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## **THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA: Friends or Tolerant Neighbors?**

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**Universiteit Leiden**

**THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA  
Friends or Tolerant Neighbors?**

*A research paper on the influence of the reconciliation process on the friendship  
between Japan and South Korea*

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MSc Thesis Public Administration, International and European Governance

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	page 2
2. Literature Review.....	page 8
2.1. <u>Friendship</u> .....	page 8
2.2. <u>Reconciliation</u> .....	page 10
2.3. <u>Japan and South Korea</u> .....	page 12
3. Theoretical Framework.....	page 13
3.1. <u>Reconciliation</u> .....	page 13
3.2. <u>Friendship</u> .....	page 15
3.3. <u>Reconciliation meets Friendship</u> .....	page 16
4. Methodology and Limitations .....	page 20
5. Reconciliation.....	page 22
5.1. <u>Challenges to Reconciliation</u> .....	page 24
5.2. <u>Minimal Reconciliation</u> .....	page 27
5.3. <u>Concluding Remarks</u> .....	page 29
6. Friendship.....	page 31
6.1. <u>National Level</u> .....	page 32
6.2. <u>Individual Level</u> .....	page 35
6.3. <u>Concluding Remarks</u> .....	page 38
7. Conclusion.....	page 40
8. Bibliography.....	page 42

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“I get by with a little help from my friends.”

(The Beatles, 1967)

As the Beatles said, everything is possible when you are surrounded by friends, even the hardest times can be softened with the help of close companions. It is undoubtedly clear how much human beings need friendship and amity relations to function properly and healthily. In the sociological and philosophical domain, the presence of friends is a comforting element and is even considered in the hierarchy of needs, being positioned third in Maslow's pyramid (Maslow, 1943). It is in the sphere of international relations, however, that such a concept has been vastly underestimated and ignored. Realism believes in a state of anarchy, characterized by the selfishness of states, while Liberalism, despite believing in the possibility of cooperation, does not provide insights into the concept of friendship and closer relationships between nations (Moravcsik, 2008). The importance of establishing durable relations and strong ties between nation-states should not be given for granted and it would offer an interesting perspective in the study of global affairs.

The role of friendship in IR brought about diverging opinions when it comes to either defining it as a diplomatic relationship or as a driving force for global action. Especially when analyzing the friendship between two specific countries, their history, and culture, perhaps their languages as well, would play an interesting role in the defining of their relations. Germany is a founding example in Europe of how friendship was successfully and strongly established, even after the years of war during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and all the atrocities it was set to atone for. Its relationship with France and with the Netherlands is the closest thing to a type of friendship that could have been achieved in the international realm, particularly when considering their history and past experiences. However, such a level of friendship could have been impossible to achieve were it not for the long process of reconciliation between the countries.

Feldman (2012) describes reconciliation as the process of institution-building that takes into account both the political and the cultural elements to create, and later strengthen, sustainable external relations. Reconciliation and friendship, despite being linked to one another, do not necessarily encompass each other, and the path from the former to the latter may be full of hardships and incomprehension. Friendship, on the other hand, has been conceptualized in many various ways by different authors. As defined by Nordin and Smith (2018), the extent to which someone can be considered a friend is a consequence of the perception of a Self in contrast to the Other. Therefore, instead of conceptualizing friendship as a personal and individual relationship, it is seen as denoting

a new way of thinking of the constitution of one's Self in relation to the Other (Nordin & Smith, 2018). Van Hoef (2018) offers a different theoretical framework to understand friendship, based on a series of criteria to establish whether a certain degree of friendship is present specifically between individual government leaders. These five criteria are: affect, grand shared project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality (Van Hoef, 2018).

In the case of Japan and South Korea, such a relationship between reconciliation and friendship is naturally complicated. Despite the will of both parties to maintain their peaceful ties, it is arguable to what extent one could define them as *friends*. After the Second World War, a process of reconciliation started between Japan and all its East- and Southeast Asian neighbors, primarily though with South Korea, once being a colony that Japan so harshly conquered before the First World War (Holcombe, 2017, p. 273). Regardless of both Japan and Germany having followed a process of reconciliation after WWII, the former seemed to exhibit more trouble in establishing a long-lasting type of friendship with its neighbor and main trade partner in the region of East Asia. While Germany was quickly accepted as leader in the European aftermath of the War, after apologies and compensations for its mistakes, Japan still suffers criticism from its former colonies (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 255). Even more with the Republic of Korea (ROK), such tensions are still evident and past mistakes have not been forgotten. This thesis applies the reconciliation theories by Feldman (2012) and Worthington (2001), and the friendship frameworks of Van Hoef (2018) and Oelsner and Koschut (2014) on the case study of Japan and ROK relations. In this way, it attempts to present a dependent relationship between the concepts as reflected in the presented sample. The research question is then the following: to what extent did the reconciliation process post-WWII between Japan and South Korea ultimately lead to an initial stage of friendship?

Their history goes well beyond the atrocities of the Second World War. Even in Medieval times, the Korean peninsula used to be subjected and found itself continuously contested between the strong empires of both Japan and China. In 1592, one of the strongest warlords that ruled Japan in the sixteenth century, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) invaded Korea with a force of 158,000 soldiers, taking the whole peninsula by surprise. This was perhaps the first true attempt into what the Japanese would have consequently tried to establish known as its multiethnic empire. Peace was reached, but by 1598 more than two hundred thousand severed noses from both Korean and Chinese soldiers were sent to Japan as war achievements, instead of the heads of the enemies as loot from the war (Holcombe, 2017, p. 184). Korea dispatched an embassy in Japan in 1607 marked the beginning of a restoration process that will rehabilitate the relationships between the two countries. With the advent of the Tokugawa shogunate, the shogun and the Korean King exchanged a multitude of letters, addressing each other both with the honorific "Highness", stating their equal status (Mizuno, 2009, p. 55).

Still, the worst period for Korea had yet to come. The whole peninsula suffered years under Japanese rule right before WWII, from 1905 to 1945, when Japan defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese war over the contested territory (Holcombe, 2017, p. 273). After occupying Seoul, Korea was formalized as a Japanese protectorate and remained so until the end of the Second World War. Laws and political decisions were now made exclusively by Japanese officials, the Korean Emperor (and former King) was stripped of his power, the Korean army was disbanded, and episodes of guerrillas against the Japanese were always more common. In 1910, Japan annexed the peninsula as a colony. Despite colonization being the norm, even at that time, the case of Korea was exceptional: the intrusiveness of such a colonial regime in any type of policy was extremely high, and the number of Japanese residents in Korea amounted to twenty times the French in Vietnam (Holcombe, 2017, p. 275). It was then not a simple colony under an external power and did not only suffer physical military violence, but also mental and psychological. It was not rare, in fact, for the Japanese to demolish anything related to the religion or traditional culture of Korea, from shrines to temples, and purposely destroy the landscape with metal constructions, to kill the morale.

In 1907, after knowing that The Hague was going to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Peace Conference, Yi Jun, a Korean official, and anti-Japanese patriot traveled as deputy ambassador for months on the Trans-Siberian Railway to present the case of Korea to the international community. Japan was able to convince other delegates not to allow the Korean embassy into the Conference, and soon after, Yi Jun was found dead in his hotel room (Doosan University Encyclopedia, 2011). The hotel was then turned into a museum, the Yi Jun Peace Museum, in Wagenstraat, The Hague (Yi Jun Peace Museum, 2022). At the end of the First World War, inspired by the Wilsonian principles of self-determination, Korean resentment erupted and, despite being quickly suppressed, did convince the Japanese authority to adopt a gentler approach (Holcombe, 2017, p. 276). While still considering Koreans as racially and culturally similar, the Japanese imperialistic view was centered on the superiority of their race, the only one capable of driving the other Asian population towards modernity and development. With the beginning of WWII, many Koreans were called to war, either as soldiers or laborers. These included the so-called “comfort women”, pressured into providing sexual services to the Japanese soldiers (Holcombe, 2017, p. 277).

Therefore, all this heated history is the reason why, after World War II such reconciliation and peace processes were not only important but essential, for the establishment of good relations and robust ties in East Asia. On the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII, the Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 offered an official apology, which stated:

During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule

and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake, be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history (Murayama, 1995).

Regardless of this speech, which encompasses the general feeling of Japan as a nation, opinions still vary within the population. Many, including members of the Diet and political representatives, still refuse to consider such military actions as acts of aggression and believe in the good intentions of Japan based on liberating the poorest nations of East Asia from Western colonial powers. There are also strong arguments about the unfairness of Japan's reputation, given the long history of Western colonization as well as similar mistakes made by other Western nations (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 257).

Other major anniversaries were bound to be celebrated in 2005, which will however go down in history as the year of conflicts after all the past tragedies and misunderstandings between the two countries exacerbated in bigger political and economic consequences (Card, 2006). Not only it was the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, but also of the establishment of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel that, from that day onward, would have divided South Korea from the North. Also, this year marked the fortieth anniversary of the 1965 Treaty, which posed the real end of the Japanese colonization period in Korea. In fact, despite the San Francisco Peace Treaty stipulated at the end of the War to liberate Asian countries from Japanese occupation, it did not include Korea, which stayed under the control of Japan until 1965. Lastly, but not least important, 2005 was the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of such occupation, started in 1905. Thus, the Korea-Japan Friendship Year 2005 did not turn out to be as friendly as expected (Card, 2006, p. 1). Old issues were once again brought to the surface, making it more difficult to forgive and forget: the denying of comfort women, government officials' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and territorial disputes, all contributed to the strengthening of hateful remarks and degradation of friendly ties (Card, 2006, p. 5-6).

Specifically, such visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where Class-A war criminals are commemorated, were solely carried out by members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP was the almost only political party continuously in power since 1955, with only a few interruptions, and until this day, it rules over the country. The party was a result of the "1955 system" as proposed and established by the Americans during the occupation of Japan, which consisted of a merging of already existing conservative parties (Masumi, 1988, p. 286). In the years after the Second World War, American troops overthrew the militaristic government and set the foundation for a democratic parliamentary system to govern the nation, based on a Diet and the fall of the Emperor as a mere symbolic figure of Japan (Masumi, 1988, p. 287). Regardless of small gaps when other

parties managed to advance into power, it was in 2009 that a true opposition replaced the LDP: the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). As a more centrist and tolerant party, it was elected with Yukio Hatoyama as Prime Minister (Reuters, 2009). The LDP has been, in fact, defined as possessing a right-wing conservative ideology, that in the case of Japan is based on three main elements: traditions, the essence of being Japanese, with a strong opposition to the *other* as the foreigner, and tensions with socialism, born primarily from conflicts with Russia and China (Babb, 2013, p. 356-357).

This thesis applies a qualitative study to scrutinize the relationship between Japan and South Korea, making the focus of a single case study. This is conducted through a within-case analysis, rather than across-, and would allow for more detailed information to be evaluated, thanks to the multitude of observations (Toshkov, 2016, p. 285). To provide a rigorous investigation of the phenomenon of friendship, this paper utilizes both secondary and primary sources, ranging from academic articles and history books to also official governmental documents and papers. These include peace treaties, official statements, apologies and retributions, White Papers, and such. The studies of Holcombe (2017) and Sugimoto (2021) are only some examples of the myriad of research previously conducted on the topic of Japan and South Korea, whose history is widespread. In the matters of Japan's relations with its neighbors and the reconstruction of an East Asian sphere, Zakowski and colleagues (2017) offer a very interesting view, especially when considering the Japanese prime minister with a stronger and more meaningful relationship with the Korean president. Nevertheless, the new concept of friendship has yet to be adopted in this case study and would offer a more unique insight into the nature of their relation. By also analyzing their reconciliation process, an original approach is going to be undertaken to connect it with the current almost-friendly situation between the two Asian countries.

The relevance of this discussion is of both academic and sociological nature, given the importance of building diplomatic and peaceful relations in the international realm. The academic gap in the literature about such a topic is extensive: while Feldman (2012) only focuses on reconciliation, Van Hoef (2018), on the contrary, emphasizes friendship, and in addition, Worthington (2001) found that the former encompasses the latter. Other studies either focus on the concept of friendship in IR or on general research about the history of diplomatic relations between Japan and ROK, like Kim (2015), but not on their friendship nor reconciliation process. The emphasis on a possible type of friendship, given by years of attempted reconciliation, would offer relevant insight into the world of academia. This paper then contributes to the work of the above-mentioned authors, unfolding a combination of concepts and instances with what regards the relationship between Japan and South Korea. While considering important academic theory, however, the societal relevance is still of great importance. In a conflictual and tense environment like the one in East Asia, the



maintenance of peaceful ties and the strengthening of neighboring relations is essential. The historical experiences between the two countries had already caused violence and aggression in the past, and no state would allow for a repetition of past atrocities, especially when two democracies are involved. Understanding and ultimately solving this type of tension would be a step forward toward the harmonious growth of friendly relations in the region.

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter Two consists of a literature review that examines the conceptualizations of friendship and reconciliation, while also introducing the existing studies on the matter of Japan's relations with South Korea. Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework, and thus the operationalization of the concepts. This section explains how the analysis is conducted and what framework is going to be utilized. Chapter Four regards the methodology, while the analysis develops through Chapters Five and Six. The former focuses on the reconciliation process, based primarily on the theory by Feldman (2012), while the latter investigates their degree of friendship, on both a national and individual level. Here, by analyzing the friendship between Prime Minister Hatoyama and ROK's president Lee Myung-bak through the framework of Van Hoef (2018), a more individual approach is going to be assessed. Concluding remarks follow, providing an overall view on the analysis of the friendship between Japan and South Korea throughout the years and laying the foundations for further research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the analysis of the relationship between Japan and South Korea, friendship and reconciliation are the two main elements that are conceptualized and later operationalized in the next section. In the international realm, such concepts are difficult to define, and various studies have attempted to provide a universal understanding of their influence and role. To employ both of them in the case study of Japan and South Korea, and examine if their relationship is possible and insightful, a comprehensive literature review is going to be carried out, analyzing the strongest arguments on the conceptualization of reconciliation and friendship. Before moving on to their definition, however, it is important to remind that such concepts are not only true and fitting for individuals but are going to be used as well for diplomatic relationships between countries and their governmental institutions.

### 2.1 FRIENDSHIP

Friendship has been defined and conceptualized in many various ways by different authors, and it is difficult to decide what specific definition is going to prevail. The old idea of friendship as being private and voluntary has found strong criticism, according to which there are more instances of friendship: it can be also public, it can affect states and institutions, and it can be forced (Nordin & Smith, 2018, p. 373). Its historical and philosophical definition goes back to Aristotle, who divides such a concept into three types of friendship: of utility, of pleasure, and of excellent (Pangle, 2003, p. 39). While the first two refer to more shallow types of relationships, it is the last one that consists of the perfect form of friendship. A friendship of utility is when one needs something from the other, so in accordance with its usefulness, but it would be superfluous if already some type of friendship of pleasure was present. In fact, this second form is based on generosity and sharing, which naturally also includes sexual affiliations and physical pleasures. Finally, the perfect friendship does not pursue some higher benefits, but is defined by the character of friends: a friendship of the good still has pleasure and utility to be gained, but they are not the core of it (Pangle, 2003, p. 43).

While other philosophers like Plato, Cicero, and Seneca also offered different interpretations, when considering friendship in international relations, the double-faced definition as advanced by Nordin and Smith (2018) is perhaps the most useful. In fact, such relations between the personal and the public allowed for a broader type of friendship to be included in the matters of the state, which according to Plato includes the common search for the good. The usefulness of a friend is then in transforming oneself into something better and more virtuous, which would lead to stability and harmony in the state (Nordin & Smith, 2018, p. 375). According to the Confucian heritage as well, one should not be friend or even show benevolence, to anyone who is less virtuous. The term *ren* (仁) encompasses such type of friendship and is usually translated into “love” or “benevolence”, but more

specifically represents a mutually beneficial relationship, that includes the Self and the Other; the former is not an egotistical self but exists in relation to the Other (Nordin & Smith, 2018, p. 375).

Nonetheless, another introduction of friendship into the world of politics was brought up by Carl Schmitt (1996), who without giving a satisfying and comprehensive definition of this concept, implied a relationship between friends and enemies as a constant in politics. As soon as there is consciousness about one's own identity in the nation, a state will know who the enemies and who the friends are and act upon that. Contrary to previous definitions, there is no friendship if there is also no enmity (Schmitt, 1996, p. 109). Nordin and Smith (2018) were then able to link such contrast between friend and enemy and conceptualize the idea of friendship as not only a private feeling but also a contraposition to a certain Other, which by only relating to the Self already contributes to the creation of a sense of friendship. They used the example of China and its relations with other countries, and the Chinese relational ontologies defined how the co-constitution of a Self and an Other formed the foundation for further strong friendly ties in the international realm. Through a new perspective on diplomatic relationships, China would then not need homogeneity or integration as proposed by other IR scholars, but simply the maintenance of friendship defined as a continuous becoming with Others (Nordin & Smith, 2018, p. 391).

The theoretical framework advanced by Oelsner and Koschut (2014) offers a different insight on the matter of friendship, introducing the necessary criteria to affirm whether a certain degree of friendship is present. They adopt a list based on four conditions: symbolic interaction, affective attachment, self-disclosure, and mutual commitment (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 20-21). The way international friendship is then able to influence global affairs is not only based on alliances or partnerships but involves a deeper set of interactions that recall a friendship on the individual level (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 9). In addition, the theory by Van Hoef (2018) also contributed with some distinctions to evaluate a friendship, based on five main elements: affect, grand shared project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality ("AGAME"). Despite being utilized for specific individuals and government leaders, the author provides an interesting framework for the analysis of a friendship (Van Hoef, 2018). Chapter Six will use these criteria for the investigation of the relation between the Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama and the President of ROK, Lee Myung-bak.

Even in his later works, Van Hoef still pursued an extensive application of his AGAME elements on numerous occasions, thus providing insights on different relationships according to their presence. Introducing this theoretical framework for his Doctor of Philosophy, the author committed his theory to a bigger and more comprehensive academic research, regarding friendship in international relations. Other works of his include partnerships with Oelsner (2018) and O'Connor (2019) on the conceptualization of friendship. The latter is an example of another application of his

theory on the relationship between Obama and Erdoğan. Here it was even suggested a new framework, the Sentimental Utility Theory, precisely because none of the aforementioned criteria was present (Van Hoef & O'Connor, 2019). Interestingly enough, his most recent work also revolves around the concept of reconciliation, but mainly through an understanding of friendship as capable of leading to durable peace. He introduces the concept of political friendship, which has the potential of achieving positive peace. This operation was demonstrated through the case study of the French and German leaders throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, and offered yet another possibility for an evaluation of the AGAME criteria (Van Hoef, 2021).

## 2.2 RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a strong term used to describe international relations and is usually accompanied by a reflection on forgiveness. From a more psychological and individual perspective, reconciliation is the restoration of trust, after it was violated in a relationship, and it involves both some forgiveness and unforgiveness (Worthington, 2001, p. 176). These two terms are not opposed to each other, rather forgiveness is a juxtaposition of positive emotions replacing the negative ones of unforgiveness, contaminating the cold resentment and bitterness with empathy, compassion, or even love. Both these emotions involve feelings, but also active thoughts and associations, instincts, and the so-called “gut feelings” (Worthington, 2001, p. 175). This replacement of anger and hatred with positive feelings, hence the substitution of unforgiveness with forgiveness, leads to what Worthington (2001) defines as reconciliation, being the result of such contamination. Only through true forgiveness, can one establish a reconciliation. The method to REACH forgiveness is based precisely on this acronym: one needs to recall (R) the past hurt, emphasize (E) with the other, pursue an altruistic (A) act, and commit (C) aloud to hold (H) onto such forgiveness, if granted (Worthington, 2001, p. 182).

In the international realm, the term “reconciliation” was coined by Lily Gardner Feldman (2012), who initially used this concept to explain the establishment of peace and trust ties throughout Europe after World War II, especially from the point of view of Germany. In fact, Germany worked through plenty of reconciliation strategies, which did not necessarily portray a friendship, nor needed complete forgiveness, but they fostered trust and set the pace for a slow process of strengthening diplomatic ties (Feldman, 2012, p. 6). Reconciliation, in this case, builds upon the definition of both theological and moral reconciliation, by still promoting the healing prospect as part of it, but at the same time moving away from the essentiality of forgiveness. This process is described as a form of institution-building that is based on a variety of elements, both political and cultural, necessary for the establishment of diplomatic relations (Feldman, 2012, p. 10). The author offers a clear analysis of a case study that could be easily projected into the topic of this thesis. Instead of focusing on

Germany, here another imperialist country is investigated. Japan, in fact, could be considered the Germany of East Asia, when in World War II conquered neighboring countries and its perversion made it the enemy number one in front of the whole world. Japan also had to rebuild everything from scratch, after the war, and just like Germany, it had to pursue a process of reconciliation and peace with other East Asian countries.

In 2015, Feldman participated in a lecture for a summer school at the John Hopkins University to face the topic of reconciliation in the Balkans. Here again, she proposed the definition of reconciliation as the process of building durable peaceful relations between formal enemies, with the inclusion of bilateral institutions on both governmental and societal levels (JCRS, 2016). However, later during the lecture, she persisted on the term as having a deep meaning by involving the development of friendship, trust, and empathy. In doing so, she presented the case of the Balkans, where the process of reconciliation found its challenges because of the ever-changing reality of the region. It is precisely this downside of change that constitutes the dark side of reconciliation. In any case, the role of a third party as a mediator, that is, Europe, is introduced as the essential player for a smooth process (JCRS, 2016). On this matter, she emphasizes the idea of reconciliation as first and foremost a process, which needs time and careful attention to successfully develop reconciliation as an outcome. Reparations for past mistakes, at the same time, are essential in this slow procedure (Timsit, 2020). After participating in tours in both Japan and South Korea, Feldman strongly believes that Japan could learn from the reconciliation processes and strategies led by Germany in the reestablishment of regional cooperation (Feldman, 2017, p. 1).

On the other hand, Kim (2015) analyzes the same concept in the context of East Asia. The reparation in this region has been weak from the start, and similarly to Feldman (2012) his definition also involves the achievement of friendship as the natural result of the reconciliation process. In the case of Japan, both reconciliation and friendship have not been achieved, mainly because it is not deemed sufficient to reduce conflict and establish a tolerant relationship. Again, the two concepts are inherently linked and the former strictly includes the latter in its development (Kim, 2015, p. 1-2). With a mnemonic turn in the understanding of Japan's identity, the 1990s marked a change in perspective within the Japanese population, which moved from the status of victim to the recognition of having been a victimizer (Fukuoka, 2015, p. 63). This was also an outstanding reason why, for decades, attempts at reparations were little or nonexistent. The process of forgetting, in this case, successfully developed through the Japanese perception of history, since the 1965 Treaty was supposed to fix all the past mistakes. However, it only caused many issues to be left unresolved until the rise and democratization of ROK in the 90s, when the real reconciliation process started (Fukuoka, 2015, p. 68).

### 2.3 JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

On the matter of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, Sugimoto (2021) and Holcombe (2018) offer an initial historical perspective. It is important in a region like East Asia, marked by tensions and internal conflicts, that a lasting peace is established, but this is made drastically challenging by the shared history and diverse interpretations of the past. Scholars from all these neighboring countries have attempted to develop a common rational understanding of their history, based on dialogue and open-mindedness. In this way, the scope is to recognize different narratives and integrate them for a collaborative project of rewriting history together (Ping, 2018, p. 141-142). Between the massacres and mandatory war calls, for both men and women, territorial disputes, and promises of financial retributions that were not kept, Japan had a hard time fixing its past mistakes and its official apologies still counted for little (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 257).

The way reconciliation has been proven feasible in Japan was through its soft power, which is a cultural, psychological, and ideological rather than a coercive type of power. It allows nations, but also individuals, to co-opt with others instead of coercing them, to achieve their own goals, whether they may be political or not (Nye, 2005, p. 5). The argument that such cultural power of Japan may resemble some sort of soft power was advanced by McGray (2002), who believed in the strength of popular culture in the representation of a state, and its influence on international opinions. It would then have repercussions on the way the international community sees a nation and may lead to diplomatic advantages and a privileged position in business transactions (McGray, 2002). The fact that such soft power paved the way for reconciliation between Japan and South Korea is also visible in the popularity of Japanese style, food, and entertainment among the young generations of Koreans (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 311).

Nevertheless, with regards to the friendship between them, there is more perplexity. Relations between government officials have not been analyzed previously in the academic scenario, which would make this thesis investigation on the friendship between Prime Minister Hatoyama and ROK's president Lee Myung-bak even more interesting and unique. As explained above, the history between Japan and South Korea has been so tense, that the relationships studied were mostly conflictual ones and focused on LDP members, conventionally known to be more conservative and traditional (Masumi, 1988, p. 286). LDP governmental officials are the ones denying the issue of comfort women and paying homage to Japanese imperialist soldiers by visiting the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, causing a stir in various Asian countries that lived firsthand the Japanese colonization (Babb, 2013, p. 360-361).

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The foundation of this research is initiated through an analytical understanding of the main theories regarding the two concepts of friendship and reconciliation, which then offers a good basis for the examination of the relations between Japan and South Korea. Their affiliation is conceptualized with the use of two theories each, which although aforementioned in the literature review, are now to be investigated in depth. First, the independent variable of reconciliation is described, then friendship, which constitutes the dependent variable, and with its doubtful presence in our case study is better understood with the following theories. By advancing the literature that already introduced their definitions and problematics, a new theoretical framework results from them and thus offer a better understanding of both concepts through a new lens. At the end of this chapter, the hypotheses and relevant expectations are proposed, with the hope that the main analysis will shed light on them, either proving or disproving them.

#### **3.1 RECONCILIATION**

As the basis for the analysis of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, the definition utilized in this thesis embraces both the one advanced by Feldman (2012) and Kim (2015), as already introduced in the literature review. With the main difference in arguing about the position of forgiveness in the process of reconciliation, the two authors offer the right perspectives for this type of study. The former analyzes the same condition that Germany, like Japan, had to come to terms with after the Second World War, while the latter takes a closer look at East Asian history.

Feldman (2012), in fact, describes reconciliation as both a process and an end product of such a process, generally considering it according to a certain actor and its purpose. Because of the author's emphasis on international relations, reconciliation refers to the changing conditions between states as actors to create bilateral amity. Reconciliation is both the process of moving from enemies to friends, but also the end product of reaching such friendship. This process is then based on building long-lasting peaceful relations, moving from enmity to amity, through bilateral interactions of governments and societies (Feldman, 2012, p. 1-2). In this paper, however, it would be argued that these feelings of friendship and trusts as the final stage of reconciliation only consist in a second step to the establishment of long-lasting peaceful relations. They are not an inherent part of the concept, and as such, they are not to be considered yet. Reconciliation through the conceptualization given by Feldman would offer only the initial stage for the analysis of Japan-South Korea relationships, and only after is the matter of friendship evaluated.

This definition of reconciliation moves away from the theological one, which is based on the victim as the main actor and whose purpose is to forgive to reach peace. The main actor, however, is

not the victim, but rather the perpetrator, the one who caused harm in the first place. Since this process always involves a motif, the perpetrator usually has an idea of an outcome and would pursue the reconciliation strategies to reach its goal, may it be ethical or logical (Feldman, 2012, p. 3). In addition, the focus on forgiveness is of crucial importance in more religious and psychological studies, while in the political sphere it is not necessary. On the contrary, forgiving is bound to be combined with forgetting when it comes to political reconciliation, without any of the two being essential nor sufficient. Too much forgiving is senseless and would put much power in the victim's hands; but too much forgetting could be more harmful and allow the perpetrator to reshape history. Political reconciliation ultimately aims at reestablishing "a political community; it (re)creates the conditions of political trust" (Feldman, 2012, p. 10). Therefore, reconciliation in a political domain refers to both the process and its end product in the establishment of political trust even without forgiveness.

Figure 1 shows the specifics of reconciliation by Feldman (2012) when considering it in a more political sense. The motives of the actors can range from moral to pragmatic, thus including both reasons to advance some will to reparation. Naturally, the actors are not individuals but mainly governments and institutions, and the nature of this process is going to be long-term. The minimal absence of conflict may be enough to pursue a level of reconciliation, and its mechanisms include reparation trials and history remembrance, political culture, and restitution. Again, memory does play a significant role, and as it can be seen in the context of East Asia, history needs shared interpretations for creating a harmonious relation. However, it is not necessary, as the actors do not have to establish a political community based on trust and friendship. The examples given include post-war Germany, which would offer an interesting comparison to Japan's case (Feldman, 2012, p. 5).

DISCIPLINES	MOTIVES	ACTORS	MECHANISMS	NATURE	DEFINITION	CASES
<b>POLITICAL SCIENCE and HISTORY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moral and pragmatic with varying degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governments</li> <li>Groups</li> <li>Third parties</li> <li>Victims and perpetrators</li> <li>Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retrospective justice</li> <li>Trials, truth-seeking bodies, restitution, and reparation</li> <li>Institutions</li> <li>Political culture</li> <li>Political forgiveness sometimes necessary, but never sufficient</li> <li>Knowing remembrance and contrapuntal history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term process and terminus</li> <li>Relations different from past</li> <li>Contention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal: absence of war; peaceful coexistence; political accommodation; rapprochement</li> <li>Maximal: establishment of political community; trust and friendship; zones of stable peace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-war Germany</li> <li>Post-unification Germany</li> <li>Jews; Japanese Americans; Korean "comfort women"; Native Americans; Australian Aborigines; New Zealand Maoris; African American slaves</li> <li>Northern Ireland</li> <li>Great Britain and U.S.</li> <li>Concert of Europe</li> <li>European Community</li> <li>ASEAN</li> <li>Swiss Confederation</li> <li>Iroquois Confederation</li> <li>United Arab Emirates</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Reconciliation in Political Science and History (Feldman, 2012, p. 5).

Nonetheless, differences within reconciliation are to be expected. This definition implies all kinds of reconciliation, from internal to international, from practical to emotional. But especially, Feldman makes a distinction between their intensity and purpose. She analyzes four main stages the process of reconciliation needs to undergo to reach full completion, and these are: peaceful



coexistence, normalization of relations, rapprochement, and finally friendship (JCRS, 2016). In her focus on the Balkans region, peaceful coexistence has been reached, and even agreements on normalization have been advanced. However, their failure lies in the slow process of normalization and the incapability of implementing said agreements in real life (JCRS, 2016). Talks about the past, as in East Asia, are still very problematic and require several reforms to move from a peaceful existence to a real friendship. The four points that allow such development are: political leadership in the region, civil society dialogues, emphasis on domestic reform, and a less chaotic and fragile international system, which takes away the focus from the region (JCRS, 2016).

Kim (2015) exhibited that such reparation was initially very weak in East Asia. Despite this definition also including the final stage of friendship as a natural evolvement of reconciliation, it is sufficient to reach mutual satisfaction and diminished hostility (Kim, 2015, p. 2). Japan's identity from the war moved from the victim to the victimizer and for a long time, reconciliation gestures and apologies to neighboring countries were avoided. Only in the 90s, the Japanese government started to engage in more reparation processes, mainly because of China's rising and Korea's democratization (Fukuoka, 2015, p. 68). Patriarchy, memory politics, and nationalism are all linked in the memory of Japan, and cause its past tensions to stay unresolved, enforced by competing norms and ambiguous apologies (Kim, 2015, p. 3-4). The process of forgetting, in this case, is strongly linked to the Japanese perception of history and of its neighboring countries, which even after the War maintained the connotations of being inferior to the Japanese population. Only in the 1990s, with more non-LDP Prime Ministers, Japan had a mnemonic turn, which allowed the nation to more assertively take responsibility for its war crimes (Fukuoka, 2015, p. 70).

### 3.2 FRIENDSHIP

Because of the multitude of theories existing on the concept of friendship, both in the sociological and the political domain, it was challenging to focus on specific definitions. However, two main understandings have been proven to be more feasible in their application to a case study and overall comprehensive in the realm of international relations. These are manifested through the works of Oelsner and Kuschut (2014), and Van Hoef (2018). Both frameworks utilize a list of criteria to investigate a friendship in the political sphere, thus already moving away from the psychological and philosophical definition of the concept. They provide a closer perspective to what this paper is bound to examine, and therefore set a stepping stone in the study of friendship. Regardless of the latter framework considering it on an individual level, by focusing on international relations, the analysis would easily project onto a national one.

Oelsner and Koschut (2014) offer four essential elements to explain a type of relation between states. First, symbolic interaction emphasizes how a multitude of interactions may take place between the actors involved: it is then not only in political meetings that they relate to each other, but they actively take part in different activities to strengthen their ties. These activities include cultural exchanges, joint research, trade, and so on (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 20). In fact, increased economic friendship has been proven to increase political friendship as well (Kleinman, Liu, & Redding, 2020, p. 33). Second, affective attachment focuses on the shared history and common identity, which would make the actors involved more different from others, and thus closer to each other. Third, self-disclosure assumes that information between friends is clearly and spontaneously shared, perhaps through forms of consultations. And finally, mutual commitment involves solidarity and reciprocity, which would create the expectations that any type of conflict between them is going to be solved through dialogue and compromise (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 20-21).

On the other hand, such criteria have been rethought in the work by Van Hoef (2018), with a twist: friendship is, in this case, considered more on the individual level, and only then, when present, can be confirmed on the national. The elements are here different, both in numbers and meanings, regarding what they encompass and exhibit. They are the following: affect, grand project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality (Van Hoef, 2018). Affect is the emotional tie, which spreads quickly and is often almost immediate. The idea of a grand project reflects a common goal that the friends share and are thus willing to pursue through communal action. The altruistic reciprocity element is the natural retribution from one to the other without any expectation of a return of favors nor any calculation: one automatically altruistically acts for its friend. Moral obligations take a more active stance than reciprocity because it occurs when one asks for a favor, for help. But by doing so, one would put an obligation on the friend, creating a “with us or against us” dilemma: it has the potential of endangering the friendship, by putting it to the test. And finally, equality is a self-explaining concept that must exist in friendship, where both actors consider each other on the same level (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 60).

### 3.3 RECONCILIATION MEETS FRIENDSHIP

As demonstrated, the framework proposed by Feldman (2012) offers a very comprehensive understanding of the concept of reconciliation, which through strategies and mechanisms, ultimately is expected to lead to a friendship. With these mechanisms including reparation trials, cultural and political dialogues, remembrance, and truth-seeking bodies, an initial stage of a friendly relationship is introduced, that can and should develop into some sort of amity. Arguably, this prediction of friendship is questionable. Feldman (2012) introduces a “minimal” type of reconciliation based

exclusively on the absence of conflict and a tolerant relationship. At the same time, she involves the concept of friendship as the fourth and main stage of reconciliation, the outcome of the whole process, which is based on trust, empathy, and amity (JCRS, 2016). Nevertheless, it would be misleading to incorporate already the existence of a friendship as the only natural outcome of reconciliation. This so-called minimal reconciliation, in fact, is all it is needed for the successful establishment of reconciliation altogether. Friendship is a step forward, the next stage, which naturally would only be possible with the initial foundation of reconciliation but develops in a later phase. Reconciliation is therefore sufficient but not exclusive to the existence of a friendship, which will consequentially depend on and be influenced by it.

On the other hand, Feldman (2012) is not the only one that believes in a deeper and more meaningful outcome of reconciliation. The literature review covered another perspective on this matter, the REACH framework, offered by Worthington (2001), which assumes this concept to be based on five elements. The acrostic, in fact, stands for the recalling (R) of a past mistake, the emphasis (E) on the victim, a pursuit of an altruistic (A) act, and its commitment (C) to hold (H) onto such forgiveness (Worthington, 2001, p. 182). This theory is developed through an emphasis on forgiveness, which only with the replacement of anger and hatred with positive feelings, has the opportunity to lead to reconciliation (Worthington, 2001, p. 173). In the same way, the friendship model described by Van Hoef (2018) believes in five elements, which I would argue appear very much similar to the reconciliation definition by Worthington (2001). The altruism and commitment to forgiveness, an emphasis on the victim's perspective and the self-reflection on past mistakes are all sensitive matters that would play more of a role in a friendship situation, rather than a simple reconciliation process.

Based on the similarities between the works of Feldman (2012), Worthington (2001) and Van Hoef (2018), I introduce a new framework for the analysis of this thesis, which combines these three theories. With the reconciliation and friendship concepts meeting in the middle, the REACH method exhibits interesting insights into their relationship and their correlation. In fact, despite being based on solely reconciliation, the mentioning of essential elements like altruistic acts and empathy, which is anyway a strict characteristic of an affectionate relationship, inherently includes elements of friendship. This new theory assumes that the two, despite not being the same, can be very well linked. A friendship is therefore dependent on the level of reconciliation, but not vice versa. In this way, the arguments by Feldman (2012) and Worthington (2001) are questioned: by implying and expecting a friendship as the natural evolution of reconciliation and its predictable consequence, they stand by debatable claims. Thus, not accepting such a friendly outcome as the obvious result of reconciliation, a new theory can connect the two concepts in matters of the influence they exercise on one another.

The relationship between the reconciliation and friendship is easily explained and presented by the case study of Japan and South Korea. As shown in Figure 2, the previous theories share some similarities, with the only exception that the work by Van Hoef (2018) does not specifically refer to any type of reconciliation. The presence of said concepts is then marked by a YES, while their absence by a NO. As this research demonstrates in the analysis, despite the presence of a reconciliation process, successful reconciliation strategies and mechanisms, the relation between Japan and South Korea still misses what can be considered a friendship at an international level. In this way, it discourages the previous theories which implied an involvement of friendship in the state of reconciliation in the first place, while at the same time it offers a new understanding of their relationship and influence.

	<b>Reconciliation</b>	<b>Friendship</b>	<b>Reconciliation involving Friendship</b>
Feldman (2012)	YES	YES	YES
Worthington (2001)	YES	YES	YES
Van Hoef (2018)	NO	YES	NO
Japan – SK case study (2022)	YES	NO	NO

Figure 2: New Framework

The analysis then proceeds by applying the two existing theories on reconciliation and friendship, to evaluate their dependence and connections as demonstrated in the case study of Japan and South Korea. Taking a different direction from the original definitions of the concepts, this new theoretical framework offers a unique perspective on their relation and aims at proving its validity in a real-life scenario like the one demonstrated by the two East Asian countries. With this goal in mind, the thesis attempts at proposing three hypotheses that would assist in answering the anticipated research question. Thanks to some adjustments in the definitions of reconciliation and friendship, and a quick understanding of Japan’s position in repairing war mistakes, it is already possible to have certain expectations on the matter of its relationship with South Korea. By separating the idea of reconciliation from that of friendship, it should not be odd to assume some sort of peaceful reparation process to have occurred between the two.

Despite the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) continuously pointing out in previous years that Japan already sought reparation through treaties and grants, it was only in the 90s that the collective memory of the War reshaped Japanese identity. Therefore, not only through political agreements but also through cultural interactions, Japan was able to advance to some degree the proposed reconciliation, regardless of some issues of remembrances and conflictual interpretations of history still being problematic (Kim, 2015, p. 1). Holding on to the minimal definition of reconciliation as

peaceful coexistence and political accommodation, this paper only later analyzes the friendship concept and is expecting to find some elements present in the case, both in terms of individual and national friendship. A certain relation seems to be possible and fruitful, given the closeness of cultural similarities and the interactions between certain members of government. In fact, Japan has had its issues with LDP members being too conservative and extremist traditional, while the Prime Ministers from other parties, like the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), showed to be able to pursue long-lasting relations with Korean officials and enhance the ties between the countries. Thus, the following hypotheses are going to be advanced, which will be meticulously challenged throughout the research analysis and hopefully verified in their expectations.

**H1:** *Reconciliation between Japan and South Korea after the Second World War, though not easily, was successfully implemented and allowed for a development of stronger diplomatic ties.*

**H2:** *The reconciliation process between Japan and South Korea led to a weak stage of friendship, especially visible within non-LDP members.*

**H3:** *Despite the successful reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, this process did not lead to a friendship, and tensions are still perpetuated by members of the LDP.*

#### **4. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

Now that a comprehensive conceptualization of the two phenomena has been provided, it is time to move on to the operationalization of said concepts, to establish a research design that would make the analysis feasible and understandable. Since the theories establish a very abstract foundation for the investigation of the case study of Japan and South Korea relationships, the operationalization makes it easier to build some practical constraints to their application. By taking the criteria of both reconciliation and friendship as proposed by the literature, this thesis analyzes them in the context of the case study of Japan-South Korea relations.

The method utilized for this paper relies on a within-case analysis. The label “case study” refers to any type of research project, usually defined according to its main goal and usefulness in the research, which is primarily causal inference (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 296). In particular, the case is going to reflect the situation and causal mechanisms behind the relations between Japan and South Korea. What distinguishes a single-case design from other research is the type of evidence: it, in fact, examines multiple pieces of evidence about a single unit, instead of looking across units. Through making such detailed observations, one can explore alternative predictions and mechanisms of competing theories. It is also responsible for creating a stronger connection between the empirical cases and existing theories. This type of research is then based on the intensive study of a single case study, and on the analysis of rich data about such cases rather than on cross-case comparisons. A within-case analysis relies on causal relationships and mechanisms established for this general class of phenomena and applied to the particular case (Toshkov, 2016, p. 285).

The goal is mainly explanatory, and the within-case design would offer the most useful framework to comprehensively explain the case study of Japan-South Korea relations, in line with the theories regarding both friendship and reconciliation. Through the method of process tracing, the single case study of Japan and South Korea is going to be thoroughly analyzed. Process tracing is a mode of doing case study research, it encompasses the use of evidence from within the case to make inferences about causal explanations, that is, emphasizing causal mechanisms (Toshkov, 2016, p. 297-298). Since this thesis is implementing historical facts and events to explain the current state of affairs, such causalities are going to be the main focus of the paper. For this scope, both primary and secondary sources are going to be investigated. Most of them being already mentioned in the literature review, they provide the initial grounds for the analysis. Researching a variety of sources, from academic articles, and books, to government documents and official papers, the methodology of this paper would better be defined as the detailed research on a mix of primary and secondary sources. In addition, to analyze the individual friendship between Prime Minister Hatoyama and President Lee

Myung-bak, newspaper articles and personal statements are going to be employed to understand the extent of such friendship and what elements are present to consider it such.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, the reconciliation between the two countries is investigated: to what extent it follows Feldman's (2012) elements of political reconciliation, and what were the right steps to commence this process. Then, the thesis evaluates the degree of friendship, both on the national and the individual level, with the help of the criteria introduced by the literature. Through process tracing, the analysis pursues an investigation on the reconstruction of chronological events and their interpretations in both countries, discovering their underlying causal mechanisms. With a thorough combination of both primary and secondary sources, a detailed amount of data provides this case study with significant insights into the relation between reconciliation and friendship. At the end of each chapter, the hypotheses are verified, and the implications of the new proposed theoretical framework for the Japan-South Korea case study are evaluated, offering criticism on the already existing theories.

Nevertheless, the main limitation for a single case study research is precisely this characteristic of being *single*, which makes it problematic to generalize, therefore enjoying a low degree of external validity. External validity is defined as the generalizability of findings, whether the observations regarding particular research could be applied to bigger phenomena, may they be people, contexts, or periods (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 36). Given the specificity of Japan and South Korea's history, experiences and interactions, the results are hardly generalizable to different countries. Even other Japanese former colonies, despite sharing painful memories, are not comparable to the situation of Korea. Generalizing to different periods is also barely achievable, given the unpredictability and complexity of global affairs. Another constraint includes time: most issues handled in this paper, although criticized to this day, regard decades ago, a time from when not much instant information is available. That is why methods like interviews were discarded at the beginning. The use of newspaper articles may also be subject to critiques because the nature of such sources is doubtfully reliable. Reliability is a characteristic of a method, or a source, which renders it dependable and consistent (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 56). Newspaper articles and press releases may not fall under the category of reliable sources, because of their subjectivity and business-driven goals. However, by posing a fresh and instant view of the situation, media is a type of source through which it would be intelligible to grasp any sign of friendship.

## 5. RECONCILIATION

The process of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea has always been challenging and full of hardships, mainly because of their history and its subsequent difficulties in shaping a common understanding of past experiences. After the imperialistic enterprises of Japan, its defeat in the Second World War marked the end of colonialism, and the San Francisco Treaty stated clearly that all the former colonies were to be freed from Japanese occupation. However, Korea was not one of the signatory countries of this Treaty, and as such was not entitled to the reparations from Japan as stipulated in Article 14 (Treaty of San Francisco, 1952). While other former Japanese colonies were mentioned and received compensation, the Korean peninsula remained under the control of the Japanese until the 60s. It was finally able to pursue a self-governing body and rebuild its country with the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Japan, on its part, assumed full responsibilities and provided compensations for its war crimes. By declaring, “It is confirmed that all treaties or agreements concluded between the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Korea on or before August 22, 1910 are already null and void” (Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, 1965), the Treaty expected the colonial past and all it endured to be nullified and forgotten. Article 1 claims as follows:

The High Contracting Parties confirm that the problems concerning property, rights, and interests of the two High Contracting Parties and their peoples (including juridical persons) and the claims between the High Contracting Parties and between their peoples, including those stipulated in Article IV(a) of the Peace Treaty with Japan signed at the city of San Francisco on September 8, 1951, have been settled completely and finally (Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, 1965).

As such, the Treaty attempted to develop normal diplomatic relationships between Japan and Korea. Settling property problems and establishing economic cooperation, it marked the beginning of a partnership on multiple levels. Japan provided a reparation fee of \$800 million, as an apology and compensation for its illegal occupation. The sum was divided into \$300 million for economic aid and \$200 million for private trust, and with this, ROK renounced the claim of further retributions (Ishikida, 2005, p. 21). In doing so, the initial step for reparation and reconciliation was set, twenty years after the end of the war, but it was set. Legally, the decisions achieved with this Treaty settled problems on a government-to-government basis, and for a couple of decades, they were enough. It was the very first attempt at establishing what Feldman considers the first stage of reconciliation, thus peaceful coexistence, and even touch upon the second step of normalization of relations (JCRS, 2016).

However, a big issue in East Asia remains in the interpretations of shared history, which is hardly agreed upon by various countries. On this matter, interesting projects regarding history textbooks and museums have been undertaken by historians from all over the region, to find a



common understanding and set the foundations for a more harmonious coexistence (Ping, 2018, p. 142). Japan's relations with numerous East Asian countries have all been subject to challenges, but with South Korea, the situation is more endangered. Disagreements are very common, and the main issues that cause the reconciliation process to be extremely difficult include territorial disputes, and the problematic history of labor slaves, including comfort women (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 255). These problems regarding war memory are exacerbated by various instances of false information in Japanese textbooks. The way authorities can influence education, and consequently, civil society, indicates how such issues are so problematic, in the way history shapes the understanding of right and wrong. A big educational reform in the 80s, however, saw the reduction of such textbooks, with the initiation of a bigger effort to report the rightful history of Japan (Hirano, 2009, p. 148).

Compared to a similar imperialistic country, also defeated in the Second World War, it is interesting to see how Japan shut its eyes and remained taciturn about its war crimes until only very recently (Hirano, 2009, p. 208). In fact, the way Germany dealt with its expansionist past is of considerable difference: German civil society groups, non-governmental activists, and scholars set the stage for the reveal of major war crimes, facing head-on the atrocities perpetrated by the Third Reich (Feldman, 2012, p. 55). On the contrary, Japan has been unable to deal with its past because for a long period – and arguably even now still – there was no consensus on actual occurrences (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 257). The issue of textbooks is an example of this lack of self-reflection. In addition, there was no post-war investigation on Japan's actions and taboos during WWII, as there was in Germany. It was in the 90s and 2000s that historians started to reveal some clarity. However, regardless of these differences, it is natural that both countries have been going through a process of reparation full of obstacles and difficulties. Even Germany suffered the consequences of the identification with former persecutors. Although the generational gap may help distance oneself from the atrocities of the war, a feeling of involvement would still be present and divisions in societies may render the reconciliation even more challenging (Hirano, 2009, p. 207).

Nevertheless, these tensions are not enough to provoke any true violent act of aggression, and a minimal stage of reconciliation seems to have been fairly and successfully achieved between Japan and South Korea. The attempts of informal networks between them that include historians, journalists, academics, and teachers, are but one example of how civil society is trying to move toward more peaceful coexistence in the region. By rewriting textbooks and focusing on education, their main goal is to establish a common interpretation of history in East Asia (Ping, 2018, p. 142). Japan and South Korea's cooperation in this matter founded numerous study groups and forums. However, only in 2001, governmental action was taken to establish research committees between Japan and ROK.

Regardless of some politically sensitive issues, the attempts to develop joint research programs are a steppingstone for reconciliation (Hirano, 2009, p. 211).

All in all, the contrast with Germany is significant for the understanding of Japan's case, that despite having gone through a similar past finds it difficult to atone for it in the same direct and apologizing way. The consequences in education are of remarkable importance since by shaping the future generations, they are responsible for the perpetuating of tensions within the region. In the requirement of reaching friendship from the first three stages of reconciliation, Feldman includes the involvement of the civil society, and dialogues within non-state actors, with a special emphasis on concerns over shared memory and the possible rewriting of history (JCRS, 2016). Reconciliation between Japan and South Korea seems now to possess the right foundations for its process toward a more sustainable friendship, but some obstacles still constrain the peaceful and tolerant coexistence to blossom into anything more.

## 5.2 CHALLENGES TO RECONCILIATION

Five main challenges still provoke strong controversy in the region of East Asia, and they are: territorial disputes, the Nanjing Massacre, the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and Korean laborers, including the comfort women. For the purpose of this paper, the Nanjing Massacre would be put aside, being related to the relationship between Japan and China and moving away from the focus of South Korea. In fact, it recalls the atrocities of 1937, when the Japanese troops slaughtered 300,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians in one of the largest southern cities of China. Even for this episode, Japanese historians suggest a smaller number of victims, around 100,000, again proving the instability and contrasting views on history (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 256). For now, the focus is solely on Japan's relation with South Korea and the problems following their specific history.

First and foremost, the issue of comfort women is the center of contrasting opinions. The term "comfort women" refers to the tens or hundreds of thousands of young women from Japanese colonies, although the majority were of Korean origins, abducted and drafted for the Japanese army (Ching, 2019, p. 59). They were recruited not as soldiers, but to provide sexual services in the so-called "comfort stations" throughout the Japanese empire, from 1932 to 1945. Suffering physical and psychological violence, these women were forced to service between ten and twenty men a day, without guarantee of proper medical care nor any type of additional payment. Approximately, 70% of these women died before 1945, and many others never managed to return home. For those who did, strict Confucian values prevented them to share their experiences and were forever marked by psychological and physical signs of abuse (Ching, 2019, p. 60). The recruitment of these women against their will was directly and indirectly conducted by the Japanese military, in the establishment

and management of frontline brothels. Many Japanese still argue against the military enforcement of these women, considering the comfort stations simple brothels (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 255).

Only in 1991, survivor Kim Hak-soon publicly shared her story as a sex slave and the response of the Japanese government was a straightforward denial, before the usual justification that the 1965 Treaty already included colonial compensations and promised normal diplomatic relations (Ching, 2019, p. 59). Nevertheless, soon enough the Japanese government financed war history studies on the matter of comfort women, and official statements followed, offering “sincere apologies and remorse” to all the victims involved (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1993). In 1995, Murayama Tomiichi from the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) was elected Prime Minister, and a non-governmental fund, called the Asian Women’s Fund was initiated to provide healthcare and support to the former comfort women. The money was sent together with letters from the Prime Ministers, and since the fund continued until 2007, these included the letters of four ministers in total (Takekawa, 2015, p. 84). It was then in the 90s that Japan was able to officially apologize and assume full responsibilities, despite fifty years passed. With a sudden change in identity, Japan moved from being the victim to accepting its role as victimizer in East Asia, a shift considered unthinkable before, when the domestic post-war image was one of victims of militarism. The friction with the US in the 80s, thus distancing Japan from the West, and the rise of South Korea as a democracy and powerful economy marked the mnemonic turn within the Japanese people. New issues came to the surface, the silence of comfort women broke out, and Japan was overwhelmed with a sudden sense of regret and a new recognition of itself as the perpetrator (Fukuoka, 2015, p. 70).

The second issue regards other types of Korean laborers, which precisely like the comfort women, could be more correctly defined as slaves. During WWII, other types of workers were recruited from all Japanese colonies, once again with a vast majority being Koreans. They included soldiers, forced to join the war for the Japanese Empire, but many were called to simply work in industries. This issue regarding laborers reflects the one of the comfort women in its problematic to determine the extent to which such workers were compelled to work. Many ex-laborers filed lawsuits against seventy Japanese companies for the poor work conditions and treatments reserved for non-Japanese workers (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 256). Regarding the practical matter of South Koreans demanding more compensation, the two found some disagreements: Japan claims once again that all compensations and retributions for war mistakes were settled with the 1965 Treaty, which was supposed to resolve such financial and material disputes (Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, 1965). However, the money retributed was not truthfully spent, and there was very little clarity about what ROK had done with the \$800 million from Japan. Secret documents were unleashed in 2005 and proved that such compensations were used for rebuilding the country

after the war and boosting its economy, instead of being distributed to the individuals who suffered at the hands of the Japanese. With this sum, the government stated not to demand more, either at the individual or national level (Ching, 2019, p. 60). Many individuals were forgotten, including wounded Korean soldiers both living in South Korea and Japan, who were neglected compensations (Ishikida, 2005, p. 21). Thus, many families never received what was promised to them, and the blame shifted between the Japanese and Korean governments, the latter of which used such colonial compensation for rebuilding the country (Card, 2006, p. 2).

Thirdly, the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine have been subject to critiques from all former Japanese colonies and the controversy of such an act has caused multiple scandals over the years in the early 2000s. The Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto temple located in Tokyo, built by Emperor Meiji in 1869 to honor those who died for Japan (Yasukuni Jinja, 2022). Once symbol of patriotism and war dead, it has now adopted a darker meaning of imperialistic Japan. After the Second World War, most Japanese dead were enshrined at Yasukuni, except for war criminals as deemed so by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Between the 1950s and 1960s, however, many Class-B and Class-C criminals, those not directly involved in the preparation and conducting of the war, started to be enshrined. In 1978, the names of 14 former Class-A war criminals joined (Fukuoka, 2013, p. 29). The visits to the shrine were carried out mainly throughout the 90s and 2000s, but solely by LDP officials. These included many Prime Ministers, from Ryūtarō Hashimoto (1996-1998) to Koizumi Jun'ichirō (2001-2006) and Shinzō Abe (2006-2007; 2012-2020). Protests in South Korea and China are not rare to follow such events, in response to the controversy of these visits, which are by now symbols of right-wing extremism. Some even resulted in drastic tragedies: in 2001, for instance, after Koizumi Jun'ichirō's visit, twenty Koreans cut off their fingers, chanting "Apologize!", in an anti-Japan protest (Ching, 2019, p. 58-59).

Lastly, territorial issues are still a debated topic throughout East Asia. In particular, the Liancourt Rocks, *Takeshima* in Japanese and *Dokdo* in Korean, are a small set of uninhabited islands in the Sea of Japan, positioned right between the two countries (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 257). The sovereignty over the Liancourt Rocks is still up to debate and neither of the two is willing to give up claim over their ownership. The history of these rocks is conflictual: Japan occupied them in 1905, five years before it annexed the whole Korean peninsula and made it its formal colony. When the Treaty of San Francisco demanded the end of Japanese occupation, there was no mention of the islands. Korean claim is based on a historical trauma caused by the thirty-year colonization, while Japan's resembles an unapologetic gesture for its mistakes (Bowman, 2014, p. 440). In addition to the historical and political context, the importance of these rocks is linked to issues of resources and fishing rights. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which both countries took part

of, clearly states in Article 121(3): “Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone (EEZ) or continental shelf.” (United Nations, 1982). Here Japan and ROK find disagreements. In fact, the former believes that the Liancourt Rocks *are* islands and, as such, they involve an exclusive economic zone under UNCLOS (United Nations, 1982). The opposing view of South Korea, however, does not classify them as having an impact on an exclusive economic zone and therefore should be regarded as simple rocks (Bowman, 2014, p. 442). Similarly to the anti-Japan sentiment that drove protesting Yasukuni Shrine’s visits, many South Koreans also feel very strongly about *Dokdo* islands, and their rallies reached the same type of intensity. In 2005, an old Korean couple, Park Kyung-Ja and Cho Seung-kyu, cut off their fingers to protest Tokyo’s claims on the islands (Ching, 2019, p. 59).

Overall, what makes reconciliation a difficult process for Japan in relation to the entire region of East Asia has its roots deep in war memories and past mistakes. Between the laborers and comfort women, the whole colonial past of Japan is still a thorn in its history and can very well pose a menace to Japanese identity and reputation. Territorial disputes as well are strongly linked to history, and the incapability of agreeing on ownership, or even surrendering it, is a threat to durable relations. Peace does not only require justice, but also a bit of sacrifice, and if none of the two can give up their claims, such peace would never be reachable. Finally, the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine could be perhaps the most illogical form of challenge to reconciliation: the fact that only LDP officials are the ones visiting the shrine is already proof of how most of the government and Japanese people feel about it. Out of respect for the neighboring countries, followed by self-reflection on mistakes from the war, general opinions regarding the Yasukuni Shrine agree that it should only be a memoir of horrors and darkness.

### 5.3 MINIMAL RECONCILIATION

The reconciliation as carried out by Japan with regard to South Korea respects the definition of a minimal reconciliation. It is characterized by an absence of violent and direct conflict, clear attempts at political accommodation, mutual findings of compromise in various situations, and an overall peaceful coexistence (JCRS, 2016). Through the right mechanisms, the victim and the perpetrator involved were able to pursue a long-term type of reconciliation. Such mechanisms involve reparations trials, political culture and political forgiveness, truth-seeking bodies, remembrance, and retrospective justice. The actors’ motives range from moral to pragmatic, and perhaps it is precisely this diversity in motives that caused the reconciliation process to be characterized by sporadic conflictual situations (Feldman, 2012, p. 10).

The 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and ROK was the first attempt to build diplomatic relations, with an overall consensus on the colonial past and the rightful compensations

that followed. As explained above, however, it is debatable how rightful they were, as the South Korean government used such retributions for rebuilding the country and its economy. Nevertheless, the Treaty marked the beginning of what was supposed to be a normal diplomatic relationship. Political accommodation and peaceful coexistence were then already set after WWII, with agreements over retributions for war crimes and Japan's capability of assuming full responsibilities (Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, 1965). In addition to this, official apologies and remembrance were carried out by Japan in the 90s, after the Japanese government issued studies and research projects to reevaluate war memory (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1993). With projects such as the Asian Women Fund and other joint research programs, efforts are at least being made to heal the wounds from the past. It is not merely a lack of conflict, but an active civil society's attempt to repair past mistakes and rewrite history together for a more peaceful future.

The actors involved in a political reconciliation process are, naturally, governments, perhaps sometimes joined by third parties and civil society groups, whoever represented the victim and the perpetrator (Feldman, 2012, p. 11). In this case, however, issues on a national level between the Japanese and South Korean governments are fairly settled. Legally and politically, the two agreed back in 1965 with the Treaty on Basic Relations. Thus, political accommodation cannot be considered a failure in line with the aforementioned challenges. On the other hand, if the Japanese government is the perpetrator, the victim here is an encompassing group of South Korean individuals, not their government. These survivors and relatives of survivors are the ones that did not forget what had happened and still cannot believe justice was achieved. It was the individuals that were supposed to receive retributions from Japan, and while the former colonizer found an agreement with ROK, it did not pursue its duty in front of the public. Because the Republic of Korea officially declared to stop further demands for retributions, when it received the \$800 million from Japan, the issue refers to individuals alone, the ones who have never received the promised sums.

The motives behind the actors' actions can vary from moral to pragmatic, and it is safe to say that Japanese actions were not always morally driven. Again, a difference is visible between the LDP officials and the ones from more centrist and leftist parties of Japan. While Murayama Tomiichi from the Japan Socialist Party supported the Asian Women Fund for retributions to comfort women, despite the argument that reparations have already been offered, the response of Shinzō Abe to his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine differs in character. He declared in an official statement:

Some people criticize the visit to Yasukuni as paying homage to war criminals, but the purpose of my visit today, on the anniversary of my administration's taking office, is to report before the souls of the war dead how my administration has worked for one year and to renew the pledge that Japan must never wage a war again. It is not my intention at all to hurt the feelings of the Chinese and Korean people. It is my wish to

respect each other's character, protect freedom and democracy, and build a friendship with China and Korea with respect, as did all the previous Prime Ministers who visited Yasukuni Shrine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2013).

Here, the motive of his apology was not driven by shame, guilt, or regret, but rather by the need of maintaining a civic relation with China and South Korea, and not to destroy the international image of Japan. By trying to explain the reasoning behind such a controversial visit, he attempted to maintain a reconciling approach, while still defending his action. On the other hand, the motive of ROK when it regards the \$800 million retribution fee is also debatable. After receiving the sum and spending it on rebuilding the country, the documents that stated they renounced to demand further compensation from Japan were kept a secret for decades (Ching, 2019, p. 60). It is then arguable whether the South Korean government used such issues as a pretext to being financially aided by Japan, to grow economically. Given the fact that the sums were not fairly distributed, it would appear that their motive was inherently economic.

In addition, finding a rapprochement, which is part of the definition of minimal reconciliation, has been the center of many issues between Japan and South Korea. Through economic ties, they were able to find agreement on numerous occasions and ultimately establish a strong economic partnership (Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 91). Another example of compromise regards the Liancourt Rocks. To minimize the tensions over sovereignty, there was a successful development of fisheries agreements in 1998, that are still in place to this day (Bowman, 2014, p. 442). Even with the matter of comfort women, despite the official apologies and financial aid from the 1965 Treaty, the Asian Women Fund was established to fill the gap left open by years of silence. The difference is then vast when the LDP members are elected Prime Ministers: because of the conservative element of the party, they are the ones who obstinately claim their sovereignty over the Liancourt Rocks. Also, they are the ones under scrutiny when going to visit the Yasukuni Shrine. Whenever they are once again re-elected, waves of scandals and critiques are only to be expected from the South Korean population. The nature of this type of reconciliation is proven to have been a long-term path, and arguably it is still in the process, with various contentious occurrences on the way (Feldman, 2012, p. 10-11).

### 5.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, reconciliation was successful enough to sign formal agreements and pursue a diplomatic exchange, and resulted in a complete lack of direct violent conflict. With the main distinction between the victim not being ROK itself, but individuals of the Korean peninsula, Japan found itself playing the role of aggressor, the persecutor, who through the years following the war tragedies very simplistically established a minimal stage of reconciliation. Political accommodation and efforts for

compromise are being attempted and provided good solutions on numerous occasions. In fact, it managed to offer apologies, support projects of reparations, and donate contributions; it was held accountable for years of occupation through trials and truth-seeking bodies, while at the same time establishing some diplomatic and economic relations with the intent of being durable and beneficial. Regarding the hypothesis advanced in the theoretical framework, it is then to be clarified that some issues still constrain a total and encompassing success in reconciliation.

**H1:** *Reconciliation between Japan and South Korea after the Second World War, though not easily, was successfully implemented and allowed for a development of stronger diplomatic ties.*

Reconciliation was then achieved on a minimal stage, by not including friendship. There are no expectations of violent conflicts between the two democracies, and even such tensions are not enough to destroy the diplomacy and economic ties. The 1965 Treaty marked the beginning of a reconciliation, but it is only through the present and the educational influence on history interpretations and memories that the two populations, and their youth, can learn to build stronger and friendlier relations. Therefore, peaceful coexistence and efforts to normalization have been conducted, as was attempted rapprochement through various agreements and treaties. However, the challenges, including the contrasting views on laborers, the disputes over Liancourt Rocks, and the continuous visits to the Yasukuni Shrine from LDP members, play a key role as obstacles to a swifter and more complete reconciliation. Regardless of not challenging the political accommodation and a general sense of normalization, certain issues still determine difficulties in the process of reconciliation.

If it seems that such coexistence and tolerance persevere, they do not stick for long. War memories and historical issues can still arise and such challenges to a more mature reconciliation constrain the duration of such tolerance. As Feldman introduced, the possibility of sudden changes and the complexity of international relations makes it difficult to pursue reconciliation, if one is not careful in the process (JCRS, 2016). Precisely because this is not an easy and quick process, it would need extra care. The first issue is whether Japan and South Korea can hold onto the first three stages of reconciliation they reached already, them being: stage 1, peaceful coexistence, stage 2, normalization of relations, and 3, rapprochement. This being already proven difficult has its potential in stabilizing when certain government parties are in power. The second matter is whether they have the possibility of moving towards number 4, friendship. Regardless of not having yet reached the fourth point as described by Feldman, they have the potential to do so. By promoting civil society dialogues, the attempts of rewriting history books and various research joint programs established a solid ground for the evaluation of a possible friendship (JCRS, 2016).



## 6. FRIENDSHIP

As demonstrated in the previous chapter the reconciliation process was successfully implemented between Japan and South Korea after WWII, and despite some difficulties and continuous challenges to this day, it has reached the protentional of developing peaceful diplomatic ties. This chapter reveals whether such reconciliation helped leading to a more stable and durable friendship. The fact that the countries were able to establish a minimal stage of reconciliation through the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is remarkable but this example only revealed a difference between a positive and negative peace, where the former includes a degree of friendship and trust while the latter is a mere absence of conflict (Oelsner, 2007, p. 263-264). Moving away from Feldman's definition and the REACH framework that incorporates friendship in the reconciliation stage, its influence on the next phase, that is, friendship, is yet to be determined. Amity between two countries can be of essential importance for the development of their regional cooperation and allow for greater diplomatic ties to flourish, benefitting both parties, and the whole of East Asia as well. It is imperative for the region to establish some sort of stability, given the past discrepancies and continuous tensions that constrain further cooperation and vicinity. However, it would be misleading to assume that, after a bare reconciliation, neither of the two pursued some sort of strategy of closeness to strengthen their ties.

This, from Japan's point of view, has been attempted mostly through an impressive construction of its international and national image. After having been considered the enemy number one of the whole world, its main goal after WWII, except one of economic nature, was to improve its role in the international community. Such a goal led to a change in the image of Japan, and only recently developed what is now called Cool Japan, which introduced a new perspective of the country, based on the playful, unpredictable, fun, and cute characteristics of pop culture. These took life in manga, anime, sushi, and activities like karaoke. Cool Japan opened up the way for the country to become a soft power, and directly and indirectly influence international relations (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 305-306). Soft Power is a different form of power where the sources of such authority do not come from force or violence, but from cultural, psychological, and ideological influences. This new type of influence has been argued to have the power to allow compliance from external actors for both political and economic gains, but with the use of soft means (Nye, 2005, p. 5). Through the spread of its cultural products, Japan was successfully able to establish this type of soft power all over the world, even causing more strengthening of diplomatic ties. Its audience involves mostly young people oversea, and especially in Taiwan, South Korea, and Thailand, Japanese fashion, food, and books, including anime and manga, are very popular and appreciated (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 310-311).

It is however debatable how such appreciation affects politics (Sugimoto, 2021, p. 311). Perhaps it is specifically because of the chosen audience of Cool Japan, that is, young and non-elite,

that such representation of the nation does not seem to have extremely successful outcomes when it comes to building an international friendship. In addition, regardless of the popularity of Japanese pop culture, cuisine, and fashion, a dissociation of issues take presence that prevents a truthful influential accomplishment in more important matters like politics and international relations. Through “value compartmentalization”, any South Korean teen may be obsessed with their favorite Japanese manga, but still take part in anti-Japan protests and strongly criticize Japanese war crimes (Befu, 2003, p. 17). This clearly shows that the popularity of Japanese culture did not help solve historical rancor and, despite positioning a more vulnerable and approachable image of Japan, it would need much more work for the establishment of a stronger friendly relation with South Korea.

### 6.1 NATIONAL LEVEL

To analyze the friendship at a national level between Japan and South Korea, the framework of Oelsner and Koschut (2014) is going to be applied. Through a systematic understanding of this relationship, the governmental, cultural, and economic ties between the two are going to be emphasized. The strongest sign of a friendship is given by the cultural exchanges as explained above, that through soft power made their way into the South Korean youth and tie it with its Japanese correspondent as long related cousins. The extent to which such vicinity can be considered a strong durable friendship, however, is still unsure. The fact that there is no real affective attachment would also offer an interesting view on the matter, and self-disclosure and mutual commitment are also hardly visible in this case, given the differences already very present in their relation.

The element of affective attachment involves emotional ties given by a shared history and a common past. By attaching positive sentiments to symbols and traditions, friends are meant to establish a unique relation as characterized by trust and emotional memories (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 20-21). This aspect seems to be slightly problematic since the principal origin of such emotional ties is to be given by a common understanding of history, which clearly lacks. As expressed in the previous chapter, interpretations on history tend to be altered according to the nation, which would make it difficult to attach positive emotions to memories. It is precisely these contradictions and different interpretations of history that caused the conflictual state of East Asia in the first place, positioning memory as the central focus for possible cooperation. The issues of comfort women and colonization are only part of the war responsibility Japan is failing to admit, and its neighboring countries, including South Korea, but also China, and Taiwan, still find it difficult to forgive and forget. Despite the attempted apologies and self-reflections, Japan’s efforts in resolving historical issues have been constantly contradicted by right-wing politicians (Ping, 2018, p. 138).

If this criterion is slightly blurred in the relation between Japan and South Korea, the two elements of self-disclosure and mutual commitment are completely missing. The former refers to the openness of both in divulging information to each other, their consultation mechanisms, and tolerance over bad news (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 21). It is rare to expect the South Korean and Japanese populations to react well to the other's usual claim over the Liancourt Rocks, or even to find an agreement on historical experiences. Bad news is not met with the calmness and tolerance of old friends, rather they are taken as an excuse to divulge the repressed hatred and anti-Japanese sentiment, like in the case of finger-chopping during protests in Seoul (Ching, 2019, p. 58-59). In the same way, these demonstrations point out the lack of a mutual commitment, which implies already a high degree of friendship and previously established peaceful relations, which would give some certainties when it comes to the settlement of disputes (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 21). Some agreements were reached with the Hatoyama administration in 2009 when the DPJ rose to power and promoted an East Asian Community to strengthen regional cooperation (Zakowski, Socha, & Bochorodycz, 2017, p. 157). However, most disputes are still unsettled and controversies within the Japanese government itself still cause the gaps between the two countries to expand, rendering dialogues more difficult.

Nevertheless, the first element of a symbolic interaction seems to have been constantly present between Japan and South Korea since the 1965 Treaty. This criterion, in fact, implies more than just political meetings, including other types of interactions such as cultural exchanges and economic agreements (Oelsner & Koschut, 2014, p. 20). Trade represents perhaps the easiest interaction that does not need political connections nor implies governmental involvement. In 1965, property rights and economic cooperation were the main points of agreement (Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, 1965). Offering a new line of connection, the economic cooperation between Japan and South Korea has allowed both to prosper through the 90s and 2000s, creating an economic friendship that can easily lead to a more political one (Kleinman, Liu, & Redding, 2020, p. 35). The economic partnership has been characterized by both cooperation and competition. Right after the war, both countries suffered a period of economic downside and poverty. But already in the 60s, their recovery fruited in a partnership worth \$120 million, with the majority of Japanese goods being destined for the Korean population. With the democratization and economic boom of South Korea in the 90s, trade grew to the sum of \$49.7 billion, and soon reached \$100 billion in 2011. Now Japan represents the destination of more than 70% of South Korean exports, showing that mutual dependence is characteristic of both economies (Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 92-93).

In 2012, matters got complicated when Japan further advanced its claims over *Takeshima*, which caused a tumultuous response in South Korea. ROK Foreign Ministry stated: "The Japanese government will not be able to further develop bilateral military ties with South Korea if it doesn't

give up claims to *Dokdo*.” (Min-uck, 2013). Rather than representing a new module through which it managed to develop some relations despite bad political relations, it is precisely these hostilities that ended up obstructing further economic agreements. In fact, these tensions were the ones that stopped a possible bilateral currency swap agreement, a financial plan to restabilize East Asia which was concluded in 2005 but needed a revision in 2012. Because of the Liancourt Rocks debate, sprouting that exact year, the swap fund, instead of reaching the established \$70 billion, went back down to \$13 billion (Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 94).

Another type of interaction reflects the cultural exchanges and scholarly connections between the South Korean and Japanese civil society. Still, at a national level, this new type of cooperation witnessed a considerable expansion of contacts between academics, teachers, and students (Hirano, 2009, p. 210-211). Through the cooperation in rewriting history textbooks, China, Japan, and South Korea realized the potential in the promotion of mutual understandings within the populations and the breakdown of traditional restrictions of national narratives (Ping, 2018, p. 142). Three main projects related specifically to the Japan-South Korea cooperation, and these are: The Japan-South Korea Joint Study Group on History Textbooks, Japan Korea Joint Studies Forum, and Japan-South Korea’s Historian Conference. These programs had the main goal of approaching matters of history that are not agreed upon, and all represent attempts at nongovernmental actions deliberately seeking reparations. Issues such as imperialism, war crimes, and citizenship, brought together scholars, historians, and researchers from both Japanese and South Korean Universities. To unify universities, they promoted bilateral dialogues, most of them ending with vast publications of journals and books (Hirano, 2009, p. 211-216). The simple pursuit of exchanges between historians and scholars demonstrated the real importance of bilateral cooperation within civil society.

Cultural exchanges are another example of further interactions, dissociating them from governmental influence. These are what promote the soft power as mentioned above: the popularity of Japanese pop culture and cultural products has been known by the whole globe, and still plays a key role in the image of the nation (McGray, 2002). It does not only refer to Japan, however, but it also had its success the other way around. In fact, the favorite genre of music by the majority of Japanese teenagers is K-pop, and the most watched shows within the Japanese population are undoubtedly K-dramas (Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 88). The cultural ties between such close neighbors are not to be underestimated and hopefully will influence a youth more capable of forgiveness and forgetting. It was at the end of the 90s that the two were able to gradually establish a close cultural relationship: with President Kim Dae-jung, South Korea was able to cooperate with Japan in the promotion of programs and institutions to facilitate such cultural exchanges. In 1998, when the President traveled to Tokyo and met Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, they together declared a “Joint

Declaration of Partnership toward the Twenty-First Century.” The Japanese government explicitly apologized for the colonial occupation of the peninsula and, in this way, set the stage for a multidimensional attempt at friendship (Park, 2019, p. 38).

Nevertheless, with three of the criteria missing, the relationship between South Korea and Japan can hardly be considered a friendship. In a 2013 survey, 73% of South Koreans and 71% of the Japanese population described the relations with each other as “bad” (Heo & Roehrig, 2014, p. 88). If the issues described in the previous chapter were challenges to reconciliation, they definitely manifested themselves to be even more challenging to friendship, despite a self-reinforcing correlation between an economic and a political friendship (Kleinman, Liu, & Redding, 2020, p. 35). In addition, considering the symbolic interactions given by cultural products and exchanges, it would be misleading to affirm that their influence was always positive. Early in 2014, the Angoulême Comics Festival in France hosted a theme on war memory and gendered violence, in commemoration of the beginning of the First World War, and the Korean *manhwa* on comfort women attracted strong criticism from Japan. After selecting memories and collective amnesia about certain issues, both governments’ involvements in the framing of cultural products that touch upon these historical issues have caused an unnecessary politicization of pop culture. Soft power, in this case, did not foster dialogues nor brought diverse opinions closer: it only managed to engage citizens in officialized stories, avoiding different influences. Both *manhwa* and *manga* artists are then stripped of the responsibility of portraying these stories with bigger intents for reconciliation (Park, 2019, p. 56-57).

#### 6.4 INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The final section of this chapter focuses on the friendship between Japan and South Korea from the individual level of their respective heads of government, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and President Lee Myung-bak. In 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won the elections against the LDP with Hatoyama as Prime Minister, which marked an unusual break from the continuous LDP rule. The main reason for the DPJ’s success was the announcement of the ending of Japan’s dependence on the United States, and a more Asian-focused foreign policy promotion. The opposition argued the difficulty in establishing strong cooperation with China and the whole region, divided by deep historical wounds and territorial disputes, but nevertheless, the East Asian Community was announced in 2009 as the main foreign policy project (Zakowski, Socha, & Bochorodycz, 2017, p. 157). In 2008, the Republic of Korea also held its elections and Lee Myung-bak from the Grand National Party was elected President of ROK, promising a South Korea open to cooperative exchanges both in the region of East Asia and with the United States (BCC, 2007). In order to reflect on the extent of this friendship and its result, the framework of Van Hoef (2018) is going to be applied

on their interactions, with the analysis of the five criteria of affect, grand shared project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality (Van Hoef, 2018).

As demonstrated in the affective attachment explained in the previous subchapter on a national level, also the affect as introduced by Van Hoef (2018) on the individual level had a positive outcome. The affective bond includes emotions, but also inward reflections and outward demonstrations of fondness (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 62-63). At the press conference in 2009, when Hatoyama visited South Korea, words like “trust”, “warmly welcome”, and “sincere thanks” are constantly repeated. The kindness shown by both parties is manifest enough of a high degree of affection, proven again by the continuous agreements on various issues faced during the conference. When Hatoyama expressed his profound desire to fix relationships through cultural exchanges, he was positively surprised with the President complimenting his wife on her knowledge of Korean stars, precisely because of the Korean boom in Japan (Hatoyama & Myung-bak, 2009). This was another subtle hint that the relationship is close enough to involve the spouses as well, and advance compliments and remarks with the sincerity and affability of a friend. In fact, affect is not only measured through a personal bond but also through its dissemination to the families of the actors (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 124).

In addition, when the South Korean navy vessel sank in 2010, Hatoyama promptly called Myung-bak to offer his respect and condolences for the tragic accident. At the same time, the two reaffirmed their intentions of continuing their bilateral support (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2010). The level of affect is therefore substantiated by such episodes, where interactions do not only involve political matters but also sentimental references. Their mutual understanding is also proof of their equal status as government leaders, but also as individuals. As mentioned above, by congratulating on the knowledge of Korean pop culture, the President addressed a common interest that makes them more equal humans, moving away from being just the heads of government and considering their individual hobbies as well. Also, the two had met even before Hatoyama was elected Prime Minister and established a friendly relation that grew in the months afterward and developed into what was described by Myung-bak as a “relationship of trust” (Hatoyama & Myung-bak, 2009).

Perhaps the most visible element of all the five is the grand project, which implies a common aim that brought the two to work together and allowed them to move in the same direction to reach said goal. This is the criterion that makes a political friendship different from a normal friendship: they are tied by a common cause. Their actions are then dictated by a shared project, which is inherently connected to the actors’ values and ideologies (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 66). This can be easily demonstrated by the variety of agreements and regional projects the partnership set itself to achieve, of both political and economic nature. Two issues formed the grand project between the administrations of Myung-bak and Hatoyama: the East Asian Community (EAC) and the nuclear

issue with North Korea. The two leaders, in fact, promised to continue diplomatic meetings to pursue their goal of bringing back North Korea to the Six-Party-Talk. In addition, they pledged to host and contribute to the summits of the Group of Twenty (G20) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). This being part of their economic project, they believed it would be successful in developing East Asia and enhancing regional collaboration, also expanding cooperation on the matter of climate change. In doing so, the President clearly stated that the personal and individual trust between him and his colleague Hatoyama needs to be reflected on the national level, strengthening consequently the bilateral relations between the countries. There were also agreements on the development of cultural exchanges, to which the Prime Minister added: “The President and I share the belief that outstanding issues between our countries can be overcome as the younger generations build experiences of heart-warming exchanges.” (Hatoyama & Myung-bak, 2009).

Once again, however, some elements are missing, which are, altruistic reciprocity and moral obligations. The former is what renders any type of political relations a fuller friendship because it implies gestures that are done out of complete altruism and without expecting anything in return, thus differing from a *quid pro quo* partnership (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 67). In contrast to altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations is a more active demand for help, where friends put to the test their relation to evaluate how willing the other is in pursuing the same stance. This final element represents the dark side of altruistic reciprocity, that is, the active appeal to reciprocate friendly actions (Van Hoef, 2018, p. 70). However, during the year Hatoyama was in office, he did not have the opportunity to pursue such actions, either passively or actively, toward President Lee Myung-bak. The East Asian Community was from the beginning an ambitious project, and with the prompt resignation of Hatoyama in June 2010, the friendship was over as quickly as it started. His failure was mostly given by the mismanagement of the American troops in Okinawa, which marked the end of his career as Prime Minister (Zakowski, Socha, & Bochorodycz, 2017, p. 174). Therefore, despite strong agreements and affective interactions, the two did not enjoy a durable friendship and did not have the opportunity to evaluate such elements as altruistic reciprocity and moral obligations.

Overall, the presence of a majority of criteria as discussed by the framework of Van Hoef (2018) offers an interesting insight into the individual friendship between the two leaders. Regardless of some aspects of the theoretical framework missing in this specific situation between President Myung-bak and Prime Minister Hatoyama, it is undoubtedly clear that a certain level of affection and sense of equality was established between the two. In fact, coming from a more tolerant party, Hatoyama continuously proved to be willing to reflect on Japanese history and multiple times stated his position in dealing with delicate issues (Hatoyama & Myung-bak, 2009). In his pursuit of an East Asian Community as his grand project, he strongly involved President Myung-bak in its achievement

and put a lot of trust in their bilateral agreements. The close relationship started as a partnership, given precisely by this project and the threat of North Korean nuclear power. But it slowly evolved into a friendly acquaintance marked by strong arrangements and common understanding. The ability of Hatoyama, but of the DPJ in general, to reflect on wartimes and officially apologize for past mistakes is a point in favor for ROK and marks a distinction from their counterparts in the LDP.

### 6.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, a variety of attempts in establishing a friendship have been carried out both at a national and an individual level, throughout the years and with a special focus on the 2000s. Of the elements expected by Feldman in order to reach the final stage of friendship, only one was visible, and that is the focus on the region (JCRS, 2016). By proposing the EAC, the Hatoyama administration attempted something that was never thought of before, which was a distancing from the US and the Western sphere for a more Asian-focused foreign policy. His efforts in establishing stronger relationships with China and South Korea were meant to strengthen the region, re-establish a connection in East Asia, and move away from the chaotic international community (Zakowski, Socha, & Bochorodycz, 2017, p. 157). Nevertheless, the EAC failed, thus obliterating even this fading attempt at friendship as a natural outcome of reconciliation.

Nationally speaking, the two countries seem to have a good foundation to build some sort of amity, through different types of interactions and a common cultural background. Regardless of some unresolved issues, mainly linked to history and war memories, members of non-LDP parties demonstrated time and again their eagerness and commitment to work towards their solutions. The difference here between the LDP and DPJ members have been significantly substantiated throughout the analysis. The former being the conservative party from which Prime Ministers denying issues of comfort women and still visiting the Yasukuni Shrine come from, makes it harder to continue the strategic friendly ties with ROK as pursued by their DPJ counterparts. They have, in fact, demonstrated multiple times to put more emphasis and attention on history, and were able to establish stronger diplomatic relations with South Korea. As manifested by the individual relationship between President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Hatoyama, the ideological similarity played a key role in the relationship and can allow for deeper friendship, if given the chance. A chance LDP members seem not to consider enough. In relation to the hypothesis, it would be correct to state that they advanced the right expectations. They made a clear distinction between LDP and non-LDP members, with such distinction being what ultimately determined the degree of friendship between the countries. However, both hypotheses definitely assumed a stable level of reconciliation as the foundation for a possible friendship, them being:



**H2:** *The reconciliation process between Japan and South Korea led to a weak stage of friendship, especially visible within non-LDP members.*

**H3:** *Despite the successful reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, this process did not lead to a friendship, and tensions are still perpetuated by members of the LDP.*

Hypothesis number two initially advanced a stage of friendship that could be achieved through the already possible reconciliation process, but especially by non-LDP members. The close relationship between President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Hatoyama was a clear example of the vicinity these actors can achieve when they found common goals and share their ideologies. Such amity is a recurrence among non-LDP Prime Ministers, who happen to find a lot of agreements with South Korean Presidents and advance more Asian-focused policies. In the same way, it was Murayama Tomiichi, a member of the Japan Socialist Party, that supported the Asian Women Fund in 1995. Despite not coming from the same party, the ideological differences are minimal, and still like the DPJ positioned itself in a more center-left role in the political spectrum. As the definition of a grand project implies, such a project will only find means of development if the actors possess the same beliefs (Van Hoef & Oelsner, 2018, p. 66).

On the other hand, hypothesis number three stated that, regardless of accepting the role of a significant reconciliation, a friendship is then challenged by LDP members, of a more right-wing ideology. It is then more difficult, or even impossible, to establish a durable friendship within South Korea when Prime Ministers from this party are elected. Precisely when members of the LDP come to power, controversial scandals usually follow and interactions degrade within the region, especially between Japan and ROK. If some reforms are advanced by DPJ or other non-LDP Ministers, they are then nullified years later when they are again replaced by LDP officials; if one step is taken towards the development of friendlier relations, it takes ten steps back with the predictable visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by a rightwing parliamentarian. This analysis has then provided a suitable demonstration of both the hypotheses, thus claiming that amity between Japan and South Korea has still a long way to go and would need much more than a minimal reconciliation strategy to occur.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This thesis presented the case study of Japan and South Korea to test existing theories on reconciliation and friendship and prove them inapplicable in such a situation. Because of this, a new framework has the possibility of arising from this research, by offering a more comprehensive understanding of both concepts. Throughout a conflictual history of wars and colonization, the two Asian Tigers are now at the center of East Asia's future for cooperation. Their diplomatic and economic relations are of essential importance for both parties and the region itself, which will overall thrive if Japan's mistakes of the past are correctly atoned for. After the Second World War, continuous attempts of reconciliation made it possible to reach some level of peaceful coexistence and a normalization of relations. Through treaties, economic agreements, and cultural exchanges, Japan and South Korea had the opportunity to explore their relationship on multiple levels. By checking various boxes for both reconciliation and friendship, this case study positioned itself on a different layer compared to what has been proposed by existing theories. However, to answer the research question: the extent to which such reconciliation led to a more sustainable and durable friendship is still very little and abounds to a simple lack of conflict and tolerant attitudes.

In conclusion, it is not black or white. This research contributed to the broader application of the theories by Feldman (2012), Worthington (2001), Van Hoef (2018), and Oelsner and Koschut (2014), by creating a new framework to analyze both friendship and reconciliation, with a clear example as given by the case study of Japan and South Korea. The definitions of both terms as advanced in Chapter Three are, in fact, too strict and could not easily be appropriated by the sample presented. That is why the new proposed theoretical framework of an increasing influence of reconciliation on the stage of friendship, found its evidence in this analysis. Reconciliation and friendship are two very distinct concepts that should not be taken as interchangeable, but rather as having a dependent relation always unpredictable, by the two consisting of very different characteristics. The research on Japan and South Korea demonstrated that reconciliation does not always end in the stage of friendship as expected by Feldman (2012) and does not always include the clear structural method of Worthington (2001), based on REACH, to be successful. By implying a more separate definition, it is safe to claim that reconciliation has been reached, but in the sense of real reconciliation, that is, incorporating a lack of conflict and the establishment of simple tolerance.

With the qualitative approach to the case study of Japan and South Korea, the analysis proved that such a relationship did reach reconciliation on a very low degree, and friendship on an even lower. If reconciliation has been overall accepted, and conflict being the last resort for any peaceful and democratic country, friendship is still in the process of revealing itself. In fact, it is not enough for reconciliation to lead to friendship. Many different aspects need to be present as well, and these

include the symbolic interactions element as presented by Oelsner and Koschut (2014) and the affective bond as explained by Van Hoef (2018). In addition, this thesis proved that reconciliation by itself is not necessarily based on forgiveness, as Worthington (2001) expected, nor does it need altruistic acts to develop. These elements constitute more of an amity relation, which is clearly lacking in the case of Japan and South Korea. Nevertheless, the absence of conflict and tolerant rapports exist between the two, thus providing the only type of reconciliation needed. Regardless of Feldman (2012) introducing the concept of minimal reconciliation, her theory still presents friendship as the final and natural outcome of reconciliation, a notion that has been disproved by this analysis on Japan and South Korea. Future research could further develop the concept of reconciliation as proposed by this paper, regarding its influence on amity relations and consequences for the international community.

In addition, this study has demonstrated that the level of friendship between Japan and South Korea is still very low, on a both national and individual level, and it would need a more stable process of cooperation in order to reach some degree of friendship. The framework of Van Hoef (2018) and Oelsner and Koschut (2014) were then able to operationalize the extent to which such friendship is present, but as the hypotheses already suggests, it can go two very distinct way. In fact, they provided the ground for an interesting separation of the two main political parties of Japan, by explaining how friendship can very well vary because of differences mainly residing in their ideologies. While friendship was achievable with DPJ, it took a sudden reverse with LDP members as Prime Ministers. It is not enough to have some ambitions to establish and protect a bilateral friendship when progress is ignored by the opposition party and the attempted projects for closeness are either canceled or disturbed. Friendship is therefore not something that can simply be reached and thus accepted, it is not natural for a friendship to exist under any circumstance. It is a process that needs to be cultivated and persevered, it requires constant attention and care, with the actors expected to put efforts into its development, if their goal is to truly remain friends. However, further research would be needed to investigate the ideologies of both Japanese parties regarding their influence in international relations, especially when considering regional projects and bilateral agreements with South Korea. Hopefully, in a not-so-far-away future, these attempts to friendship will successfully thrive and thus guarantee a brighter opportunity for cooperation within the region.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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