASEAN has consistently issued statements following its summits, signaling a commitment to present a unified front. It has also sought to show that ASEAN does have shared interests and a common policy regarding managing the disputes (Hu 2023).

Simultaneously, ASEAN has communicated to external powers that if one major power succeeds in dividing ASEAN by influencing a specific member state, others could follow suit, ultimately undermining ASEAN Centrality. ASEAN Centrality is vital for maintaining a neutral and balanced approach to resolving the SCS disputes, as it ensures that the interests of all major powers in the region are considered. By emphasizing this, ASEAN aims to safeguard its central role in the region's security architecture and remind external powers to respect its leadership in man-

aging the SCS disputes (Tan 2017). As a result, all parties to the dispute have so far agreed to consider ASEAN a vehicle for promoting dialogue, recognizing its value as a platform for fostering communication and reducing tensions in the region (Majumdar 2015, 82).

The development of a group identity within ASEAN is further evident in the collective endorsement of the Declaration of Conduct (DOC) and the ongoing negotiations for a Code of Conduct (COC) in the SCS. Originally proposed by the Philippines and other claimants, these agreements have evolved from individual initiatives into a shared goal for all ASEAN member states (Thayer 2013; Zou 2021). Although the SCS disputes continue to divide ASEAN, the organization has cultivated the ability to mobilize collective support for the DOC and for the COC, demonstrating a growing sense of unity. This process reflects ASEAN's socialization, where member states have come to recognize that maintaining centrality through ASEAN-led initiatives like the DOC and COC benefits the entire group and aligns with the expectations of the international community. These developments highlight ASEAN's progress toward becoming a more institutionalized and effective supranational organization, capable of managing complex regional issues and navigating the challenges of the SCS disputes.

A security community in the storm: ASEAN amid US–China rivalry

The strategic competition between the US and China is intensifying, making it a central topic of global discussion. Governments worldwide are closely monitoring this rivalry, as it holds the potential to significantly alter the international landscape. Southeast Asia, particularly the ASEAN member states, has naturally become a focal point of this competition between the two superpowers. As Jonathan Stromseth notes, the region's proximity to China makes it particularly vulnerable to becoming a "testing ground" for China's role as a global power (Stromseth 2019, 2).

This is evident in China's initiatives, both past and present, such as

the "Going Out Strategy," the "Belt and Road Initiative," and the "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" (CSFM), all of which have placed ASEAN countries at the center of their focus. Meanwhile, the US also views Southeast Asia as a crucial region in its efforts to counter China's influence and advance its broader strategic goals, as seen in policies like the "Rebalancing to Asia," the "Indo-Pacific Strategy," and the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework" (IPEF). From Chinese perspectives, these initiatives are often perceived as efforts to contain China. Following the launch of the IPEF in May 2022, China claimed that the initiative was designed to disrupt regional cooperation and serve as a tool to coerce regional countries (Xinhua Net 2022).

As a result, the geopolitical structure in Southeast Asia is shifting, with both superpowers promoting their own visions of security and economic world order. This intensifying competition has placed unprecedented pressure on ASEAN states to choose sides. The traditional hedging strategy that many ASEAN countries adopted after the Cold War, when great power competition was less pronounced, is gradually becoming untenable. Simply put, ASEAN nations are under mounting pressure, as neither Washington nor Beijing is willing to continue being used without expecting something in return (Tung 2022). Both superpowers, either explicitly or implicitly, are urging states to take decisive positions on key issues. The ambiguity that ASEAN once relied on is fading; accommodating one superpower is now likely to be seen by the other as a direct challenge to its interests.

ASEAN, as a bloc, has not yet reached a consensus on how to respond to this rivalry (Grossman 2023). Instead, only individual leaders have occasionally voiced their stances. For instance, at the 27th International Conference on the Future of Asia in Tokyo in 2022, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasized that most Southeast Asian countries do not wish to take sides (Barret 2022). The organization's stance on the US-China competition can be understood through the lens of a security community shaped by the shared legacy of colonialism, which exhibits three defining characteristics.

First, lingering distrust rooted in ASEAN's colonial history with

larger powers, including the US and China, has prevented the bloc from adopting a unified position. At the same time, Cold War legacies continue to influence the region, as each ASEAN country maintains a different relationship with the US and China (Hansson et al. 2020, 501–503). Some countries, such as the Philippines, Laos, and Cambodia, have clearer preferences based on historical and contemporary ties. For instance, as a US treaty ally, the Philippines leans more toward Washington, while Cambodia's closer relationship with China makes it appear more aligned with Beijing. Despite claims by some ASEAN members that they do not wish to take sides, these relationships make neutrality difficult (Sim 2024).

Moreover, ASEAN countries with differing preferences often regard each other with suspicion, which in turn complicates efforts to reach a consensus. As a result, at this stage, forging a unified ASEAN stance on the strategic competition between the US and China seems neither viable nor feasible. For example, following the Trump administration's imposition of reciprocal tariffs on ASEAN countries in April 2025, the bloc struggled to articulate a coordinated response. Diverging national circumstances and preferences made consensus difficult: while Cambodia and Vietnam faced steep tariffs, countries like Singapore and the Philippines were less affected due to economic diversification and lower reliance on the US (Medina 2025).

Distrust toward major powers lingers among ASEAN states, rooted in their histories of colonization and, in some cases, subsequent abandonment by these powers. This difficult historical experience prevents most ASEAN countries from fully committing to formal alliances with either the US or China. Despite ongoing US efforts to rally ASEAN states to its side, inconsistencies in Washington's policies toward the region have caused hesitation (Shambaugh 2020, 184). As for China, its geographical proximity may make it seem like a viable security option for some states, but there is widespread distrust. This is evident in the results of the *State of Southeast Asia Surveys* conducted from 2019 to 2025, which show deep skepticism among ASEAN countries and citizens toward China (ASEAN Studies Center 2025). This distrust makes it even harder for

ASEAN to lean decisively toward one superpower or reach a consensus on such matters.

Even though ASEAN strives for a consensus-based approach, compelling its members to follow a unified stance risks violating the organization's core principle of non-intervention. In both theory and practice, ASEAN, as a supranational body, lacks the authority to force any specific member state to act in a particular way, even when a state clearly aligns itself with either the US or China. ASEAN and its members, therefore, do not rush other members to take sides, as doing so would be seen as an infringement on the autonomy of member states, eroding trust in the organization and creating more instability in the region.

ASEAN's inherent flexibility is another characteristic that shapes its approach to the US-China rivalry. For most ASEAN members, the primary goal is to maximize their national interests. However, the tactics and strategies they employ toward Washington and Beijing remain highly flexible. This flexibility explains why many ASEAN members participate in both US-led initiatives like the IPEF and China-led initiatives like the CSFM. More specifically, as of 2024, seven ASEAN countries-Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam-have endorsed or supported China's CSFM (Seah et al. 2024, 45), while seven ASEAN states-Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam-are part of the US-led IPEF (U.S. Department of Commerce 2024).

This flexibility allows ASEAN countries to engage in initiatives led by either the US or China, or both, depending on their interests. From the ASEAN perspective, participating in these initiatives signals autonomy in policymaking rather than allegiance to one superpower. Their participation is less about alignment and more about safeguarding their own interests and maintaining sovereignty. For ASEAN states, any alliance or cooperation mechanisms are seen as flexible relationships. This contrasts with the more rigid, camp-based view of alliances typically held by Western powers. ASEAN's relationships with both the US and China remain fluid and non-committal. Participating in initiatives led by either side is simply a signal of cooperation, not an expression of opposition,

and does not imply full endorsement or rejection. ASEAN countries carefully choose areas of cooperation with the US or China on certain issues while opposing them on others, ensuring that their own interests and autonomy are preserved.

Both Washington and Beijing recognize this flexibility in ASEAN's approach and have adapted accordingly. In response, both the US and China have adapted by becoming more accommodating, patient, and generous in their dealings with ASEAN states. For instance, the US-led IPEF allows member countries to selectively engage in areas of interest, rather than mandating participation across the board. This flexibility leads to more tailored cooperation agreements. Specifically, IPEF's four pillars–trade, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy–allow countries to choose which pillars to join, without obligating them to participate in others unless they opt to do so (Vietnam National Trade Repository 2022). This flexibility means that joining the IPEF does not equate to fully embracing US rules or choosing the US over China in their rivalry. Similarly, China has shown a greater willingness to cooperate with ASEAN and has publicly affirmed its respect for their autonomy. From Beijing's perspective, the mere fact that ASEAN countries refrain from explicitly choosing sides is, in itself, a win (Huang 2022). The overall flexibility in both the IPEF and China-led initiatives allows ASEAN states to engage without strong pressure, preserving their freedom to navigate between the two superpowers while safeguarding their national interests.

As a group, ASEAN has actively sought to present itself as a unified and autonomous entity, not easily swayed by major powers. It aims to demonstrate its own agency, positioning itself as an equal player among global powers (Khoo 2022). This approach is evident in ASEAN's efforts to include both the US and China, despite their intensifying conflicts, in ASEAN-led discussions and mechanisms where the two superpowers can engage directly. For example, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken agreed to meet on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Laos, on July 27, 2024. During this meeting, they openly discussed pressing issues such as the

South China Sea disputes, Taiwan, and other regional challenges (China Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024). While such dialogues may often be seen as mere talk, ASEAN views them as opportunities to promote understanding and socialization, where constructive rhetoric might gradually influence the behavior of both the US and China. By offering these platforms, ASEAN bolsters its credibility and reputation, ensuring that it retains a central role amid the ongoing US–China rivalry.

Despite ASEAN's efforts to project unity, centrality, and integration, its non-intervention principle creates a paradox. This specific principle limits ASEAN's ability to directly influence the stances of its member states or forge a consensus regarding the US–China strategic competition. As a result, ASEAN's collective response is often limited to symbolic statements that signal to the international community its intent to engage with the strategic rivalry. These statements, however, are sufficient to remind both the US and China of ASEAN's importance and centrality. For instance, in 2021, ASEAN released the five-page ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which highlighted the group's interest in shaping the region's economic and security architecture. The document outlined areas of cooperation, including maritime collaboration, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and other key issues (ASEAN 2021). Through such initiatives, ASEAN aims to maintain its centrality, though it remains a loosely-organized body that represents a group still in the making.

In essence, while ASEAN may not always present the most united front on various issues, it is largely unanimous in its decision to remain neutral in the US–China conflict (Shambaugh 2020, 180). Most ASEAN countries have maintained their autonomy in engaging with both powers, and the member states remain distrustful of both the US and China. Across Southeast Asia, there is a pervasive distrust regarding the presence of major powers in the region. According to the State of Southeast Asia: 2024 Survey Report, 37.6 percent of Southeast Asian respondents express distrust toward the US, while a larger proportion–50.1 percent–distrust China in their contributions to global peace, security, prosperity, and governance (Seah et al. 2024, 56, 64). This distrust enables them to

pragmatically engage with both sides without openly criticizing either. In this context, distrust is not entirely detrimental; rather, it creates space for ASEAN's centrality. Since all member states share a common wariness of major powers, this mutual distrust reinforces ASEAN's neutrality, which, in turn, enhances its central role. In short, where there is distrust, there is space for neutrality, which fosters centrality and ultimately, autonomy–ASEAN's most cherished value.

Nevertheless, while ASEAN countries currently avoid explicitly aligning with either the US or China, there may come a time when they are forced to choose sides. Unless ASEAN can create more overlapping interests between the two superpowers–such as by fostering mutual dependencies through investment and supply chains–it may face future situations where neutrality is no longer an option. By intertwining US and Chinese interests within the ASEAN framework, the group could potentially delay or avoid having to take sides altogether.

Conclusion

This article has explored the influence of colonial history on ASEAN integration, addressing a topic that has received insufficient scholarly attention in international politics. Given that nearly all ASEAN members were once under colonial rule, the organization exhibits many characteristics of a post-colonial entity, which this article conceptualizes as a "security community of the colonized states." This framework offers both theoretical and empirical insights, presenting a unique perspective on ASEAN's integration.

Theoretically, this security community of the colonized states is contrasted with the "security community of the colonizer states," exemplified by the EU. ASEAN's distinct identity is defined by three key traits: lingering distrust, inherent flexibility, and its status as a group still in the making. The history of colonialism has fostered a deep distrust among ASEAN states toward larger powers, particularly regarding potential threats to their sovereignty and autonomy. This distrust underpins the

non-intervention principle that ASEAN upholds. Flexibility is also a defining feature, as ASEAN member states tend to view alliances and international cooperation as fluid and flexible relationships, unlike the more rigid frameworks seen in the West. The concept of a group still in the making reflects ASEAN's ongoing efforts to build a collective identity that emphasizes the organization's centrality and agency. These three traits-distrust, flexibility, and evolving group identity-shape ASEAN's behavior and the dynamics of inter-state relations in Southeast Asia.

Empirically, this article has examined ASEAN's stance toward two key geopolitical challenges including the South China Sea disputes and the ongoing US-China strategic competition. Despite their limitations, ASEAN's norms and values-particularly its emphasis on consensus and non-interference-have played a stabilizing role, helping to maintain peace and regional order amid rising tensions. In both cases, the three defining traits of ASEAN's security community are clearly visible. The non-intervention principle has hindered ASEAN from adopting a unified stance on the South China Sea disputes, leaving the organization vulnerable to external influence. However, ASEAN states have demonstrated flexibility by setting aside their differences and cooperating on broader maritime issues. ASEAN has also played a central role in advancing negotiations such as mobilizing member states' support for the conclusion of the earlier DOC and the ongoing COC negotiations.

In the context of the US-China rivalry, ASEAN's lingering distrust of both superpowers-due to China's geographical proximity and history of tributary relations, and the US's inconsistent policies toward the region-has made it difficult for the organization to fully align with either. Yet, the flexibility of ASEAN states allows them to engage with both US-led and China-led initiatives, often participating in both simultaneously. As a group, ASEAN continually strives to assert its autonomy and demonstrate that it is not being swayed by Washington or Beijing. The organization's efforts to maintain ASEAN-led forums and involve both superpowers in these mechanisms underscore its commitment to preserving its centrality amid great power competition.

In conclusion, the colonial legacies of ASEAN member states have

deeply influenced the organization's integration and the behavior of its member states. What is often perceived as fragmentation or lack of consensus is, in fact, a strategic posture rooted in a shared history of subjugation. This posture reflects two key premises: the region's varied colonial experiences make uniformity neither feasible nor desirable, and ASEAN's principles of consensus, non-interference, and sovereign equality serve as a post-colonial response that privileges autonomy and mutual respect over hierarchy. Framing ASEAN as a security community of the colonized states highlights the enduring influence of history in shaping regional security and economic architecture and offers a fresh lens for understanding ASEAN's response to contemporary geopolitical challenges.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acharya, Amitav. 2009. *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order*. Routledge.

Acharya, Amitav. 2013. *The making of Southeast Asia: International relations of a region*. Cornell University Press.

AICHR (ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights). 2009. *Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.* ASEAN Secretariat.

ASEAN Main Portal. 2008. *The ASEAN Charter.* ASEAN Secretariat.

ASEAN Main Portal. 2023. "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting Stability in the Maritime Sphere in Southeast Asia." December 30. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Final-Draft-ASEAN-FMs-Statement-on-Maintaining-and-Promoting-Stability-in-the-Maritime-Sphere-in-SEA.pdf.

ASEAN Studies Center. 2025. *State of Southeast Asia Survey*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. April 22. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/centres/asean-studies-centre/state-of-southeast-asia-survey.

ASEAN. 2020a. "The Narrative of ASEAN Identity." November 12. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/9-The-Narrative-of-ASEAN-Identity_Adopted-37th-ASEAN-Summit_12Nov2020.pdf.

ASEAN. 2020b. "ASEAN hits historic milestone with signing of RCEP." November 15. https://asean.org/asean-hits-historic-milestone-with-signing-of-rcep/.

ASEAN. 2021. "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific." Accessed April 23, 2025. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

ASEAN. 2025. "The Founding of ASEAN." April 21. https://asean.org/the-founding-of-asean/.

Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. 2025. "South China Sea Energy Exploration and Development." April 22. https://amti.csis.org/south-china-sea-energy-exploration-and-development/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Energy%20Information%20Agency,under%20disputed%20islets%20and%20reefs.

Ba, Alice D., and Mark Beeson. 2008. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: the politics of change, contestation, and adaptation*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Barrett, Chris. 2022. "We don't want to pick sides: The view from South-East Asia as China woos Pacific." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 26. https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/we-don-t-want-to-pick-sides-the-view-from-south-east-asia-as-china-woos-pacific-20220526-p5aosj.html.

Booth, Anne E. 2007. *Colonial legacies: Economic and social development in East and Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press.

China Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2024."Wang Yi Meets with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken." July 27. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202407/t20240727_11461726.html.

China Power Team. 2021. "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" *China Power*, January 25. https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/.

Fifield, Russell H. 1958. "The five principles of peaceful co-existence." *American Journal of International Law* 52(3): 504-510.

Franklin, John K. 2006. *The hollow pact: Pacific security and the Southeast Asia treaty organization*. Texas Christian University.

Frederik, H. William. 2018. "Contemporary Southeast Asia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20. https://www.britannica.com/place/history-of-Southeast-Asia-556509.

Gomez, Jim and Joeal Calupitan. 2024. "Vietnam's coast guard visits Philippines for joint drills as both face maritime tensions with China." *AP News*, August 4. https://apnews.com/article/south-china-sea-philippines-vietnam-manila-hanoi-11f1e57dd0e077c079b83d10dc690788.

Grossman, Derek. 2023. "With ASEAN Paralyzed, Southeast Asia Seeks New Security Ties." RAND, September 18. https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/09/with-asean-paralyzed-southeast-asia-seeks-new-security.html.

Hansson, Eva, Kevin Hewison, and Jim Glassman. 2020. "Legacies of the cold war in East and Southeast Asia: An introduction." *Journal of Contemporary Asi*a 50(4): 493-510.

Hayton, Bill. 2022. "How to Solve the South China Sea Disputes" *ISEAS Perspectives* 25. Accessed November 8, 2024. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-com-

mentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-25-how-to-solve-the-south-china-sea-disputes-by-bill-hayton/.

Hu, Le. 2023. "Examining ASEAN's effectiveness in managing South China Sea disputes." *The Pacific Review* 36(1): 119-147.

Huang, Chiung-Chiu. 2022. "China's 'international united front' diplomacy: When staying neutral means a win for China." *Think China*, November 17. https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/chinas-international-united-front-diplomacy-when-staying-neutral-means-win-china.

Khoo, Nicholas. 2022. "Great power Rivalry and Southeast Asian agency: Southeast Asia in an Era of US-China strategic competition." *Political Science* 74(2-3): 141-154.

Kim, Min-hyung. 2011. "Theorizing ASEAN integration." *Asian Perspective* 35(3): 407-435.

Kipgen, Nehginpao. 2018. "ASEAN and China in the South China Sea disputes." *Asian Affairs* 49(3): 433-448.

Lambe, Jon. 2022. "The UK and ASEAN: A New Stage in Indo-Pacific Engagement." *RUSI*, May 24. https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/uk-and-asean-new-stage-indo-pacific-engagement.

Le, Hong Hiep. 2016. "Việt Nam, ASEAN và thế lưỡng nan về đồng thuận'" (Vietnam, ASEAN, and the Consensus Dilemma). *Vietnam Net,* September 1. http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/tuanvietnam/tieudiem/viet-nam-asean-va-the-luong-nan-ve-dong-thuan-324302.html.

LePoer, Barbara Leitch. 1989. *Thailand: A country study* (Sixth Edition). Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

Majumdar, Munmun. 2015. "The ASEAN way of conflict management in the South China Sea." *Strategic Analysis* 39(1): 73-87.

McLaughlin, Timothy. 2023. "The Most Dangerous Conflict No One Is Talking About." *The Atlantic*, December 2. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/12/south-china-sea-philippines-dispute-explained/676218/.

Medina, Ayman Falak. 2025. "ASEAN's Response to US Tariffs: Toward a Unified Regional Strategy." *ASEAN Briefing*, April 10. https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/aseans-response-to-u-s-tariffs-toward-a-unified-regional-strategy/.

Minh, Pham Quang. 2015. “In the crossfire: Vietnam and great powers in the emerging East Asian security architecture.” In *Building confidence in East Asia: Maritime conflicts, interdependence and Asian identity thinking*, edited by Togo, K., Naidu, G., Allan, Walter. Palgrave Macmillan.

Moaje, Marita. 2025. “PCG deepens maritime cooperation with Vietnam.” *Philippine News Agency*, April 17. https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1248306#:~:text=By-,Marita%20Moaje,-April%2017%2C%202025.

Munro, André. 2025. “Non-Aligned Movement.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 17. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Aligned-Movement.

Osborne, Milton. 2004. *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History* (Ninth Edition). South Wind Production.

Owen, Norman G. 2005. *The emergence of modern Southeast Asia: A new history*. National University of Singapore Press.

Plummer, Michael G. 2006. “ASEAN-EU economic relationship: Integration and lessons for the ASEAN economic community.” *Journal of Asian Economics* 17(3): 427-447.

Rattanasevee, Pattharapong. 2014. “Explaining the dynamics of regional integration: democratisation, identity, institutions and leadership in the case of ASEAN.” PhD diss., University of Bath.

Sanjaya, Trystanto. 2024. “Time for ASEAN to stand up in the South China Sea.” *East Asia Forum*, April 27. https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/04/27/time-for-asean-to-stand-up-in-the-south-china-sea/.

Seah, S. et al. 2024. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2024 Survey Report*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Severino, Rodolfo C. 2007. “ASEAN beyond forty: Towards political and economic integration.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29(3): 406-423.

Shambaugh, David. 2020. *Where Great Powers Meet: America & China in Southeast Asia*. Oxford University Press.

Shih, Chih-yu. 2024. *Relations and Roles in China's Internationalism: Rediscovering Confucianism in a Pluriversal World*. State University of New York Press.

Shih, Chih-yu. 2025. “Global South as the Relations of Suffering: Pluriversalism and the Unpredictable Collective.” (forthcoming).

Sim, Dewey. 2024. "'Tremendous risk': can Asean unity endure if US–China tensions erupt?" *South China Morning Post*, September 27. https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3280064/tremendous-risk-can-asean-unity-endure-if-us-china-tensions-erupt.

Storey, Ian. 2018. "ASEAN's Failing Grade in the South China Sea." In *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India*, edited by Gilbert Rozman and Joseph Chinyong Liow. Springer.

Stromseth, Jonathan. 2019. *Don't make us choose: Southeast Asia in the throes of US–China rivalry*. Brookings Institution.

Tan, See Seng. 2017. "Rethinking 'ASEAN Centrality' in the regional governance of East Asia." *The Singapore Economic Review* 62(03): 721–740.

Thayer, Carlyle A. 2013. "ASEAN, China and the code of conduct in the South China Sea." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 33(2): 75–84.

Thul, Prak Chan and Stuart Grudgings. 2012. "SE Asia meeting in disarray over sea dispute with China." *Reuters*, July 13. https://www.reuters.com/article/world/se-asia-meeting-in-disarray-over-sea-dispute-with-china-idUSBRE86C0BD/.

Tung, Nguyen Cong. 2022. "Uneasy embrace: Vietnam's responses to the US Free and Open Indo–Pacific strategy amid US–China rivalry." *The Pacific Review* 35(5): 884–914.

Tung, Nguyen Cong. 2024. "Does Reputation Matter? Explaining China's Evolving Strategy in South China Sea Disputes." *Issues & Studies 60*(04): 2450013.

Tung, Nguyen Cong. 2025. "The struggle for influence: Vietnam's economic statecraft in Laos and Cambodia and its effectiveness." *The Pacific Review* 1–31.

U.S. Department of Commerce. 2024. "Indo–Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity." September 23. https://www.commerce.gov/ipef.

UN News. 2023. "More than two years on, impact of Myanmar military coup 'devastating.'" March 16. https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134682.

Vietnam National Trade Repository. 2022. "The Indo–Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is Not a Free Trade Agreement, but Will Be Judged on the Same Principles." June 6. https://vntr.moit.gov.vn/news/the-indo-pacific-economic-framework-ipef-is-not-a-free-trade-agreement-but-will-be-judged-on-the-same-principles.

Vietnam Plus. 2024. “Vietnam-Philippines joint press statement.” January 30. https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-philippines-joint-press-statement/277037.vnp.

VOA Vietnamese. 2019. “Chuyên gia: Cần lập ‘tiểu Asean’ đối phó với Trung Quốc” (Experts: Need to form ‘small ASEAN’ to deal with China). November 28. https://www.voatiengviet.com/a/chuy%C3%AAn-gia-c%E1%BA%A7n-l%E1%BA%ADp-ti%E1%BB%83u-asean-%C4%91%E1%BB%91i-ph%C3%B3-v%E1%BB%9Bi-trung-qu%E1%BB%91c/5184039.html.

Walt, Stephen M. 1985. “Alliance formation and the balance of world power.” *International Security* 9(4): 3-43.

Xinhua Net新華網. 2022. “Waijiaobu: Mei ‘yintai jingji kuangjia’ shi xiepo diqu guojia de gongju外交部：美「印太經濟框架」是脅迫地區國家的工具” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The US “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework” is a tool to coerce countries in the region). May 25. http://www.news.cn/world/2022-05/25/c_1128684162.htm.

Xiao, Josh, and Liu, Lucille. 2025. “Beijing warns nations not to cut US trade deals at China’s expense.” *Bloomberg,* April 21. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-21/china-warns-countries-not-to-cut-deals-with-us-at-its-expense?srnd=phx-politics.

Zou, Keyuan, ed. 2021. *Routledge Handbook of the South China Sea*. Routledge.

Article

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 121-145
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.005

When Historical Terms Lose Their Validity:
Reevaluating Silla's "Unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea"

Soon-hong KWON

Abstract

The names given to historical events often change along with changes in interpretation. This article examines the established historical term Samguk Tongil Jeonjaeng (Unification War of the Three Kingdoms of Korea), focusing on how this seventh-century war in East Asia unfolded and how its name has changed over time. On this topic, previous discussions have centered on the idea of the nation. They have mainly been about how the historical term reveals the formative moment of the Korean nation or how it either expands or limits the coverage of Korean history. However, this paper explores new possibilities to move beyond the historical assumption of the nation as the main subject with a center–periphery structure and rhetoric of domination and subordination. For this study, it is necessary to emphasize the interconnected nature of East Asia as a new community and to transcend the paradigm of modern nationalism and the discourse of dominant-subordinate structures. For this purpose, the present article does not limit itself to examining the seventh-century war simply in terms of the national unification but attempts to interpret it as an opportunity to foster a new East Asian community.

Keywords

Unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, Unified Silla, North-South States Period, Samhan Unification, historical terms

Soon-hong KWON is an Assistant Professor at Korea Aerospace University. Email: kwon358@kau.ac.kr.

This article is a revised and supplemented version of: Kwon, Soon-hong. 2019. "Yeoksayongeoedo yuhyogihani itda-Silla 'Samguktongil'ui gyunyeol." (Historical terminology has an expiration date: Silla's "Unification of the Three Kingdoms"). *Naeileul Yeoneun Yeoksa* 75: 22-36.

Same War, Different Names

The South Korean poet Kim Chun-su says in his famous work "The Flower" that a gesture becomes a flower when it is called by a name that suits its color and fragrance. He says that a being can at last have meaning when called by a name, and academic historians have long accepted this rhetoric. It is the historian's role to identify and name meaningful events among the numerous fragments of the past, akin to drawing a constellation by selecting only a few stars in the night sky. Historians must clearly distinguish between the past as fact and history as interpretation. The name they give depends on the meaning they convey, and the meaning they convey depends on the time and the space in which we live. The demands of the times differ according to the conditions of society; this is why the same historical event has been called by different names.

The term Yugio sabyeon (6.25事變, June 25th Incident) has been used to emphasize North Korea's responsibility for the start of the Korean War since the Rhee Syng-man regime. The use of the term has not only fostered hostility and hatred against North Korea, but it has also made it easy to forget about the armed conflicts before June 25, 1950, such as skirmishes along the 38th parallel like the Battle of Hill 292, or the partisan guerrilla warfare in Jirisan Mountain. Starting in the 1980s, the term Korean War (韓國戰爭) began to be commonly used internationally to reflect the war's international nature (Kim C. 1989, 25-63). After the 2000s, those who looked forward to Korea's reunification proposed the term Yugio nambuk jeonjaeng (6.25南北戰爭, 6.25 War between North and South Korea) to stress that the war was essentially a civil war between those of the same ethnicity. (Lee 2003, 339-374). In brief, different names have been given to the same war, as the discovery of new data and the accumulation of research have deepened our understanding. It is also due to the historical demand for peace, as we move beyond the ideological conflicts of the Cold War era.

Has this kind of terminological variation occurred only for the Korean War? Not really. The same is true for the term Imjin waeran (壬辰倭亂, Japanese Invasion of Korea in the Year of Imjin) in Korean history.

Historians have noted that on the one hand, the term waeran (倭亂) indicates Joseon Dynasty's intention to morally condemn Japan for causing the war. On the other hand, the term's narrow scope conceals the dynamics and diversity of Joseon society as seen in the case of Korean commoners' participation in the Righteous Army (義兵) campaigns, as well as the war's international nature. Therefore, new terms such as Imjin[1] jeonjaeng (壬辰戰爭, Imjin War) (Ha 2011, 331–367), Dongasia 7-nyeon Jeonjaeng (東亞細亞 七年戰爭, East Asian Seven Years War) (Kim G. 2012, 61–86),[2] and Dongasia Samguk Jeonjaeng (東亞細亞 三國戰爭, The War of East Asian Three Countries) (Chung 2007),[3] have been suggested. On the other hand, in Japan, the same war has been called Chōsen seibatsu (朝鮮征伐, Conquest of Korea). This term connotes their perception of the war as a 'holy war' or a 'just war' as well as their aspiration to be the center of the international order.

The aspiration materialized at the beginning of the twentieth century when Japan became an imperialist power and incorporated Korea as its colony. To reeducate Koreans as subjects of the Japanese Empire, national policy research was conducted. The research found that a new name was needed for the sixteenth-century war between Korea and Japan, reflecting the fact that Korea, which had already been colonized, was no longer the object of conquest but 'one body with Japan.' Thus, the war was renamed Bunroku Keichō no eki (文祿慶長の役, War in the Years of Bunroku and Keichō) (Ikeuchi 1914),[4] which made it sound like

---

1 Imjin(壬辰) stands for 1592 in the sexagenary cycle and refers to the first invasion of Japan, which took place from 1592 to 1593. Japan's second invasion took place from 1597 to 1598, and thus is sometimes called Jeongyu jaeran (丁酉再亂, Second Japanese Invasion of Korea in the Year of Jeongyu) as 1597 is a Jeongyu year in the sexagenary cycle. However, the two invasions are generally referred to as the "Imjin War."

2 The Seven Years War literally means the time span of the first invasion (1592–1593) and the second invasion (1597–1598).

3 In this war, not only Japan and the Joseon Dynasty, but also the Ming dynasty participated. Thus, it could be called the "Three Countries War."

4 Bunroku (文祿, 1592–1596) is the Japanese era name (年號) for the Emperor Go-Yōzei (後陽成), and Keichō (慶長, 1596–1615) is the era name after Bunroku. Since eki (役) is a relatively value-neutral term meaning "war" or "military campaign," it may be argued that Bunroku Keichō no eki

a civil war. Yet again, in post-1945 Japan, another proposal was made to change the war's name to Chōsen shinryaku (朝鮮侵略, Invasion of Korea) (Kitajima 1982). This new name also reflected the demand of the time, namely, a critical examination of the prewar historical studies that served Japanese imperialism.

Let us return to seventh-century East Asia and discuss the war commonly called Samguk tongil jeonjaeng (三國統一戰爭, Unification War of the Three Kingdoms of Korea).[5] Samguk Tongil is the terminological expression of the Silla (新羅) Kingdom's unification of the Korean peninsula. According to East Asian Confucian ideology, ruling power became legitimate when it was deemed to have been mandated by heaven, and it was in this sense that the Chinese emperor was referred to as the Son of Heaven (天子, Tianzi). Likewise, when the Goryeo (高麗) and Joseon (朝鮮) dynasties succeeded the Silla Kingdom as the rulers of Korea, they legitimized their successions by establishing an orthodox historical lineage from Silla through Goryeo to Joseon. In addition, this Silla-centered discourse of historical orthodoxy excludes Goguryeo (高句麗) and Baekje (百濟) Kingdoms, the vanquished of the unification war, and Balhae (渤海), the successor of Goguryeo.[6] Then, would the other parties

---

cannot be regarded as a term with an internal war (civil war) connotation. However, the fact that such terminology began to be used only after the forced annexation of Korea suggests an intention to view Korea not as a target of conquest, but as a region already subjugated.

5 In this article, Unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea (三國統一) and Samhan Unification (一統三韓) are used separately. While both terms mean Goguryeo (高句麗), Baekje (百濟), and Silla (新羅) merged into one, the backgrounds of the two terms are different. First, in the case of Samhan Unification, it was already used since the Silla period. The original meaning was to combine Mahan (馬韓), Jinhan (辰韓), and Byeonhan (弁韓) into one, not Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. Mahan, Jinhan, and Byeonhan were reincorporated into Baekje, Silla, and Goguryeo, respectively, and regarding the timing of the reincorporation, there are the seventh century thesis (Kim 2010, 293-327) and the ninth century thesis (Yoon G. 2019b, 265-307). The term Unification of the Three Kingdoms is eventually a concept with Unified Silla in mind. The term Unified Silla is considered as an invention by the colonialist historians of the twentieth century (Yoon S. 2007, 125-142), and an appropriation from the pre-modern Samhan Unification (一統三韓) (Kim 2009, 373-395).

6 Goryeo adopted the name "Goryeo" to justify its succession to Goguryeo, the overthrow of Silla, and the establishment of a new dynasty amid the turmoil of the Later Three Kingdoms period. However, *Samguksagi*, a historical record compiled under government sponsorship during the

of the seventh-century war, including Goguryeo and Baekje in Korea and the Tang (唐) dynasty in China, have agreed to call it the unification war of the Three Kingdoms of Korea? Does the naming of this ancient historical event and its historical orthodoxy still matter to us living in a democratic republic? The purpose of this article is to trace the ways in which the seventh-century Korean war has been evaluated and to examine the names it has been called. One of the important lessons that this investigation will teach is that a war's name may not reflect its actual nature or consequences.

Changes in Name

"Samhan has become one household, and people do not have different minds (三韓爲一家 百姓無二心). Even though we have not yet reached peace, we can say that it has come to a lull." [*Samguksagi* (三國史記, *History of the Three Kingdoms*). In Book 42, Yeoljeon (列傳) 3 Biography of Kim Yu-sin, vol. 2]

This remark, which Kim Yu-sin (金庾信) made when he paid a visit to the sick King Munmu (文武王), can be considered the first to describe the outcome of the seventh-century war as Samhan Unification (三韓一統). Historians view this record as an invention during the time of King Sinmun (神文王, 665-692) or as an example of the propaganda common during the later period of the Silla Kingdom. However, it is clear that already in the Silla period, there were attempts to ascribe the term Samhan Unification to this war, thereby legitimizing its rulership and justifying its dominance. Whether the war was the main factor in the unification of Korea is less important than the ensuing effect of the term creation. In the tenth century, Gyeon Hwon (甄萱) and Gung Ye (弓裔) led the revival of Baekje and Goguryeo Kingdoms, and Korea was again divided into

---

Goryeo dynasty, focuses on Silla among the Three Kingdoms, and reflects a narrative and system that emphasizes Silla's so-called "unification" achievements and its flexible diplomacy with the Tang Dynasty (Han 1994, 47-48).

three Kingdoms–what is commonly called the Later Three Kingdoms Period. When Goryeo subdued them and achieved reunification, they could repeat the cause of Samhan Unification, making Silla's earlier accomplishment more solid. This orthodox line of Korean rulership, namely, from the Three Kingdoms and Silla to Goryeo and Joseon, was confirmed by later historical records, including *Samguksagi* written by Kim Bu-sik (金富軾) in the twelfth century, *Dongguktonggam* (東國通鑑, Comprehensive Mirror of the Eastern State) by Seo Geo-jeong (徐居正) and others in the fifteenth century, and *Dongsagangmok* (東史綱目, Compendium of Eastern History) by Ahn Jeong-bok (安鼎福) in the eighteenth century.

These confirmations had the effect of excluding the Balhae Kingdom (698–926) from the canonical history. While Balhae was an indispensable part of the historical perception of East Asia, it was always figured as the other in the dominant historical writings until the end of the eighteenth century. Balhae stayed in the historiographical periphery since neither China nor Korea wanted to include it in the orthodox line. The government-compiled historical books of Goryeo and Joseon Korea adhered to the thesis of the Silla orthodoxy, and thus they excluded Balhae as the enemy and the other; in fact, Balhae, the claimed successor of Goguryeo, was in confrontation with Silla. Similarly, in China's history books, Balhae appeared only in the Biographies (列傳) sections, which covered neighboring states, and not in the main sections.

In contrast, two nineteenth-century books, Haedong yeoksa (海東繹史, Elucidated History of East of the Sea) by Han Chi-yun (韓致奫) and Han Jin-seo (韓鎭書), and *Daedongjiji* (大東地志, Geographical Notations on the Great East) by Kim Jeong-ho (金正浩), represented the emergence of a different perspective from *Balhaego* (渤海考, History of Balhae) compiled by Yu Deuk-gong (柳得恭) at the end of the eighteenth century. Notably, these two books did not perceive Balhae as an enemy or the other, questioned Silla's monopolization of historical orthodoxy, and advanced the thesis of North-South States (南北國, North being Balhae and South being Unified Silla). In this new historical discourse, the result of the seventh-century war could no longer be viewed as Samhan (三韓)

Unification. The upheaval in East Asia, which began with the advent of the Qing (清) dynasty in the seventeenth century, was an important trigger for the intellectuals of Joseon Korea to revisit and reverse their previous non-recognition of the northern region, where Balhae had been located. (Cho 2009, 49-90) At this time, East Asia countries that had adapted to the Ming (明)-centered international order were accepting a new East Asian order centered around the Qing dynasty of the Jurchen people (女眞), who had been despised as barbarians. This change served as the background for the change in Hwayi (華夷) theory,[7] giving new recognition to Joseon Korea's indigenous and traditional culture, sparking interest in domestic history. In other words, Korean intellectuals began to recognize the independence of their own history, overcoming the China-centric worldview. As social conditions changed, so did the meaning of the seventh-century war. Whereas the discourse of Silla orthodoxy referred to it as a unification war, the new thesis of North-South States designated its outcome as the coexistence with Balhae. In addition, in the logic of the new thesis, the task of unification was to be assigned to Goryeo, not to Silla. In this way, the meaning of Samhan Unification (一統三韓) was erased from the reference of the seventh-century war.

Yet again, the argument of Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms reappeared in the modern era. The advent of modern society in Korea, which began in the late nineteenth century, demanded the overcoming of the traditional way of thinking and causationism. However, Korea's efforts to recodify its history were hindered by its colonization by Japan. Following Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, Japanese academ-

---

[7] The Hwayi (華夷) theory stands for a recognition system that distinguishes *junghwa* (中華) as civilization and *yijeok* (夷狄) as barbarism. Since its founding, the Joseon Dynasty acknowledged only the Ming dynasty as a civilized country. Then, the Jurchen (女眞), which had been classified as barbarians since the seventeenth century, militarily conquered the center of the civilization, Ming dynasty, and founded Qing China, thus breaking a crack in the existing Hwayi theory. Joseon faced a political reality that could no longer discriminate or neglect Qing as barbarism. New understanding and redefinition of civilization and barbarism were necessary. Among the intellectuals in Joseon, groups were divided in accordance to the definition of civilization and barbarism, and attitudes toward Qing. (Huh 2009)

ics began to focus their attention on Manchuria. Under the slogan of "Study's Contribution to the National Policy," they did basic studies on how Japanese imperialism could effectively manage Manchuria and Korea and conducted detailed research of the historical geography of Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula.[8] These academic activities served the ulterior purpose of demonstrating the importance of managing Manchuria for the stable colonial rule of Korea. With the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in the early 1930s and the establishment of Manchukuo in 1934, the Japanese intellectual maneuver further expanded. They advanced a series of colonialist historical theses, including the claim that Korean history was characterized by its peninsular nature and that Korea was subordinated by Manchuria, to justify the argument for the separation of Manchuria from China and to advocate the so-called Manseon View of History (滿鮮史觀, Japanese colonialist view of Manchuria-Korea history). The reasoning behind this Japanese imperialist claim was that if Manchuria were separated from China and Korea were subordinate to Manchuria, colonial rule over both Manchuria and Korea would become more efficient (Inoue 2013). To uphold this imperialist logic, it was important for the Japanese to find evidence in the historical changes in the inner boundary between Korea and Manchuria. Aiming to write a different history for Manchuria and Korea, the advocates of the Manseon View of History emphasized Silla's unification of Korea thesis, severed Balhae from Korean history, and reincorporated it into Manchurian history. In brief, the utility of Silla's orthodox discourse was rediscovered during Japanese colonial rule of Korea, and the thesis of Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea reappeared as part of the expansionist policy of Japanese imperialism (Kim 2011, 37-75).

Opposing and overcoming the Japanese colonialist history was the

---

[8] The Manseon Historic-Geographical Research Center (滿鮮歷史地理調査部) established in 1908 by South Manchuria Railway Company (南滿洲鐵道株式會社) and Tokyo Imperial University (東京帝國大學) tried to clarify the boundaries between China and Korea by identifying the historical boundary between Manchuria and Korea. The result was published in 16 volumes of *Manseonjiri-yeoksayeongubogo* (滿鮮地理歷史研究報告, Manseon Historic-Geographical Research Report).

task for contemporary Korean historians and intellectuals. In the early 1900s, Korean intellectuals, including Shin Chae-ho (申采浩), suggested that the nation could take a form that would continue to exist autonomously despite its state being usurped by imperialist powers. After Korea's liberation, Son Jin-tae (孫晉泰) and others reinterpreted Silla's unification of Korea as a crucial factor in the historical establishment of the nation's identity (Schmid 2007, 403-461). Here again, the same term was used but for a different purpose. While Japanese colonialist historians exploited the discourse of ancient Korea's unification by Silla to distinguish the history of Korea from that of Manchuria and to serve imperialist policy, Korean nationalist historians appropriated it for the purpose of restoring national history and as a means of resisting imperialism. In this manner, the thesis of unification of the Three Kingdoms was reappropriated (Kim 2011, 37-75). In post-liberation Korea, attempts were made to adjust the historical understanding of Unified Silla and Balhae, such as the restoration of Balhae as part of Korean history, and the limiting of the significance of Silla's unification. The term Unified Silla and Balhae was thus introduced in various introductions and textbooks.

The term Unified Silla and Balhae and the idea of limited unification soon faced criticism. In the 1980s, it was pointed out that the idea of the coexistence of Unified Silla and Balhae was awkward, and that the thesis of Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms should be refuted for the restoration of the entire history of Korea, including Balhae[9] (Kim Y. 1989, 195-223). As a result, the emphasis on the seventh-century war shifted from being a Silla-centered unification war in Korea to being an international war in East Asia. Furthermore, after reviewing the thesis of Silla's unification of the three kingdoms, which had long been established, some critics claimed that it was not contemporaries' understanding, but a later generation's assessment. They even suggested that Silla unified nothing but Baekje. It did not mean that they failed to recognize

---

[9] The idea of "limited unification" indicates that Silla did not occupy all of the previous Goguryeo territory.

the historical contributions of the thesis of unification of the Three Kingdoms to the historical study of national formation, nor did they ignore the national question that has confronted modern Korean historiography since modern times. However, they still argued for the adoption of the North–South States thesis as the best way to restitute Korean history in its entirety. Later, China's so-called Northeast Project (東北工程) served as momentum for the further development of this view. Since the 2000s, China's promotion of the "unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation" thesis has led to attempts to incorporate the histories of Goguryeo and Balhae into Chinese history. Korean historians responded by consolidating a holistic view of Korean history that included Goguryeo and Balhae. For this reason, the thesis of North–South States, rather than the thesis of the unification of the Three Kingdoms, was chosen for further study. Still, it is an ongoing debate on whether to take the outcome of the seventh-century war as the unification of Korea and the formation of the nation (Noh 2009), or as the formation of the North–South States Period as a step towards the restoration of Korean history in its entirety (Kim Y. 2012).[10]

Two Debates

We have identified how this war has been evaluated and what it has been called across different periods. Let us discuss next how it should be evaluated and what name should be used. This requires a brief review of the previous discussions, which have converged on two major debates. The first is whether the outcome of the seventh-century war can actually be considered the unification of Korea's Three Kingdoms. There are two arguments: the first is that Silla indeed unified the Three Kingdoms of Korea (Noh 2011, 329–345; Kim 2014, 25–81), and the other is that Silla

---

[10] Recent discussions on this subject are summarized in the series of articles under the title "Samguktongil gwa Tongil Silla ui chaechomyeong" (Reexamination of the Unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea and Unified Silla) in *Yeoksabipyeong* issues published in 2019 and 2020.

only incorporated Baekje (Kim 2010, 293–327; Kim 2016, 1–38). The main disagreement between them is over the location of the two territories that Silla occupied after the war: namely, "the Baekje territory south of Pyongyang" (平壤已南百濟土地), which appeared in the records of the postwar negotiations between Tang China and Silla, or "Goguryeo Namgyeong" (高句麗南境, the southern border of Goguryeo), where Silla is said to have stationed military bases (駐軍). Regarding these territories, the first argument is that Silla achieved the unification of Korea by securing the former territory of Goguryeo through military conquest. In contrast, the second argument is that the two recorded territories were not part of Goguryeo and, therefore, Silla's occupation did not extend beyond Baekje. It is a corollary that this latter argument supports the thesis of North–South States.

The second major debate is about the question of when the perception of Samhan Unification emerged. As discussed earlier, the term Samhan Unification reflected Silla's contemporary perception of the seventh-century war's outcome (Kim 2018, 241–276; Kim 2019, 365–399). Yoon Kyeong-jin further identified that this perception first appeared in the late ninth century (Yoon 2019a, 12–39; Yoon 2019b, 265–307). The main focus is placed on the historical records where the term Samhan Unification appeared, namely, "Kim Yu-sin Haengrok" (金庾信行錄, Chronicle of Kim Yu-sin's Sayings and Doings) and the Uncheon-dong Silla Stele. There are two interpretations of these records. The first interpretation identifies the period of these two sources as the seventh century, and that at this time, the Silla royal family began using the term Samhan Unification to reinforce its authority. The second interpretation on the other hand, identifies the period of the two sources as the ninth century and understands the use of the term as a logic to cope with social division and national crisis, such as the Rebellion of Kim Heon-chang (金憲昌). This latter interpretation indicates that it was not the seventh-century war but the tenth-century war in the Later Three Kingdoms period that led to the first unification in Korean history. It also means that Goryeo, not Silla, was the groundbreaking moment in the national history. In summary, whereas the first argument embraces the holistic perspective of Korean

history by stressing the inclusion of Balhae, the second argument identifies the period of national formation not as Silla but as Goryeo. It should also be noted that the latter's version of the Samhan Unification thesis once again had the effect of excluding Balhae, the successor of Goguryeo, and thus the wholeness of its Korean history is compromised.

Beyond Nation and Korean History

We have seen that the seventh-century war has been called different names from its end to the present day, depending on the demands of each epoch in Korean history. In brief, from the Silla Kingdom to the Joseon Dynasty, it was known as the Unification War of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, reflecting the historical orthodoxy of Silla. Since the nineteenth century, with the advent of Qing China and the rise of Korean territorial consciousness over the northern region, the war's previous name, which had excluded Balhae from Korean history, was no longer valid. Later, in modern times, the result of the war was renamed yet again as the unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, by colonialist historians who supported Japanese imperialism. In a critical response, Korean nationalist historians reincorporated Balhae into Korean history, giving new significance to the unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea as a period of national formation. In the meantime, the term Unified Silla and Balhae became a ground for two contesting theses: one is the thesis of Silla's unification of Korea that emphasizes this national historical formative moment, and the other is the thesis of North-South States that calls for the restoration of the wholeness of Korean history. The conflict between the two theses is likely to continue because both are logical and meet some of the demands of our society.

However, it has become clear that the term of Unification of the Three Kingdoms is no longer unquestionable. The validity of this term, for which modern Korean historiography has given a renewal, is being questioned again. At the same time, it is proposed that the thesis of North-South States, built upon the premise that Balhae is part of Korean

history, also needs to be re-examined. The proposal is a response to the demand of the time for a new community that goes beyond modern concepts of nation and nation-states. In fact, the thesis of Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms and the thesis of North-South States share a nationalist perspective on Korean history, which takes the nation as its primary subject. (Lee Jae-hwan 2019, 40-65) However, we need a discussion about how the inclusion of Balhae in Korean history is necessary to conceive of such a new East Asian community. In the same vein, we need to discuss whether the restoration of the nation's past from the beginning of human history is necessary, given that the nation itself is a relatively modern concept.

Certain aspects are missing from nation-centered Korean history. First, writing of Korean history based on the nation naturally assumes a center, which constitutes the present nation of ours, and a periphery, which is outside us. This story of center and periphery tends to marginalize the histories of the periphery, such as Buyeo (夫餘), Okjeo (沃沮), Eumnu (挹婁), Malgal (靺鞨), Dongye (東濊), and Gaya (伽倻). Second, the exclusive focus on Korean history may lead to overlooking its connections to the histories of other East Asian countries. For example, historians have focused on whether the result of the seventh-century war was the unification of the Three Kingdoms or the formation of North-South States, while they have overlooked the social changes that the same war brought to East Asian countries. This narrow vision stems from the limitations inherent in the concept of the nation and its exclusive focus on Korean history. If the idea of an East Asian community requires a different history of Korea that goes beyond the paradigm of center and periphery, domination and subordination, and nation-based Korean history, then the seventh-century war needs a completely different name. History is an interpretation, indeed. Bearing this in mind, this article seeks a new meaning of the seventh-century war, opening up new possibilities beyond those relevant only to Korean history.

Revisiting Mid-to-Late Seventh-Century East Asia

The seventh century marked a watershed in East Asian history. The Turk/Göktürks (突厥), established as an empire in the Eurasian steppe region in the mid-sixth century, were divided into the Eastern Turkic Khaganate (東突厥) and the Western Turkic Khaganate (西突厥) in the seventh century. At this time, the Sui (隋) and Tang Dynasties were established in mainland China, subjugating the Turk/Göktürks and Turkistan in the west, as well as conquering Goguryeo and Baekje in the east. In the late seventh century, with the revival of the Turk/Göktürks in the Mongolian steppes, the Tang Dynasty began to shrink. In the midst of conflict between Tang China and the Turk/Göktürks, Balhae was founded in the east, while Silla fought against Tang's dominance. Additionally, during this time, the Taika Reforms (大化の改新) and the Jinshin War (壬申の乱) occurred in Japan. As in the international relations between Korea, China, and Japan in the early twentieth century, each of these seventh-century events happened in the context of an interconnected East Asia (or, even further, Eurasia). Each country's situation and conditions were different under these international circumstances, but when change occurred, it always centered around hostile relations between neighboring states, such as those between Turk/Göktürks, Goguryeo and Sui-Tang. (Kim H. 1989, 289-294) Just as the context of the Cold War should be considered when examining the Korean War, Sui-Tang's international strategy offers a crucial perspective for reevaluating the seventh-century war and moving beyond the victor's perspective, in this case, Silla. Likewise, the consequences of the war should be viewed not in terms of the unification of the Three Kingdoms or of the North-South States, but in terms of the changes across East Asian countries.

The Sui dynasty, which overcame the period of division during the time of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties (魏晉南北朝) and achieved the unification of China, invaded neighboring states several times to establish legitimacy internally and a China-centered international order externally. The Tang Dynasty, which followed the Sui dynasty and was founded in 618, employed the same East Asian strategy as its

predecessor. Emperor Taizong(太宗) of Tang pacified the public sentiment scattered by the fall of the Sui dynasty and conquered the Eastern Turkic Khaganate of Mobei (幕北) in 630 ("Tujuezhuan" (突厥傳) in Old Book of Tang (Jiutangshu 舊唐書) Vol. 194-1), Tuyuhun (吐谷渾) of Xiyu (西域) in 635, and Gaochang (高昌) in 640. This means that in the first half of the seventh century, the Tang Dynasty subjugated the territory west of China, where the Turk/Göktürks had ruled. By the mid-to-late seventh century, Tang's remaining obstacle in establishing a China-centered international order was in the east, namely, Goguryeo.

Goguryeo, on the other hand, maintained a moderate international policy in the early years of the Tang Dynasty, unlike its previous hardline approach during the King Yeongyang (嬰陽王) period against the Sui dynasty. Then, in September or October of 642, massive bloodshed broke out in Pyongyang (平壤), with the appearance of Yeon Gae-so-mun (淵蓋蘇文). King Yeongnyu (營留王) was assassinated, and 180 noblewomen were killed. Yeon Gae-so-mun installed the king's young nephew as the new king, made himself Mangniji (莫離支, the prime minister of Goguryeo), and took control of the state. His ascent to power also entailed the purge of the factions that had adopted a moderate stance towards China. For the stability of his new regime, Yeon Gae-so-mun turned to a hardline policy against the Tang Dynasty.

Taizong was waiting for the right moment to attack Goguryeo. He performed condolence rituals (弔祭) for the murdered Goguryeo King Yeongnyu, which helped him consolidate his position. The time had come when Silla, facing a national crisis from the attacks from Goguryeo and Baekje, asked for salvation. At last, Taizong declared war against Goguryeo in 645: "My intention to conquer Goguryeo is to wash the shame of the Chinese sons and to take revenge on the Goguryeo military. In addition, China has pacified all four corners of the world, but Goguryeo has not yet been pacified. Therefore, I am trying to take Goguryeo with the power of scholars and officials (士大夫) while I am still young." Note that in this declaration, the bilateral relationship between the two countries left little room for Silla to intervene.

At this point, it is necessary to mention briefly the beginning of the

seventh-century war. Previously, the alliance between Silla and Tang in the 640s was largely regarded as the beginning of the war. This means that the nature of the war was an East Asian international war, and its characteristics are particularly evident in the case of the Eastern Expeditions of China (Sui and Tang) and in the intense rivalry between Three Kingdoms. However, it is worthwhile to note that Goguryeo's attack on Silla (603) under Sui's pressure on Goguryeo can be seen as the starting point for the war and the determinant of its nature. This interpretation can offer a critique of the existing account, which provides only a limited explanation and focuses solely on the perspective of a single state, the Silla Kingdom. Still, it is true that the plan for the conquest of Goguryeo by Taizong of the Tang Dynasty in 645 and the alliance between Silla and Tang in 648 must have been a significant turning point in the war.

In 645, Taizong mobilized more than 200,000 army and naval forces for the attack on Goguryeo. To defend itself, Goguryeo mobilized 150,000 troops. This scale of the military forces of the two states involved in the war is significant. The drafting of hundreds of thousands of troops would have been impossible with Tang's existing professional military system. To transform peasants into the Tang's standing army, the Binghu system (兵戶制) was abolished, and the Fubing system (府兵制) was adopted. Goguryeo was no different. Before the war, both countries mobilized a large number of peasants to build a large-scale military force. This military reorganization had organic connections to every aspect of the society. To maintain and operate a large military force, enormous funding was needed, and thus, stable tax collection was required. In other words, it is possible to infer that if tax collection must have been made stable enough to fund a massive army, the bureaucracy responsible for tax collection must also have been made stable. For the large-scale military mobilization, both the Tang Dynasty and Goguryeo must have had established state bureaucracies based on the Yulryeong (律令) legal system. Going a little further, it could be considered that the Tang and Goguryeo's reinforced centralization, including a large military force and enormous funding, may have also triggered the centralization of other societies, such as Baekje, Silla, and Japan. It was in this context that condi-

tions for an international war were shaped for East Asian countries in the seventh century. Therefore, Yeon Gae-so-mun's seizure of power in 642 in Goguryeo, King Uija's (義慈王) self-coup in the same year in Baekje, the seizure of power by Kim Chun-chu (金春秋) in 647 in Silla, and the Taika Reform in the late 640s in Japan are not events independent from each other but a chain reaction.

The Tang Dynasty had to revise its short-term occupation strategy after the failure of the offensive at Ansi Fortress (安市城) during its invasion of Goguryeo. In 659, King Taejong Muyeol (太宗武烈王) of Silla, faced with internal and external crises due to frequent attacks by Baekje, requested its Chinese alliance to attack Baekje. Tang also needed a new strategy after the Liaodong attack failed due to a lack of support. This strategy involved a direct attack on Pyongyang after securing Baekje as the rear base. Baekje Kingdom fell in 660 when the attacking forces led by Su Dingfang (蘇定方) and Liu Boying (劉伯英), in association with the Silla army, took over Sabi Castle (泗沘城). Baekje's diplomacy thoroughly failed in the Tang-centered international order. However, immediately after Baekje's fall, in 662, Tang attacked Goguryeo but was defeated by the superior command of Yeon Gae-so-mun. After all, Tang's direct-attack strategy on Pyongyang ended in failure as well. From the Tang's point of view, the fall of Baekje was nothing more than securing an outpost for the direct attack on Pyongyang, and the relationship between the Tang and Silla had to change after the fall of Baekje.

The war between Goguryeo and Tang came to a halt from 662, when the Pyongyang attack failed, to 666, when Tang resumed its attack. This sudden respite was unusual in light of the fierce battles in the preceding years. When the Baekje Restoration Movement arose, Tang considered the withdrawal of the military stationed there under the command of Liu Renyuan (劉仁願), which Liu Rengui (劉仁軌) opposed because of Baekje's strategic value for the conquest of Goguryeo. In 663, the Silla-Tang forces defeated Japanese naval forces at Baekgang (白江), the lower reaches of the Geum River (錦江), and captured Juryu Castle (周留城) in Hansan (韓山), suppressing the Baekje Restoration Movement. After the defeat in the Battle of Baekgang, Yamato Japan (大和), which had at-

tempted to consolidate power by raising military tensions, encountered the culmination of internal contradictions that led to a civil war known as the Jinshin War. In the meantime, Tang appointed Buyeo Yung (扶餘隆) to Ungjin Dodok (熊津都督, Commander of Ungjin) and gained control over the previous territory of Baekje by arranging the Chwirisan league (就利山會盟) with Silla King Munmu in 665.

In 664, Yeon Gae-so-mun disappeared from history. After the death of this anti-Tang Goguryeo statesman, the political battle over China policy led to the internal conflict among his children. In 666, his eldest son, Yeon Nam-saeng (淵男生), went into exile in Tang China, and his brother Yeon Jeong-to (淵淨土) surrendered to Silla. After establishing the official policy for the former territory of Baekje, Tang's interest naturally turned to Goguryeo again. Tang organized the last Goguryeo attack. The attack, which began in 667, ended with the fall of Pyongyang in 668, and Goguryeo was destroyed.

Silla could not avoid war with Tang China, which now occupied the former territory of Baekje. Although taking over this territory was not Tang's original goal, there was no reason to give Silla the territory that it had secured for the conquest of Goguryeo. Silla made efforts to improve relations with Wae (倭, Japan), and at the same time supported the former Goguryeo people's anti-Tang movement. By 671, King Munmu of Silla was able to take control over the old territory of Baekje by establishing Soburi-ju (所夫里州) in the Sabi Castle and appointing Jinwang (眞王) to Dodok (都督). In 674, after suppressing the former Goguryeo people's anti-Chinese movement, Tang China commenced its attack on Silla. Silla and Tang had no choice but to contend for final victory. After the defeat of its 200,000 troops led by Li Jinxing (李謹行) in the Battle of Maeso (買肖城戰鬪) in 675, Tang withdrew from the Protectorate General to Pacify the East (安東都護府) to Liaodong Castle (遼東城) in 676. The war between Silla and Tang thus came to an end. However, considering that this seventh-century war originated from Sui and Tang China's willingness to occupy and subjugate Goguryeo, we can say that it did not end until this willingness disappeared after the founding of Balhae in the former territory of Goguryeo by Goguryeo emigrants in 698.

A New Attempt at Naming the War

As we have seen, the Tang strategy linked the countries involved in the East Asian war of the seventh century. Considering the possibility of revisiting seventh-century East Asia, there have been two recent proposals to change the name of the war: the Northeast Asian War in the Mid-to-Late Seventh Century (Lee Jae-hwan 2019, 62) or the Manchuria-Korean War in the Seventh Century (Yeo 2020, 306). However, both proposals have their own shortcomings.

There are two issues with the first proposal of the Northeast Asian War in the Mid-to-Late Seventh Century. First, while the word "Northeast Asia" refers to all of the countries that participated in the war, namely, Tang, Goguryeo, Silla, Baekje, Wae, Malgal, and Kitan (契丹), it does not include Turk/Göktürks, Xueyantuo (薛延陀), and Tubo (吐蕃), which also influenced the war. In addition, the term does not specify the subject and object of the war, thus making its meaning ambiguous. Accordingly, some scholars have pointed out that the broader concept of "Eastern Eurasia" seems more appropriate, but the war's subject remains ambiguous even with this change (Lee 2020, 229). The second issue is that this term cannot distinguish Tang China's conflicts with the Turk/Göktürks and with Tuyuhun and Gaochang. The latter conflict was not part of the seventh-century war, but the term unwittingly includes it because of the following facts: the latter conflict began in the 620s as a derivative of the seventh-century war, both the years of 634, when Tang subjugated Tuyuhun, and 639, when Gaochang was destroyed, fall into the temporal range of the mid-seventh century, and these two states also fall into the spatial range of Northeast Asia.

There are also two issues with the second proposal of the Manchurian-Korean War in the Seventh Century. First, again, the name does not make clear the subject of the war. Without identifying the leading force of the war, which was Tang China, this term only emphasizes the geographical area of the war that Manchuria-Korea encompasses. Second, it is likely that this name would not be distinguished from the Manseon View of History and would unwittingly serve the claims of Japanese co-

lonialist historians. To remind, the advocates of the Manseon View of History attempted to write a history in which Manchuria is separated from China and the Korean peninsula was subordinated to Manchuria, with the goal of reconfiguring Manseon (Manchuria–Korea) as a single historical world.

Instead, we need a name that satisfies three conditions. First, the name must reveal the nature of the seventh–century war as a Tang–led international war. Second, it must encompass the entire time and space that influenced the war. Third, the name must distinguish this war from those that came before it. As a term that meets these conditions, this article proposes 'The Second East Asian War of the Seventh Century' as the new name of the seventh–century war. According to this nomenclature, the first East Asian war would be the Tang's war against the Turk/Göktürks, Tuyuhu, and Gaochang, which occurred in accordance with its western strategy. Thus, the proposed name distinguishes it from the previous war, and at the same time, it reveals the characteristics of the war as an East Asian international conflict of the seventh century, with Tang and Goguryeo as its two pivotal forces.

Having proposed the new term, this present article acknowledges the need to clarify the meaning of "East Asia." Let us undertake this task by discussing Nishijima Sadao's East Asian World theory (Nishijima 1962; Nishijima 1970), which has been criticized in three ways: first, it has been pointed out that the theory's spatial coverage is too narrow, and second, the time span it examines is too short, and third, since the theory focuses only on China and its relationship with the surrounding powers, it makes the relationship and subjecthood within these surrounding powers difficult to evaluate.

Alternatively, the Eastern Eurasia theory has recently appeared in Japanese academic circles (Suganuma 2014, 4; Hirose 2018, 4). The main point of change is that "Eastern Eurasia" replaces "East Asia," thereby expanding the term's meaning to encompass the steppe region of Central Asia, which was closely linked to China, as well as nomadic societies of northwestern China. This recounting of the war not only presents the nomadic powers of northwest China, such as the Turk/Göktürks

and Xueyantuo, as one of the main actors in the war, but also considers the relationships among neighboring powers, including Goguryeo and Xueyantao, as well as Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla.

It is still questionable whether the term "Eastern Eurasia" is appropriate as an alternative name for two reasons. First, different researchers apply different criteria to define the area referred to by the term "Eastern Eurasia." Generally speaking, researchers agree to include the steppe zone of Central Asia, but there is still disagreement as to how far its western limit should extend and whether the southern waters should be included. Second, even if the meaning of "Eastern Eurasia" covers interlocking international orders, it has not yet been established whether the term can actually operate as a signifier for a regional "community" or "world."

True, "East Asia" is a term with its own limitations. While acknowledging the limitations, this article proposes using the term as the name of the seventh-century war. Changes in East Asian countries during the war were not trivial. Silla, Balhae, and Japan strengthened their centralized state systems by adopting the Tang's precedent immediately after the war. The Tang-centered East Asian network expanded further due to the development of traffic routes and the dissemination of geographic information during the war. It should also not be overlooked that increased agricultural productivity in each state was the internal motivation for these changes. (Lee Jeong-bin 2019, 66-86) In other words, the background of the war was each country's strengthening of state centralization based on socioeconomic development, resulting in the establishment of the Tang-centered international order and the East Asian state system. Although contemporaries of Silla evaluated the war as the unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, if this name is no longer valid today, we perhaps do not need to use it. If the name and significance of this war are important to us, I propose that it be reassessed as the start of the interconnected East Asian community, and that the history of East Asia as a new community be explored in future research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cho, Sung-san. 2009. "Joseon hugi Soron-gye ui godaesa yeon-gu wa junghwajuui ui beon-yong" (Modified Sino-Centrism: The Studies of Ancient History by the Soron School). *Yeoksa Hakbo* 202: 49-90.

Chung, Doo-hee, Yi Geong-sun. 2007. "16segi choetaejeonjaeng, Imjinwaeran" (The Largest War in the Sixteenth Century, Imjinwaeran). In *Imjinwaeran Dongasia Samgukjeonjaeng (A Transnational History of the "Imjin Waeran" 1592-1598: The East Asian Dimension)*, edited by Chung, Doo-hee and Yi Geong-sun. Humanist.

Ha, Woo-bong. 2011. "Dongasia gukjejeonjaeng euroseo ui Imjinjeonjaeng" (Imjin War as an East Asian International War). *Hanilgwangyesa Yeongu* 39: 331-367.

Han, Young-woo. 1994. "Goryeosidae ui yeoksaeuisikgwa yeoksaseosul" (Historical Consciousness and Historiography in the Goryeo Dynasty). In *Hankuk eui yeoksaga wa yeoksahak sang (Historians and Historiography in Korea, Vol. 1)*, edited by Cho Dong-geol, Han Young-woo, and Park Chan-seung. Changbi.

Hirose, Norio. 2018. *Kodai nipponto toubu yuurashia no kokusaikankei (International Relations between Ancient Japan and Eastern Eurasia)*. Bensei Shuppan.

Huh, Tae-yong. 2009. *Joseon hugi Junghwa-ron gwa yeoksa insik (The Junghwa Theory and Historical Perception in the Late Joseon Dynasty)*. Acanet.

Ikeuchi, Hiroshi. 1914. *Bunroku Keichō no eki (Bunroku–Keichō War or Hideyoshi's Invasions of Korea)*. South Manchuria Railways Company.

Inoue, Naoki. 2013. *Teikoku Nihon to 'Mansenshi' (Imperial Japan and Manchuria-Korea History)*. Hanawa Shobo.

Kim, Chum-kon. 1989. "Namnodang pongnyeok hyeongmyeong noseoneui yeonjangeoneseo ireonan hangukjeonjaeng" (The Korean War Begun as an Extension of the Violent Revolution of the Workers' Party of South Korea). In *Hangukjeonjaeng: gangdaeguk jeongchiwa nambukhan galdeung (The Korean War: The Power Politics and Conflict between South and North Korea)*, edited by Kim Cheol-beom. Pyeongminsa.

Kim, Gi-bong. 2012. "1592nyeon jeonjaeng eul eotteoke bureul geosinga" (What

Can We Call the War of 1592–A Civilizational Historical Reflection). *Hanguk Sahaksa Hakbo* 27: 61–86.

Kim, Heung-kyu. 2009. "Sillatongil damnoneun sikminsahakeui balmyeonginga?" (Is the Discourse of Silla's Unification an Invention of Colonial Historiography?). *Changjakgwa Bipyeong* 145: 373–395.

Kim, Ho-dong. 1989. "Kodae Yumok Gukga-ui Gujo" (The Structure of an Ancient Nomadic State) in *Kangja Chung,guksa (Course in Chinese History)*, Vol. 2, edited by Institute of Oriental History, Seoul National University. Jisik Sanup.

Kim, Soo-tae. 2014. "Silla ui cheonhagwan gwa Samguktongillon" (Silla's World View, the Idea of the Unification of Three Kingdoms). *Sillasa Hakbo* 32: 25–81.

Kim, Young-ha. 1989. "Silla ui Samguktongil eul boneun sigak" (The View on Silla's Unification of the Three Kingdoms of Korea). In *Hanguk gotaesaron (Korean Ancient History)*. Hangilsa.

Kim, Young-ha. 2010. "Iltongsamhan ui silsanggwa uisik" (Reality and Consciousness of the Three Hans' Unification). *Hangukgotaesa Yeongu* 59: 293–327.

Kim, Young-ha. 2011. "Sillatongillon ui gwejeokgwa hamui" (The Development and Implication of the Theory of Silla's Unification). *Hanguksa Yeongu* 153: 37–75.

Kim, Young-ha. 2012. *Hangukkotaesa ui insikgwa nonri (The Perception and Logic of Korean Ancient History)*. Sungkyunkwan University Press.

Kim, Young-ha. 2016. "7segi Dongasia ui jeongsewa jeonjaeng" (The Circumstances and War of East Asia in the 7th Century). *Sillasa Hakpo* 38: 1–38.

Kim, Young-ha. 2018. "Silla ui 'Baekjetonghap'gwa 'Iltongsamhan' chaeron" (Silla's 'Baekje Integration' and the Re-discussion of 'Three Hans' Unification'). *Hangukgodaesa Yeongu* 89: 241–276.

Kim, Young-ha. 2019. "Silla ui 'Baekjetonghap'gwa 'Iltongsamhan' chaeron 2" (Silla's 'Baekje Integration' and the Re-discussion of 'Three Hans' Unification' part 2). *Hangukgodaesa Yeongu* 95: 365–399.

Kitajima, Manji. 1982. *Chōsen nichinichiki, Kōrai nikki: Hideyoshi no Chōsen shinryaku to sono rekishiteki kokuhatsu (Joseon Diary, Goryeo Diary: Hideyoshi's Invasion of Joseon and Historical Accusations)*. Soshiete.

Lee, Jae-hwan. 2019. "7segi Chung,·hupan dongbugasia ui jeonjaeng eul eotteoke

bureul geosinga" (How to Name the War in the Middle and Late 7th Century Northeast Asia). *Yeoksabipyeong* 126: 62.

Lee, Jeong-bin. 2019. "Goguryeowa su·tang ui jeonjaeng, mueoseul bakkwonna?" (What Changes did the Goguryeo-Sui & Tang Wars Bring?). *Yeoksabipyeong* 126: 66-86.

Lee, Ki-chon. 2020. "Tangui ipjangeseo bon Silla ui tongil (Silla's Unification of Three Kingdoms from Tang's Point of View)." *Yeoksabipyeong* 130: 229.

Lee, Sin-cheol. 2003. "Joseonminjujuuiinmingonghwaguk ui 6·25nambukjeonjaenge daehan yeongudonghyang" (Research Trends in the 6·25 South and North War of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea). In *Bukhan ui hanguksa yeongudonghyang 2-Geunhyeondae pyeon (Research Trends in the Korean History of North Korea),* vol. 2. National Institute of Korean History.

Nishijima, Sadao. 1962. "6-8-seiki no Higashi Ajia" (East Asia in the 6th to 8th Centuries). *Iwanami Kōza Nihon Rekishi, vol. 2 (Iwanami Lecture Series: Japanese History, vol. 2),* edited by Ishimoda Sho. Iwanami Shoten.

Nishijima, Sadao. 1970. "Josetsu-Higashi Ajia sekai no keisei" (Introduction: The Formation of the East Asian World). *Iwanami Kōza Nihon Rekishi, vol. 4 (Iwanami Lecture Series: Japanese History, vol. 4),* edited by Naohiro Asao. Iwanami Shoten.

Noh, Tae-don. 2009. *Samguktongiljeonjaengsa (The Unification War of the Three Kingdoms).* Seoul National University Press.

Noh, Tae-don. 2011. "7segi jeonjaeng ui seonggyeok eul dulleossan nonui" (Discussion on the Nature of the Seventh Century War). *Hanguksayeongu (The Journal of Korean History)* 154: 329-345.

Schmid, Andre. 2002. *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919.* Columbia University Press.

Suganuma, Aigo. 2014. *7-seiki kōhan kara 8-seiki no Tōbu Yūrashia no kokusai jōsei to sono sui'i (The International Situation in Eastern Eurasia from the Latter Half of the 7th Century to the 8th Century and Its Changes).* Keisuisha.

Yeo, Ho-gyu. 2020. "7segi manju·hanbando jeonjaenggwa jijeonghak gujoeui jaepyeon" (The Manchuria-Korean War in the 7th Century and Reshaping of Geopolitical Structure). *Yeoksabipyeong* 131: 306.

Yoon, Kyeong-jin. 2019a. "Silla ui yeongtouisikgwa Samhaniltonguisik" (Silla's

Perception of its Own Territory and the 'Three Hans were One' Notion). *Yeoksabipyeong* 126: 12–39.

Yoon, Kyeong-jin. 2019b. "Samhaniltonguisik eun 7segi ui inyeom inga?" (Was the 'Three Hans were One' Notion a Product of the Seventh Century?). *Hanguk-godaesa Yeongu* 93: 265–307.

Yoon, Seon-tae. 2007. "'Tongilsilla' ui balmyeonggwa geundaeyeoksahak ui seong-nip" (Invention of 'Unified Silla' and Establishment of Modern History). *Silla-munhwa* 29: 125–142.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 147-177
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.006

Was There a Military Revolution in Late Joseon Korea?

A Comparative Analysis of the Recent Discussions on Late Joseon Military History in Korean and Anglo-American Academic Society

Kunha KIM, Dukhee YUN

Abstract

This article examines the applicability of the Military Revolution Thesis to late Joseon Dynasty history (1599–1897), comparing the recent discussions in Anglo–American and Korean academia. The military changes in Joseon following the Imjin War (1592–1598) and the Manchu Invasions (1636–7), particularly the shift from cavalry to infantry tactics and the adoption of gunpowder weapons, are explored through the lens of the military revolution theory. By comparing and critically assessing the scholarship of No Yeong-gu, Kim Yeong-joon, Tonio Andrade, and Kang Hyeok-hyeon, the study evaluates the similarities and differences between European and Joseon military transformations. It highlights the limitations of directly applying the Eurocentric military revolution theory to Joseon, emphasizing the need to consider Joseon's unique historical and cultural context. This article contributes to a broader understanding of military changes in late Joseon and positions them within global military history, arguing for a more nuanced approach to interpreting military innovations outside Europe.

Keywords

Joseon Military Revolution, Gunpowder Weapons, Imjin War, Military Revolution, Musketeer Training, East Asian Warfare, Asia Military Revolution

Lead author: Kunha Kim is a Research Assistant Professor at the Center for Digital Humanities & Computational Social Sciences at KAIST. Email: littlekg@naver.com

Corresponding author: Dukhee Yun is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Military History at Korea Military Academy.

Introduction

The military system of the later Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897) period differed significantly from that of the early period. The Imjin War of 1592–1598 and the Manchu Invasions from 1637 were major turning points for Joseon's military system, which necessitated and resulted in several fundamental changes.

Despite the widespread transformations that occurred in Joseon's military operations, organization, defense system, military administration, weapons, and tactics, no single comprehensive term or framework has been coined to describe these changes. In part, this is perhaps due to the fact that relatively few scholars work in the field of Joseon military history. Even those few scholars tend to focus on several highly specific topics within the wide definition of military history. To be sure, these scholars' narrow foci have led to a significant deepening of our knowledge in many important areas of the military history of Joseon Korea. Yet, we nevertheless lack an integrated, holistic, and critical approach to explain the nature and significance of the developments that occurred in the late Joseon military system. This is in contrast to other areas of late-Joseon history, where there are multiple discourses seeking to explain developments of the period. These discourses, although controversial, provide frameworks for understanding the evolutions reflected in the historical record. In the field of military history, there are as yet only explanatory frameworks for specific sub-fields, such as the Five Military Divisions system or the capital defense system.

Of course, the lack of an all-encompassing framework does not mean there has been no effort by scholars to assess and explain late-Joseon military developments more holistically. The most notable attempt at an explanatory thesis has been to apply the early modern European Military Revolution Thesis. The thesis' suitability to the Joseon context was first discussed by scholars in South Korea, in response to which several Anglo-American scholars specializing in East Asian history also carefully examined its potential applicability. Since its inception, the Military Revolution Thesis has prompted one of the fiercest debates in the

field of European military history. There have been various attempts to apply the thesis to non-European regions, particularly to East Asia. Applying the Military Revolution Theory to Joseon is part of this wider trend.

Reviewing the ongoing debate over the existence or otherwise of a Military Revolution in Joseon can provide a meaningful contribution on two levels. Firstly, within Korean history, discussion of the thesis can lead to the construction of a useful framework to understand the military history of the late Joseon period as a whole. Secondly, as part of world history, interrogating the same theoretical framework applied to other countries improves our understanding of the universality and particularity of Korean military history.

This article aims to compare and analyze discussions of the Military Revolution Thesis in the late Joseon context seen in both Anglo-American and Korean academia, providing a comprehensive overview of the scholarship to date. Specifically, the article focuses on two main aspects. Firstly, it examines how Anglo-American and Korean academia respectively analyze the Military Revolution Theory in Joseon. Secondly, the article identifies the major similarities and differences between these two discussions. The aim is to provide a more world-history-oriented and balanced basis for further research into late Joseon military history.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly explains the 'Military Revolution' thesis and examines the academic debates prompted by it. It presents an overview of not only the European debates but also the discourses concerning the existence of East Asian military revolution, which have recently garnered attention. The section also provides a theoretical background for the analysis that follows. Section 3 introduces two studies by Anglo-American scholars. Reviewing the work of Kang Hyeok-hyeon and Tonio Andrade, as well as that of Kang and Kirsten Cooper, the section examines how Anglo-American academic field explains Joseon's military revolution, focusing particularly on what late-Joseon changes they highlight. Section 4 introduces Korean scholarship in the form of two studies, by No Yeong-gu and Kim Yeong-joon respectively, as well as recent trends in Korean

military research. Finally, Section 5 compares the similarities and differences between the Anglo–American and Korean discussions. While there are certainly aspects of the military revolution that both fields focus on, the subtle differences in how these scholars seek to prove the existence of a Military Revolution are revealing.

The Military Revolution Thesis: A Historiographical Review

This section examines the historiographical development of the European 'Military Revolution' thesis to provide a theoretical context in which to review the recent debates on East Asian and Joseon military revolution.

1) Debates Around an Early modern 'European' Military Revolution

Despite numerous attacks on Michael Roberts' thesis on the 'Military Revolution,' the idea that Europe's military power underwent a radical change or 'modernization' which contributed to its eventual world dominance still stands (Starkey 2003, 35). The basic argument of Roberts' 1967 article is that 'by 1660 the modern art of war had come to birth'; by modern art of war he meant 'mass armies, strict discipline, the control of the state, the submergence of the individual' and 'the use of propaganda, psychological warfare, and terrorism as military weapons' (Roberts 1995, 29). Roberts argued that this fundamental transformation was initiated by the tactical reforms overseen by Maurice of Orange and Gustav Adolf of Sweden, which enabled their armies to use their firepower more efficiently than their opponents (Roberts 1995, 13–15). This, in turn, triggered the chain of development which eventually led to a transformation of government and its financial system to sustain the 'modern' war effort. In other words, the military revolution created the modern state (Black 2008, 34–41).

The debate was later reinvigorated by Geoffrey Parker's revision. Instead of confining himself to Maurice and Gustav as Roberts had done,

Parker included the early modern Spanish army as another pioneer of modern warfare (Parker 1995, 39). Furthermore, Parker presented a more fundamental origin of the military revolution than Roberts' tactical reforms: it was the new type of fortress which appeared in Renaissance Italy, the *trace italienne,* which revolutionized European warfare (Parker 1995, 39). The significance of Parker's argument is, as Clifford Rogers pointed out, that he raised 'military technology as a causative factor' in the Military Revolution debate (Rogers 1995, 4).

Indeed, after Parker, technology became an inseparable aspect of any discussion of early modern warfare and even in general early modern history. Among the important technological developments, gunpowder has almost always received the most emphasis. Although numerous criteria have been suggested for establishing the beginning of the early modern European military revolution, most have nonetheless identified gunpowder weaponry as one of the most important characteristics (Raymond 2007, 3). This scholarly consensus is reflected in Armstrong Starkey's argument that, 'the introduction of gunpowder was fundamental to this revolution, which included the introduction of cannon, artillery fortification, and big-gun sailing vessels' (Starkey 2003, 35). Russell F. Weigley defined the era from the Battle of Breitenfeld in 1631 to the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 as 'the Age of Battles' (Weigley 1991, xi). In those battles, Weigley concluded that 'firepower' was the key factor, embodying 'a new kind of tactical proficiency' (Weigley 1991, xi). Similarly, Parker cited the French invasion of Italy in 1494-95 as the beginning of modern warfare (Parker 1995, 9). Parker's rationale is identical to that of Weigley: firearms were the catalysts of major change (Parker 1995, 9-10). In many works of early modern military history, the innovations of a string of military reformers, such as Maurice and Gustav, are also interpreted in light of the shifting balance in battle tactics from 'shock' to 'firepower'(Showalter and Astore 2007, 61-63).

The validity of the Military Revolution Thesis has by no means gone uncontested, however. For instance, in his 1985 article, David A. Parrott argued that the characteristics of the period often attributed to the military revolution 'was not revolution, but an almost complete failure to

meet the challenges posed by the administration and deployment of contemporary armies' (Parrott 1995, 228). Jeremy Black also argued that there were three 'revolutionary' periods instead of a single 'military revolution,' and the nature of the military revolution was 'the clever adaptation of existing ideas to suit local circumstances' (Black 1995, 110–111). He further argued that military adaptation is a more appropriate term than revolution (Black 2011, 7). Although his argument of three specific periods of military revolutions is debatable, his emphasis on adaptation to suit particular circumstances is an important corrective to the notion of the military revolution as a model to be followed by every army.

John France, a prominent medieval military historian, asserted that 'battle, before the modern age, was inevitably, in its crucial stage, a close quarter affair because missile weapons suffered from grave limitations' (France 2005, 503). He further noted that this "close-quarters battle fought in close-order formation remained untouched" and "nothing resembling 'Military Revolution' occurred before the nineteenth century" (France 2005, 507). Peter H. Wilson also contended that the 'idea of a military revolution' is based on a largely nineteenth-century concept of a "coherent story of modernization." He also undermined Roberts' dichotomy by arguing that Gustav Adolph's army at the Battle of Lützen (1632) cannot be simply referred to as a 'progressive' force against its 'reactionary' opponent (Wilson 2018, 113). He further posited that, although 'it has become a historiographical convention' that the more firepower-oriented Dutch infantry tactics were inherently superior to those of the Spanish army, 'the distinction is not accurate, nor does it correspond to sixteenth-century military thinking that drew directly on the ancient world for its inspiration' (Wilson 2009, 90).

In another recent work, Frank Jacob and Gilmar Visión-Alons maintained that "there never was a military revolution" and "the changes in the practice of war observed in Europe during the Early Modern period took place on a global scale, occurred numerous times throughout history, and are part of an endless evolutionary process of research and development prompted by immediate threats" (Jacob and Visión-Alonso 2016, 1). This succinctly summarizes the direction in which the most re-

cent academic debates concerning the concept of a military revolution have been moving.

2) The Cases for 'East Asian' Military Revolution

The Military Revolution debate did not long remain confined within the boundaries of European history. Recently, several scholars attempted to rectify the 'Eurocentrism' allegedly inherent in the 'European' Military Revolution Thesis, by proposing the case for the existence of an 'East Asian' or even 'Eurasian' military revolution. Without doubt, the achievements of these studies have been considerable, especially in pointing out several points that scholars specializing in European military history were largely unaware of. Nevertheless, even they could not completely free themselves from the basic framework established by Roberts and Parker.

Scholars of non-European military history have mostly accepted the fundamental tenets of the 'gunpowder revolution' theory. Tonio Andrade's recent work is one of the most notable examples. In an article co-authored by Kang Hyeok-hyeon and Kirsten Cooper, Andrade argued that "East Asian developments show striking parallels with European ones, and that the Military Revolution should perhaps be seen not as a European-specific development, but rather as a Eurasian-wide phenomenon" (Andrade, Kang and Cooper 2014, 51-84). One such parallel is the existence of volley-fire tactics and the drilling that enabled them. In a more recent work in 2016, Andrade named the entire period from the 10th to the mid-15th century the 'gunpowder age.' According to Andrade, this period began with China as the leading world power in gunpowder technology. After five hundred years, Europeans had begun to secure pre-eminence, only for China to quickly close the gap. It was not until the eighteenth century that a gap opened up again and what Andrade referred to as the 'Great Military Divergence' occurred (Andrade 2016, 297-298). Similarly, Peter Lorge situated the Asian military revolution through the existence of the 'gunpowder revolution' (Lorge 2008, 10-21). Lorge also argued that every aspect of early modern warfare in Europe was also evidenced in Chinese warfare (Lorge 2008, 73). Clearly, in

these works, gunpowder technology is central to understanding military innovation during this period.

Interestingly, despite specifically rejecting the notion of a uniquely 'European' military revolution, these scholars nonetheless implicitly accept Parker's premise that the 'rise of the West' was made possible by Europe's military superiority. Parker indeed acknowledged that the people of East Asia were familiar with many of the key concepts of the Military Revolution (Parker 1995, 136). He particularly emphasized how early modern Japan successfully employed Western firearms (Parker 2007, 333). This example is highly significant, as Japan is well known as being the only East Asian nation that successfully 'modernized' itself and developed into a great power during the late-nineteenth century. Here, once again, it is firearms, and the tactics focused on maximizing their effect, that symbolize 'modernity.'

To be sure, these studies have greatly widened the scope of the Military Revolution debates and provided many valuable insights. However, two main weaknesses stand out. Firstly, the arguments concerning the East Asian or Eurasian Military Revolution are predominantly confined within the tactical and technological areas. More specifically, these studies mostly attempt to locate the 'gunpowder revolution' in Asia. Of course, the emphasis on gunpowder weaponry and tactics is important in European Military Revolution Thesis. However, it is important because this innovation in warfare was supposed to lead to the birth of the modern state system, not because of the adoption of gunpowder weaponry itself.

Secondly, as we have seen, there are increasing doubts over the existence of a European military revolution as Roberts and Parker understood it. Numerous recent studies argue that the effects of the tactical reforms of Maurice of Nasau and Gustav Adolph have been exaggerated, questioning whether firepower-oriented tactics were indeed more 'modern' than allegedly more traditional shock tactics. In this context, we are bound to question the utility of arguing for the existence of an Asian military revolution based on some similarities with a European military revolution—if, indeed, there was such a phenomenon.

The Joseon Military Revolution Thesis in Anglo-American Scholarship

This section examines the discourses on possible military revolution in late Joseon Korea, discussed in Anglo-American academia. As we have seen above, there has been significant recent research interest among Anglo-American scholars in the pertinence of discussing an Asian military. These scholars' focus tends to be on China and Japan, however, or these countries' interaction with European maritime empires (such as those of Portugal, Spain or the Netherlands). Early modern Korea under the Joseon Dynasty has received scant attention. Notably, only two studies have seriously addressed the case for a military revolution in Joseon, both of which include Kang Hyeok-hyeon as an author. Some of the content in these two studies overlaps significantly. Nonetheless, since these two studies focus on different aspects of Joseon's military innovation, this section will examine each study in detail. Although the 2014 article co-authored by Tonio Andrade, Kang Hyeok-hyeon, and Kirsten Cooper provides a more comprehensive discussion of the military revolution in Joseon, this section discusses Kang Hyeok-hyeon's 2013 article first, following the order of publication.

1) Kang Hyeok-hyeon. 2013. "Big Heads and Buddhist Demons: The Korean Musketry Revolution and the Northern Expeditions of 1654 and 1658." *Journal of Chinese Military History* 2 (2).

Kang's 2013 article explores how Joseon's military revolution, though resembling Europe's, took a unique path. Focusing on Joseon's northern expeditions of 1654 and 1658, mounted against Russian Cossacks at the Qing dynasty's request, Kang shows how Joseon successfully used firearms to repel Cossack forces. According to Kang, these campaigns, known as the 'Nashin Expeditions,' demonstrated Joseon's military advancements, particularly in the use of gunpowder weapons.

Kang argues that Joseon's military innovations were significant in three ways: (1) The number of musketeers increased rapidly after the Im-

jin War, with musketeers replacing archers in military units by 1708. (2) Joseon improved training methods, introducing advanced tactics like volley and rotating fire. (3) The Joseon government expanded its military budget to maintain these innovations, shifting from unpaid conscripts to salaried soldiers, seemingly following a similar path to its contemporary European 'fiscal–military states.'

These changes align with Peter Lorge's definition of a revolution as a "permanent change." Joseon restructured its military around infantry firearms, making lasting institutional changes. Compared to Europe, however, Joseon's revolution remained 'incomplete,' as it was largely confined to musketry. The momentum for reform declined under the Qing–dynasty hegemony that took hold after the Manchu invasions of the mid–seventeenth century.

Despite the success of its northern expeditions, Joseon lost the drive to continue military innovations, as the stabilization of the Qing borders removed external pressures. Consequently, Joseon did not complete the financial reforms needed to sustain its military revolution.

2) Andrade, Tonio, Kang Hyeok-hyeon, and Kirsten Cooper. 2014. "A Korean Military Revolution? Parallel Military Innovations in East Asia and Europe." *Journal of World History* 25 (1).

The 2014 joint article by Andrade, Kang and Cooper highlights how East Asian military innovations, particularly in Joseon,paralleled developments in Europe, challenging the Eurocentric view of the military revolution. Tonio Andrade, the lead author, has extensively studied military revolutions in Asia, while Kang Hyeok-hyeon focuses on Joseon's military changes, and Kirsten Cooper studies early modern European transnational interactions. Together, they offer a comprehensive analysis of the military revolution from Asian, Korean, and European perspectives.

Andrade, Kang and Cooper's article emphasizes the importance of East Asia in the global discourse on the military revolution, particularly focusing on the "Revolution in Drill" in Joseon. This concept refers to the introduction of disciplined, coordinated military units, essential for the effective use of gunpowder weapons. In Europe, leaders like William

Louis of Nassau developed tactics such as volley fire, which allowed continuous shooting. Similarly, in Asia, China and Japan also adapted to gunpowder weapons, developing infantry tactics, as seen in Qi Jiguang's manual *Ji xiao xin shu* (The New Book of Effective Techniques) and Japan's use of gunpowder in the Sengoku (Warring States) period (15–16th centuries).

According to the authors, the Imjin War played a particularly significant role in introducing these changes to Joseon. After the war, Joseon rapidly transformed its military system by adopting Japanese gunpowder weapons as well as Chinese training methods. The establishment of the Military Training Agency (Hunryeondogam), a standing army of salaried full-time soldiers, marked a significant departure from Joseon's traditional conscription system, which relied on peasant militia. The focus on musketeers and the adoption of advanced training methods, such as volley fire, allowed Joseon to modernize its military system.

The key argument of the article is that Joseon's innovations in infantry tactics, particularly the use of musketeers and coordinated firing methods, paralleled developments in Europe. For example, the deployment and training of musketeers described in Joseon's *Orientation to the Military Arts* closely resembles European manuals like William Barriffe's Military Discipline. Both emphasized strict discipline, sequential firing, and the use of signals like drums to coordinate movements.

Even more, according to the authors, these Joseon military innovations were not just a theoretical development but successfully tested in the field, as can be seen in the skirmishes with Russian Cossack forces during the Northern Expeditions of 1654 and 1658. Joseon's musketeers played a decisive role in these engagements, demonstrating the effectiveness of their training and tactics.

The article concludes by questioning the Eurocentric perspective of the military revolution, arguing that similar developments occurred in East Asia. The authors call for further research and global data to support the idea that the military revolution was not confined to Europe.

The Joseon Military Revolution Thesis in Korean

Scholarship

This section examines how scholars working within Korean academia have responded to the theory of the military revolution in Joseon. Discussion of the thesis in the Korean academe has been relatively slow to arrive, despite its pre-eminence in the Anglophone military historiography of both Europe and Asia. Its occasional treatment has mostly been confined to the works of Korean scholars specializing in Western military history. Nonetheless, a few researchers have shown interest in the thesis' applicability to the Joseon context. Moreover, No Yeong-gu raised the possibility of a military revolution in Joseon earlier than his Anglo-American counterparts. Therefore, this article will first examine No Yeong-gu's pioneering work before moving to the subsequent research of Kim Yeong-joon.

1) No, Yeong-gu. 2007. "'Military Revolution' and Joseon Dynasty's Military Reforms in the 17th and 18th Centuries." *Journal of Western History* 36.

No Yeong-gu's article explores the possibility of linking Joseon's military changes with the theory of the Military Revolution. He challenges traditional explanations of Joseon's post-Imjin War changes based on internal development theories, arguing that these changes align more with the military transformations seen in Europe after large-scale wars.

The article examines three main areas: changes in battle tactics, the expansion of military forces, and the establishment of a centralized fiscal structure. The main arguments are as follows.

Firstly, in terms of battle tactics, Joseon's shift from cavalry-based to infantry-based tactics after the Imjin War parallels changes in sixteenth-century Europe. Joseon adopted Qi Jiguang's *Zhe School tactics* and muskets, replacing bows. Infantry, equipped with swords for close combat, became the primary military force, supported by cavalry. This resembled Europe's transition from medieval tactics dominated by cavalry to the early modern tactics of musket and pike formations.

Secondly, with regard to military expansion, the size of Joseon's military grew significantly after the Imjin War, exceeding one million men by the early eighteenth century. The central army became dominant, and Joseon included lower social classes in its ranks. This expansion was driven by concerns over potential conflicts with the Qing dynasty and was part of King Hyojong's northern campaign policy.

Thirdly, to support its expanded military, Joseon made changes to centralize its fiscal system. These fiscal reforms are exemplified by the Law of Great Equity, which replaced tribute with rice and cloth, better suited for provisioning soldiers. Centralized taxation under the Seonhyecheong ministry allowed for efficient resource management, similar to Europe's adoption of mercantilism to fund large-scale wars.

No Yeong-gu argues that in these three important regards the changes in late Joseon reflect elements of a military revolution, as seen in Europe. While not identical, Joseon's military reforms, increased war expenditures, and centralized governance align with the global trends of military revolutions. No's article suggests that applying the Military Revolution Thesis offers a new perspective on late Joseon's historical significance by placing it within a global context, but it also acknowledges key differences between Joseon and Europe.

2) Kim, Yeong-joon. 2014. "Training Methods and Military Discipline of Joseon Musketeers around the 17th Century." *Journal of Military History* 92.

Kim Yeong-joon's article is one of the few studies to explicitly review the Military Revolution Thesis in Joseon after No Yeong-gu. The article criticizes the focus on military organization in late Joseon research while neglecting aspects such as training and tactics. It aims to explore the features of Joseon's military revolution that distinguish it from Europe.

Kim examines Joseon's military innovations through two key aspects: musketeer training and military discipline. Musketeer training is divided into individual firearms training and formation training. Joseon emphasized accuracy in firearm handling, using techniques like cheek-firing, similar to those introduced in Japan by Portuguese traders. For

formation training, Joseon adopted systems resembling European tactics, such as volley fire and rotating fire, documented in manuals such as the *New Artillery Manual* and the *Orientation to the Military Arts*. Yet, historical records reveal that Joseon's musketeers often adapted their tactics in response to cavalry-centric opponents like the Manchus, sometimes abandoning volley fire in favor of individual shooting from cover.

Military discipline is examined through two systems: the Reward System for Enemy Heads and the Collective Punishment. In contrast to Europe's focus on strict discipline, Joseon motivated soldiers by offering rewards for successful marksmanship, encouraging individual accuracy. The Collective Punishment system helped maintain unit cohesion, especially in mixed-rank units like the Sogo Army, where lower social classes dominated. This system allowed commanders to maintain control and accountability, stabilizing the military from the mid-seventeenth century.

Kim's article concludes that while Joseon's military innovations paralleled those in Europe, such as the emphasis on gunpowder weapons and new training methods, significant differences existed in how musketeers operated and the cultural values surrounding military discipline. Thus, mechanically applying the European military revolution theory to Joseon is problematic, as it would obscure these distinct cultural motivations and practices.

3) Recent Discussions on Military Revolution Theory in Korean Academia

The term "Military Revolution Thesis" itself is rarely used in Korean scholarship, aside from the two studies examined above. Nevertheless, discussions on topics related to the Military Revolution Thesis such as the adoption of firearms, the expansion of musketry units, and the standardization of training methods—have seen many new contributions in recent years.

Although these studies do not directly address the theory of a military revolution, they do provide significant insights into the military transformations in mid-to late-Joseon Korea which are often held as major components of the military revolution in Europe. Therefore, it is nec-

essary to outline this recent scholarship here.

New scholarship in this area can be summarized in terms of two main areas: reforms to the military system and advancements in firearms technology.

The transformation of the military system has not been a primary focus of discussions of the Military Revolution in Joseon within either Anglophone or Korean academia (Kim Jong-soo 2015). This is the main weakness of the Military Revolution debate regarding Joseon. Without structural changes in military institutions, advancements in weaponry and training methods cannot be effectively implemented. From this perspective, the research concerning the shift from a '兵農一致' (*byeongnong ilchi*, military-agricultural integration) system to a '兵農分離' (*byeongnong bunri*, military-agricultural separation) system before and after the Imjin War (1592-1598) deserves special attention.

The Military Training Agency (Hunryeondogam) was the central institution in military system reform. It operated based on the principle of military-agricultural separation. In the context of Korean history, this was an innovative reform that shifted the military system from one of military-agricultural integration to one of military-agricultural separation. This reform was not merely an institutional change. The establishment of the Military Training Agency was in response to Qi Jiguang's manual *Ji xiao xin shu*.

To adapt the core concepts of the *Ji xiao xin shu* to the realities on the ground in Joseon, various efforts were made. Firstly, in order to reform and implement the military system according to *Ji xiao xin shu* principles, Joseon imported military instructors from Ming China (Jang 2022). As the new military system gradually became more familiar, Joseon compiled and produced its own military manuals that better adapted the system to local circumstances (Li 2021). The Royal Division (Eoyeongcheong), the Anti-Manchu Division (Cheongnyeongcheong), and the Forbidden Guard Division (Geumwiyeong), which were subsequently established, also partially adopted the principle of military-agricultural separation (Jang 2022). Additionally, a common characteristic of these military divisions was that they were all created with the primary objec-

tive of defending the capital.

This transformation highlights the difference between the emergence of standing armies in Europe and Korea. In Europe, standing armies developed as large-scale national forces that upheld absolute monarchy and were actively deployed in wars of conquest. In contrast, standing armies in Korea were not aimed at expansion but were instead focused solely on the defense of the capital.

The perceived need for this transformation declined during the eighteenth century, as the risk of invasion diminished and improving the living standards of the general populace took political precedence. Notably, reformists commonly referred to as "Silhak" scholars argued for a return from military-agricultural separation to military-agricultural integration. Yet, rather than being a regression in military innovation, this shift in fact reflected an effort to sustain military reforms while adapting to changing realities (Kim Jin-su 2011).

Joseon's military reforms were not confined to renaming military divisions or reorganizing their structures. The system underwent a fundamental transformation as it shifted from a conscript-based system to a recruitment-based or mercenary one, significantly altering the way military forces were mobilized. Furthermore, the creation of capital defense-oriented military divisions, rather than regional defense units, redefined the system of national defense.

In sum, recent research indicates that although military developments in Joseon differed from the Military Revolution in Europe, they nonetheless demonstrate that Joseon was undergoing its own significant military transformation.

The other important component of the Military Revolution debate is the adoption of firearms. What follows is an outline of the recent discussions on the distinct characteristics of Joseon firearm development.

Several recent studies have highlighted the unique aspects of Joseon's utilization of gunpowder weapons. Kim Jin-su attempted to analyze the domestic impact of musket adoption in Joseon and compare it with trends in East Asia (Kim Jin-su 2015). This study is particularly noteworthy as it provides a comprehensive review of existing Korean

scholarship on muskets, arguing that Joseon prioritized the introduction and expansion of muskets following the Imjin War. It demonstrates that scholars generally agree that Joseon's adoption of muskets was a result of interactions and exchanges within East Asia and that musket production saw a rapid expansion after the Imjin War (see also Kim Jong-soo 2015).

Yet, a broader analysis of Joseon's utilization of gunpowder weapons offers deeper insights into the country's military transformation, as illustrated by Kim Byonglyuen's recent study (Kim Byonglyuen 2023). In fact, Joseon had a long history of gunpowder weaponry. It had already employed firearms in battles against Waegu (J. Wako, Japanese pirates) in the late fourteenth century. Throughout the early Joseon period, the kingdom continued to develop its gunpowder weapons, but with a focus on large-scale artillery, such as cannons, rather than personal firearms. These larger weapons were mainly utilized in naval warfare and siege defense, and they evolved primarily as defensive weapons rather than offensive ones.

The Imjin War of 1592-8 was a critical inflection point that catalyzed a shift from large-scale artillery to small firearms. Nevertheless, technological limitations meant that small firearms continued to be difficult to employ effectively. In fact, in battles fought after the Imjin War, the effectiveness of firearms remained limited, and close-combat units still occupied a dominant role on the battlefield (Jang 2021). Furthermore, Joseon's fundamental defense strategy relied on retreating into mountain fortresses, in order to conduct protracted, defensive warfare. For these reasons, from the eighteenth century onward, Joseon once again prioritized large firearms suited for defensive warfare. In particular, the army focused on support weapons (such as the Hwacha, 火車, or mobile artillery) that could overcome the technical limitations of accuracy and rate of fire (Kim Byonglyuen 2023).

In summary, Joseon's gunpowder weaponry did not evolve along the same trajectory as its counterparts in Europe. In Europe, where continuous warfare was the norm, small firearms were advantageous not only for defensive purposes but also for offensive operations. By con-

trast, in the context of Joseon, which prioritized defense, and which faced technological constraints and limited incentive for continuous innovation, artillery took precedence. This suggests that when discussing the Military Revolution in Joseon it would be misleading to consider only the musket as representative of the Gunpowder Revolution. Instead, another core element of Joseon's military transformation was its focus on large firearms.

A Comparison Between Anglo-American and Korean Academia: A Critical Assessment

Building on the preceding review of Anglo-American and Korean scholars' arguments in favor of a Military Revolution in Joseon, this final section examines the similarities and differences in these studies and critically assesses their merits.

The first point to note is that scholars working in Anglo-American and Korean academia all clearly acknowledge one key point: the "Gunpowder Revolution" indeed occurred in Joseon. Before the Imjin War, while China and Japan widely adopted infantry firearms, Joseon approached gunpowder weaponry from a different direction, focusing more on large cannons. After the Imjin War, however, Joseon turned its attention to infantry firearms, reflecting the practice of the invading Japanese forces they had encountered, and rapidly replaced its traditional archery-centered weapon system with one built around the musket. Scholars also agree that not only did the number of musketeers increase, but new tactics and training methods for their operation were also developed. In other words, Joseon simultaneously achieved both the quantitative expansion of its army and the growing sophistication in mastery of gunpowder weaponry by its infantry.

The rationale behind each scholar's argument for these innovations differs somewhat, however. Kang Hyeok-hyeon emphasizes the performance of musketeer units during the Nashin Expedition as evidence of the success of the Gunpowder Revolution. Tonio Andrade focuses less on

the performance of musketeer units in combat and more on their training methods. He highlights that, similar to their European contemporaries, Joseon musketeer units adopted volley fire and sequential fire tactics, and underwent rigorous training based on manuals. Andrade thus places more emphasis on the "Revolution in Drill," which he sees as essential for the success of the Gunpowder Revolution–as it was in early modern European cases. No Yeong-gu focuses on the rapid expansion of musketeer forces and the formation of a large standing army. Kim Yeong-joon has argued that Joseon's musketeers were influenced by a military culture that valued individual ability over strict adherence to training manuals, marking a contrast to Andrade's argument. These subtle differences in perspective reveal that, while these scholars broadly agree that a Gunpowder Revolution occurred in late Joseon Korea, there is yet no consensus around its impact and origins.

Beyond the revolutions in gunpowder weaponry and drill, the areas of military affairs selected for study by historians of late Joseon differ significantly. No Yeong-gu, who first proposed the possibility of a Military Revolution in Joseon, also discussed the management of large armies and the centralization of the fiscal structure to support military expenditures. Although Kang Hyeok-hyeon introduces these topics, he limits the scope of Joseon's Military Revolution by stating, "Joseon's military reforms were radical by local standards, but the military revolution in Joseon was mostly confined to the musketry revolution, with limited effects on fiscal mobilization and social reforms." Tonio Andrade, too, focuses on the content of the Drill Revolution and does not address the relationship between military innovation and social change in Joseon. Instead, he notes that, despite the Gunpowder Revolution, the cultural tradition of archery remained intact in Joseon. Kim Yeong-joon, apart from discussing changes in training techniques, does not mention other aspects of the military revolution theory. In other words, apart from the Gunpowder and Drill Revolutions and with the exception of No Yeong-gu, scholars hesitate in making the case for a Joseon Military Revolution more broadly defined.

One characteristic unique to Anglo-American researchers is their

emphasis on the connection between Europe and Joseon. Kang Hyeok-hyeon views the two Northern Expeditions (Nashin Expeditions) as a confrontation between the Military Revolutions of Europe and Joseon. He argues that the European revolution failed in East Asia, while the Joseon Military Revolution proved its validity. Tonio Andrade focuses on the Dutchman Jan Janse Weltevree (Pak Yŏn), who drifted ashore in Joseon. He attaches great significance to the fact that Weltevree's arrival coincided with the period of the Gunpowder Revolution in Joseon. Hailing from the Netherlands, Weltevree came from one of the European countries undergoing significant military innovations at the time. Andrade argues that it was with the help of Weltevree that Joseon improved its gunpowder weaponry–thus establishing a connection between the military innovations of Joseon and Europe.[1] Anglo–American scholars broadly speaking tend to interpret even occasional or small–scale military encounters Europe and Joseon as events with a large historical significance. Although this might enable scholars to see the military history of Joseon in a broader, global perspective, there is a danger of over–simplification and exaggeration.

Reviewing this field more broadly, there are definite limitations to the scholarship making the case for a Joseon Military Revolution. While these studies' novel contributions to our understanding of late Joseon military transformation are welcome, the case for a Military Revolution in Joseon remains unconvincing in several key regards.

Firstly, it is doubtful that the quantitative expansion of musketeer units (which was, in fact, quite modest compared to contemporary European armies) led to a proportional improvement in the combat effectiveness of the late Joseon military. In fact, the Joseon government soon found itself unable to sustain the costs of maintaining its enlarged musketeer units and regressed to past practices. Instead of maintaining a large

---

[1] The claim of such a Joseon–European connection is generally not accepted in Korean academia. Instead, Korean scholars argue that while Joseon was interested in Dutch firearms and ships, it adopted a defensive posture toward improving its military system through Dutch technology. For related discussions, see Kim Moonsik, "Chosŏn intellectuals' understanding of Holland in the 18th Century," (Kim 2007).

salaried standing army, Joseon reverted to the traditional system whereby a small group of regular soldiers (*Jeonggun*) was sustained by economic contributions made by auxiliary personnel (*boin*), the regular soldiers serving in rotation.[2] This system was not dissimilar to the militia system of the early Joseon period, which relied on an essentially amateur, peasant army. The alleged "Gunpowder Revolution" in Joseon Korea therefore did not ultimately lead to the greater professionalization of the Joseon military system, nor to the maintenance of a large standing army such as those seen in Europe.

Moreover, as even Kang Hyeok-hyeon admits, it is questionable whether the Nashin Expedition can be seen as a proof of a successful Gunpowder Revolution in Joseon. First of all, this clash between Joseon and Russia was hardly a grand confrontation between two parallel armies that had both undergone military revolutions. The Joseon army that participated in the Nashin Expedition numbered about 200, all of whom were musketeers, as noted in existing studies. Given these numbers, the Joseon troops can only be said to have participated in skirmishes, rather than in a full-scale pitched battle. Furthermore, mid-seventeenth-century Russia cannot be described as a pioneer of military transformation in Europe. Secondly, it remains to be determined whether the Joseon troops actually utilized volley fire or sequential fire in battle, and how effective they were in combat. The primary sources are vague about this. While it is true that Joseon troops earned a reputation as "Big Heads" and successfully completed the Nashin Expedition, the precise role of firearms in

---

[2] In essence, apart from the Military Training Agency (Hunryeondogam), the other military divisions–the Anti-Manchu Division (Chongyeongcheong), the Defense Command (Suyeocheong), the Royal Division (Eoyeongcheong), and the Forbidden Guard Division (Geumwiyeong)–retained a similar system to the early Joseon period, with both regular soldiers and auxiliary personnel. The main difference was that the financial operations of each division were managed under military oversight, rather than by individual soldiers themselves. For representative studies on the financial operations of military divisions in late Joseon, see *Research on the Military System of the Joseon Dynasty* (Cha 1973), *Research on Military Affairs in the Joseon Dynasty* (Cha 1995), *Studies on the history of military system in the late period of the Yi dynasty* (Choi 1991), and 'Inception of Eoyeong-Cheong and Establishment of On-duty Salary Payment System in the 17th century' (Kim 2021).

these battles has not been fully clarified. Therefore, it would be rash to conclude that a "Gunpowder Revolution" had successfully taken place based solely on the use of firearms in, and the outcome of, the Nashin Expedition.[3]

The idea that Joseon experienced a Military Revolution after the sixteenth century because it changed the proportion of its army rapidly, by replacing traditional bow and edged weaponry with musketeers, can be questioned from another direction as well. In fact, had the late Joseon army had opportunities to be involved in more major wars, the tactical doctrine solely relying on muskets would have necessarily become untenable. In sixteenth–to seventeenth–century Europe, while musketeers were introduced, traditional pikemen and cavalry were still valued, and new and old tactical elements were integrated into a combined tactical system depending on the combat situation.[4] In contrast, as researchers point out, Joseon abnormally increased the number of musketeers, which can be seen as evidence of its lack of combat experience and its failure to align military innovations with practical realities, rather than as evidence for "modern" innovation.

More importantly, it is questionable whether the proposition that Joseon reformed its society through military innovation is plausible in the context of the stable East Asian diplomatic order led by the Qing dynasty. While Joseon was concerned with military issues due to its conflicts with the Qing and its fear of possible future conflicts, it is hard to argue that Joseon aimed to become an international military power. Fundamentally, Joseon was under such diplomatic pressure from the Qing

---

[3] In fact, the battles during the Nashin Expedition were not open–field engagements where formations were deployed. Rather, they were a series of riverine and siege battles, fought mostly on boats or near river fortifications. In such battle forms, the use of tactics like volley fire or sequential fire would have been highly restricted. For a more detailed explanation of the battle developments during the Nashin Expedition, see 'Sino–Korean Expeditions to the Amur of the 1650s in Russian Sources' (Kye 2018).

[4] Recently, there has been a view that warfare during the era of the military revolution was not dominated by musketeer tactics alone, but by the combined use of pikemen and other units. For related discussions, see "The 'Push of Pike' in Seventeenth–Century English Infantry Combat," (Yun 2022).

that it was nearly impossible to overtly expand its military forces. In fact, according to the Jeongchuk Treaty, signed after the Manchu invasions, Joseon was prohibited from constructing fortresses and defenses without explicit permission from the Qing.[5] Although King Hyojong promoted the 'Northern Expeditions' as a pretext, it remained nigh on impossible for Joseon to expand its military to the level necessary for a confrontation with Qing. Therefore, as long as Qing sat at the head of a stable international order, the prospect of an independent "military revolution" on the Korean Peninsula was remote.

In addition, the arguments put forth for Joseon's Military Revolution can also be critiqued based on recent developments in the debate over the European Military Revolution. Specifically, two closely related criticisms can be levelled at the "early modern Korean Military Revolution" thesis in light of the latest European historiography.

Firstly, the argument for an early modern Korean Military Revolution relied too heavily on several assumptions not supported by the empirical record, especially as regards the "Gunpowder Revolution." These assumptions are increasingly being questioned by revisionist studies of early modern European history. As we have seen, the cases for a Korean Military Revolution are in large part constructed upon Joseon's adoption of gunpowder weaponry. For example, much emphasis has been given to the importance of 'volley fire.' The practice of infantry counter-march that enabled volley fire by the Dutch army under Maurice of Nassau (1567–1625) had conventionally been regarded as a key innovation in European military revolution. Some research into East Asian military history found "striking parallels," most notably in the Battle of Nagashino (1575) in Japan and in the practice of the early modern Korean army, and thus claimed there were similar revolutions in East Asia as in Europe (Andrade, Kang, and Cooper 2014, 51–84; Parker 2007, 333). Yet, it has more recently been pointed out that the Dutch army reformed by Maurice

---

[5] For a detailed analysis, see 'The Peace Treaty of 1637 and the An Ch'uwon Case in 1666' (Kim 2016).

of Nassau "did not sweep victory over Spain" (Black 1991, 19). The Battle of Nieuwpoort (1600), long regarded as the crowning achievement of Maurice's revolutionized Dutch army, was, in fact, a very hard-won victory for the Dutch that had little to do with infantry firepower and after which the Dutch army rarely fought a battle (Wilson 2022, 85). Recent scholarship has also argued that the volley fire practiced by the army of Japanese warlord Oda Nobunaga at Nagashino is mostly a fiction. On a more fundamental level, the adoption of firearms or certain tactics concerning infantry firepower alone cannot serve as proof of a Military Revolution. This is why recent studies instead emphasize the importance of traditional edged weapons and effective integration between traditional and new weaponry in early modern European warfare (Philips 1999, 256-257; Yun 2022, 837-857). This question of integrated weaponry systems has not yet been given sufficient treatment in the historiography of early modern Korea.

Secondly, despite the recent revisionist arguments made against an early modern European Military Revolution, there is no doubt that the majority of scholars still agree that a major change in European warfare did indeed occur in the early modern era-however gradual and haphazard that change may have been. One of the most important changes was the expansion in the scale of warfare and of European armies. For example, Louis XIV's France fought several major wars throughout his reign and, as a result, created a huge, professional standing army which dwarfed in size the armies of the preceding centuries (Lynn 1997). To sustain such massive armies, major European countries had to reform their finance systems, resulting in the so-called "fiscal-military state" (Brewer 1989). If we are to identify one truly innovative change with long-term significance, this would be it. However, it is difficult to observe anything comparable in early modern Korean history. Despite claims that the Joseon government did create a paid, professional standing army, this was a far cry from Louis XIV's 400,000-strong standing army and there was no evidence whatsoever that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Joseon state finances approached a "fiscal-military state."

In conclusion, the pioneering contributions of the research notwithstanding, recent scholarship arguing for a late-Joseon Military Revolution fails to overcome several key problems and leaves much to be desired. The task of future research in this area must build upon and go beyond, the findings of the studies examined here in order to produce a more balanced, concrete picture of military developments in the late Joseon period.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have examined the discussions around the plausibility of a Joseon Military Revolution in both Anglo-American and Korean scholarship and explored the similarities and differences between these two bodies of literature. The discussions were born of an attempt to apply the European Military Revolution Thesis to the Joseon context, which is admirable in itself and has undoubtedly contributed greatly to the field of Korean military history. Nevertheless, there are several problems that require further research.

The Military Revolution Thesis in its original form, as proposed by Michael Roberts, argues that military innovations in Europe around the sixteenth to seventeenth century triggered social innovations that eventually contributed to the establishment of the modern state system. In its earlier form, the essence of European military revolution thesis centered on the adoption of gunpowder weaponry and tactical reforms to maximize its effect. The thesis has since attracted criticism for its technological determinism, while historians have also identified inconclusive evidence of transformation in the empirical record. Nevertheless, there have been attempts to apply this theory to Asian military history. Known as the 'Asian Military Revolution Theory,' this interpretation suggests that similar military innovations occurred in Asia. Yet, the Asian Military Revolution Thesis is not immune to the same criticisms leveled at its European counterpart.

The proposition of a Military Revolution in Joseon can be consid-

ered part of the broader Asian Military Revolution Thesis. Both Anglo–American scholars, such as Tonio Andrade and Kang Hyeok-hyeon, and Korean scholars, such as No Yeong-gu and Kim Yeong–joon, have explored this proposition seriously. Tonio Andrade focused on the rapid increase in the proportion of musketeers in late Joseon and the standardization of their training methods. Kang Hyeok-hyeon highlighted the performance of musketeers in actual combat during the Nashin Expedition. Both scholars argued that the Gunpowder and Drill Revolutions that occurred in Europe also took place in Joseon, suggesting the possibility of a Military Revolution in Joseon. Korean scholars' application of the Theory has been different. No Yeong-gu, for example, emphasized how the shift toward a musketeer–centric army in late Joseon brought about broader social changes. He argued that the expansion of artillery units led to changes in the military service system and the way military finances were managed. Kim Yeong–joon, on the other hand, focused on training and discipline, noting the similarities between Joseon's training methods, such as the implementation of sequential fire tactics, and European military innovations.

Taken as a whole, scholars who have investigated the possibility of a Military Revolution in Joseon have generally agreed on the existence of a "Gunpowder Revolution," but there is no consensus as to whether a true "Military Revolution" occurred. In fact, to varying degrees, some studies express skepticism in this regard.

Inevitably, applying the Military Revolution Thesis to Joseon requires caution. The Theory itself is not without its flaws, but more importantly, the changes that occurred in Joseon do not closely resemble those in Europe. Can we, as Kang Hyeok-hyeon suggests, describe Joseon's Military Revolution as being "limited to the musketry revolution, with other areas remaining restricted"? Such an interpretation may be possible. Yet if the revolution was confined to the musketry revolution, we must consider whether it is meaningful enough to be called a 'revolution' at all. If so, then the case of Joseon might be more valuable as an example of a failed military innovation rather than of successful innovation. In this case, it may be more worthwhile to examine how Joseon overcame

the shocks that followed its failed military innovations.

Recently, some scholars have proposed the term ‘evolution’ instead of ‘revolution’ when discussing military developments in early modern Europe. Frank Jacob and Gilmar Visoni-Alonzo, in their work, have gone so far as to declare that the idea of a military revolution was never more than a mirage, arguing that military tactics and technologies simply evolved and adapted to the circumstances of each country or region worldwide.

The key to evolution is adaptation. Joseon, too, succeeded in rapidly replacing its military system with one based on gunpowder weapons through an innovative process. Yet, we can understand that Joseon adapted to the resulting shocks in its own unique way. In other words, rather than seeking examples of military innovation in Joseon that resemble those in Europe, we should instead focus on the particularities of how Joseon started with a military innovation similar to those in Europe but transformed its military system in a distinct manner. This remains an important task for future research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

Andrade, Tonio. 2016. *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*. Princeton University Press.

Black, Jeremy. 2011. *Beyond the Military Revolution: War in the Seventeenth-Century World*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Brewer, John. 1989. *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783*. Harvard University Press.

Cha, Moonseop. 1973. *Joseonsidae Gunje Yeongu (Research on the Military System of the Joseon Dynasty)*. Dankook University Press.

Cha, Moonseop. 1995. *Joseonsidae Gunsa Jeongchaek Yeongu (Research on Military Affairs in the Joseon Dynasty).* Dankook University Press.

Choi, Hyosik. 1991. *Joseon hugi gunsa jedosa yeongu (Studies on the History of the Military System in the Late Period of the Yi Dynasty)*. PhD diss., Sungshin Women's University.

Jacob, Frank, and Gilmar Visioni-Alonze. 2016. *The Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: A Revision*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim, Byonglyuen. 2023. *Joseon hugi hwayakyugi-ui baljeongwa hwaryong (Development and Use of Gunpowder Weapons in the Late Joseon Dynasty).* PhD diss., The Academy of Korean Studies.

Lorge, Peter A. 2008. *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb*. Cambridge University Press.

Lynn, John A. 1997. *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610-1715.* Cambridge University Press.

Parker, Geoffrey. 1996. *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, Gervase. 1999. *The Anglo-Scots Wars 1513-1550*. Boydell Press.

Raymond, James. 2007. *Henry VIII's Military Revolution: The Armies of Sixteenth-Century Britain and Europe*. I.B. Tauris.

Showalter, Dennis E., and William J. Astore. 2007. *Soldiers' Lives Through History: The Early Modern World*. Westview Press.

Starkey, Armstrong. 2003. *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700–1789*. Praeger.

Weigley, Russel F. 1991. *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*. Indiana University Press.

Wilson, Peter. 2009. *The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy*. Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, Peter. 2018. *Lutzen: (Great Battles Series)*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, Peter. 2022. *Iron and Blood: A Military History of German-speaking People since 1500*. Allan Lane.

Journal Articles and Book Chapters:

Andrade, Tonio, Kang Hyeok-hyeon, and Kirsten Cooper. 2014. "A Korean Military Revolution? Parallel Military Innovations in East Asia and Europe." *Journal of World History* 25 (1): 51–84.

Black, Jeremy. 1995. "A Military Revolution?" In *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers. Westview Press.

Black, Jeremy. 2008. "Was There a Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe?" *History Today 58* (7): 34–41.

France, John. 2005. "Close Order and Close Quarter: The Culture of Combat in the West." *The International History Review* 27 (3): 498–517.

Jang, Jungsoo. 2021. "Simha Jeonyeok (1619) dangsi Joseon 'Doryeogun' ui pyeonje wa gyumo" (The Organization and Scale of Toryogun of Joseon during the Campaign of Simha in 1619). *Journal of Joseon Dynasty History* 96: 43–83.

Jang, Jungsoo. 2022. "Injodae choban Oyeongsa · Jongrungsa-ui seolchwa wa Chinmyeong Paegeum jeongchaek-ui giryu byeonhwa" (The Establishment of Oyeongsa and Jongrungsa and the Shift of the Strategy toward the Later Jin during Injo's Early Reign). *The Journal for the Studies of Korean History* 86: 161–206.

Jang, Jungsoo. 2022. “Joseon Seonjodae Seok-ogun ui pyeonseonggwa Myeong Ryeonbyeonggyosa ui yeokhal” (The Establishment of Sogogun during King Seonjo’s Reign and the Role of the Ming Military Instructors). *Journal of Joseon Dynasty History* 100: 231-282.

Kang, Hyeok-hyeon. 2013. “Big Heads and Buddhist Demons: The Korean Musketry Revolution and the Northern Expeditions of 1654 and 1658.” *Journal of Chinese Military History* 2 (2): 127-189.

Kim, Hyundong. 2021. “17-segi Eoyeongcheong (Oyeongcheong) changseol gwa Beonsang Geullyoje (Beonsang Geullyoje) ui seongnip” (Inception of Eoyeong-Cheong and Establishment of Onduty Salary Payment System in the 17th Century). *Korean Historical Studies* 192: 231-282.

Kim, Jinsu. 2011. “Joseon hugi silhakja ui gunje gaehyeongnon e daehan yeongu” (A Study of Military System Reform Theories by Silhak Scholars in Late Joseon). *Journal of Military History Studies* 131: 133-159.

Kim, Jinsu. 2015. “Joseon hugi jochong yeongu ui hyeonhwang gwa gwaje” (Study on Machlock Musket of the Late Joseon Dynasty). *Journal of Military History Studies* 139: 453-472.

Kim, Jong-soo. 2015. “Hunryeondogam seolchi mit unyeong ui Dong-Asiajeok teukseong” (A Study on the East Asian Characteristic of Establishment and Managing System of Hunryeondogam). *Jangseogak* 33: 26-58.

Kim, Kunha. 2016. “Jeongch’uyakjo ui seonggyeok gwa Hyeonjongdae An Chuwon sageon” (The Peace Treaty of 1637 and the An Juwon Case in 1666). *Journal of Joseon Dynasty History* 78: 87-124.

Kim, Moonsik. 2007. “18-segi Joseon jisikin ui Nederlande ihae” (Joseon Intellectual’s Understanding of Holland in the 18th Century). *Journal of Historical Studies* 39: 27-46.

Kim, Yeong-joon. 2014. “17-segi Joseon ui posu hunryeon bangsik gwa gunyul” (Training Methods and Military Discipline of Joseon Musketeers around the 17th-Century). *Journal of Military History* 92: 167-197.

Kye, Seungbum. 2018. “Reosia jaryoro bon 1650-nyeondae Heukryonggang wonjeong (Naseon jeongbeol)” (Sino-Korean Expedition to the Amur of the 1650s in Russian Sources). *Yeolsang Gojon Yeongu* 65: 139-168.

Li, Zhaoxi. 2021. “Imjin Waeran sigi “Gihyo sinseo” ui jeonrae wa gunsi sang ui byeonhwa” (During the Japanese Invasion of Korea (1592-1598), the Tradi-

tion of *Jixiaoxinshu* and Change in Military Affairs). *The Journal of Korean Studies* 63: 229–252.

No, Yeong-gu. 2007. ""Gunsa Hyeongmyeongnon (Military Revolution)" gwa 17~18-segi Joseon ui gunsajeok byeonhwa" ("Military Revolution" and Joseon Dynasty's Military Reforms in the 17th and 18th Centuries). *Journal of Western History* 36: 33–57.

Parrott, David A. 1995. "Strategy and Tactics in the Thirty Years' War: The 'Military Revolution.'" In *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers. Westview Press.

Parker, Geoffrey. 1995. "The 'Military Revolution, 1560–1660'–A Myth?" In *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers. Westview Press.

Parker, Geoffrey. 2007. "The Limits of Revolutions in Military Affairs: Maurice of Nassau, The Battle of Nieuwpoort (1600), and the Legacy." *The Journal of Military History* 71 (2): 331–372.

Roberts, Michael. 1995. "The 'Military Revolution, 1560–1660'" In *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers. Westview Press.

Rogers, Clifford J. 1995. "The Military Revolution in History and Historiography." In *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers. Westview Press.

Yun, Dukhee. 2022. "The 'Push of Pike' in SeventeenthCentury English Infantry Combat." *Journal of Military History* 86 (4): 837.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 179-205
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.007

Cultural Mobilization for Korea's Independence:
An Analysis of a 1942 Stage Performance in Wartime Hawai'i

Heeyoung CHOI

Abstract

This article examines a stage performance by Koreans in Hawai'i on August 30, 1942, to explore how cultural events served political purposes during the Pacific War. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 propelled the United States' entry into World War II, severely straining U.S.–Japan relations. These circumstances raise questions about whether Korean Hawaiians–marginalized both as Japan's colonial subjects (1910–1945) and as a racial minority–leveraged their status by aligning with the United States against their shared enemy, Japan. Analyses of local newspapers and archival sources reveal that Koreans organized this cultural event in collaboration with other ethnic groups, excluding the Japanese, to present Korea's traditional music and dance to African American servicemen from the 369th Infantry Regiment. This event exemplifies ethnic Koreans' strategic efforts to forge cross-racial and cross-ethnic solidarity–while deliberately excluding the Japanese–to assert their cultural identity and advance their ultimate goal: Korean independence.

Keywords

Korean Hawaiians, Pacific War, African American servicemen, Korean independence movement, traditional Korean music and dance, wartime performance

Heeyoung CHOI is Visiting Scholar in the Department of History at Northern Illinois University. Email: hychoi1115@gmail.com

Introduction

This article examines a stage performance by Koreans in Hawai‘i on August 30, 1942, to explore how they used performances for political purposes. According to a *Kungminbo* article dated September 2, 1942, the event was a collaborative effort by Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian ethnic groups, and it was overseen by the Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office in Honolulu. The performance, held at the Honolulu Academy of Arts (presently the Honolulu Museum of Art) at 3:00 p.m., welcomed approximately 200 African American servicemen to an afternoon program of music and dance (*Kungminbo*, September 2, 1942c). Key terms such as “combined efforts,” “Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office,” and “African American troops” prompt important questions: Who initiated these united efforts? What roles did the Morale Section and African American troops play? What performances were presented, and by whom? What was the ultimate goal of the event? This article explores these questions by examining the background, content, and significance of the 1942 performance within the context of the Pacific War.

A surprise military strike by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service against the U.S. naval base in Hawai‘i on the morning of December 7, 1941 led to the U.S. entry into World War II. After two hours of bombing, 18 U.S. ships were sunk or damaged, 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed, and 2,403 people, including 68 civilians, were killed. The American people were outraged. The surprise attack united the American people in a massive mobilization for war and heightened military alert status. Wartime propaganda in combination with hatred toward the Japanese exacerbated underlying racism. The war against Japan until August 1945 featured a degree of savagery unmatched by the war being fought simultaneously against the European Axis. Japanese became dehumanized, to a much greater degree than Germans or Italians, in the minds of American combatants and civilians (Weingartner 1992, 54). For Korean Americans, the United States’ entry into World War II signaled the potential realization of Korean liberation. This fervent hope was especially intense

in Hawai'i, home to the largest and oldest Korean diaspora in North America. Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i closely followed the unfolding events, quietly harboring a sense of anticipation.

In Hawai'i, although racial discrimination manifested in the "Yellow Peril" mentality, the fear that Asian immigrants would inundate white American society and threaten every American institution, was less pronounced (Bailey and Farber 1994, 26). Asian immigrant groups, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans, constituted over eighty percent of plantation workers in Hawai'i during the early twentieth century. Among them, the Japanese constituted the largest single ethnic group in Hawai'i. It is probably fair to say that before the Second World War, community ties between Hawai'i and Japan were, on the whole, closer than those of West Coast communities (Stephan 2011, 11). However, the situation completely changed as Japan revealed its ambition to control the Pacific area.

Amidst fears of another Japanese invasion, martial law was declared just hours after the attack. The government did consider mass incarceration in Hawai'i, as was implemented on the mainland. However, it was ultimately deemed impractical; the Japanese American citizenry and the immigrant population in Hawai'i made up over one third of the islands' total population, and their labor was needed to sustain the economy and the war effort in the islands. The Enemy Alien Control Program in Hawai'i led to the internment of 1,202 individuals of Japanese ancestry, as documented in case files within the Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General (National Archives 1942–1946). These individuals–deemed genuine security threats–constituted less than one percent of the Japanese population in Hawai'i (Allen 1950, 134). The military government in Hawai'i, instead of implementing the mass internment of Japanese Americans, issued hundreds of orders (e.g., curfews and restrictions on traveling, possessing communication devices, and financial dealings) applicable only to persons of Japanese ancestry and enemy aliens.

Because Korea was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945, Koreans in Hawai'i were classified as enemy aliens (Macmillan 1985, 180). This designation caused deep humiliation within the community. In addi-

tion, Koreans encountered "unexpected and devastating legal and practical consequences," as their physical appearance often led to misidentification as Japanese (L. M. Kim 2003, 80). Given the long history of Japanese colonial rule over Korea and the persistent Korean resistance both within Korea and abroad, it is unsurprising that Korean communities in the United States in 1941 deeply resented being conflated with the Japanese (L. M. Kim 2003).

This study can be seen as an extension of recent scholarship that approaches the history of the Korean independence movement in the United States from diverse perspectives. In particular, recent studies focusing on Korean women's organizations and the activities of specific individuals within the Korean American community have made noteworthy contributions (e.g., M. Lee 2012; J. Park 2012; S. Park 2016; Y. Hong 2017; J. Park 2017; Chang 2019). Previous studies on Korean activities in Hawai'i during the Pacific War have shown that Korean political refugees and multigenerational Korean immigrants contributed to the war effort through activities such as war bond rallies, enlistment in the armed forces, and work in the defense industry (Shin 1972; A. S. Choi 2003; L. M. Kim 2003; D. Kim 2004; D. Kim 2007; Cha 2010; R. S. Kim 2011; Jang 2020; Jang 2021). These studies have demonstrated how Korean immigrants navigated the complex task of proving their loyalty to the United States while simultaneously advocating for Korean independence. However, the history of the Korean diaspora's cultural activities during the Pacific War remains largely unexplored. Only recently have scholars revealed cultural events in which the Asian local population in Hawai'i shared their own culture under the auspices of the local authorities as a means to facilitate the ethnic groups' assimilation into the host society (P. M. Choy 2000; R. Lee 2017; H. Choi 2020; H. Choi 2021a). To my knowledge, Choi Heeyoung's recent Korean-language article appears to be the only existing research on Koreans' musical performances during the war years (H. Choi 2024). Choi demonstrates that ethnic Koreans actively staged performances for U.S. military forces and political figures as a means of expressing both their collective desire for Korea's independence from Japanese rule and their aspirations for American citizenship.

However, as Choi herself noted, the 1942 event warrants further in-depth analysis.

Thus, this study aims to examine the event's background, content, and implications by analyzing local newspaper articles and records from the Hawai'i War Records Depository (HWRD) at the Archives and Special Collections Department of Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (HWRD 1941-1947). As demonstrated below, the wartime mission of the Korean diaspora community-to seize a golden opportunity for Korea's independence by demonstrating unwavering loyalty to the United States-extended to their musical activities. Their strategic approach involved uniting Hawai'i's multiethnic and multiracial communities, excluding the Japanese, while asserting a distinct Korean identity.

Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i and Their Commitment to Korea's Independence

According to the 1940 census, 6,851 Koreans were residing in Hawai'i (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943a), a figure more than four times greater than the 1,711 Koreans living on the U.S. mainland during the same period (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943b). The first large wave of Korean immigration to the United States began in 1903, when Korean laborers arrived in Hawai'i to work on sugar plantations. Between 1903 and 1905, an estimated 7,291 to 7,600 Koreans immigrated to Hawai'i as contract laborers, although the precise figure varies by source (Baik and Murabayashi 2011, 78). Most of them were single males in their twenties and thirties. They were followed by "picture brides" who came to Hawai'i from 1910 onward. The picture bride system used photographs of Korean women to arrange matches with Korean males living in Hawai'i as plantation workers (Patterson 2000, 80-99). Until the United States government enacted the Immigration Act of 1924, which completely prohibited immigration from Asia, around 1,000 Korean picture brides arrived in Hawai'i (Y. Hong 2017, 3).

In the early stages of Korean immigration to Hawai'i, Korean pic-

ture brides accepted the male-dominated Korean community and patriarchal family structure on plantations in exchange for financial support and the promise of a stable life in the host society. This was largely due to the fact that the plantation environment constrained their social interactions to fellow Koreans and other Asians. However, following the Japanese labor strike of 1920, many Korean picture brides migrated to urban areas. With this move came diversification in residence, workplaces, and occupations, enabling them to form relationships with people from a wider range of racial and class backgrounds than before. Upon arriving in cities, Korean picture brides entered peripheral sectors of the labor market out of necessity-for their own survival and their families' livelihoods. These occupational choices reflected their continued subjection to racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, the urban environment offered access to linguistic, cultural, and educational capital, which allowed Korean picture brides to form new social networks beyond the male-centered Korean community. Their increased participation in economic activities also brought changes to familial relationships (for more information, see Noh 2021a; 2021b).

The original cohort of married immigrants grew at a fast pace during the first two decades of their stay in Hawai'i. They drastically multiplied as Korean immigrant couples were mostly at the peak ages for reproduction. Korean Hawaiians were largely Korean-speaking foreign-born adults with an increasing number of Hawai'i-born children (Yu 1977, 129-130). In the early 1940s, approximately two-thirds of Koreans were American citizens, most of whom had been born in Hawai'i (Bureau of the Census 1943a; Baik and Murabayashi 2011, 94-95).

During and shortly after the period when the picture brides moved to Hawai'i, about 900 Korean students, intellectuals, and political exiles arrived in the U.S. territories (Kwon 2003, 29). Some of those who finished degrees in the mainland moved to Hawai'i. These individuals, as political leaders, launched national independence movements with Korean immigrants. They were distinctly different in personal temperament, educational backgrounds, and strategies for Korean independence (H. Kim 2002). Such divergence within the movement bred personal rival-

ries, which consequently led to divisions within the organizations of Korean immigrants in America. In Hawai'i, the schism between those advocating for Pak Yong-man (1881-1928) and those supporting Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) was pervasive.

As the Kungminhoe (Korean National Association; hereafter the KNA) had one of its headquarters in Hawai'i, Rhee and Pak initiated political activities in Hawai'i beginning in the mid-1910s. Rhee advocated a diplomatic approach to freeing Korea, calling for independence activities through the Korean Commission to America and Europe. Rhee's diplomatic strategies were opposed by advocates for Pak, whose focus was on strengthening military build-up. While in Hawai'i, Pak established the Korean Military Corps in 1914, while Rhee founded educational facilities for young Koreans (Tikhonov 2009, 4). Rhee's continuing disagreement with using funds for the Korean Military Corps led to its shutdown in 1917. After Rhee was appointed as the President of the Shanghai-based Korean Provisional Government (hereafter the KPG) in 1919, a scandal over allegations of Rhee's abuse of power brought about a more intense dispute. Rhee left the KNA and organized the Tongjihoe (Comrades' Association) in Honolulu in 1921 to reinforce his position vis-à-vis the KPG. As a result, political divisions within the Korean communities in Hawai'i became increasingly pronounced (for further details, see D. Kim 1998; S. Hong 1998; S. Hong 2016).

Shortly before the war broke out, Koreans in the United States and Hawai'i made a concerted effort to join the forces of the divided Korean political organizations. As a notable example, Korean political refugees in the United States established the United Korean Committee in America (hereafter the UKC). In April 1941, fourteen representatives from nine Korean nationalist organizations, including the Tongjihoe and KNA, convened in Hawai'i and agreed to establish the UKC (R. S. Kim 2011, 136). The purpose of the UKC was to merge all the largest Korean immigrant political organizations in pursuit of the unification of all Korean groups in the United States in light of the growing political and military crisis in the Pacific. The UKC's objectives included the support of the KPG in China, the presentation of a united front of all Koreans for anti-

Japanese resistance, and active diplomacy to win recognition by the U.S. government (Cha 2010, 95).

The first-generation Koreans, most of whom came to Hawai'i as plantation workers and picture brides, had been a primary source of political funding since their arrival in Hawai'i. Despite the low wages that Korean immigrants received for their labor—the average daily wage of a Korean plantation worker was 65 cents in 1905-the Korean immigrant community raised substantial funds for overseas political activity in the United States as well as in other Korean diasporic communities in Mexico, China, Japan, and Siberia (B. Choy 1979, 123). Korean political refugees became unified in their hatred of the Japanese colonizers and their fervent hope for Korean emancipation at the onset of the war. In the wake of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the ethnic Korean population in Hawai'i, including children of plantation workers and picture brides, cooperated with martial law in Hawai'i and contributed to the war effort (L. M. Kim 2003, 82-85).

A major concern of Koreans in America was that they would not be taken into consideration by the U.S. in its post-war decisions regarding Korea. Many activities of the Koreans in America, therefore, were designed to convince the American government that Koreans should not be treated as Japanese and that they should be allowed to govern their own nation. They got involved in U.S. military training and provided financial support through the purchase of defense bonds. Additionally, they joined anti-Japanese war propaganda and defense industries with great enthusiasm, declaring their allegiance to the Allied cause. Stage performances during the war period were a means to prove the loyalty of the Koreans.

Emergence of Cultural Events Hosted by the Koreans for American Servicemen

Before the Japanese attack complicated the relations between the U.S. and Japan, there were various multicultural events where different ethnic groups in Hawai'i showcased their traditional music or dance at the Ho-

nolulu Academy of Arts, the Young Women's Christian Association (hereafter YWCA), and schools. Such cultural events were supported and highly acclaimed by haoles (white people or whiteness in Hawai'i) within the local authorities; these events aligned with their initiatives to represent Hawai'i as a "multicultural model of interracial solidarity and equality" while maintaining the status of the more privileged and dominant groups by obscuring the subordination and marginalization of minority groups (Okamura 2000, 125).

Ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i were most actively involved in cultural events during the late 1920s and 1930s, a period marked by the establishment of numerous Korean cultural organizations, most notably the Hyung Jay Club (Sisters' Club). Founded in 1927 as a YWCA-affiliated institution for second-generation Koreans in Hawai'i, the Hyung Jay Club played a crucial role in helping Koreans gain a foothold in Hawai'i's cultural scene. This organization continued to thrive until the outbreak of war. Ha Soo Whang (1892-1984), also known as Hwang Hae-su, who earned a sociology degree from Athens College in Alabama, played a pivotal role in the early staging of Korean cultural performances (for detailed information on Korean women students in the U.S. during the early twentieth century, refer to S. Kim 2011; H. Park 2015). Susan Chun Lee (1895-1969), referred to as Mrs. Henry Lee, a graduate of Ewha Woman's University, also played a significant role in promoting these performances (Van Zile 2007, 259). Despite having limited professional education and training in the performing arts, these elite women—Whang as the founder of the Hyung Jay Club and Lee as its teacher-took the lead in passing down traditional Korean performing arts to the second generation.

The first and representative piece by the Hyung Jay Club was *The Wedding Ceremony* based on the play script, *A Korean Girl's Cycle of Joy*. Ha Soo Whang dramatized the play by incorporating folk games, traditional Korean music, and dance into the tradition of Korean arranged marriage. The play, showing the old customs of a Korean wedding, which begins with the exchange of an offer of marriage between the parents of the couple via a broker, premiered in 1928 at local events like the

Korean Spring Festival. The festival was part of the Asian festival series hosted by the Honolulu Academy of Arts to introduce Asian holiday traditions to the multiethnic residents of Honolulu.

Hawai‘i’s unique multicultural setting was a crucial factor in how the Koreans–both the older and the younger generations–were so passionate about Korean music and dance. They shared a common ambition to present great musical performances alongside other ethnic groups at various multicultural events (P. M. Choy 2000; R. Lee 2017; H. Choi 2020). The musical activities of the Hyung Jay Club, which became a popular activity for the second generation, bridged the political divisions within the community and the generational division (H. Choi 2021b). It was inevitable that the local multicultural events disappeared during the years of military rule. However, Korean immigrants and their children never stopped presenting Korean music and dance during the war despite a huge decrease in local cultural events. On the contrary, they became more active in cultural activities, hosting–not merely participating in–musical events in Hawai’i; morale–boosting concerts and a banquet that Koreans hosted were an important conduit to manifest their political goals (H. Choi 2024).

It should be noted that even before the Pacific War, Koreans in Hawai‘i organized events to entertain servicemen. One such event took place on July 10, 1941, just three months after the establishment of the UKC. Hosted at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the event was attended by more than 600 people, including 400 invited military personnel from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps (*Honolulu Advertiser*, July 8, 1941a). According to a newspaper article, the audience enthusiastically cheered a performance presented by Honolulu’s Korean community. The entertainment featured “typical Korean songs, dances, and tableaux in authentic costume” (*Honolulu Advertiser*, July 11, 1941b). Figure 1, excerpted from the article, illustrates Korean women participating in the event. From left to right, Alma Shin, Clara Ahn, and Gertrude Lee are seated in the front row, while Eleanor Min, Lily Ahn, and Daisy Kim stand behind them. They were members of the Hyung Jay Club while attending high school and university in Hawai‘i.

Figure 1. Korean Women Entertaining Servicemen in 1941
Source: *Honolulu Advertiser,* July 11, 1941b

The 1941 cultural event demonstrated that the UKC served as a unifying force in support of American defense. In collaboration with the Honolulu mayor's entertainment committee for enlisted personnel, this event marked the UKC's first joint initiative. Won Soon Lee (1890–1993), chairman of the UKC, stated that they planned to organize additional programs for Koreans serving in the Army, National Guard, and Selective Service, as well as for military officers. The Honolulu members of the committee are recorded as C. H. Taugh, S. W. Son, P. Y. Cho, Henry Kim, Y. S. Sim, H. N. Min, W. K. Ahn, S. H. Kang, Warren Kim, S. H. Char, S. W. Lim, and W. S. Lee (*Honolulu Star–Bulletin*, July 11, 1941c). Following the unexpected attack on Pearl Harbor a few months later, the UKC intensified its efforts to demonstrate solidarity with the American war effort. The 1942 stage performance exemplified this heightened engagement.

The 1942 Stage Performance for Korean Independence

The 1942 stage performances reflected Korean efforts to unite Hawai‘i’s multiethnic and multiracial communities–excluding the Japanese–while asserting a distinct Korean identity. Their ultimate goal was to advance the political cause of Korean independence.

Uniting Multiethnic and Multiracial Groups in Hawai‘i Except Japanese

On June 3, 1942, the UKC hosted a Korean fundraising concert for the American Red Cross, which was part of the UKC’s efforts to support the organization (*Kungminbo*, May 13, 1942a). The UKC expressed Koreans’ full support for the war effort, stating, “Koreans felt so pleased to know that the proceeds of the benefit concert would aid the Red Cross and serve as a driving force leading to the U.S. victory in the end” (*Kungminbo*, June 3, 1942b). At the event, second-generation Koreans performed Korean folk songs, as well as court and folk dances, for an audience composed primarily of white American Red Cross officials. Three months later, Koreans hosted another musical event in Honolulu, drawing attention to its unique participants and audience. A *Kungminbo* newspaper article provides insight into this performance:

> As a combined effort by the Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian ethnic groups of the Morale Section of the Military Governor’s Office in Honolulu, the Honolulu Academy of Arts invited about 200 African American troops to enjoy music and dance on August 30 at 3 p.m. Mrs. Noji Shon, supported by Chŏng-song Ahn, performed Korean court dance and *Sŭngmu* (Monk’s Dance), while young women presented *nŏl* (Korean see-saw), and Patra Pang sang “Arirang.” For the court dance, four females recorded as Suk-myŏng Ahn, Suk-sŏng Ahn, Hee-soon Lee, and Hee-yŏn Lee showed Korean traditional dance in *hanbok*

> (Korean traditional clothing), showing off their graceful movements. The Chinese provided snacks and desserts to the audience, and the Filipinos prepared their native rice cake for the event. This event was possible thanks to a generous donation from the American Methodist Church in Wahiawa and Honolulu, Korean St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and Korean Christian Church (*Kungminbo*, September 2, 1942c). Translated by the author.

The Morale Section was a subcommittee under the Military Governor's Office, established at the request of the U.S. military following the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was tasked with preventing racial and ethnic conflicts within the multiethnic, multiracial society of Hawai'i and promoting unity (Shivers 1946, 8–9). More specifically, the Morale Section aimed to act as a mediator between the military and civilian society on issues related to public morality, striving to maintain a unified and cooperative community. In other words, the establishment of the Morale Section was evidence of the U.S. government's concerted efforts to mobilize communities of all races for the war effort.

Koreans played a leading role in organizing the morale-boosting concert, with representatives from Chinese, Filipino, and Hawaiian communities also participating. Each of these ethnic groups was affiliated with the Morale Section of the Military Governor's Office. Given the tense U.S.–Japan relations at the time, one might assume that the Morale Section excluded ethnic Japanese from its interracial committee. However, its origins can be traced back to the Oahu Citizens Committee for Home Defense, an advisory group of Japanese Americans formed in 1941 to promote Japanese loyalty in Hawai'i and suppress subversive elements. This committee played a pivotal role in a broader loyalty program aimed at reducing ethnic tensions across the islands. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Morale Section of the Military Governor's Office replaced these advisory groups (Okihiro 1991, 201–202). Although the influence of the Japanese ethnic committee had declined, a significant number of Japanese Americans remained involved in the Morale Section throughout the Pacific War. Against this backdrop, the col-

laboration led by Korean groups–deliberately excluding Japanese–reflected ethnic Koreans' conscious effort to publicly align with the American war effort and, by extension, assert their commitment to Korea's independence from Japanese rule.

Intriguingly, the concert was not organized for the general armed forces of the United States but specifically for African American servicemen. Around 30,000 African American military personnel and war workers had been brought to the war zone from the mainland during World War II. However, Hawai'i had never really encountered what was called a "Negro Problem" because its multiracial and multiethnic communities barely acknowledged the presence of African Americans. In fact, fewer than 200 "Negroes of American birth" lived in Hawai'i in 1940 (Bailey and Farber 1993, 818). Among them were members of the Twenty–Fifth Infantry Regiment, who had arrived in Hawai'i in 1913. This regiment, the first African American unit deployed to Hawai'i after the annexation, had previously seen combat in both the Indian Wars (1860s–1890s) and the Spanish–American War (1898). Despite initial resistance from local government and business leaders who sought to prevent the stationing of African American troops in the territory, these servicemen were eventually accepted. They soon attracted public attention, notably through their baseball team, which was accompanied by a jazz band that performed between innings to entertain spectators (Pierce 2019, 117). Nonetheless, the relatively small African American population in Hawai'i remained largely invisible to the broader local community.

The war brought African American servicemen to Hawai'i, with the second group arriving in 1942 as members of the 369th Infantry Regiment (Ziobro 2017, 23–26). During World War I, the U.S. Army assigned the 369th Infantry Regiment to menial tasks, undervaluing their potential. However, when the regiment was transferred to the French Army, they proved their valor in combat, earning France's highest military distinction, the *Croix de Guerre*. Upon their return to the United States on February 17, 1919, they were celebrated with a grand parade along Fifth Avenue in New York City. Despite their heroic accomplishments, the regiment continued to face racial discrimination throughout the 1920s. Nev-

ertheless, they solidified their place in New York's social and military life. In 1937, their enduring legacy was further honored through a mural funded by the Works Progress Administration, which commemorated the contributions of "Negro Soldiers in American Wars" (Ziobro 2017, 24). The following year, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., assumed command of the regiment, and in October 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promoted Davis to brigadier general, making him the first African American general officer in the U.S. Army.

As World War II loomed, President Roosevelt took steps to secretly aid Britain and prepare the country for potential involvement in the conflict, even while maintaining a stance of neutrality in 1940. Accordingly, the U.S. Army underwent significant changes, which had a profound impact on the 369th Infantry Regiment. On August 30, 1940, the regiment was reorganized and redesignated as the 369th Coast Artillery (Antiaircraft), before being inducted into federal service on January 13, 1941. The newly formed 369th Coast Artillery was stationed at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York, before relocating to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, in late summer 1941 (Ziobro 2017, 24). In the spring of 1942, the regiment moved west to California, where many soldiers found themselves stationed in the backyards of Los Angeles suburbs. Finally, on June 16, 1942, the 369th departed from the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, bound for Hawai'i (Ziobro 2017, 25).

The Korean concert on August 30 was likely held to welcome the 369th Infantry Regiment. By the time they arrived in Hawai'i, the regiment had built a reputation for resilience and for swiftly confronting racial slights and bigotry from White servicemen. Unlike the U.S. mainland, Hawai'i fell outside the formal boundaries of Jim Crow segregation, making encounters between White and Black servicemen unpredictable. Southern White soldiers, in particular, were frustrated by the absence of enforced segregation and often instigated conflicts by attempting to impose Jim Crow rules in a place where they had never existed (Pierce 2019, 117–118).

The arrival of this new group of servicemen during the war complicated the standard depiction of race relations in Hawai'i. Encounters be-

tween Black servicemen, White servicemen, and local Asian women at social gatherings–where local women were encouraged to fulfill their patriotic "duty" by serving as companions and dance partners for servicemen–were often fraught with racial tension (for more information, see Pierce 2019). For instance, many local women were reluctant to dance with African American servicemen (Pierce 2019, 109–110). These challenges were not unique to Hawai'i but were prevalent across the United States. A major issue was the lack of desirable recreational facilities for African American servicemen in nearby towns, forcing them to be transported to venues they would not have chosen on their own. Without community cooperation in providing adequate facilities, military officials believed that the only viable way to prevent conflicts between Black and White servicemen was through the extensive use of highly trained military police (Nalty and McGregor 1981, 161).

In this context, the 1942 Korean concert was a significant demonstration of ethnic Koreans' support for the American war effort. The event was initiated by Koreans specifically for the newly arrived African American servicemen, who had significantly fewer entertainment opportunities than their White counterparts. By organizing a gathering that brought together all racial and ethnic groups–except the Japanese–ethnic Koreans signaled their commitment to American patriotism. This proactive gesture also served as a strategic effort to dispel suspicions among U.S. officials that Koreans were potential enemy aliens with ties to Japan (L. M. Kim 2003, 80–81).

Asserting Koreanness

The performances of the Hyung Jay Club, which had represented Korea at local multicultural events since the late 1920s, were prominently featured in the 1942 morale-boosting concert. The young Korean Americans who participated were not professional performers but individuals specializing in other fields (for more information, see H. Choi 2021a). For example, among the four Korean dancers who performed at the 1942

morale-boosting concert, Suk-sŏng Ahn and Suk-myŏng Ahn-both daughters of Chŏng-song Ahn (1895-1989, also known as Mrs. Ahn Won-gyu), the event's Korean director—had majored in business rather than the performing arts. As nonprofessionals, both first- and second-generation Korean Hawaiians, including members of the Hyung Jay Club, participated in presenting newly adapted Korean traditional performances on stage.

Chŏng-song Ahn herself was not a professional performing artist. She arrived in Hawai'i in 1920 to marry Won-gyu Ahn, a key member of the KNA in Hawai'i (Cho 2023). Originally from Pyongyang, she graduated from Jeong-ui Elementary School, operated by the Pyongyang Methodist Church, in 1910. She then graduated from Ewha Women's School in 1913 and taught at a girls' high school in Pyongyang for two years. Afterward, she taught at Samil Girls' High School in Suwon, Gyeonggi-do, from 1914 to 1916. From 1916 to 1917, she studied at the Yokohama Women's School in Japan. Before moving to Hawai'i, she served as a dormitory supervisor and a teacher at Pyongyang Women's School. Despite her extensive educational background, Ahn had limited professional experience in the performing arts, much like Susan Chun Lee, who had earlier assumed leadership of the Hyung Jay Club. Given this, it is reasonable to assume that the dances performed were likely short, choreographed pieces adapted from traditional Korean dance, rather than full-length, authentic performances (Van Zile 2007, 259).

Time constraints at the event likely further influenced the adaptation of the performances. As a result, Koreans in Hawai'i presented quasi-traditional performances that roughly imitated the original forms. These performances, accompanied by Korean music and dance, appealed to predominantly non-Korean audiences who had never encountered such displays. Despite deviating from traditional Korean music and dance in their purest form, these performances effectively showcased Korea's cultural distinctiveness, allowing the audience to appreciate the uniqueness of Korean heritage within the context of the broader geopolitical narrative.

The performers who presented traditional Korean arts on the mo-

rale-boosting stage in 1942 were all women. This, however, does not imply that all Korean performers on early-twentieth-century stages were always women. In English-adapted plays frequently featured at multicultural events, men occasionally appeared in roles such as grooms or fathers, depending on the dramatic context. Furthermore, traditional Korean musical accompaniment was often provided by middle-aged men (H. Choi 2022). In short, while Korean men did participate in certain cultural performances, women predominantly led and enacted the traditional repertoire. Notably, the 1942 event featured concise programs of Korean music and dance-elements that had previously been incorporated into English-language dramatic formats-with women occupying the visible stage roles. Throughout the Pacific War era, including the 1942 performance, women-though not exclusively-were the primary performers in short-format presentations of Korean cultural arts.

It is important to note that Koreans were not the only group of women staging performances for U.S. armed forces during the war. Various racial and ethnic groups, predominantly women, participated in cultural activities throughout the war years. As documented in the Hawai‘i War Records Depository collection, both military and civilian populations collaborated to organize concerts and variety shows for enlisted men and defense workers on O‘ahu. Professionals and amateurs, adults and children, Honolulu residents, Mainland defense workers and military personnel all volunteered their talents without seeking personal remuneration. The emergence of new performance and dance groups as part of military morale-boosting entertainment programs during this period is noteworthy, especially considering that these groups were often organized along racial lines. For instance, the USO Scrapbook records the formation of women's organizations that participated in entertainment visits to U.S. military units. Among these were the all-white "Flying Squadron" and "Hui Menebune," a group composed of women of color. Both of these groups debuted during this era, engaging in joint dance performances with servicemen.

The 1942 performance underscores how Korean Hawaiians distinguished themselves through their initiative and active engagement, de-

spite their small population and limited professional artistic resources. In order to persuade U.S. officials of their political objectives, Koreans emphasized their cultural and ideological distinctions from the Japanese. By presenting traditional Korean performances at the event, they reinforced their identity as a community separate from Japan, aligning their cultural expression with their political agenda.

Conclusion

The musical activities of the Korean diaspora in the early 1940s stand in stark contrast to those of professional performers in colonial Korea, whose activities were tightly controlled by the Japanese government. These performers were compelled to participate in staged events organized by colonial authorities to demonstrate their support for Japan's imperialist military efforts. Korean court musicians, for example, were forced to perform at events commemorating the 2600th Anniversary of the Japanese Empire, including playing the Japanese national anthem, "Kimigayo" (君が代), and the militaristic song "Umi Yukaba" (海行かば), at the opening ceremony (Hood 2001, 166).

Korean entertainers under Japanese colonial rule were regularly mobilized to perform at morale-boosting concerts for the Imperial Japanese Army and at political events promoting the colonized people's support for Japanese pan-Asianism. The Japanese military rigorously censored these performances, ensuring that they aligned with Japan's militaristic objectives. The use of foreign languages—particularly English—and American cultural symbols-such as baseball, cafes, music, and Hollywood films-was strictly prohibited in all forms of entertainment. For Korean performers, participating in such activities was a painful and humiliating experience, as they were forced to contribute to Japan's imperialist narrative.

In stark contrast, free from the constraints of Japanese colonial rule and situated within U.S. territory at war with Japan, ethnic Koreans in Hawai'i—including second—generation U.S. citizens-used the stage as a

platform for articulating their political aspirations. The 1942 performance before the 369th Infantry Regiment, a unit of African American servicemen, is a striking example of this approach. The inclusion of diverse communities–excluding the Japanese–along with the African American audience emphasized solidarity among various ethnic and racial groups, providing Koreans an opportunity to advocate for their political cause of independence. This cultural presentation, showcasing traditional Korean music and dance, was part of a broader strategy to promote Korean heritage to Americans and establish a place for Korea within the global geopolitical discourse of the era.

What, then, were the consequences when Koreans in Hawai‘i excluded Japanese and instead collaborated with other ethnic groups in their performances? It is clear that through their diasporic cultural activities, Koreans in Hawai‘i sought to expand their social position, carving out a place for themselves within the host country while simultaneously engaging in the resistance movement for their homeland. However, these efforts did not result in tangible political or diplomatic gains for Korean Americans. Despite their active participation in the war effort, they continued to be excluded from U.S. immigration laws. While the revision of immigration policy in 1943 granted Chinese immigrants access to citizenship–and later extended labor immigration to Filipinos, Indians, and others in 1945, 1946, and 1949—Koreans were not allowed to apply for U.S. citizenship until 1952 (U.S. Congress 1952). From this perspective, the 1942 performance ultimately failed to construct a successful public image of Koreans as both loyal to the United States and committed to independence from Japan within the racial hierarchy of Asians in America.

This study provides new insights into the intersection of ethnic identity, diaspora politics, and cultural diplomacy within the broader context of the Korean independence movement. However, it has yet to fully address the complexities of American racial discrimination, traditional minority cultures, and dominant gender norms in Hawai‘i. In particular, a more in–depth analysis of racially and ethnically segregated women’s morale–boosting units—including the briefly mentioned “Flying Squadron” and “Hui Menebune”—remain a critical subject for future research.

Such studies will provide a more nuanced understanding of the racialized class structures, ethnocultural traditions, and prevailing gender norms within wartime Hawai'i, long idealized as a paradise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Honolulu Advertiser. 1941a. “Koreans Entertain Service Men.” July 8.

_____. 1941b. “Koreans in Show for Service Men.” July 11.

_____. 1941c. “Korean Group Will Plan More Service Parties.” July 11.

HWRD (Hawai‘i War Records Depository). 1941–1947. “USO Scrapbook,” Archives and Special Collections department of Hamilton Library, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Kungminbo. 1942a. “Jaemi Hanjok Yeonhap Wiwonhoe ui Miguk jeoksipjasa jiwon hwaldong(II)” (Activities of the United Korean Committee in America Supporting the American Red Cross). May 13.

_____. 1942b. “Miguk Jeoksipjasa jiwon eul wihan gongyeon” (Performance to benefit the American Red Cross). June 3.

_____. 1942c. “Honollullu eseo Jeongsinbu Yeonhap euro heugin gunin chodaeyeon” (Black Soldiers Invited to an Event by United Morale Sections in Honolulu). September 2.

National Archives. 1942–1946. “Hawai‘i, Civilian Internees Folders” (NAID 833674); “Hawai‘i: Enemy Alien General File” (NAID 900260); and “Records Relating to Japanese Civilian Internees During World War II” (NAID 872144). Records of the Enemy Prisoner of War Information Bureau, RG 389.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1943a. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population, Second Series–Characteristics of the Population, Hawaii*. Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

_____. 1943b. 1*940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population.* Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Congress. 1952. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, Public Law 82–414, 66 Stat. 163, enacted June 27, 1952. Available at: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE–66/pdf/STATUTE–66–Pg163.pdf.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Gwynfread. 1950. *Hawaii's War Years, 1941–1945*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Baik, Tae-Ung, and Duk Hee Lee Murabayashi. 2011. "The Historical Development of Early Korean Immigration to Hawaii and Its Legal Structure." *Journal of Korean Law* 11: 77–100.

Bailey, Beth, and David Farber. 1993. "The 'Double-V' Campaign in World War II Hawaii." *Journal of Social History* 26 (4): 817–843.

_____. 1994. *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cha, Marn J. 2010. *Koreans in Central California, 1903–1957: A Study of Settlement and Transnational Politics*. University Press of America.

Chang, Taehan. 2019. "3.1undong kwa miju hanin sahoe" (The March 1st Movement and the Korean American Community). *Hallim Ilbonhak* 35: 128–161.

Cho, Kyu-tae. 2023. "Hawaii ijumin An Won-gyu ui sahoe-gyeongjejeok sam gwa minjokjeok hwaldong (1903–1947)" (Socioeconomic Life and Ethnic Activities of Hawaiian Immigrant Ahn Won-gyu [1903–1947]). *Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Yeongu* 115: 39–81.

Choi, Anne Soon. 2003. "'Are They Koreaned Enough?' Generation and the Korean Independence Movement before World War II." *Amerasia Journal* 29 (3): 57–78.

Choi, Heeyoung. 2020. "Multicultural Musicscape for National Pride: Performing Arts of East-Asian Diasporas in Hawai'i before WWII." *Asian Culture and History* 12 (1): 9–16.

_____. 2021a. "Curating Koreanness: Musical Activities of Korean Elite Women in Hawai'i during the Japanese Colonial Period, 1910–1945." *Women and Music* 25: 110–127.

_____. 2021b. "Political Reconciliation through the Performing Arts: Musical Activities of Koreans in Early Twentieth-Century Hawai'i." *The Review of Korean Studies* 24 (1): 239–264.

_____. 2022. "Miju Hanin sahoe cheot namseong jeontong akgi yeonjudan Nampungsa ui chulhyeon baegyeong gwa hwaldong bunseok (1920~50nyeondae)" (An Analysis of the Background and Activities of Nampungsa, the First

Korean Male Traditional Instrumental Ensemble in the Korean American Community, 1920s–1950s). *Hanguk Munhwa* 97: 479–505.

_____. 2024. "Taepyeongyang jeonjaenggi (1941–1945) Hawai Hanin ui choguk dongnip ul wihan gongyeon hwaldong" (Stage Performances for the Korean Independence Movement Among Koreans in Hawai'i During the Pacific War [1941–1945]). *Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Yeongu* 88: 100–130.

Choy, Bong–Yun. 1979. *Koreans in America*. Nelson Hall.

Choy, Peggy Myo–Young. 2000. "Anatomy of a Dancer: Place, Lineage and Liberation." *Amerasia Journal* 26 (2): 234–261.

Hong, Yunjeong. 2017. "Hawai Hanin yeoseong danche wa sajin sinbu ui dongnip undong" (Korean Women's Organizations in Hawai'i and the Independence Movement of Picture Brides). *Yeoseonggwa Yeoksa* 26: 1–26.

Hong, Sun–pyo. 1998. "1930–nyeondae huban Hawai Hanin ui tongil undong" (The Korean Unification Movement in Hawaii, in the late 1930's). *Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Yeongu* 12: 195–227.

Hood, Christopher 2001. *Japanese Education Reform: Nakasone's Legacy*. Routledge.

_____. 2016. "1900~1930–nyeondae Hawai Hanin sahoe ui seonjeon oegyo hwaldong" (Propaganda and Diplomatic Activities of Korean Society in Hawaii from 1900s to 1930s). *Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Yeongu* 89: 5–42.

Jang, Kyungho. 2020. "Taepyeongyang jeonjaenggi Jaemi Hanin ui jeonsi haengdong" (A Study on Second–Generation Korean Americans Who Served in the U.S. Military During World War II: Focusing on the Record of Young Warriors in the *Shinhan Minbo*). *Yeoksa Munhwa Yeongu* 69: 189–242.

_____. 2021. "Je 2cha segye taejongi migun e chonggunhan Hawai Hanin 2se" (Second–Generation Korean Americans from Hawai'i Who Served in the U.S. Military During World War II). *Yeoksa wa Gyeonggye* 118: 115–143.

Kim, Dohyung. 1998. "1930–nyeondae choban Hawai Hanin sahoe ui tonghyang" (Movements in the Korean community in Hawaii in the early 1930s). *Hanguk Geunhyeondae Sa Yeongu* 9: 202–236.

_____. 2004. "Taepyeongyang jeonjaenggi Jaemi Hanin ui jeonsi haengdong" (Wartime Actions of Korean Americans during the Pacific War). *Yeoksa Munhwa Yeongu* 21: 65–93.

_____. 2007. "Taepyeongyang jeonjaenggi Hanin sahoe ui tonghyang" (Trends in the Korean Community during the Pacific War). In *Buk Miju Hanin Ui Yeoksa* (History of Korean Americans in North America), edited by National Institute of Korean History.

Kim, Han-Kyo. 2002. "The Korean Independence Movement in the United States." Paper presented at the Conference on Korean Americans, Past, Present, and Future, Falls Church, VA.

Kim, Lili M. 2003. "The Limits of Americanism and Democracy: Korean Americans, Trans-national Allegiance, and the Question of Loyalty on the Homefront during World War." *Amerasia Journal* 29 (3): 79-96.

Kim, Richard S. 2011. *The Quest for Statehood: Korean Immigrant Nationalism and U.S. Sovereignty, 1905-1945*. Oxford University Press.

Kim, Sung-eun. 2011. "1920~30-nyeondae Mi gugyuhak yeoseong chisigin ui hyeonsil insik gwa sahoe hwaldong" (The Social Awareness and Activities of Korean Women Intellectuals Studying in the U.S. during the 1920s and 1930s). PhD diss., Sogang University.

Kwon, Okyun. 2003. *Buddhist and Protestant Korean Immigrants: Religious Beliefs and Socioeconomic Aspects of Life.* LFB Scholarly Publishing.

Lee, Myunghwa. 2012. "Jaemi Sireopka Kim Jongnim ui saengae wa tongnip undong" (The Life and Independence Activities of Korean American Entrepreneur Kim Jong-rim). *Hanguk Tongnip Undongsa Yeongu* 43: 113-168.

Lee, Rika. 2017. "Inventing Korean Tradition in Hawai'i: Race Relations and Modernization of Korean Immigrant Women in Prewar Hawai'i." *Yeoseonggwa Yeoksa* 26: 27-79.

Macmillan, Michael E. 1985. "Unwanted Allies: Koreans as Enemy Aliens in World War II." *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 19: 179-203.

Nalty, Bernard C., and Morris J. McGregor, eds. 1981. *Blacks in the Military: Essential Documents.* Scholarly Resources, Inc.

Noh, Sunhee. 2021a. "Changsojeok gwanjeom eseo bon sahoejeok gwangye ui pyunhwa–20segi cho Hanin sajin sinbu reul jungsim euro" (Changes in Social Relationships from a Spatial Perspective: Focusing on Korean Picture Brides in the Early 20th Century). *Hangukhak Nonjip* 85: 139-179.

_____. 2021b. "Hanin yeoseong tiasup'ora gongdongche yeongu-sajin sinbu ui gongdongche, Yeongnam buin sireop tongmaenghoe (Yeongnambuinhoe)

reul jungsim euro–" (A Study on Diasporic Communities of Korean Women: Focusing on Picture Brides and the Yeongnam Women's Industrial League [Yeongnam Women's Association]). *Yeoseong Gwa Yeoksa* 34: 151–192.

Okamura, Jonathan Y. 2000. "Race Relations in Hawai'i during World War II: The Non-internment of Japanese Americans." *Amerasia Journal* 26 (2): 117–141.

Okihiro, Gary Y. 1991. *Cane Fires: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawaii, 1865-1945.* Temple University Press.

Park, Haeseong. 2015. "Intellectual Diaspora, Nation, and Gender: Korean Women Students in the United States before 1945." PhD diss., Purdue University.

Park, Jongyeon. 2012. "Jaemi Hanin Hwang Sayong ui minjok undong" (The Nationalist Movement of Hwang Saryong in America). *Hanguk Minjok Undongsa Yeongu* 72: 157–184.

Park, Junhyun. 2017. "Hawai·Miju sahoe eseo Min Chanho ui Hanin gyoyuk gwa minjok undong" (Min Chan-ho's Educational and Nationalist Activities in the Korean Communities of Hawai'i and the Mainland U.S.). *Hanguk Tongnip Undongsa Yeongu* 91: 5–42.

Park, Soonseop. 2016. "1920~40-nyeondae Hyeonsun ui Jaemi tongnip undong" (Hyun Jun's Korean Independence Activities in America during the 1920s–1940s). *Hanguk Tongnip Undongsa Yeongu* 56: 5–47.

Patterson, Wayne. 2000. *The Ilse: First-generation Korean Immigrants in Hawai'i, 1903-1973.* University of Hawai'i Press.

Pierce, Lori. 2019. "'Doing Our Duty': Dancing, Dating, and the Limits of Tolerance in Wartime Hawai'i." *Hawaiian Journal of History* 53: 107–131.

Shin, Linda. 1972. "Koreans in America, 1903–1945." *Amerasia Journal* 1 (3): 32–39.

Shivers, Robert L. 1946. *Cooperation of Racial Groups in Hawaii During the War*. Chamber of Commerce of Honolulu.

Stephan, John J. 2011. *Hawaii under the Rising Sun: Japan's Plans for Conquest after Pearl Harbor*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Tikhonov, Vladimir. 2009. "Militarism and Anti-militarism in South Korea: 'Militarized Masculinity' and the Conscientious Objector Movement." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 7 (12): 1–32.

Van Zile, Judy. 2007. "Korean Dance in Hawai'i." In *From the Land of Hibiscus:*

Koreans in Hawai'i, edited by Yŏng-ho Ch'oe, 256-277. University of Hawai'i Press.

Weingartner, James J. 1992. "Trophies of War: U.S. Troops and the Mutilation of Japanese War Dead, 1941-1945." *Pacific Historical Review* 61 (1): 53-67.

Yu, Eui-young. 1977. "Koreans in America: An Emerging Ethnic Minority." *Amerasia Journal* 4 (1): 117-131.

Ziobro, Melissa. 2017. "369th Sustainment Brigade." *On Point: The Journal of Army History* 23 (2): 23-26.

Book Review

Before the Imjin War: East Asian International Relations in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

Barend NOORDAM

(Reviewed Books)

Räuberische Chinesen und tückische Japaner: Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen China und Japan im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert.

[Predatory Chinese and Treacherous Japanese: Diplomatic Relations between China and Japan in the 15th and 16th Centuries.]
By Csaba Oláh. Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009. xv + 346 pages. ISBN 9783447060714

Avant la tempête: La Corée face à la menace japonaise 1530-1590.

[Before the Storm: Korea Facing the Japanese Threat 1530-1590.]
By Guillaume Carré. Collège de France, 2019. 416 pages. ISBN 9782905358202 263

Intruder to the Patriarchal Alliance

Sinae HYUN

(Reviewed Book)

Inter-Asian Intimacies Across Race, Religion, and Colonialism.

By Chie Ikeya. Cornell University Press, 2024. 282 pages. ISBN: 9781501777165

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 211-222
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.008

[Book Review]

Before the Imjin War:
East Asian International Relations in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

Barend NOORDAM

Reviewed Books

Räuberische Chinesen und tückische Japaner: Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen China und Japan im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert.
[Predatory Chinese and Treacherous Japanese: Diplomatic Relations between China and Japan in the 15th and 16th Centuries.]
By Csaba Oláh. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009. pp. xv+346. ISBN 978-3-447-06071-4.

Avant la tempête: La Corée face à la menace japonaise 1530-1590.
[Before the Storm: Korea Facing the Japanese Threat 1530-1590.]
By Guillaume Carré. Paris: Collège de France, 2019. pp. 416. ISBN 978-2-905358-20-2.

Barend NOORDAM is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Heidelberg University.
E-mail: barend.noordam@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de

English is the hegemonial language in modern Western academia and this is no less true for East Asian area studies. Nevertheless, works of considerable interest continue to be produced in other Western languages and two of these considered here—one written in German and one in French—have appeared in the last two decades. Both of these works have shed important new light on international relations in East Asia prior to the Imjin War but have not received the attention they deserve, because they do not belong to the anglophone research mainstream. In temporal terms, both works only partially overlap, notably in their treatments of the early sixteenth century, but are otherwise complementary in subject matter as the former focuses on the development of Sino-Japanese relations and the latter on those between Japan and Korea.

The first (German-language) work, whose title translates as "Predatory Chinese and Treacherous Japanese: Diplomatic Relations between China and Japan in the 15th and 16th Centuries" was written by the Hungarian scholar Csaba Oláh. It traces these diplomatic relations predominantly from the perspective of the Japanese and the twenty tribute embassies that they sent between 1432 and 1549. As such, the work concludes its narrative just before the large waves of *Wokou* (Japanese: *Wakō*, Korean: *Waegu*) "Japanese" piracy hit the southeastern coasts of the Chinese Ming empire in the 1550s and 1560s. However, the author refrains from commenting on the significance of the simultaneous breakdown of formal diplomatic relations between Ming China and Japan and the rise of large-scale pirate violence. The book therefore does not add to the ongoing debate on the exact nature and extent of Japanese involvement in *Wokou* piracy during the mid-sixteenth century, but it does provide an unparalleled detailed look at the Japanese side of the diplomatic relations before violence became the norm along the Ming coasts. Oláh brings together and impressive range of Chinese and Japanese primary sources, as well as the full panoply of relevant secondary research as it existed by 2009 in all modern academic languages. The book is divided into a large introduction, complete with a near-exhaustive treatment of the historiography (as is customary for German-style academic works), as well as five chapters, before reaching a rather brief conclusion. The most impor-

tant and detailed sources that Oláh uses are the diaries of Buddhist Zen temples in Kyoto, which were charged with managing the preparations of the missions on behalf of the Ashikaga shogunate (1336–1573), because of their familiarity with the Chinese language and culture. A tipping point regarding the detail of the sources seems to have been 1511, when control over these missions finally came into the hands of the Ōuchi daimyō and the monks from Kyoto no longer recorded the preparations.

In the introduction and the first chapter, "Foreign Trade and Diplomatic Relations with China: Rules and Peculiarities," Oláh sketches the historical background of the restrictive Ming tributary system and the reasons it came to be. The Ming founding emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–1398) wished to restrict interactions between his subjects and overseas actors, partly for the political danger these interactions could pose as defeated domestic enemies and Japanese raiders depended on the maritime world. The Ming court monopolized control over overseas interactions like foreign trade and diplomacy and stipulated that they be subjected to a highly ritualized and regulated system. Following Li Kangying and Angela Schottenhammer,however, Oláh holds that the main *raison d'être* of this system was ideological: upholding the claim of Ming China as the centre of the East Asian world order (pp 27–29). Compared to previous Chinese dynasties, this led to a highly illiberal state of affairs, especially *vis-à-vis* trade. Hence, Oláh's book poses its main question of how the Japanese practically conducted diplomatic relations under these conditions after a rocky start under the first Ming emperors, which earned the Japanese the reputation of being cunning and untrustworthy, a reputation they would never lose. To control interactions, the Ming provided foreign rulers it recognized as vassals (like the Japanese shoguns) with tallies (*kanhe)* which tributary envoys could use to identify themselves as authentic missions, and the first chapter also explores this system in detail in the case of Japan. Japan would receive these in the 1430s as diplomatic relations between the two countries returned to normal. Oláh also fastidiously describes the composition and function of the *biao*, which were indispensable letters issued by foreign rulers addressed to the Ming emperor. Any misstep in the formulation of these letters, es-

pecially if it undermined the superiority claim of the Ming emperor, could lead to a refusal of the tribute mission, hence the expertise of the literate Zen monks was essential.

The second chapter, "The Preparation of the Embassies to China in Japan," and the third chapter, "The Preparation of Diplomatic Documents: The Vassal Letter (biao) and Accompanying Document" stay true to their titles and describe the preparations in painstaking detail, based on a thorough reading of the Japanese primary source materials. This preparation and its financing depended on a collaboration of the shogun's bakufu with Buddhist temples, daimyō and merchants. Oláh's research makes it clear that the bakufu's role was increasingly marginalized after 1465 as the country's emerging civil wars impoverished the shogunate, although tributary missions would continue to be sent in its name until 1547. Instead, the competing Ōuchi and Hosokawa daimyō took over *de facto* control, although Buddhist monks remained indispensable mediators because of their language skills and facility with Chinese culture. Competing missions sent by both daimyō eventually clashed in Ningbo in 1523, which led the Chinese court to further tighten its policies regulating the Japanese visitors. With the fall of the Ōuchi in the 1550s, the *kanhe* tallies were also lost in a fire, which ended the formal diplomatic relations as there seem to be no sources confirming that Japan received replacement tallies. Chapter Two gives detailed breakdowns of the costs of different tributary missions and their financiers, the administration of the ships, and the backgrounds and roles of the participants. Of particular note here are the backgrounds of interpreters, who often were Chinese refugees or captives (pp. 82–85). Interesting is also how Chinese monks, Ryūkyū and even Korea were instrumentalized by Japan on certain occasions to lubricate contact between China and Japan in case of conflicts, although Oláh only mentions these in passing (pp. 69–70, 108, 125, 166). Chapter Three provides a detailed breakdown of the structure and contents of the *biao*, which the author has translated as "Vassal Letter." The so-called "Accompanying Document" (*biefu* in Chinese) is also put in the spotlight, a document which enumerated the diplomatic gifts offered by the bakufu and also sometimes included miscellaneous information

about urgent matters. This genre of document was incidentally also used in communications between Korea and Ryūkyū. The author again stresses the vital role Buddhist monks played in composing these documents.

The fourth chapter, "Japanese Missions in China," affords an intricate look at the actual travel and stay of several Japanese missions in China. The role of the interpreters is brought to fore, as well as the sea route travelled, the reception in Ningbo and the eventual stay in the guesthouse in Beijing. The granularity offered by Oláh's narrative would allow for interesting comparisons with European accounts of their missions to China during the Ming and Qing eras. The chapter also briefly dwells on the private trade in goods between Japanese and Chinese merchants that was allowed within the context of these missions beyond the exchange of diplomatic gifts. Oláh mentions that Japanese merchants were often swindled by their Chinese colleagues and that therefore the disturbances that took place during these missions cannot always be solely put at the door of the former.

The fifth and final, chapter, "Trade and Merchandise between Japan and China," zooms in more specifically on this private trade and the role the differing values of silver and copper coins in both countries played in the commercial dynamics. This chapter makes clear that the tribute system could only serve as a pressure relief valve for the growing trade ambitions of the respective mercantile populations of both Japan and China for so long, as the economies in both countries grew and diversified in the course of time. Oláh specifically singles out the trade in Japanese swords, a popular item on the Chinese market. The Japanese increased production of these weapons for export, which led the Chinese court to put a cap on the import quotas and attempted to pay for them with fewer and debased coins in an effort to restrict the loss of valuable currency. In this context Oláh paraphrases the Japanese uttering an ominous warning: if the Chinese emperor would not allow for fair trade, the tributary trade would become defunct, and a new wave of piracy would take its place (p. 306). This was something which would indeed happen.

My biggest criticism of Oláh's work is that it sells itself short through the lack of a thorough conclusion which highlights the main

findings of his work and how they complement or challenge the existing state of the field. This is especially poignant, because the author also omits to sum up the key insights of each chapter in their respective final paragraphs, leaving this to the reader, which is a disservice to the non-specialist. In the final analysis, not much new is revealed about the substance of Sino-Japanese foreign relations as represented by these tributary embassies, except for the already extant perception that they were mostly an excuse to conduct trade in luxury goods and a way for the shogunate to bolster its domestic legitimacy. What the book does offer is an amazingly deep probe into the internal political machinations on the Japanese side of the diplomatic equation and a panoramic view of the shifting landscape of power brokers that assumed responsibility (or often simply usurped it) to represent Japan to its powerful neighbour overseas. Devotees of diplomatic history will also be captivated by the many minutiae of East Asian practice presented here, often for the very first time.

This book will likely be the most profound treatment of formal Japanese relations with China during the Ming dynasty for a long time to come, as the author was exceptionally thorough in utilizing his extraordinarily large collection of primary sources. In the conclusion the author also offers a tantalizing prospect on how to continue the exploration of Sino-Japanese relations at this time, namely, by investigating the private ties between subjects of both countries. Especially the activities of Japanese Buddhist monks and their contacts with Chinese monks and scholars could be profitably traced in the extant source material. This approach has already been implemented for the Song dynasty and has yielded fruitful results.[1] From the perspective of intellectual history, studying these international exchanges of ideas and knowledge during the Ming would be a welcome topic and a focus on the informal aspect of international relations could shed new light on formal diplomacy alone would not.

---

1 Jeffrey Kotyk, 2020, 'The Medieval Chinese Vision of Japan: Buddhist Perspectives in the Tang and Song Periods,' *Studies in Chinese Religions* 6 (4): 360–85.

The second book that is subject of this review has a title which can be rendered as "Before the Storm: Korea in the Face of the Japanese Threat 1530–1590." It was written by the French East Asianist Guillaume Carré and it zooms in on Chosŏn Korea's relations with Japan from the perspective of the former. In terms of temporal coordinates, it picks up where the first book stops: the early-to-mid sixteenth century. Carré's work consists of a lengthy introduction, six chapters and a thorough conclusion. In the introduction, the author makes it clear that he wishes to shed light on the relations between both countries in the few decades before the outbreak of the Imjin War (1592–1598), a conflict which the author sees as the final nail in the coffin for the Chinese tributary system. This system upheld a kind of maritime *pax sinica* and *inter alia* positioned Korea in a loose defensive maritime alliance with Ming China as a result of the first wave of Japanese piracy in the late fourteenth century. Note that Carré here diverges from Csaba Oláh's claims regarding the main motivation for enforcing the tribute system. For Oláh, it was an ideological exercise first, a system embodying the superiority claim of the Ming empire, rather than primarily a pragmatic response to maritime threats as Carré contends. These differences aside, this second book highlights the practical similarities between Chinese and Korean relations with the Japanese circa 1530. As with the conduct of Sino-Japanese relations, in diplomatic exchanges with Korea the Japanese Ashikaga shogunate had been marginalized as an actor by the mid-fifteenth century because of ongoing civil wars. Instead, official contacts were maintained through the intercession of prominent daimyō families on Tsushima and Kyūshū, who sent impostor embassies and were mostly interested in trade. As a consequence, the Koreans were not well informed on Japanese affairs. A contrast with Oláh's work is formed by Carré's quantity of sources. Because the latter describes his topic from the point of view of the Koreans, he is forced to rely on a much leaner source base, mainly constituted by Chosŏn's *Veritable Records*. The entries for the crucial period of 1560–1580 were largely lost, however, as a result of the destruction wrought by the Imjin War. Carré thus supplements the *Veritable Records* mostly with the writings of Korean civil official Yu Sŏngnyong

(1542–1607), who wrote a detailed—if highly partisan—personal account of the Imjin War and the period leading up to it after the war. In addition to providing an account of Korean relations with Japan just before the Imjin War, Carré also aims to question some of the received wisdoms pertaining to aspects of this era, especially those related to the Korean military reforms before the Imjin War.

The first chapter, "The Silver Islands: Japanese Silver Takes over Korea," argues that the discovery of new silver veins and a new technique to extract them (cupellation, which ironically came from Korea) in Japan started to undermine the regional power balance in East Asia. Suddenly, the Japanese had a trump card in hand which allowed them greater access to the Chinese and Korean markets through smuggling and piracy. This would also in due course attract European actors. The Koreans were first confronted with this new reality and after a short while made the conscious decision to not monetize silver in the domestic market and to closely monitor Japanese trading activities along their shores. They took this momentous decision while fearing social upheaval and a deterioration of their relations with the Ming by functioning as a facilitator of silver-fueled trade. This led to the rerouting of this illicit trade to China, where silver was eagerly accepted as an alternative currency. The Koreans only used obtained silver as currency during their tributary trade with Ming China, which kept the luxury trade goods thus obtained compartmentalized within the elite domain. Carré concludes the chapter by positing that the access to silver gave the rulers of Japan the assurance to challenge the East Asian world order, including when it was unified under Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598). In the second chapter, "The Ŭlmyo Affair," which refers to a largescale attack by pirates in the eponymous year 1555, the resulting belligerence was felt for the first time by the Koreans. It stoked fears that the fourteenth century *Wokou* piracy was making a comeback and revealed deficiencies in the military defence. Carré, however, questions why this event had such a shock value. After all, when looking at the known facts it seems like the provincial armies had been relatively successful, despite initial losses, in largely defeating the raid on their own without the reinforcements from the capital armies. The

shock seems to have come from a dual awareness of the intensity of the contemporaneous pirate attacks on Ming China as well as the deplorable state of the Korean military based as it was on the decreasing conscription of free men by way of corvée service. This conscription had been progressively undermined by recent socio-economic changes. Carré also dwells on the reasons the pirates launched this attack and connects it to the active repression of Japanese trade with China on or near Korean territory, which had led to many casualties among the pirates. This chapter also shows how and why Tsushima distanced itself from the pirate activities by blaming its Japanese competitors in overseas trade. As Tsushima was recognized by Korea as the official representation of Japanese shogunal authority, they were held responsible for the activities of the pirates.

In the third chapter, "Mysteries and Myths of the 'Victorious Strategy'," the author engages in some myth busting regarding the purported military reforms that were undertaken as a response to the Ŭlmyo Affair and which were blamed for Korea's initial disastrous defeats during the Imjin War. Carré argues that these reforms were more a chimera than real, and this modern misconception is caused by a lack of sources and resulting overreliance on Yu Sŏngnyong's testimony. One of the key features of these purported reforms Yu criticized was that troops were no longer to resist invading enemies on the spot as individual units, but should mobilize on a provincial scale and gather at predetermined locations to await their commanders who sometimes had to travel for hundreds of kilometers. Nevertheless, Carré posits that aspects of these reforms were not very different from earlier Korean military praxis and that Yu misrepresented their debilitating effects in order to justify his own failed postwar military reforms after his ouster. The author continues his myth busting in the fourth chapter, titled "Nothing Equals Firearms." The Ŭlmyo Affair and other incidents had confronted the Korean army with pirates armed with the latest (Western-style) firearms, which should have spurred technological innovation but did not, as lamented by Yu Sŏngnyong. Carré takes Yu to task, however, by presenting evidence that Western style harquebuses did influence native gun designs and that

cannons were updated to shoot more effective iron cannonballs. However, success with these improved firearms against the Jurchen in the north and with iron cannonballs against pirates prematurely restored confidence in the existing arsenal. Fully appropriating the harquebus was obstructed, because these relied on specialized skills to manufacture and required more complex training regimens. Carré concludes the chapter by positing that the centralized weapon production system, subject to political decisions of a few experts, could block innovations too easily. When this control broke down, as it did during the Imjin War, free reign was given to local initiative, which led to the successful appropriation of the harquebus by the frontline naval squadron of admiral Yi Sunshin (1545–1598).

The fifth chapter, "Who Were the *Wakō*?," asks a question that has been asked many times before in East Asian historiographies and this chapter, in the opinion of this reviewer, does not bring much to the debate which is new. The pirates remain multiethnic members of coastal societies, dependent on the sea for their livelihoods, who turned to banditry when central authorities were weak while benefitting from a preexisting facility with violence. Tsushima was eager enough to capitalize on this multiethnic nature to distance itself from the pirates by informing the Koreans *inter alia* of the Chinese leadership of these groups. The chapter does provide a useful overview of the historiographical debates and it compares the *Wokou* piracy wave of the late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries with that of the mid-sixteenth century. Carré highlights the usually underacknowledged role of Koreans in the piracy waves and concludes that, whereas this role was very significant during the first wave, Koreans were mostly uninvolved in the second one. The author concludes that the country's smaller size and more efficient navy and trade surveillance practices kept the Korean coastal populations from joining the pirates in the sixteenth century in significant numbers. A seeming paradox, unresolved by the author, presents itself of a Korea too weak to resist the Japanese invasion of 1592, but strong enough to keep itself outside of the piracy turmoil which embroiled the Chinese coasts just a few decades earlier. The sixth chapter, "Ambiguous Alliances: Chosŏn and

Tsushima in the Midst of Turmoil," redirects our gaze to the diplomatic aspects of Korean relations with Japan, as represented by Tsushima. This diplomacy centered on the dilemma of repatriating the many pirates of diverse origins that ended up shipwrecked on the Korean coasts. Handing them over to the Ming court as criminals risked Korea being drawn much further into the conflict between the Ming and the pirates on the side of the former, while simultaneously increasing friction with Japan. Executing the shipwrecked pirates would similarly risk hostilities with both China and Japan, and executing men innocent of committing crimes on Korean soil raised ethical concerns. In the latter part of the chapter the author shows how Tsushima was instrumentalized by Hideyoshi to conduct diplomacy in a bid for recognition as Japan's new leader and obtaining permission to have his troops pass through the country on the way to attack Ming China. For this purpose, a rare Korean member of the pirates, Sahwadong, was extradited to Korea as a sign of goodwill and Hideyoshi's new power as unified Japan's leader. Carré posits that Hideyoshi's crackdown on the pirates was more apparent than real: he still needed them for his invasion of the mainland despite his proscription of piracy. This gesture was well received by the Korean court, who initially saw the pacification of Japan under the leadership of Hideyoshi as a hopeful development.

Carré ties the strands of his research together in his conclusion, where he also draws a useful comparison between the Chosŏn's relations with the Jurchen and the Japanese to explain why the Japanese invasion took the Koreans unaware. Whereas it benefitted the Koreans to have the Jurchen divided among themselves, a divided Japan on the contrary always meant piracy and chaos. Hence the Korean court welcomed the reunification of Japan, which should have restored peace and tranquility. However, this was a different Japan from the one before the effective exploitation of the silver mines. The abundance of silver had made Japan a driving force behind the rising private trade in the region and whetted the appetite of its rulers for continental conquest and the exploitation of international trade. This miscalculation was aided and abetted by the success with which the Koreans were able to enforce their system of restrict-

ed trade with only one Japanese actor, Tsushima, and enforce their control over their territory and domestic economic arrangements. Korea's fate diverged from China, because it had managed to annul the impact of silver on its internal socio-economic relations and therefore became largely immune to the destabilization wrought by private trade kindled by this Japanese bullion. In this way a victim of its own success, the Chosŏn dynasty was also unable to mitigate the recruitment crisis which undermined its military, leaving it in a weak state before an unexpected full-scale Japanese invasion, despite attempts at upgrading its firearms. Carré offers here, for the first time, a comprehensive treatment of the half-century of Japanese-Korean relations leading up to the Imjin War, carefully weighing different explanations as to why the invasion came as such a surprise. In the opinion of this reviewer, Carré's work threatens to be too reductionist in its consideration of Japanese silver as the game changer for the East Asian international order. It does not adequately explain why the earlier fourteenth-century wave of piracy took a hold in the absence of this silver. It would seem that the absence of a strong central political power in Japan was a sufficient explanation for the emergence of these phenomena, although Carré does state that the sixteenth-century wave of piracy resorted less to plunder and more to illegal trading activities than its predecessor. This could then be ascribed to the impact of the availability of silver, although the nature of the available sources should make it hard to quantify this shift in pirate activities. However, together with Oláh's work, Carré's book also provides many new insights in the nature of international relations in East Asia before the landmark Imjin War. Carré's book should be required reading for understanding Korea's ambivalent reaction to the rise of a unified Japan and the country's subsequent early defeats during the Imjin War and would be so had it been written in English. This reviewer's hope is that by bringing the two monographs by Oláh and Carré to the attention of a wider readership, their insights will not be lost.

JNAH, vol. 21, no.2 (Summer 2025): 223-230
doi.org/10.23037/jnah.2025.21.2.009

[Book Review]

Intruder to the Patriarchal Alliance

Sinae HYUN

Reviewed Book

Inter-Asian Intimacies Across Race, Religion, and Colonialism. By Chie Ikeya. Cornell University Press, 2024. 282 pages. ISBN 9781501777165

Sinae HYUN is a Research Professor at the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University. E-mail: siena714@gmail.com

Cherished by the author's firsthand experience and family history, *Inter-Asian Intimacies across Race, Religion, and Colonialism* excavates the stories of women in Burma who intermarried and converted. They were regarded as an "infidel and traitor" (p. 3), and thus were marginalized by the "patriarchal alliance" (p. 96) between the British imperialists and the Burmese nationalists from the colonial to the postcolonial period. Supplied with various sources from legal documents to oral histories, Chie Ikeya elaborates how the British colonizers tried to make their colonial subjects in Burma legible through conflating race and religion (Chapters 1–4); how the anticolonial nationalists in Burma strove to create an untainted body of a Burmese nation-state through othering and incrimination (Chapters 5–6); and how the orientalists have reduced the Japanese imperialists to uncivilized and insignificant by treating them peculiar (Chapters 7–8). What binds these colonizers, nationalists, and orientalists is their unrelenting "alienation" of the Burmese women who chose intermarriage and conversion, essentially making them unworthy subjects of the nation-state.

Among those who committed alienation of Burmese women, Burmese anticolonial nationalists who were the "most vociferous critics of intermarriage and conversion… self-identified as buddha batha bama amyo," that is, "the Burmese Buddhist kind" (pp. 6–7, 5) can be considered as the main protagonist. The author terms the logic of these critics for reducing the role of Burmese women who intermarried as "Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism" (p. 6). The book argues that the alienation of the intermarried and converted Burmese women was not only the agenda of the colonizer but also of the colonized subjects in Burma. Their fears and suspicions of the Other (amyo gya) and the descendants of the intermarried families like "zerbadi (Burmese Muslim or Indo-Burmese Muslim)" and "kabya (mixed)" did not stop at improvising and theorizing the Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism. It actually culminated in the violence, representatively the "anti-Indian riots" of 1938. In the process, the inter-Asian marriage and conversion have become the subject of antagonism, further justifying the alienation of the Burmese women in the colonial and national histories.

In order to grasp how the British colonizers, Burmese anticolonial nationalists, and orientalists alienated Burmese women not only from the colonial administration but also from the national history of today's Myanmar, a brief sketch of its historical background may be useful. In a nutshell, it took about sixty years for the British to conquer the entirety of Burman territory. Britain obtained control over Lower Burma after the two Anglo-Burmese wars in 1824-1826 and 1852-1853, respectively. The third Anglo-Burmese war allowed Britain to annex Upper Burma in 1885. Until its separation from India in 1937, Burma was a 'province' of India, and thus was governed by both British and Indian laws and policies.

Anticolonial movements arose against both Britain and India from the late nineteenth century, first by traditional ruling elites calling for the restoration of Burmese dynastic rule and expanded to cultural nationalist movements led by the modern elites who had received Western education and training. In 1930, Dobama Asiayone (We Burmese Association), led by students in Yangon University who called themselves "thakin (masters)," emerged, while the millenarian movement called Saya San Rebellion swept the rural countryside until 1932. Some of those thakins, including the most famous Burmese nationalists, Aung San, collaborated with the Japanese imperialists in the early 1940s with the promise of full independence of Burma from the British colonial rule. They formed the Burmese Independence Army in 1941 with the help of the Japanese military, but upon realizing that Japan was no different from other imperialists, the Burmese nationalists formed the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League in 1944. Aung San, before being assassinated in July 1947, negotiated with the British for a peaceful transfer of sovereignty, and in January 1948, U Nu declared the independence of Burma. The time that this book mainly deals with ranges from the nineteenth century before the full annexation of Burma into British-governing India to the Pacific War that housed nearly three hundred thousand Japanese soldiers on Burmese soil, far exceeding the sixty thousand Europeans who stayed in Burma between 1872-1941 (p. 2).

The book consists of a total of eight chapters in addition to an introduction and an epilogue. The first two chapters set the stage by examining how the migration before and during the European colonization in Southeast Asia created the conditions for intermarriage and conversion in Burma. What should be noted here is that the "young, laboring men from China and India" in the nineteenth century "had no intention of settling in their destinations, unlike their predecessors" (p. 38). In other words, intermarriage was more of a choice and a decision made by the migrants and their local spouses based on their intimacy and necessity. The book argues that British colonizers' fascination with the Burmese openness to intermarriage stems from their limited knowledge as well as their intended prejudice against Asian people, not the actual reality. Chapter Two pays attention to how the British colonizers utilized the "Burmese Buddhist customary law" based on their interpretation to identify their colonial subjects (p. 53), which is essential to understanding the patriarchal alliance between the British imperialists and the Burmese anticolonial nationalists and the latter's adherence to Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism for the alienation of Burmese women who chose intermarriage.

After setting the stage for the creation of "colonial alibi" in the first two chapters, Chapters Three and Four dive into how the British colonizers schematized their colonial subjects in Burma. Chapter Three investigates the ways the British tried to categorize the population through conflation of race and religion and reduction of complex realities to create a legible identity of their colonial subjects. Mapping religion onto race, or vice versa, enabled the British colonial administration to distinguish "immigration versus indigenous populations" (pp. 66, 64). In addition, it allowed the colonial judiciary to utilize "personal laws" which apply to a certain class or group of people, based on their religion, faith, and culture. Buddhist law was applied only to the members of the Buddhist community and precluded Buddhists from the application of Muslim law. In this way, "religion, race, and origin status" became "co-constitutive" (p. 64). The presumption that the Burmese are originally Buddhist made Christian Burmese or Muslim Burmese to seem "anomalous and questionable" (p. 66). As this overly simplified process of matching race and

religion did not reflect the complex racial, ethnic, social, and religious realities of Burma, where Indians, Persians, Chinese, and other foreign people had moved and settled for centuries, it could effectively marginalize unwanted groups within the colonial subjects.

In particular, as elaborated in Chapter Four, Burmese women who intermarried with foreign immigrants and converted to Islam or Christianity did not find their place in the colonial administrative system, thereby becoming an easy target of discrimination and incrimination. Assuming that the Burmese women who intermarried abandoned their right to be a Buddhist Burmese, their indigenous rights of property and personhood were forfeited. In this way, the patriarchal alliance between British imperialists and their colonial subjects "created a legal enclosure that systematically alienated the Burmese women" (p. 98).

Using Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism, anticolonial nationalists also alienated the Burmese women who chose intermarriage and conversion. The author, therefore, argues "the colonial alibi turned into an anticolonial alibi" (p. 103). Chapters Five and Six examine how the colonial and anticolonial alibi developed and were applied. Chapter Five explains the process of constructing Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism with increasing concerns over the 'extinction' of the Burmese Buddhist kind that was supported by allegedly modern, scientific eugenics. The addressed concern justified the sacralization of Burmese Buddhist women from the early twentieth century. Eulogization of Burmese women that "had benefitted from the unparalleled liberty and equality made possible by the operation of Burmese Buddhist law" (p. 119), simultaneously raised awareness and fear against any external factors that could ruin the Burmese women's opportunity for being autonomous and free under the protection of Burmese Buddhist law. As demonstrated in the subtitle, "Boycott Foreign Husbands!" (p. 107), the anticolonial nationalists shared a xenophobic panic to protect the Burmese women, effectively regulating the latter's bodies and identities.

Chapter Six interrogates the ways in which aversion and consequent alienation of the Indians by the British and Burmese intensified, conducive to the separation of Burma from India in 1937 and the racial

violence in 1938. Again, the most unfortunate yet unwritten victims of this were the Burmese women who married the Indians and their descendants. Their choice of intermarriage was often accused of marriage opportunism. The intention of the Burmese women for choosing foreign, that is, non-Burmese origin, and non-Buddhist, was disparaged and blamed for their ignorance, greed, or the foreign men's lack of "right intentions" (p. 129). Intermarriage was said to pollute the national spirits and bodies, and ultimately, led to the extinction of "buddha batha bama amyo." Regardless of the political and ideological discrepancies, both the conservative and socialist nationalist leaders resonated that the sinful women needed to be saved by the Burmese nation, led by enlightened Burmese men. In this context, the Buddhist Women's Special Marriage and Succession Act passed in 1939 mandated that the Burmese Buddhist law apply to all questions relating to marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance, and the ownership of property of a woman in Burma "who professes the Buddhist faith" (p. 136).

Chapters Seven and Eight focus on the Japanese occupation period and the relationship between the Burmese and Japanese, how both remember each other, and how their relationship is viewed by outsiders, especially by Western scholars and/or orientalists. The author's main argument in Chapter Seven focuses on the "gendered narrative of 'patriotic collaboration'" (p. 162), in which "women appear only as victims of Japanese aggression whose violation transforms Burmese men into heroes and patriots" (p. 159). Above-mentioned thakins like Aung San and U Nu at first collaborated with the Japanese imperial army, but realizing Japan would not be able to bring them full independence from Britain, they soon turned against the Japanese imperialists. While their initial collaboration with Japan was praised as "strategic, righteous, and necessary for Burma's national liberation" (p. 160), Burmese women's collaboration with the Japanese was neither acknowledged nor spoken of, other than being derogated as "japan gadaw (the Japanese's mistress) who followed in the footsteps of the kala gadaw [an Indian's mistress]" (p. 159).

In this context, the main task of Chapter Eight seems to restore not only the Burmese women's place in the national and colonial histories

but also *inter-Asian intimacies* that had been constantly defied and silenced even before British colonization. Building upon a critical analysis of the Japanese imperialists' paternalistic assimilation disguised under the slogan of "Asia for Asians," the author walks a tightrope between differentiating and familiarizing the Japanese empire from Western empires. While the alienation of the Burmese women who intermarried and converted by the British colonizers and the Burmese anticolonial nationalists continued from the British colonial to the Japanese occupation period, the Japanese colonizers, unlike in the conventional histories, seem to be more inclined to cultivate intimate relationships with the Burmese women. Since most narratives and impressions of the author's family towards the Japanese occupation period and people appear positive in Chapters Seven and Eight, the author's argument that Japanese idealization of the Asian family "challenged the prewar political discourse of Burmese Buddhist exceptionalism and its attendant disavowal of *inter-Asian intimacies*" (p. 181) unwittingly incur the perplexity towards benign treatment of Japanese imperialism.

From the Western or orientalist views, the Japanese empire might have been seen or made to be incomparable and idiosyncratic, as the author inferred. From the perspective of Northeast Asians who experienced Japanese colonial rule for a longer period and under different circumstances, the alienation of Burmese women by British colonialists and Burmese anticolonial nationalists, rather than by Japanese colonialists, may be more resonant with their experience. The Japanese occupation and rule over Southeast Asian territories were substantially shorter than the several decades-long colonial rule by non-Asian empires over the same territories. Therefore, it must have been almost impossible for the Japanese to derail the Western colonizers and anticolonial nationalists' alienation of women who chose intermarriage and conversion. On the other hand, the Japanese colonial rule in Korea and Taiwan left different footprints. Put simply, the *inter-Asian intimacies* and violences these women experienced can be compared to those of Burmese women, but they are not to be conflated. In this sense, a further investigation on the Japanese colonial laws and norms on defining and regulating the Bur-

mese women who chose intermarriage and conversion is desired.
Overall, the author's challenge vis-a-vis the "Eurocentric paradigm of incomparability" (p. 191) and anomaly of Japanese imperialism through unearthing "intimacies and interwoven histories of colonization across chronologies and territories" (p. 191) deserves attention and appreciation. Not only does the *Inter-Asian Intimacies* give life to a silenced history of the Burmese women who intermarried and converted, but it also exhorts a critical and not racially biased survey on the nature of Japanese imperialism in Southeast Asia during the Pacific War.

It is ironic that Japanese advancement and intrusion into Southeast Asia, where multiple western colonial powers had competed for their share, dramatically increased global attention to the region and Japan yet studies of Japanese imperialism in Southeast Asia have been dichotomized and, somewhat consequently, marginalized. Very likely due to the overwhelming influence of the Cold War in the region, as well as the far shorter time of its presence, the Japanese occupation and wartime period in Southeast Asia have not received sufficient attention from historians and area specialists. In this regard, the book is a timely reminder for historians of Southeast Asia of their homework.

Notes for Contributors

The Journal of Northeast Asian History [JNAH] is a peer-reviewed biannual open-access journal published by the Northeast Asian History Foundation. It aims to explicate the contexts and current situations of historically controversial topics in and of the Northeast Asian region across all periods. The journal seeks to test diverse methodologies, including interdisciplinary and transnational approaches, textual and intertextual interpretations, and media and visual analyses. By publishing high-quality academic papers, book reviews, and research trend reports in English, JNAH provides a platform for international dialogue among scholars in the humanities and social sciences while fostering exchanges with policymakers and practitioners. Dedicated to promoting academic and practical conversations, the journal contributes to deepening understanding of Northeast Asia's past, present, and future.

JNAH is published semiannually, in June and December. Submissions are available at all times; however, to be considered for publication in the June issues, your manuscript must be submitted by February 28, and for the December issues, by August 31. All eligible manuscripts submitted to JNAH undergo a peer review process conducted by three experts in the relevant fields, as recommended by the editorial board members. Please note that even if a manuscript is approved by reviewers, there may be an additional 6-month delay in publication due to the backlog of previously accepted manuscripts. The publication costs for JNAH are covered by the Northeast Asian History Foundation. Authors do not need to pay any article-processing charge. For detailed information about the submission of manuscripts, please contact the Journal at jnah@nahf.or.kr or jnah.nahf@gmail.com.

Please note: The Journal of Northeast Asian History will be published online starting in 2025, with all articles made available to readers as open access.

Preparation of Manuscripts

General Guidelines

1. *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* follows the "author–date" system of *the Chicago Manual of Style,* 18th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2024).
2. Submitted manuscripts, including an abstract, keywords, footnotes, reference, and illustrations, should be approximately 7,000–9,000 words in length. The manuscript should be double-spaced in 12-point type, use standard fonts, and be submitted as an electronic file in Microsoft Word format only.
3. The first page of the manuscript should provide the article title and the names(s) and affiliations(s) of the author(s).
4. The second page should provide an abstract of no more than 150 words and at least five keywords that are placed following the abstract.
5. Romanization systems for East Asian languages are as follows: Revised Romanization, by the Republic of Korea government, for Korean, Pinyin for Chinese, and Hepburn for Japanese. For Inner Asian languages, Manchu and Mongolian, please follow the systems used in the *Cambridge History of China*, volume 6. Exceptions to these are proper names that are internationally recognized, such as Koguryo.
6. Diacritics in East Asian language romanization systems (e.g., macrons in Japanese) must be given consistently.
7. East Asian (Korean, Chinese, and Japanese) scripts should appear wherever necessary in the body of the text or in the footnotes, following the appropriate romanization. Korean scripts should be in standard PC or Macintosh encoding, Chinese characters in standard Big5 encoding (please use the traditional form, or *fantizi* 繁體字), and Japanese kanji and kana in Shift-JIS.

Illustrations and Proofs

Authors are encouraged to present high-quality illustrations (maps, photographs, etc.) in their manuscripts. Changes at the proofreading stage and later will be accepted only upon the Editorial Board's approval. Final proofs are sent to both authors and book reviewers, and corrections are to be limited to printing errors only.

Copyright

Authors are to obtain permission to reproduce any copyrighted material. In assigning copyright, authors may use their own materials in other publications if *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* is acknowledged as the original place of publication and the Northeast Asian History Foundation is notified in writing in advance. Authors also agree to assign the copyright of their manuscript to the Northeast Asian History Foundation to ensure that the materials in the journal can be distributed as widely as possible.

Open Access (OA)

The Journal of Northeast Asian History is an open-access journal downloadable from its official webpage and other academic databases. All the articles of the journal are distributed and used under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonDerivative License (CC-BY-ND), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the articles are cited appropriately, whereas they may not be altered, transformed, or serve as the basis for a derivative work. To reuse parts or all the contents of the published articles in other books or media for scholarly and educational purposes, the process of permission request to the publisher is not necessary. However, the work may be redistributed as a derivative work (such as translations) by none but the author(s). All contents of the journal are available immediately upon publication without an embargo period.

Publication Ethics

The stipulations below are the public pronouncement of *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* for academic integrity and originality.

1. Articles and book reviews in *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* do not represent the views of the Northeast Asian History Foundation or the journal's Editorial Board.
2. Three specialists, including editorial board members, if appropriate, will be appointed peer reviewers to evaluate the suitability of the manuscript. The Editor-in-Chief is responsible for the final acceptance or rejection of the manuscript.
3. Any form of scholarly misconduct, including plagiarism, forgery, or falsification, in the process of research or writing the manuscript is not permitted. If misconduct is reported, Editorial Board will form a committee to consider the withdrawal of the manuscript. If misconduct is proved, the manuscript under investigation will be immediately withdrawn and the author will not be permitted to submit further manuscripts to *The Journal of Northeast Asian History*.
4. Quotation of or references to sources in the manuscript must be clear. Authors are fully responsible for all the factual and numerical contents published in their manuscript.
5. In the case of co-authored manuscripts, the order of authors should reflect the extent to which they contributed to the completion of the manuscript.

The Journal of Northeast Asian History
Volume 21 Number 2 Summer 2025

Published in June 2025
Compiled by Northeast Asian History Foundation
Published by Northeast Asian History Foundation
NH Life Bldg, 81, Tongil-ro, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Tel: +82-2-2012-6000 Fax: +82-2-2012-6186

Special Issue

Paths to Historical Reconciliation: Choices for Europe and Asia

Article

Book Review

ISSN 1976-3735