The Eternal Victim: Victimization as Myth in the South Korea-Japan Trade Dispute

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INTRODUCTION

"I think this is our chance to be united as a nation," uttered Lee Min-Youn, a 22-year-old college student, when asked about the nation-wide anti-Japan protests in July of 2019. "Some people say," she continued, "that the [Japanese] government and people should be seen separately. However, since anti-Korean protests are already widespread in the country, it's not easy to separate the people from the government" (Choi 2019). It is exactly this attitude, as articulated by Ms. Lee, that was encapsulated in the widespread surge of anti-Japanese sentiments that swept over large parts of South Korean society in mid-2019. United under a common banner of nationalism and a mission to protect the nation, this surge saw nearly all sectors of society participate in the public condemnation of the Japanese government (Kim 2019; Seo 2021, 4; Xu 2019).

These strong, collective outcries came as a result of the South Korea-Japan trade dispute (henceforth referred to as ROK-Japan trade dispute), which followed from the Japanese government announcing export restrictions against South Korean companies on July 1 of the same year. This dispute escalated further in the following month, which saw the complete removal of South Korea from its 'whitelist' of trusted trading partners. Claimed by the Japanese government to be caused by South Korea's non-compliance with export controls on certain sensitive materials – for which no evidence was ever provided – this removal specifically targeted the domestic semiconductor industry, and thus hit South Korea in the heart of its economy (Deacon 2022, 794; Seo 2021, 4). The ROK-Japan trade dispute, however, furthermore touched upon a highly sensitive issue between the two nations, namely their shared colonial past. This is the case, since the trade dispute appeared in a context that was heavily marked by conflicting memories on the Japanese colonial occupation of South Korea from 1910 to 1945.

When seen through this wider context, the 2019 trade dispute finds its origin in a set of monumental Supreme Court rulings on the compensation of forced labour victims as utilized by numerous Japanese enterprises. These forced labourers were predominantly used in the colonial era, where large numbers of ethnic Koreans were forcedly brought to Japan in order to work in mines and other heavy industries that helped to sustain the Japanese Imperial conquest and World War II efforts. While employed, Korean labourers were exposed to extremely harsh

working conditions, as well as substantial racial violence through frequent lynchings performed by Japanese supervisors (Hisako 2015, 91; Seokwoo Lee & Seryon Lee 2019, 597). As a result, in January of 2019, the South Korean Supreme Court concluded that the victims of such forced labour practices were irrevocably entitled to monetary compensation for the hardships they endured under Japanese employment (Deacon 2022, 794).

Since the end of the imperial era in 1945, however, the atrocities suffered by ethnic Koreans during such forced labour practices have been severely suppressed in Japanese history and society. Mentions to forced labour were largely left out of Japanese history textbooks, and South Koreans workers talking about the pain and suffering that they endured are often made out as liars and are heavily condemned (Hisako 2015, 90; Johnsen 2022). On these grounds, the Supreme Court ruling was seen as a decisive victory: not only did it end a twenty yearlong battle for compensation, it also forced the Japanese enterprises and government to come to terms with the atrocities of their imperial past. This, however, would not be the case, as the concerning Japanese enterprises – namely Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries – heavily protested the decision, along with the Japanese government (Seo 2021, 2). Consequently, the South Korean courts announced the liquidation of all South Korean assets held by these companies in June 2019, which generated increasing Japanese governmental condemnation. These condemnations peaked with a warning for retaliation, which was closely and abruptly followed by the (ungrounded) trade restrictions (Ibid.). In spite of the Japanese government's denials of these restrictions as being motivated by the Supreme Court ruling, the 2019 trade dispute is thus considered to be a clear act of Japanese retaliation against the push for colonial compensation.

Conflict surrounding the colonial past as found in the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute is anything but a unique occurrence between the two nations, as the dynamic as described above has become almost characteristic for the ROK-Japan bilateral relations. This dynamic has been encapsulated in what scholars have come to call the 'history problem' (Korean: *yoksa munjae*, Japanese: *rekishi mondai*). In general, the 'history problem' can be defined as the overarching term for the numerous interrelated contemporary disputes between the two countries, underpinned by the memory of Japan's colonial rule over Korea during the early 20th Century. More specifically, each dispute framed under the 'history problem' umbrella is generated by a conflicting perception of this colonial past, and is accredited to the frequent whitewashing of the colonial history by successive Japanese right-wing government (Deacon 2022, 791). As

such, contemporary issues such as the revision of Japanese history textbooks, territorial disputes over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands, and the ongoing visits of Japanese Prime Ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine are all thoroughly ingrained into the 'history problem' dynamic (e.g. Korostelina & Uesugi 2021, 188; Ku 2016, 78; Deacon 2022, 791).

In spite of its central position in the ROK-Japan relations, however, the 'history problem' has presented itself as a paradox to International Relations (IR) scholars. This is the case since, according to the mainstream IR theories of realism and liberalism, two countries that share a common threat (North Korea and China), a common ally (the United States), and close economic ties should not see such a high degree of tensions. As such, the existence of the 'history problem' is regarded as 'irrational' state behaviour (Deacon 2022, 790; Seo 2021, 1). For instance, through the security-centred lens of realism, two countries sharing vital security concerns should not be entangled in conflicts on a distant past, as safeguarding the immediate survival of the state should be regarded as the main priority (Cha 1999). On the other hand, liberalists have pointed predominantly at the economic aspect of the ROK-Japan bilateral relationship, and claim that with such close economic cooperation, the degree of tensions as witnessed in the 'history problem' are highly unimaginable (Deacon 2022, 790; Jackson 2018, 129). As a result of the insufficiencies of the traditional schools of thought in explaining the 'history problem,' scholarship has predominantly turned to the identity-based perspective of constructivism. Yet, even this perspective is often noted to fail at encapsulating the intricate dynamics of the 'history problem' (Deacon 2022, 796; Kim 2015, 483). As such, scholars have begun to consolidate the shortcomings of constructivist theory with theories and methodologies originating outside the discipline of IR (e.g. Ji Young Kim 2014; Minseon Ku 2016; Jungmin Seo 2021). While the constructivist literature thus encapsulates a plethora of different perspectives, conclusions, and hypotheses, it nonetheless seems to collectively emphasize a certain dominant theme throughout the converging explanations, namely the recurring trope of the historical victimization of the Korean nation. However, despite this centrality, this victimization has yet to attract substantial academic interest from IR scholars. On this basis, this thesis zooms in on this South Korean victimization syndrome and seeks to understand its operation. In particular, this study will do so through the theoretical lens of national myth, which – through its emphasis on narrative creation on the basis of national memories – could provide a functional understanding on the role of South Korean victimhood in the contemporary 'history problem'. As such, an analysis on the 'history problem' through the lens of myth aids the current academic discussion through the potential provision of a new framework on the way national

memories permeate the ROK-Japan relations – in spite of their shared national interests. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the usefulness of this concept in explaining the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute, and, by extension, the 'history problem' as a whole. This will be done through the following research question:

Can the trope of 'Korean victimization' be theorized through a concept of national myth? And, if so, how is this myth reflected in the South Korean responses to the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute?

Following this introduction, the remainder of this paper is structured in two main chapters. In the first chapter, this paper builds and presents a theoretical framework on the functioning and structuring of national myths, which is subsequently applied to the larger dynamics of the 'history problem.' In the second chapter, which represents the empirical chapter of this study, this theoretical framework will be tested through a discourse analysis on South Korean presidential speeches and news media articles on the dispute. Through the results of both the literature research and empirical analysis, this study will then conclude whether the trope of Korean victimization indeed rather refers to a victimization myth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I. THE HISTORY PROBLEM, MEMORY, AND MYTH

As stated in the introductory section of this study, the 'history problem' between South Korea and Japan is characterized by a conflicting memory on their shared (colonial) past, and can thus more effectively be defined as a history-based 'memory problem.' Within this schema, these memories are regarded to enjoy such widespread dominance in their respective societies that they are able to generate hostilities when faced with 'alternative' narratives on the shared past. This primacy of memory is perhaps most effectively illustrated by the periodic history textbook disputes, which are frequently triggered by Japanese governmental revisions on textbook contents that cover the colonial period and the treatment of ethnic Koreans. These disputes comprise of a direct confrontation between conflicting interpretations on the 'reality' of the colonial period, and on what can be regarded as the 'true' history between the two nations. Most commonly, these confrontations position a largely whitewashed Japanese Imperial administration against widespread Korean suffering and persecution – which cannot be reconciled and consequently generate conflict (Kimura 2019, 49-50; Ku 2016, 87). However,

in all of the disputes that fall under the 'history problem' umbrella, including the ROK-Japan trade dispute, memory holds a central position.

Due to this importance, the role of memory and remembrance in the perpetuation of the 'history problem' is often highlighted in the academic literature – especially within the constructivist strand. Scholars such as Minseon Ku (2016), Eun A Jo (2022), and Mikyeong Kim (2014), for instance, have all emphasized the substantial depth with which the memories of the colonial past have been ingrained in the South Korean national consciousness, which continues to guide the ROK-Japan relations of today. These colonial memories consist mainly of victimhood and humiliation, and are nationalized in such a way that they have come to structure how the colonial period is remembered (Seo 2008, 374; Lim 2010, 1-2; Kim 2014, 86). These memories conflict with the Japanese mnemonic tradition of "impenitence," as defined by Jo, and thus make way for conflicts on the right way to remember the past and interpret the present to arise (Jo 2022, 4). Due to these dynamics, Mikyeong Kim has even referred to the events of the 'history problem' as a "bilateral memory war" (Kim 2014, 92).

Within the contemporary trade dispute, these dynamics are prominently present. This is the case, since the previously mentioned absence of forced labour from the Japanese national memory facilitates a dispute on the legitimacy and validity of the compensation of forced labour victims to arise. This pivotal role of a nationalized memory within the ROK-Japan trade dispute and 'history problem' as a whole essentially enables it to be studied through the lens of myth, as its theoretical foundation similarly relies on the primacy of shared memories. As will be analysed in this chapter, this is the case, since national myths operate through a nation's collective memory – which is generally regarded as memories that are broadly shared between members of any given community (e.g. Bell 2003, 69; Zerubavel 2003, 2-3). These memory-based myths, similar to the aforementioned dynamic of the 'history problem', come to be included in the national consciousness, and subsequently guide how contemporary issues are perceived. Yet, in order to sufficiently study the 'history problem' through this lens, the conventional understanding of myth needs to be somewhat qualified and supplemented. Therefore, this chapter will formulate a clear theoretical framework for the functioning of national myths, which can subsequently be applied to the notion of Korean victimization within the events of the 'history problem.'

II. DEFINING MYTH

At the turn of the 21st Century, the field of International Relations witnessed a "cultural turn" within the discipline. Whereas the previous century was led by the principles of post-enlightenment 'rationality' – embodied by the traditional schools of realism and liberalism – this new strand of scholarship successfully awakened the discipline to the importance of culture in state relations. As such, led by prominent scholars such as Peter J. Katzenstein and Ted Hopf, concepts such as identity, norms, and myth have been effectively brought into the academic sphere to revisit the questions and problems of IR (Subotic 2013, 307). Since the initial emergence of the cultural turn, myth has come to be a frequently invoked term and often fundamental aspect in studies on nationalism, national identity, and collective memory (e.g. Blackburn 2018; González 2019; He 2007; Tyrell 2013). More critically, this fundamental position has caused it to be regarded by some as "no less important to constructing the nation state than internationally recognized borders" (Vlastos 2013, 244). Yet, despite these claims of significance, the concept of myth is often invoked superficially, as scholars frequently fail to provide a sufficient theoretical and definitional basis for the usage of the term. This subsequently leaves myth with a substantially weak conceptual basis, and therefore creates the necessity to provide a clear and coherent framework for its functioning in the continuous process of nation-building.

However, while thus not commonly employed, a framework on the functioning of myth within IR is far from absent. Most notably, such frameworks have been provided by scholars such as Anthony D. Smith and Duncan Bell, who have pioneered the study of myth within the discipline. Smith (1999) for instance, utilizes a framework of myth in order to explain the construction of what he calls an *ethnie*, or an ethnic group as a community. Here, the author distinguishes between 'myths of origins and descent' and 'myths of ethnic election,' both of which refer to grand stories about an ethnie's past which frequently include mythical stories on holy missions, founding heroes, and epic journeys. As such, Smith defines myth as bringing together elements of historical fact and legendary elaboration in one robust vision to create a sense of commitment and bond between members of a distinct community (Smith 1999, 57). According to Bell, however, this conceptualization fails to provide a sufficient distinction between memory and myth, which are often used interchangeably by Smith (Bell 2003, 70). Instead, Bell proposes a radically different approach on national myth through the introduction of "mythscapes." This concept refers to the discursive realm in which national myths are forged, transmitted, and renegotiated (Ibid., 75). Overall, Bell provides a much broader

conceptualization of myth compared to Smith, as he argues that myths are able to subsume all events, personalities, traditions, artifacts and social practices that foster a connection with a community's past and identity. Accordingly, Bell defines national myths as "a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation's past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology: a story that elucidates its contemporary meaning through (re)constructing its past" (Ibid., 75). Yet, similar to Smith, Bell too limits his understanding of myth to separate, ancient stories, for instance on the origins of the nation and heroic figures (Ibid., 75-6). While this study mostly loans from these conceptualizations, such definitions of national myth will have to be somewhat adjusted in order to be applicable to the notion of Korean victimization. This is the case, since the notion of victimization rather refers to a system of meaning-making that utilizes numerous collective memories from both historical and contemporary events. As such, this study will further loan from Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957).

As a semiologist, Barthes approached the concept of myth as a predominantly linguistic phenomenon. Through this lens, he characterized myth as a "form of speech" that is imbedded in a system of communication through which it gains its meaning (Boer 2011, 215). Rather than limiting himself to stories, Barthes argues that myth can be contained in a plethora of concepts, such as human behaviour, objects, or sound. These concepts can become mythical once they come to convey a meaning that is different from their literal form. He illustrates this, for instance, through an analysis on roses, which he says becomes mythical once they come to symbolize passion rather than the actual flower (Barthes 1957, 111). For these second meanings to make sense, however, they have to be culturally accepted. This is done through a process of 'cultural transmission' where these meanings are naturalized through society-wide repetition and conditioning (Barthes 1957, 137-141). Through this conditioning, myths attain a certain 'naturalness' about them as they become seen as unquestioned realities (Boer 2011, 221). In this study's definitional framework, this notion of an unquestioned nature as well as the broad conceptual basis of myth are utilized alongside the previously specified conceptualization as proposed by Smith and Bell. As such, myth is defined in this study as a certain (re)construction of a nation's collective memory that formulates a simplified, selective, and unquestioned narrative about a nation's past, present, and future. It should additionally be emphasized that this study understands myths as not inherently separated from fact, as national myths can indeed – and oftentimes do – arise from factual history. Nonetheless, they are regarded to frequently

involve at least some degree of embellishment, and come to function as a 'template' through which the nation, the world, and current events can be understood.

III. National Myths in National Communities

As argued by Gérard Bouchard, myths do not function as separate, independent phenomena in world politics, but are intrinsically connected to a myriad of wide-ranging mechanisms that underpin the very foundations of nationhood (Bouchard 2013, 7). The provided working-definition of national myth should thus not be regarded to function in a vacuum. Instead, these intricate connections have to be contextualized within the broader dynamics of nation-building in order to generate a complete understanding of the functioning of myths within national communities.

Out of these mechanisms, the most prominent is perhaps the connection between national myths and national identity. Namely, as first argued by Smith – but broadly accepted by scholars such as Minseon Ku (2016, 80) and Mikyeong Kim (2009, 374) – national myths function to reproduce national identities along successive generations, which positions it as a fundamental feature of identity (Smith 1999, 56). Gi-Wook Shin further built on this notion, and argues that this is the case, since such myths connect certain communities to their ethnic heritage, and thus integrate the past and the present into one continuous nation with a distinct identity (Shin 2006, 214). This connection, however, is mutually reinforced, as it is the national identity that gives national myths their importance, and allows it to be reproduced. A second connected mechanism is that between myth and societal disruption, as, according to Smith, myths emerge into the political daylight at certain significant societal crossroads, or 'benchmark episodes' as defined by Eviatar Zerubavel.[1] These crossroads are generated by societal disruptions, caused for instance by rapid economic growth, and make way for the creation and reproduction of myths within the national consciousness (Smith 1999, 83: Zerubavel 2004, 84).

In addition, when positioning myth in national communities, this study furthermore identified three mechanisms along which myths are expressed and materialize in the social and political realm. These contend that national myths are observable through (1) references to certain core 'mythical memories' that reproduce such myths in the national community; (2) the

[1] It should be noted that the work cited by Eviatar Zerubavel does not explicitly cover the concept of myth, but utilizes a conceptualization of 'collective memory' that largely corresponds with this study's definitional framework of myth.

'othering' of external (national) communities that are excluded by national myths; and (3) the unleashing of deep emotional responses in reaction to the activation of national myths within the national consciousness. It should be noted, however, that the academic literature furthermore identifies a fourth characteristic, namely national myths as materializing and reinforcing themselves through (political) rituals (e.g. Bell 2003, 69-70; Söderman 2022, 5). However, considering the limited scope of this study, this ritualistic aspect will be excluded from any further analysis, as the study of ritual in world politics requires an additional theoretical framework in order to be properly studied (Bell 1997, 1-2).

In accordance with these mechanisms, the first avenue along which myths are regarded to be detectable in societies regards references to 'mythical memories.' More concretely, this study introduces this concept to signify memories on historical events or people that are stored in the collective memory and have become elevated and mythicized. This is caused by the largely formulaic structure of myth, which – through its normative description on how the nation and its history ought to be perceived – highlights certain model events to a 'mythical plain,' where they come to embody the national myth itself. These events or people constitute of certain key memories on which the myth is built, and can thus be used as symbols to activate the myth in the national consciousness. Elites in particular have often been noted to play a significant part in the frequent activation of national myths through references to 'mythical memories,' as they are utilized to solidify a personal powerbase or change public perceptions, for instance (e.g. Bell 2003, 75; He 2013, 225; Smith 1999, 150). Finally, elites additionally draw upon 'mythical memories' to exercise 'othering' practices to foster international hostility. This argument, however, will be further substantiated in the following paragraph.

Second, scholarship seems to contend that myths can materialize through process of 'othering,' meaning the creation of a unique identity on the basis of an outside group as inherently different (He 2013, 225). As nations mainly define themselves vis-à-vis an other, myth comes to serve as the cognitive foundation for this delineation. Scholars such as Smith, Bell and Söderman, for instance, argue that unique and nation-specific myths included in the public consciousness are one of the main features that separate one community from another, and that this inside-outside dynamic often materializes when faced with the rival community (Bell 2003, 67-8; Smith 1999, 141; Söderman 2022, 3-4) In an international sense, the 'othering' through national myths frequently involves an external national community with which the nation shares a history of conflict. Noticeable, however, is that this dynamic is not static, and myths often change their symbolic content in response to varying degrees of perceived conflict

with these outsiders (Kriesberg 1982). These changes, as established in the previous paragraph, can be facilitated through elite guidance (He 2013, 225).

Finally, national myths are furthermore said to materialize through emotional reactivity from the populace. This emotional reactivity arises when national myths are triggered and activated in the national consciousness. While taking many forms, these emotions arise through the intricate connection with a shared past, which actively links myth to identity and the destiny of the nation, and thus attaches it to certain emotions (He 2013, 225; Smith 1999, 264). When these emotion-laden myths are triggered in the national consciousness, so are the associated emotions, causing the populace to potentially be called into action to defend their sense of common identity. In the political realm, these responses materialize through political action, for instance through widespread protest movements (Smith 1999, 178).

The three mechanisms as described in this section will be regarded as the observable implications of myth within any given society, and will thus be used for the literature analysis on the South Korean victimization myth in the following section. However, while these mechanisms are generally supported by the academic literature, this framework has to be somewhat qualified. First, due to the broad forms and messages national myths can entail, it should be noted that these avenues for the materialization of myth might not be universally present, as some elements may either be absent or not directly observable in some cases. In addition, this framework heavily relies on Western – or rather Euro- and US-centric – theories, studies and data, and might therefore not be translatable to non-Western contexts. However, as the study of myth finds both its origin as well as the majority of academic attention in Western academia, this framework will nonetheless be cautiously utilized to study the extent to which the concept of myth can be useful in the South Korean case. Finally, it must also be clarified that this study has made no distinctions between ethnic and national myths in the formulation of this framework, while such distinctions have been noted by scholars (Smith 1999). This distinction has been neglected, however, due to the fact that South Korean society has often been noted to function under a system of ethnic nationalism, where no clear distinction is made between the South Korean nation and ethnicity (Kal 2011, 64; Kim B. 2019, 151; Shin 2006, 4). This can be illustrated by the term *minjok*, for instance, which combines the notion of race, nation, and ethnicity into one all-encompassing concept (Shin 2006, 4-5). This thus fuses ethnic and national myths into one undistinguishable whole, causing any potential differences to be negligible.

IV. THE MYTH OF KOREAN VICTIMIZATION

With the establishment of this theoretical framework on the functioning of national myths in national communities, we can once again turn to the notion of South Korean victimization, and test it along this theoretical perspective. First, this section will do so by redefining this common trope within the parameters of a national myth. As stated previously, the notion of victimization largely refers to the widespread memories of Korean victimhood at the hands of the Japanese, through for instance the assimilation policy and forced labour practices, which have come to dominate the collective memory on the colonial period. In addition, a large strand of scholarship has furthermore come to argue that this victimization continues to affect how the ROK-Japan relations are perceived. Jie-Hyun Lim, for instance, has argued that victimhood has become a dominant nationalist discourse in the construction of the modern Korean identity vis-à-vis other nations (Lim 2010, 1; Ibid. 5). Similarly, Young Jeong Hu and Johanna Vollhardt found that South Korean newspapers frequently referenced the nation's past victimization in reports on the 'history problem,' thus proving the concept to hold a central position in the perceptions of the contemporary ROK-Japan relations. (Hu & Vollhardt 2021). This continued influence positions Korean victimhood as a guiding narrative within the society, and allows for its conceptualization as a national myth. Because of these dynamics, the myth of Korean victimization can be defined as a guiding narrative on the ROK-Japan relations that frames these relations through a notion of continuous victimhood, based on the widespread historical memories of Korean suffering during the colonial period and previous Japanese invasions. This narrative thus simplifies the history of the ROK-Japan relations to be characterized by a simple dichotomy of an perpetually victimized innocent Korea versus an inherently 'evil' Japan.

While the definitional framework thus allows for the trope of Korean victimization to be conceptualized as a national myth, this alone is insufficient in proving the victimization myth to be a guiding force in the 'history problem.' As such, its presence and prevalence within these contemporary bilateral disputes will furthermore be assessed through the three mechanisms for the societal materialization of national myths as previously specified. Following the first mechanism – which prescribes that national myths materialize through references to 'mythical memories' – the established academic literature on the 'history problem' was found to highlight a substantial number of references to the colonial era. These references were most commonly built on memories of certain events, (groups of) people, and – in some cases – long-term developments such as Japanese militarism (e.g. Hu & Vollhardt 2021, 632-4; You & Kim 2020,

66-9). In all cases, these memories were utilized to either contextualize the current disputes or as a point of comparison. This, for instance, can be exemplified by preliminary evidence from the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute, where President Moon was found to reference the Imjin War – or the first Japanese invasion – in order contextualize the Japanese actions of the trade war through a memory of unprovoked attacks (Deacon 2022, 800). The references to such events within these contexts frame the current disputes as a continuation of past struggles, as it connects the past suffering to the current national disputes without any relativization. This historical framing thus enables a connection with a national narrative on the nature of the ROK-Japan relations to be made, and thus function as a symbol for the activation of the victimization myth. As such, the events, persons, and developments that are referred to in these contexts can indeed be determined to represent 'mythical memories.'

Noticeable, however, is that the referenced events that are considered 'mythical' regard a broad spectrum of memories – including those on resistance (e.g. Deacon 2022, 800; De Ceuster 2001, 216; Hu & Vollhardt 2020, 632). These 'mythical memories' of resistance are included in the victimization myth as their utilization is built on the same notion of a continued struggle against the Japanese. Namely, here too, the memories of the colonial period are used to equalize the current dispute with the past memories of victimization. Instead of highlighting mass suffering, however, these memories instead function to illustrate the fighting spirit of the Korean nation in the face of widespread suffering – which must be reawakened in the contemporary 'battles.' Furthermore, as concluded in Hu and Vollhardt's media analysis on the comfort women dispute, references to 'mythical memories' on resistance can additionally function as a coping mechanism stemming from a group's perceived vulnerability, thus linking it to a notion of victimization (Hu & Vollhardt 2020, 636). This mechanism can be illustrated by Roh Moo-Hyun's references to the March 1st movement, for instance, when addressing the Treaty on Basic Relations. Here, the unfairness of the treaty – and thus the Japanese – was positioned to be able to be countered by the heroicness of the South Korean people, as illustrated through the March 1st movement (You & Kim 2020, 66).

Throughout all of the aforementioned examples – as well as in the vast majority of cases analysed in the established literature – the reproduction and activation of the victimization myth through 'mythical memories' was found to be predominantly performed by political leaders. For instance, in addition to Moon and Roh, Chun Doo-Hwan, Park Gun-Hye and Lee Myung-Bak have all actively drawn upon the memory of colonial suffering to justify contemporary policies (You & Kim 2020, 58; Ibid., 69-70; Saito 2017, 63). Consequently, the role of political

leaders and elites in reproducing the victimization myth for political gain is rather substantial and thoroughly ingrained in the 'history problem'.

This dynamic can most effectively be illustrated through the first dispute to be classified under this umbrella, namely the 1982 history textbook issue. Here, military president Chun Doo-Hwan was able to temporarily relieve his regime from harsh domestic criticism by drawing on the memory of Japanese militarism – and therefore created a parallel between the textbook dispute and past Japanese aggression. By doing so, he activated the memory of colonial suffering, which overpowered the negative sentiments surrounding his rule and momentarily united the nation under his leadership (Kimura 2014, 9). Following this first involvement, Chun has been noted to have often played a significant role in the issues of the 'history problem,' predominantly to counter domestic strife (Ibid.). It must be noted, however, that the Chun's presidency can furthermore be regarded as a 'benchmark episode' for the widespread emergence of the victimization myth. This is the case, since the contemporary South Korean society had recently emerged from an era of rapid economic development which permanently altered the social structures of society (Park 2018, 303-4). In addition, South Korea furthermore dealt with great political instability through the recent assassination of Park Chung Hee and the subsequent Kwangju Massacre (Brazinsky 2016, 323). As such, both the creation and perpetuation of this national myth can be largely accounted to the domestic leadership and its drawing upon mythicised memories.

The second mechanism, which prescribes national myths to 'other' external national communities, is equally prominently reflected in South Korean society. Namely, in accordance with 'good' Korea versus 'evil' Japan, the victimization myth prescribes the Korean people as the innocent victims of continuous Japanese aggression, who are by extension constructed as the ultimate evil (Lim 2010, 1). Through this dichotomy, the identity of the Korean victim is thus dependent on the Japanese victimizer, which constructs a national identity on the basis of being distinct and in opposition to Japan. Consequently, Japan has often been noted for its role as the prominent 'other' in South Korean society (Kim 2014, 40; Kal 2011, 73; Shin 2006, 98). This is especially visible in the domestic history education, where South Korea's nationalistic education puts a heavy emphasis on both Japanese evil aggression and the good Korean 'heroes' that tried to stop it (Kim 2014, 36; Shin 2006, 38). This is further exacerbated by the frequently invoked political strategy of "Japan-bashing" by post-war elites, which drew on the memories and experiences of the colonial era, and furthermore reinforced the victim-victimizer dichotomy

and an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality (Shin 2006, 100). This strategy can be exemplified by the aforementioned 1982 history textbook issue, which saw the relief of domestic pressure on the Chun Doo-Hwan regime by casting negative attention onto the Japanese government through accusations of returned militarism (Saito 2017, 63).

Within the ‘history problem,’ this ‘othering’ materializes mainly through interactions with Japan. Most commonly, this interaction reinforces the narrative on Japan as inherently ‘evil’ through confrontations with an ‘unrepentant’ Japan (Deacon 2020, 793). This, for instance, can be illustrated by the comfort women dispute, where the Japanese government initially refused to compensate victims through denials of its involvement. This unfounded denial – which aimed to relieve the Japanese from their war responsibility and thus role as victimizer– creates an image of Japan as unrepentant, and “still guilty of the same sins due to its failure to remember,” as argued by Deacon (Deacon 2020, 800; Kim M. 2014, 89-90). In addition, these denials can be interpreted as Japan once again encroaching on Korean identity: first through the erasure of Korean culture during the colonial era, and now through the erasure of its history. These interpretations once again create a continuous historical narrative with Japan as inherently evil at the center, and thus fosters the ‘othering’ of Japan in opposition to the good and innocent Korea. In the case of the comfort women, this ‘othering’ materialized for instance through the erection of a statue, which aimed to encapsulate and symbolize the cruelty of the Japanese towards the innocent women and children, as well as their unapologetic nature (Kim M. 2014, 88-90).

A final defining feature of the materialization of the victimization myth through the ‘othering’ of Japan, is in its active rejection of historical memories that do not fit with the narrative of a purely evil Japan versus a purely innocent Korea. This, for instance, can be illustrated by Lim Jie-Hyun’s analysis on the South Korean reactions to the international publication of Yoko Kawashima’s *So Far from the Bamboo Grove,* which contains an autobiographic story on Kawashima’s return to Japan after its defeat and the hardships she endured. As this book included stories of Japanese suffering at the hands of Koreans, the novel produced great backlash among South Koreans, which claimed that the story was a “historical distortion” and obscures the ‘real’ South Korean victims (Lim 2010, 3-4). Through the indiscriminate rejection of Japanese suffering, the victimization myth thus materializes and is reproduced through a reaffirmation of Japan as inherently and essentially different.

The third and final avenue for the materialization of national myths in national communities stipulates that myths materialize through strong emotional responses from the population. These emotions are said to arise when myths are activated in the national consciousness, especially in confrontations with the previously described 'other.' Again, this dynamic is clearly visible within the framework of the 'history problem' and the South Korean victimization myth. Namely, within this schema, emotional reactivity is enabled by the aforementioned 'nationalization' of the memories of colonial suffering, where memories of individual hardships have become collectivized in such a way that they are held by the entire national community (Lim 2009, 1; Paik 1996, 18). For instance, individual experiences of colonial martyrdom have come to be regarded as a "service to the nation," which highlights their collective value rather than the struggles of an individual (Kal 2011, 62). Furthermore, when national myths become deeply integrated in the national consciousness and enjoy a general degree of acceptance in society – as is the case with the victimization myth – the confrontation with conflicting narratives on the shared past can generate fierce emotional responses (Kim 2014, 34). Through the previously mentioned Japanese unrepentance, such conflicting narratives are almost characteristic for the 'history problem' dynamic. For instance, within the previously mentioned Japanese governmental reactions to the comfort women, this conflicting narrative can be illustrated by the perception of Japan as the perpetrator as held in (South) Korea – in accordance with the victimization myth – and Japan as a victim within the country itself (Kim 2014, 36-7; Kim M. 2014, 89-90). This Japanese denial of the victim identity consequently generates an "identity clash" where South Korean perceptions interpret this unrepentance as an "insult to national pride, and by extension, national security" (Kim 2014, 34). With national myths being emotion-laden, this assault to the nation and the national identity subsequently awakens certain emotions within the national consciousness, and thus generates fierce counterresponses with the aim of defending the sense of common identity as prescribed by the notion of continuous victimhood.

This materializes for instance in widespread protest movements, where South Korean citizens gather to express their collective dissatisfaction and anger. This can be exemplified, for instance, by the 2005 mass protests against revisions in the Japanese government's officially sanctioned history textbooks and the weekly Wednesday protests for the compensation of comfort women, where protesters expressed their collective "resentment" and "anger." (BBC news, 2005; Okano 2012) Similar dynamics were also visible in the aforementioned 2019 'No Japan' boycott (Song, White & Inagaki 2019). This emotional reactivity, however, is most

effectively studied by Jie-Hyun Lim through the previously mentioned publication of *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*. Within this minor dispute, the release of the novel in American high schools generated attacks and protests from all major South Korean news media, as well as a number of civic groups (Lim 2009, 3). The widespread outrage to such a relatively minor development would seem rather disproportionate. However, when contextualized through a guiding myth of widespread Korean suffering and Japanese aggression, the global release of the novel can be seen as an encroachment on the national identity, which needs to be defended. The emotional reactivity generated by the international release of *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* as well as the other protests mentioned thus once again constitute of a materialization of the victimization myth in South Korean society.

Following this final mechanism, the victimization myth can be concluded to fit both the definitional framework as well as the three mechanisms for societal materialization. As such, this study is able to provide substantial evidence for the conceptualization of the trope of victimhood through a framework of national myth. However, as this theoretical framework relies predominantly on theoretical evidence, this framework must also be tested empirically. Consequently, the following chapter will search for this empirical evidence in the South Korean responses to the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute on the basis of the three mechanisms as prescribed by this study.

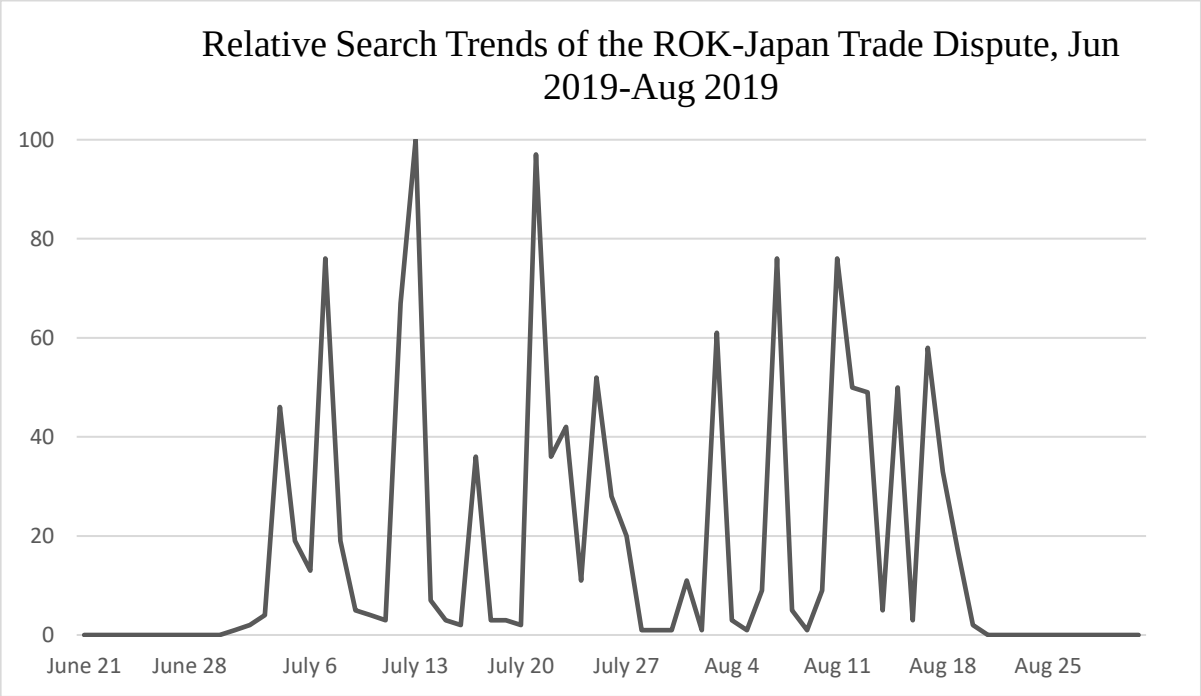
THE VICTIMIZATION MYTH IN THE ROK-JAPAN TRADE DISPUTE: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

I. METHOD

In order to investigate the presence of the victimization myth in the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute, this study employed a discourse analysis on the South Korean governmental and media responses to the dispute. While still relatively new to the field of IR, discourse – and by extension discourse analysis – has proven to be of tremendous value to post-structuralist and constructivist theory (Holzscheiter 2014, 143; Milliken 1999, 225). While the concept contains a plethora of different approaches, in general, discourse in IR can be understood as "the space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, transformed, and accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality," as defined by Holzscheiter (2014, 144). Discourse analysis, then, is an analysis of the linguistic and communicative processes through which such a social reality is constructed (Ibid.). Under this conceptualization, the method of discourse analysis allows for national myths within the South Korean responses to the trade dispute to be unearthed, as these

myths are situated in this 'social reality.' In order to do so, however, this study adheres to a number of strict inclusion criteria for the collection of data.

Due to the large timespan of the dispute – which remains unsolved at the time of writing – the analysis conducted in this study limits itself to the first two months of the conflict, meaning from July 1st, 2019, to August 31st of the same year. This demarcation is based on the two major developments of the dispute, namely (1) the enactment of trade restrictions on July 4th, and (2) the removal of South Korea from the 'whitelist' on August 2nd. In addition, this timeframe furthermore encapsulates the period of the greatest public interest in the issue, as illustrated by the graph below.[2]



Graph 1: News Media Coverage on the ROK-Japan Trade Dispute from June 2019 to August 2019, data retrieved from Naver Datalab

On this temporal basis, this study furthermore generated some additional inclusion criteria for the governmental and news media sources. First, it must be noted that the analysis on the governmental materials is limited to speeches, statements, and briefings performed by then-President Moon Jae-In. This is the case, since such presidential materials were found to be most suitable for the analysis in this study, as other materials provided by the Ministry of

[2] Graph 1 depicts the relative frequency of the search terms "Korea-Japan trade dispute" (hanilmuyŏkpunjaeng), "Korea-Japan economic war" (hanilgyŏngjejŏnjaeng), and "Japanese economic retaliation" (ilbon'gyŏngjebobok) on a scale from 0 to 100 on South Korea media site *Naver* (Naver Trends, n.d.). This graph was generated by *Naver Trends* on November 6, 2022.

Foreign Affairs – such as press releases and ministerial statements – were found to provide an insufficient amount of data. Each speech was accessed through the official South Korean governmental online archive (see appendix), and was found through the search term "ROK-Japan trade dispute" (*hanilmuyŏkpunjaeng*). The documents included either a central focus on the trade issue or a prominent feature in secondary topics. Second, in the analysis on the victimization myth in the South Korean media, this study limited itself to the inclusion of opinion pieces, columns, and interviews. These sources were selected over conventional news articles due to their relative length and non-factual basis, allowing them to more easily include emotion-based discourses such as those encapsulated in the victimization myth. For this media analysis, data was collected from three major newspapers, with those being the *DongA Ilbo*, the *JoongAng Ilbo*, and the *Hankyoreh*. South Korea's most widely read newspaper, *Chosun Ilbo*, was deliberately omitted from this study due to its heavy right-wing political orientation, which causes it to often avoid Japan-based criticisms (Deacon 2019, 802). Similarly to the political speeches, these media sources were found with the search term "ROK-Japan trade dispute" (*hanilmuyŏkpunjaeng*), this time through the *Naver News* search engine.

The data as yielded by these inclusion criteria were subsequently checked on recurrent narratives, themes, and ideas that contain reflections of the victimization myth. More concretely, this analysis will search for a narrative of *continuous victimhood*, guided – but not limited– by the three aforementioned mechanisms of the materialization of national myths. In accordance with the first mechanism, each text will be checked on a historical continuity of victimhood and anti-Japanese struggles, analysed through the usage and inclusion of 'mythical memories' on past Korean (colonial) suffering. Furthermore, as the victimization myth includes the 'othering' of the Japanese, each text will be analysed on a victim-victimizer dichotomy, with a special focus on Japan as inherently malicious. These two mechanisms combined essentially frame South Korea as the victim of typical Japanese aggression, which accurately encapsulates the core of the victimization myth. The final mechanism, which prescribes national myths to inciting emotions, will enjoy a lesser focus within this analysis, as the expressed emotions cannot be assumed to be inherently connected to victimization myth unless explicitly mentioned.

II. Analysis & Results

In total, the aforementioned inclusion criteria yielded 28 data sources, with each document having been published between July 2nd and August 19th. Out of these sources, 10

documents contain records of presidential speeches, with the remaining 18 representing media articles on the trade dispute.[3] Within these 18 articles, the *DongA Ilbo* is most prominently represented, having published 8 within the specified timeframe. The *Hankyoreh* and *JoongAng Ilbo,* on the other hand, were represented by 4 and 6 articles respectively. Overall, each presidential speech was found to embody a relatively similar narrative on the trade dispute, showing a strong consistency in the governmental perceptions of the dispute and the ROK-Japan relations. Contrastingly, the news media articles showed a much broader set of discourses, predominantly between the progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* and the two conservative newspapers *DongA Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo*. Nonetheless, this study does identify a common narrative on South Korean victimhood and Japanese evilness.

First, it must be noted that such narratives were enabled by an extensive connection of the 2019 trade dispute with the issue of forced labour compensation, and thus by extension the 'history problem'. Namely, in nearly all of the analysed speeches and news media articles, the trade restrictions were found to be allocated to the South Korean Supreme Court ruling of the prior month (see Appendix Hankyoreh, b; JoongAng Ilbo, c; Moon 2019c; Moon 2019d). This was oftentimes paired with a strong condemnation of the Japanese excuses for dispute, as illustrated by the following July 17 *DongA Ilbo* editorial:

> "Japan has announced that if South Korea does not respond to the arbitration committee [on forced labor] by the 18th, it will be removed from the whitelist of preferred trading partners. […] Nonetheless, Japan has shown an intransigent attitude by continuing to insist on the logic of wrapping economic retaliation as national security, even though it has been cornered by leaked strategic materials and the failure to provide evidence" (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, b).

As argued by Chris Deacon, the strong construction of the trade dispute as being a direct result of the Supreme Court ruling on forced labour essentially serves as a "vital pre-requisite to enveloping the trade dispute in the broader discourses of the 'history problem,'" and thus allows for the victimization myth to be present in the materials (Deacon 2019, 799). This is the case, since this construction links the trade dispute to the familiar framework of the history problem, which actively traces the current dispute to the other events of Japanese colonial whitewashing as well as the memory of historical Japanese aggression towards the peninsula.

[3] See appendix for a complete overview of the utilized materials.

Following this initial construction, the victimization myth – when analysed along the aforementioned avenues for its materialization within societies – was indeed found to be clearly present in the selected materials. Most notably, this presence was facilitated by a clear victim-victimizer dichotomy, which prescribed Japan to be the main perpetrator of the dispute, with South Korea as the corresponding victim. While some documents explicitly mentioned Japan to be the perpetrator of the conflict, the majority did so implicitly through an emphasis on South Korea as suffering economically at the hands of unjust Japanese trade restrictions (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, h; Hankyoreh, d; JoongAng Ilbo, f; Moon 2019c; Moon 2019f). This sense of 'injustice' was mainly propagated through a discourse of Japan as deeply unreasonable, which invalidates the trade restrictions as beyond the realm of acceptable state behaviour, and therefore denounces them as unjust. This discourse, for instance, can be illustrated by the portrayal of South Korea and the international community as being unified against the Japanese government. More specifically, within both the presidential speeches and news media articles, other nations were oftentimes emphasized to be currently or soon to be siding with the South Korean peoples and government (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, b; Hankyoreh, d; JoongAng Ilbo, c; Moon 2019a; Moon 2019d). This framing was enabled by the aforementioned connection between the trade dispute and the compensation of forced labour, which holds Japan as going against the norms of the international trade system and thus generates international condemnation towards the country. This can be illustrated by the following excerpt from the August 2 *JoongAng Ilbo* editorial:

> "The trends in the international community are also likely to be unfavourable towards Japan. Let's face it, Japan, which has benefited from defending the value of free trade, will suddenly be criticized for wielding the sword of trade restrictions against its allies" (see Appendix JoongAng Ilbo, e).

Through the emphasis on the international community as siding with South Korea, the country is portrayed as being objectively right and reasonable in its assessment of the dispute. This reasonableness is contrasted with the unreasonableness of Japan, which is stated to have hypocritically enacted trade restrictions on illegitimate grounds. As such, Japan becomes the objective perpetrator who is unjustly attacking South Korea, which has done nothing to deserve such measures. Within the presidential speeches and the publications of the *Hankyoreh*, this portrayal of an unreasonable Japan vis-à-vis a reasonable South Korea was aided by an additional dominant framing. Namely, this framing concerns the South Korean government as acting strictly moral, rational, and reasonable, and ascribes the current tensions to the

unpredictability of Japan (see Appendix Hankyoreh, b; Hankyoreh, d; Moon 2019d; Moon 2019e). This construction is made visible through a great emphasis on South Korea as being diplomatic and solution-driven, as illustrated by the July 10 presidential speech to prominent business leaders:

> "Above all, the government is committed to a diplomatic solution. I hope that the Japanese government will respond. I hope that we won't go towards a dead end anymore" (Moon 2019b).

Here, the South Korean government positions itself as the only actor who is solution-driven and adhering to the state norms of conflict resolution. Concurrently, the Japanese attitude is deemed unhelpful by ignoring South Korea's cries for diplomacy, and is thus solely responsible for generating and prolonging the tensions between the two nations. Through this construction, the South Korean government prescribes itself to be a reasonable actor which is and remains innocent in perpetuating the conflict. Yet, in spite of this reasonable attitude, Japan's deliberately uncooperative stance causes them to still be victimized by Japan's unpredictability due to having strayed from the norms-based system.

The thorough presence of a victim-victimizer dichotomy with Japan as the perpetrator can be considered to serve as preliminary evidence for the inclusion of the victimization myth in the South Korean perceptions of the dispute. This is the case, since this dichotomy essentially embodies the second characteristic for the materialization of national myths, which states that myths materialize through the 'othering' of external national communities. In the case of the victimization myth – as explained in the previous chapter – this 'othering' rests on a dichotomy between a 'good' South Korea and 'evil' Japan, where the identity of South Korea is thus constructed in opposition with that of Japan. Within the analysed materials, this construction is not only visible through the portrayal of Japan as the 'evil' perpetrator, but also through the contrasting discourse of South Korea as reasonable and Japan as unreasonable. This mechanism, however, additionally requires a notion of Japan as inherently malicious.

Enabled by the rigid construction of Japan as an unreasonable perpetrator, the analysed materials were found to uniformly ascribe a number of additional malicious qualities to the country. For instance, the Japanese were regarded as being untrustworthy, hypocritical, and cunning, among others. Within this schema, Japan as untrustworthy was emphasized through the lacking justification given for the trade restrictions by the Japanese government. In addition, Japan as cunning was perpetrated by notions of the Japanese leadership as deliberately attacking

the South Korean economy under the guise of trade violations to prevent it from outgrowing its own (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, g; Hankyoreh, a; JoongAng Ilbo, f; Moon 2019j; Moon 2019b). These qualities, however, were predominantly ascribed to the Japanese government, as made visible through the examples above. More critically, throughout the analysed materials, the Japanese people and government were frequently separated from one another, with the former even being included in the role of the victimized (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, a; JoongAng Ilbo, e; Moon 2019c; Moon 2019j). This thus positions the Japanese government as the true perpetrator of the conflict, whose unreasonableness even causes damage to its own people. Consequently, any framings on an inherently malicious nature were solely ascribed to the Japanese leadership, with no notions of such qualities applying to the entire nation.

Nonetheless, framings of Japan as inherently malicious – either explicitly or implicitly – were rather limited in comparison to the victim-victimizer dichotomy, and were only found within the news media articles. This, however, can be explained by the fact that the governmental statements are expected to keep to a degree of diplomacy. As the condemnation of the Japanese through allusions to an inherent maliciousness can severely complicate the bilateral spat, the absence of this framing is rather expected, and thus does not necessarily weaken the victimization myth as a guiding framework. Overall, 7 out of 18 news media articles – indiscriminate of their political orientation – were found to include a number of discourses that are reminiscent of an inherent malicious Japanese nature. For instance, in four documents, an implicit framing on this nature was found to be reflected in the role ascribed to South Korea (see Appendix Donga Ilbo, a; Hankyoreh, a; Hankyoreh, d; JoongAng Ilbo, a). In this framing, the articles were found to appoint blame to the South Korean people and government for failing to prevent the emergence of the trade dispute, as illustrated by the *JoongAng Ilbo* article published on July 17:

> “"The lesson of this incident is that Korean society was surprisingly ignorant of Japan," pointed out Park Jung-Jin, a professor at Tsudajuku University in Japan. “Despite the hateful atmosphere in Japan and the Abe government sharpening its knives, we have failed to be vigilant and preventive”” (see Appendix JoongAng Ilbo, a).

The failure to keep a close eye on Japan positions the trade restrictions as an act that the South Korean government and people should have been able to anticipate. This, however, requires a notion of a well-known Japanese nature or identity that positions it to be likely to escalate conflicts or to be scheming against South Korea. Through a common conceptualization

of Japan as being malicious, it would thus be logical to allocate blame to South Korea – or the victim – for not being able to anticipate the 'natural' Japanese escalation of the conflict.

A second framing on a malicious Japanese nature concerns the Japanese government as inherently militaristic. This more extreme narrative was similarly propagated by five articles, and explicitly positions the Japanese government as having clear imperialist intensions (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, g; JoongAng Ilbo, c; Hankyoreh, a; Hankyoreh, c; Hankyoreh, b). These intensions were, however, only ascribed to then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was framed as inherently 'anti-Korean' due to his family heritage and history. Most notably, this was done through the construction of a parallel between Abe and his maternal grandfather Nobotsuka Kishi, who was a prominent Japanese Imperial military leader and convicted class A war criminal (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, g; Hankyoreh, a; JoongAng Ilbo, c). The connection between the Japanese trade restrictions and Abe's Imperial family legacy positions trade dispute as a scheme to further imperial ambitions, and consequently positions the goals of the militarist leadership to continue through Abe. This sentiment can be illustrated by statements such as: "Today's conflict is due to Abe's attempt to build a new Japanese empire" and "Abe is pursuing a plan to glorify Japan's past and intervene in North Asian hegemony" (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, g; Hankyoreh, a). As such, this ascribes the evil character of colonial Japan to be embodied by the Prime Minister, and thus frames him as inherently malicious towards Korea. While this framing thus severely constricts the notion of an inherent Japanese nature to only Abe, this discourse still utilizes the history of Japanese aggression to contextualize and explain the current actions of the Japanese government, and subsequently frames it through a narrative of continued imperial ambitions.

It must be noted, however, that this discourse was found alongside the frequent usage of military terminology. Military constructions such as Japan as acting "retaliatory," "attacking" South Korea and starting an economic "war" were found in the majority of sources, including those who did not contain an explicit narrative on a militaristic Japan (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, h; JoongAng Ilbo, d; Hankyoreh, c; Moon 2019i). Especially references to "retaliation" were frequently invoked, being mentioned in 18 of the 28 checked materials. This construction can furthermore be illustrated by the references to weaponry in the previously provided excerpts from the *JoongAng Ilbo* July 17 and August 2 articles as mentioned in this chapter. Noticeable, however, is that while the usage of such terms was most common within news media articles, they were additionally found to be present in half of the presidential speeches. While an explicit framing of Japan as inherently militaristic and malicious was thus rather limited, the frequent

usage of military terminology could still be argued to expose the South Korean peoples to view the conflict with Japan through a militarist lens. This subsequently positions the history of Japanese aggression to still affect the narrative on the dispute, and shows an implicit assumption on a Japanese nature. This is the case, since the description of the Japanese actions through its past behaviour continues these qualities into the contemporary era, and could additionally function to link the trade dispute to the imperial past. This would thus implicitly strengthen the notion of militarism as a continuous motive within the Japanese behaviour towards South Korea, and positions Japan as inherently malicious.

Through the analysis in this section, a construction of the Japanese as being perceived through an inherently malicious nature was found to be relatively prominent in the selected materials. This, in combination with the aforementioned rigid construction of a victim-victimizer dichotomy, can thus be regarded to show a prominent reflection of the victimization myth within the national response narrative towards the dispute, in accordance with the second mechanism for the materialization of national myths. This is the case, since this mechanism, as mentioned previously, prescribed the victimization myth to materialize through a notion of an inherently 'evil' Japan versus a 'good' South Korea. This mechanism, however, is not the only mechanism that unearthed reflections of the victimization myth in the national response narrative, as the first mechanism – which stipulates that the victimization myth materializes through references to 'mythical memories' and a historical continuity of victimhood – was additionally found to be present within the materials.

As analysed in this chapter, both the news media articles and presidential speeches firmly positioned South Korea as being victimized by the Japanese trade restrictions. Noticeable, however, is that in the far majority of sources, this victimization was found to be critically enlarged, meaning that the Japanese actions were positioned to inflict damage far beyond the ROK-Japan trade relations. This not only increases the maliciousness of the Japanese, but also emphasizes the extent of the victimization that the South Koreans are forced to endure. This enlargement was most prominently framed through a notion of Japan as additionally violating the international liberal order, extending the victimization to encompass the entire world (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, c; Hankyoreh, a; JoongAng Ilbo, e; Moon 2019d; Moon 2019e). This framing was found in almost half of the documents throughout both the presential speeches and news media articles, and contained an image of Japan as damaging the international trade order,

violating international law, and even as incriminating on human rights, as exemplified by the following *Hankyoreh* article published on August 9:

> ""Japan is now committing new human rights violations. The state's obstruction of the duty to relieve the victims is not only a mistake of the past, but a mistake of the present." Tae-Woong Paik, a 56-year-old professor at the University of Hawaii Law School, had power in every word. He said firmly that Japan's actions were rather unacceptable from the point of international law" (see Appendix Hankyoreh, b).

In addition, more directly targeted towards South Korea, the extremeness of the victimization was furthermore illustrated by the previously mentioned construction of the Japanese government as initiating the trade restrictions to prevent the South Korean economy from outgrowing its own. This framing was present in 12 documents, once again indiscriminately throughout the analysed materials, and was articulated through statements such as: "There is also an analysis that the background behind Japan's export restrictions is a wariness and containment mentality over South Korea's growth," and "This is tantamount to blocking the growth of our economy at a time when our economy is promoting greater progress" (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, h; Moon 2019c). This framing, which can be contextualized through the South Korean economic takeover in terms of gross GDP and other key economic indicators in the previous year, positions the Japanese actions to slow down and damage the entire domestic economy, rather than just the trade relations or targeted industries (Minegishi 2022).

Within this schema of enlarged victimhood, this grave sense of victimization was frequently found to be supported through references to 'mythical memories' on the Japanese historical aggression towards the peninsula. These memories were most commonly invoked in the presidential speeches, and were present in 14 out of the 28 sources. This thus constitutes half of the total materials, and positions this framing to be moderately present. Noticeable, however, is that such memories most commonly included references to general sentiments and developments, rather than specific historical events or people. For instance, the analysed documents included references to "deep wounds" that were about to be re-opened and "a 21st Century anti-Japan struggle" (see Appendix Hankyoreh, a; Moon 2019d). In addition, such general references can additionally be illustrated by the frequent references to Japanese militarism as analysed above. Only the March 1st independence movement served as a notable exception. This, however, was largely enabled by the 100 year anniversary of the event three

months prior to the eruption of the trade dispute (see Appendix Hankyoreh, c; Moon 2019g; Moon 2019j). As argued in the previous chapter, references to general historical developments within the era of Japanese colonialism – such as the independence struggle – contextualizes the current dispute through the history of Japanese aggression. This creates a historical continuity of the victimhood of the past, as the two are compared on equal footing. Through these dynamics, the historical references can indeed be regarded as 'mythical memories' in accordance with the previous chapter. Consequently, this thus illustrates the South Korean media and government perceptions to the trade dispute to be informed by nation-wide historical experiences, as prescribed by the victimization myth.

It must be noted, as made visible through the aforementioned examples and relative prominence of the March 1st movement, that references to 'mythical memories' most commonly included references to historical resistance. In fact, all articles that referred to the bilateral history additionally included references to resistance, and did so through a significant overstatement of the strength of these historical movements. While this emphasis within the historically-centred documents might weaken the presence of the victimization myth – as resistance tends to highlight strength rather than collective suffering – these references, as argued in the previous chapter, can additionally be regarded as coping efforts to counter a sense of victimhood. This is the case since the majority of documents that utilized a discourse on resistance did so in a context that stipulates that today's victimization is something that can be overcome (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, e; Moon 2019d; Moon 2019f). As such, these references can be argued to function as a comforting sentiment that is supposed to provide a feeling of control during unprecedented trade restrictions. This can be illustrated by the August 2 presidential speech, where Moon stated that:

> "Japan's measures have added additional difficulties to our economy, which is already in a dire situation. But, we will never lose to Japan again. We have overcome many adversaries to get to where we are today. Challenges are expected, but our companies and people have the capacity to overcome them" (Moon 2019d).

Within this excerpt, Moon alludes to a past victimization by stating that South Korea will not lose "again," but uses an implicit reference to colonial resistance to instead highlight how, just like in the past, today's victimization can be managed and conquered. Such a discourse on the trade dispute as being manageable was found more broadly within the analysed materials, through statements such as "we will overcome this situation in any case" and "if

Japan tries to damage our economy, we have ways to counteract it" (see Appendix Moon 2019d; Moon 2019c). While such references weaken the sense of victimization, it does not weaken it as a guiding framework. This is the case, since within this discourse, the current dispute is still contextualized through memories of past resistance – albeit it through broad references to 'past struggles' or a direct link to the March 1st movement. This thus diminishes the border between the two issues, as the one is seen in the terms of the other, and draws a continuous historical line between the past and present victimization. As such, the references to 'mythical memories' on resistance can be regarded as accurately portraying a sense of continuous victimhood. When the emphasis on resistance is interpreted as a response to victimization, however, these references can additionally be considered to support the notion of a victimization myth within South Korean society, as they are driven by a feeling of victimhood stemming from the colonial era. It must also be noted that within the sources that included a discourse on the conquering of victimization, a coherent emotional framework could furthermore be detected. While present throughout the materials, the framing on resistance saw the only time such emotions were presented in a consistent discourse (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, e; Hankyoreh a; Moon 2019b). Within the framing on resistance, these emotions were found to materialized through a sense of determination (see Appendix Hankyoreh, c; Moon 2019c; Moon 2019e). For instance, through the abovementioned example of the August 2 presidential speech, the resoluteness of the statement on South Korea as "never losing to Japan again" and having "the capacity to overcome" frames it as a struggle that can be conquered in a matter of time only with the participation of the people. This resoluteness positions the resistance as feasible, which, especially in combination with a historical framework, fosters the determination to achieve the goal of countering the Japanese. As such, the presence of such emotions can be regarded as a reaction against historical victimization. According to the third mechanism for the materialization of national myths, which states that myths materialize through emotions, this emotional framework can thus be argued to be a reflection of a victimization myth.

It must be noted, however, that besides the usage of collective memories on Japanese aggression, a substantial number of documents additionally contained references to a (recent) history of friendship and cooperation with the Japanese peoples. Enabled by a certain historical amnesia, these documents were found to emphasize a history of friendly ties through references to the mutually beneficial trade relations as well as their shared security concerns (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, h; JoongAng Ilbo, b; Moon 2019h; Moon 2019j). This can be illustrated by the August 2 speech from President Moon, where he announced that "Japan's actions undermine

the long-standing economic cooperation and friendly ties between the two countries" (see Appendix Moon 2019d). In the news media articles, such references can be illustrated by the July 17 DongA Ilbo column, which states that "The East Asian free trade order has been an asset that liberal democracies such as South Korea and Japan have built together for decades, and has been the common foundation for prosperity" (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, b). These references to the traditionally friendly ties between the nations functions to emphasize the strangeness of the behaviour of the Japanese government, and thus essentially denies a notion of Japan as inherently bad or South Korea as continuously victimized. However, as this framing was oftentimes used alongside such notions, this construction does not necessarily disprove the victimization myth (see Appendix DongA Ilbo, g; JoongAng Ilbo, a; Moon 2019j). Instead, a framing on the Japanese government as acting outside of the expectations for the bilateral relationship can additionally be used to position South Korea as a reasonable actor that is ready to move on from their painful past, while Japan is causing the countries to get stuck. This would thus strengthen the construction of a reasonable South Korea versus an unreasonable Japan, which – in accordance with the analysis in this chapter – would constitute of evidence for the victimization myth to be present in the national response narrative to the dispute.

As the analysis in this section has found the source materials to include a notion of South Korean victimization to be historically contextualized through 'mythical memories,' the victimization myth, in accordance with the first mechanism for its materialization, can be argued to be relatively present in the checked materials. In addition, while hypothesized to be relatively minor, this analysis furthermore unearthed an emotional discourse that is activated in response to the historical victimization, which thus illustrates the materialization of the victimization myth along the third defined mechanism. However, as this analysis also found numerous conflicting discourses, these – while fitting with the victimization myth – also weaken it to a certain extent. Yet, this relative presence in combination with the prominent presence of a distinct 'othering' of the Japanese and the victim-victimizer dichotomy – as prescribed by the second mechanism – nonetheless positions the victimization myth to be relatively prevalent within the South Korean response narrative towards the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute, and positions it to guide the contemporary perceptions.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

With the aim of supporting the academic efforts to solve the longstanding 'puzzle' of the 'history problem,' this study has utilized the concept of national myths to study the recurring trope of 'Korean victimization.' More specifically, the concept of national myth was employed to determine whether this victimization can be conceptualized through such a lens, and, if so, how a myth on Korean victimization is reflected in the South Korean perceptions on the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute. In order to do so, this study has first formulated a theoretical framework on the functioning of national myths that can accurately be applied to the trope of victimization. Through this framework, this study was able to transcribe this trope into a 'victimization myth,' which refers to a narrative on the ROK-Japan relations that highlights a notion of continuous South Korean suffering at the hands of an inherently malicious Japan. In addition, this framework furthermore identified three mechanisms for the materialization of national myths in national communities, along which this victimization myth could be tested on its presence and prominence within South Korean society. As this myth was found to satisfy all theoretical mechanisms and conditions, it was subsequently tested empirically through a discourse analysis on its reflection within the South Korean responses to the ROK-Japan trade dispute. Guided by the three aforementioned mechanisms, these reflections were studied through 10 presidential speeches and 18 news media articles from three prominent South Korean newspapers.

Overall, reflections of the victimization myth within these materials were found to be relatively prominent. Most notably, such reflections were made visible by a dominant discourse on Japan as malicious. This discourse was most commonly perpetuated through a strong victim-victimizer dichotomy which positioned Japan as the perpetrator of the dispute, as well as through a construction that contained notions of a 'reasonable' South Korea vis-à-vis an 'unreasonable' Japan. Almost half of the news media articles, however, directly positioned this unreasonableness, along with other malicious features, as the inherent nature of the Japanese. This was most commonly propagated through statements that link the current Japanese leadership to the militarist government of the imperial era, thus positioning the maliciousness of Imperial Japan to continue in the current government. In addition, this connection was furthermore implicitly reinforced through a conceptualization of the trade dispute in militarist terms, which was found in the majority of the analysed sources. While an inherent nature was thus largely limited to the Japanese government, the presence of these dynamics exposes clear assumptions on an inherent Japanese attitude towards the peninsula and proves the history of

Japanese aggression to still be a guiding framework for the South Korean perceptions on the trade restrictions. While this dynamic was thus found to be prominently reflected within the materials, a notion of South Korea as continuously victimized, however, was less dominant. Namely, while half of the documents contextualized the current trade dispute through the history of South Korean victimization, this was done most commonly through references to colonial resistance. As such references can be regarded to be generated from a feeling of victimhood, the usage of historical memories of resistance indeed contextualizes the dispute through past victimization, and thus continues this into the contemporary era. However, the overreliance on resistance to situate the trade dispute in the history of South Korean victimhood does somewhat weaken this construction, as such references are oftentimes utilised to illustrate the strength of the South Korean peoples and ability to overcome the current tensions. While notions of Japan as inherently malicious and South Korea as continuously victimized were both greatly present in the analysed materials, the victimization myth can thus be regarded as a guiding framework for the South Korean responses to the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute, and enjoys a prominent reflection within the dispute. Yet, due the co-existence of numerous contrasting discursive frameworks that both reaffirm and weaken this myth, it must be emphasized that it fails to fully explain the dynamics of the trade dispute, which is thus regarded as being influenced by a number of other undetermined factors.

Despite these initial findings however, the results as presented through the discourse analysis must be qualified against the inherent limitations of this study and its research. First, while the 2019 ROK-Japan trade dispute remains unsolved at the time of writing, this study – due to numerous restrictions – adheres to a relatively short timeframe of two months. While this period was chosen on the basis of public interest, it remains possible that results will vary once this larger timeframe is taken into account. Moreover, as the utilised articles were frequently met with online backlash in the form of negative comments, the analysis on news media and governmental materials might not be generalisable for the entirety of South Korean society. As such, an analysis on the victimization myth through popular channels is additionally required in order to create a full understanding on the permeation of the victimization myth in the South Korean perceptions on the 2019 trade dispute. Due to these limitations – in addition to the fact that this study contained a single case study in a long history of history disputes – conclusions on the role of the victimization myth within the entire ‘history problem’ cannot yet be made. Instead, this study presents an initial hypothesis on a small component of the ROK-Japan relations, and can thus serve as a basis for further research.

Rather than just explaining the 'history problem,' however, its conceptualisation through a national victimization myth can additionally provide new understandings on how the bilateral tensions can be managed. This is the case, since the concept of myth positions the current characteristic tensions of the ROK-Japan bilateral relations to be impermanent. Since myths are inherently malleable, the current tensions can subsequently be regarded as a contemporary construction, able to be modified through gradual changes in the discourse surrounding bilateral issues. While such a gradual changes in the symbolic meaning of the victimization myth will most definitely not be able to solve the issues between the two nations, the conceptualization of the 'history problem' through a mythical lens does highlight one potential avenue for the slight relaxation of tension between South Korea and Japan. As the two nations have predominantly seen friendly people-to-people ties, such relaxation would be expected to be more than welcome among the general population (Deacon 2022, 790). This would also appear to be the case for college-student Lee Min-Youn, who besides her fierce participation in the aforementioned 'No Japan' boycott, still expressed her appreciation for Japanese culture and society, stating that she used to visit Japan often and admires its unique and peaceful atmosphere (Choi 2019). If such widespread positive popular views are highlighted in both countries over a notion of victimhood and conflict, the myth of Korean victimization could potentially lose its prominence, and allow for more fruitful relations to bloom.

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APPENDIX

I. GOVERNMENTAL MATERIALS

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