Memory, Institutions, and the Domestic Politics of South Korean–Japanese Relations

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Abstract   How does collective memory shape politics in the domestic and international spheres? I argue that collective memory—an intersubjective understanding of the past—has no inherent meaning and its salience is entirely contextual. What it means politically depends on the historical trajectory through which it came to form and the political exigency for which it is mobilized in the present. I propose three strategies by which social actors mobilize collective memory: framing—negotiating how the past can be interpreted; accrediting—redefining which narrators are authorized to speak; and binding—enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform. Using this framework, I reassess the failure of South Korea–Japan reconciliation and find that it has as much to do with the mobilization of collective colonial memory in South Korea over the course of its democratization as with Japanese impenitence. Anti-Japanese memory reflects continued domestic political contestation about how South Korea remembers and identifies itself.

Memory is having a "boom,"[1] and nowhere is this more evident than in South Korea, where grievances about Japanese colonial crimes and postcolonial impenitence continue to plague relations between the two countries. Dozens of "comfort women" statues, commemorating victims of Japanese sexual slavery during World War II, have been erected in South Korea in the last decade. Since the 1990s, survivors of forced labor have also steadily challenged Japanese companies in court. Tensions finally came to a boiling point in October 2018, when, in a controversial verdict, South Korea's top court ordered Japan's Mitsubishi steel company to compensate the claimants. Crucially, the court stipulated that individual victims' pursuit of redress was valid, separate from any prior, government-to-government settlements involving historical injustices. Tokyo launched a vehement protest, insisting that the 1965 normalization treaty had "completely and finally" resolved any outstanding

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1. Blight 2009.

issues of colonial apology and reparation. The two countries have since remained at loggerheads, trapped in tit-for-tat reprisals over their trading status and threats to repeal military agreements.

This "memory boom" in South Korea, and elsewhere,[2] raises a question of broader relevance: How does collective memory shape politics in the domestic and international spheres? I advance two arguments in this regard. First, collective memory—an inter-subjective understanding of the past—has no inherent meaning and its salience is entirely contextual. What it means politically depends on the historical trajectory through which it came to form and the political exigency for which it is mobilized in the present. Second, collective memory wields political power when social actors mobilize it for strategic purposes in the public domain. I propose three strategies by which they do so: *framing*—negotiating how the past can be interpreted (what can be said); *accrediting*—redefining which narrators are authorized to speak (who has a say); and *binding*—enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform (who can say what). Through these repertoires of mnemonic contestation, collective memory shapes the "official" narrative as well as the shared context in which actors compete for narrative dominance.

Using this framework, I re-examine the puzzling case of postwar relations between South Korea and Japan—two neighboring democracies and US allies that have suffered recurring setbacks in relations due to so-called "history issues." The conventional explanation for this failure of "deep" reconciliation between the two points to signs of remorselessness by the Japanese elite: visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by prominent politicians and attempts to whitewash or glorify Japanese imperial past in history textbooks.[3] Instead, I argue that the deepening, hardening, and widening of anti-Japanism in South Korea has as much to do with the mobilization during its democratization of collective colonial memory—which has since permeated partisan identities—as with Japanese impenitence.[4] Today's historical disputes cannot be understood separately from the battling and intermingling domestic narratives in South Korea over its future as a postcolonial and post-authoritarian society.

My contributions in this paper are three-fold. Theoretically, I expand the limited research on the role of memory in international relations: how domestic political contestation over a nation's memory may critically condition political outcomes at home and abroad.[5] In doing so, I refine the concept of collective memory and introduce three strategies—framing, accrediting, and binding—by which state and societal actors engage in mnemonic contestation. Methodologically, I engage with the

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2. For other examples, see Langenbacher and Schain 2010.

3. On the distinction between "deep" and "shallow" reconciliation, see He 2009. Yasukuni Shrine is a Japanese Shinto shrine that commemorates those who died in service to the emperor. More than a thousand convicted war criminals are enshrined there, including fourteen Class A war criminals. On the textbooks, see Kim 2011; Lind 2008.

4. For an overview of Japanese narratives of (im)penitence, see Tsutsui 2009.

5. An important caveat must be added. There is a small but growing group of international relations scholars who study questions of memory in world politics; see Wang 2019.

debate on how to research memory politics, namely where to find collective memory and how to trace the mechanisms of mnemonic contestation. I note, in particular, that the "containers" of collective memory differ based on the prevailing communicative media at the time and in the place of study; for this reason, setting clear rules for finding and interpreting such evidence in the particular context is critical. Empirically, I show that the hardening of anti-Japanism in South Korea can be traced to the evolution of collective colonial memory over the course of its domestic institutional transformation—that is, how South Korean struggles for democracy became bound up in understandings of Japan. Together, my research highlights how collective memory interacts with domestic institutions and can become politically useful in postcolonial, postwar, and post-authoritarian societies.

Memory Politics: A Translation

Scholars from various disciplines and methodological traditions have explored memory as a source of collective identities and, thus, the foundation of politics.[6] Among issues of relevance in international relations, they have elaborated the influence of collective memory on national identity,[7] transitional justice,[8] foreign policy formation,[9] ontological security dynamics,[10] and international reconciliation.[11] I translate three key insights from these studies to build a processual theory of memory politics: (1) collective memory is a necessary condition for nation building; (2) this renders collective memory a subject of relentless contestation, both within and across nations; and (3) the history of contestation over collective memory—how it came to form—matters.[12]

Nation building requires a measure of control over collective memory. As Jonathan Boyarin writes, nation-states invoke "rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative control."[13] The resulting master narrative provides a set of ideas by which to assert political sovereignty,[14] as well as a repertoire of social performances that help mobilize loyalty to the nation.[15] This effort can take the form of "invented traditions"[16] that draw useful links between the past and the

6. For an overview in international relations, see Auchter 2014; Bell 2006; Resende and Budryte 2014; Wang 2019.

7. Smith 1986; Spillman 1997.

8. Ferrara 2015; Nobles 2008.

9. Berger 2012; Langenbacher and Schain 2010; Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006.

10. Donnelly and Steele 2019; Mälksoo 2015; Subotić 2018; Zarakol 2010.

11. Barkan 2001; He 2009; Lind 2008.

12. My aim here is not to provide an exhaustive overview of research on collective memory, but to draw some relevant elements and make them legible to the study of international relations.

13. Boyarin 1994, 15–16.

14. Gellner 1983.

15. Brubaker 1992.

16. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

present, or practices of memorialization that sustain images of national heroes.[17] Crucially, the collective memory that is represented in these state-sanctioned imaginaries is often selective and even fictitious: inconvenient pasts that imply alternative allegiances are erased, depoliticized, or manipulated.[18] Some scholars, thus, see national memory as inevitably "repressive," forcing a "false unity of a self-same, national subject moving through time."[19]

As a result, collective memory is almost always contested, between social groups with competing visions of and for society. If states have relied on "founding myths" to mold the past into a coherent teleology for the nation, societies have sought recognition of their own collective memories—with, without, and even against the state.[20] In this vein, scholars focusing on "popular" memory have emphasized how official and unofficial articulations of the past interpenetrate[21] and why such political contests over memory become stark in the aftermath of difficult and violent pasts, such as the end of colonial empires, wars, genocides, and dictatorships.[22] How a nation remembers its past defines the present and orients the future, making political ruptures an opportune, perhaps even necessary, moment for mnemonic revision.

It is unsurprising, then, that memory politics gains particular salience in the context of traumatic recovery:[23] people seek confirmation of the injustices they suffered and search for ways to ascribe meaning to them; and in so doing, they situate their memories within historically embedded frames that allow them to make sense of who they are (in relation to others) and how to behave (in context of the past).[24] For this reason, scholars have explored how memories of "collective traumas" condition transitional justice processes and outcomes.[25] Indeed, transitions from despotic regimes to democratic societies, and from conflict to peace, necessitate reworking collective memory: adopting post-heroic narratives that recognize past abuses and introducing necessary legal-political measures, such as trials or truth commissions, that embed the mnemonic shifts in emergent political institutions.[26] Contests over memory are inevitable in this process.

17. Schwartz 1996.
18. Anderson 2006 [1983]; Connerton 1989; Duara 1995; Gillis 1994; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Olick 2007; Trouillot 2011.
19. Duara 1995, 4.
20. Brubaker et al. 2006.
21. Wallace 1996.
22. Dixon 2018; Edwards 2016; Ferrara 2015; Gillis 1994; Suny 2015; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020.
23. On trauma and memory, see Bell 2006; Edkins 2003; Hutchison 2016; Resende and Budryte 2014. These authors emphasize how traumatic events produce openings for new understandings of social relations.
24. This, in Jennifer Milliken's words, creates a "regime of truth" that demarcates certain modes of being. Milliken 1999, 229.
25. Bell 2006; Edkins 2003.
26. Kim 2013; Teitel 2003.

Scholars have also examined how collective memory forms the ontological basis by which states operate in the international arena. Collective memory provides a key resource for constructing the nation's idea of itself; continuities in their "collective biographical narratives" and interactive routines provide nations a felt certainty about themselves and their surroundings, which underwrite their sense of agency.[27] But when this self-understanding becomes ruptured by unpredictable and critical situations, which cannot be woven neatly into the existing narrative and behavioral frames, nations become ontologically insecure; they must, then, adjust their stories and routines to restore their self-understandings.[28] Preserving this sense of ontological security requires certain mnemonic discipline.

In short, studies of collective memory coalesce around the simple notion that collective memory matters—if in unexpected ways. As Jeffery Olick notes, "Memory itself has a history: not only do particular memories change, but the very faculty of memory—its place in social relations and the form it imposes—is variable over time."[29] This makes the political stakes of collective memory difficult to pin down; yet, it also provides a promising theoretical corrective: the past has no inherent meaning, and its salience is entirely contextual. From this perspective, even if the content of collective memory varies everywhere depending on the specificities of lived experiences, the processes by which it takes effect may be generalizable across mnemonic communities if one can theorize explicitly about the (configuration of) contexts under which it is mobilized and the strategies deployed to mobilize it. This is the objective of this paper.

Memory Politics: A Revision

I contend that memory politics is defined by two contexts: the historical trajectory through which the collective memory—through processes of contestation—formed *over time*; and the political exigency for which collective memory was mobilized *at a given point in time*. This calls for two sets of revisions in the existing literature. First, the concept of collective memory must be refined with an emphasis on its dynamism, to underscore the interaction of time, memory, and power. Second, the interactive and constitutive processes of memory politics must be clarified through a relational, process-oriented approach[30] to demonstrate the interoperation of the official narratives and collective memories. I undertake each in turn.

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27. See Steele 2007 on biographical narratives, and Mitzen 2006 on routines. For recent developments in the ontological security literature, see Kinnvall and Mitzen 2017.

28. Innes and Steele 2013, 20.

29. Olick and Robbins 1998, 381.

30. This approach is relational in that it treats collective memory and official narratives as mutually constituted, and process oriented in that it emphasizes the social practices and interactions of meaning making. See relevant discussions on "experience-near" and "social-relational" approaches in Jackson and Nexon 2013.

Collective Memory: A Definition

I define collective memory as intersubjective understandings of the past.[31] Two distinctions are in order. First, collective memory is not historically determinate but socially interpretive: what matters is not what actually happened but how actors give it meaning.[32] Examining postwar narratives in Europe and Asia, Serge Schmemann once remarked that "memories depend less on history than on how a people wants to see itself at any given moment."[33] It is in this manner that collective memory becomes "discursively produced": rather than reproducing the truthful ways in which historical events transpired, collective memory is constructed.[34] Intentionality is, thus, central. As Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche note, memory is a set of practices that constitute "a symbolic representation of the past embedded in social action."[35] From this perspective, collective memory is generated by a repertoire of discursive and performative strategies that actors deploy to make sense of the group's past in relation to its present.[36]

Second and relatedly, collective memory is intersubjective: it is not a mere amalgamation of individual memories but a shared entity with self-sustaining effects of its own. According to Emanuel Adler, intersubjective meanings "exist as collective knowledge, [which] persists beyond the lives of individual social actors."[37] This is not to discount the role of the individual, however. As Amos Funkenstein asserts, "Memory can only be realized by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers. Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember. Remembering is a mental act, and therefore it is absolutely and completely personal."[38] In reconciling these views, I conceive of collective memory as a product of social contest between individual memories that, once formed, take on a life of their own. It is collective knowledge, shared by those who "engage in or recognize the appropriate performance of a social practice."[39]

An implication of these distinctions is that collective memory is necessarily heterogeneous, and thus selective.[40] Indeed, the construction of collective memory involves contestation: groups will have varying interpretations of the same events, and the memory arising from their competition will be more or less dominant in the discursive space within which they operate. Collective memory, then, is not a fixed

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31. Collective memory is often conflated with related concepts like history, identity, and narratives. In this paper, I treat collective memory as an overarching analytic category—certain interpretations of the past are formalized as history, constituted as identity, and articulated through narratives.
32. On the distinction and relationship between memory and history, see Gedi and Elam 1996. On the sociality of collective memory, see Halbwachs 1992 [1925].
33. Schmemann 2005.
34. Hutchison 2016, 64.
35. Confino and Fritzsche 2002, 5.
36. On the relationship between memory and identity, see Connerton 1989 and Wang 2012.
37. Adler 1997, 327.
38. Funkenstein 1989, 6.
39. Cohen 1987, 287.
40. Margalit 2002; Ricoeur 2004.

articulation but a product of dialogical interactions among various social actors. Crucially, this means collective memory takes shape in the context, or even as a direct consequence, of their narrative capacities. Indeed, underlying memory politics is how "past grievances or glories are constantly reproduced in contestations of power in which other stores or vents are pushed aside, marginalized or ignored."[41] Who says what and at whose cost becomes key.

Memory Politics: Some Mechanisms

It is also crucial to clarify how collective memory permeates the public domain. Though scholars have often focused on the role of elites in using historical events, this is only part of the picture.[42] Which ideas come to dominate the public discourse depends critically on the broader balance of power between competing groups and on their ability to construct, manipulate, and dismantle the process of memory production. As Thomas Berger points out, the interactive process between official narratives and collective memory, and the relative influence of one over the other, is a "matter for empirical investigation."[43] Thus, following Peter Verovšek's suggestion,[44] I develop a new framework of memory politics that underscores how actors mobilize collective memory to shape public discourse, against and through official narratives.[45]

The actors who engage in memory politics are both social and strategic:[46] they are vested in shaping official narratives and deploy available resources within a shared pool of resources to achieve their objectives.[47] State actors—from regime elites to opposition parties—seek legitimation; they publicly rationalize their policy decisions in an attempt to secure support and minimize dissent among their audiences.[48] As Ronald Krebs and Patrick Jackson argue, the preservation of their rule and authority may itself be contingent on perceived legitimacy, which "can be established only through rhetorical action."[49] Meanwhile, societal actors—from civil societies to independent media—pursue representation: how the identities and interests of different segments of the society are embodied in the rhetoric and policies of their state.[50] In short, collective memories are a product of and fuel for contemporary political contests among actors with vested narrative interests.

41. For examples of elite-focused analyses, see Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006; He 2009; Dixon 2018. Though Yinan He admits that "collective memory need not be an object of political manipulation," she concludes that "when politicians are historians memory tends to follow [their] interests." He 2009, 26.

42. See, for example, Wang 2012.

43. Berger 2012, 13.

44. Verovšek 2016.

45. The process of memory politics may be more "top-down" or "bottom-up" depending on the shape of the political institutions that mediate the narrative powers of social actors.

46. The identities of these actors are "open"; they include both state and societal actors.

47. Goddard and Krebs 2015.

48. Ibid. See also Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006.

49. Krebs and Jackson 2007, 38.

50. Hinton and O'Neil 2009.

This contestation over memory also takes place within a shared institutional context: the political space that structures (dis)incentives for collective narrative action.[51] Political institutions shape which groups mobilize and what tools they have available for strategic actions.[52] As Michael Barnett writes, "Whether these cultural resources [such as collective memory] are rearticulated and aligned in a way that makes [a policy] legitimate and desirable is highly dependent on the institutional context in which political elites strategize and calculate their political interests."[53] In memory politics, the institutions that matter are representational: civil societies that broaden the scope of legitimate narrators; elections that hold state actors accountable to narrative breach; and trials that establish the boundaries of legitimate narratives. These institutions condition the political power of narrators, the availability and salience of collective-memory frames, and thus, the processes of mnemonic contestation.

I introduce three strategies by which actors seek legitimation or representation during episodes of mnemonic contestation (Table 1).[54] First, they engage in *framing*, which I define as a social process of interaction that involves negotiating how the past is to be interpreted. A key premise here is that the meanings associated with particular events, places, and actors are ultimately open to debate.[55] Framing shapes the interpretive work in memory politics by deciding which aspects of the past to focus on; tying them together in a set of coherent meanings; and (re)constituting the ways in which certain objects are seen and understood.[56] When employed, framing generates counter-narratives that embody versions of history which are alternatives to the prevailing narrative.[57] In this process, actors shape the boundaries of what is politically acceptable and salient for the state to claim—and thus the range of appropriate narratives that can be deployed in memory debates (what can be said). In short, framing sets the terms of the mnemonic contestation.

Second, actors engage in *accrediting*, which I define as a social process of interaction that involves redefining which narrators have the authority to speak about the past.[58] This acknowledges that the shape of representational institutions determines the relative power of narrators, the state being the dominant narrator when it comes to national memory.[59] Accrediting is thus an attempt to diffuse the narrative authority of the state by marking actors *other than the state* as "representative";

51. Barnett 1999, 16; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996.
52. Thelen, Steinmo, and Longstreth 1992.
53. Barnett 1999, 17.
54. For an overview of the mechanisms of (legal) activism around historical issues, see Arrington 2019.
55. Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2019.
56. Benford and Snow 2000.
57. He 2009.
58. Accrediting, much like issue expansion and certification, helps broaden the scope of stakeholders in a given contest. But while issue expansion redefines which "issues" are related to a given policy, accrediting redefines whose views matter in a particular debate. Meanwhile, though certification refers to a top-down process of validation by "certifying agents," accrediting entails efforts to reshape the representative institutions and norms that underlie such certification. On issue expansion or "scope of conflict," see Schattschneider 1960. On certification, see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004.
59. Olick and Robbins 1998, 127.

this requires challenging the rules and procedures that intermediate memory debates and transforming the range of recognized actors that can participate in mnemonic contestation (who has a say). As more people become recognized actors in memory politics, the process and meaning of memory contestation shift to accommodate growing and varied demands for representation.[60]

Third, actors engage in *binding*—a social process of interaction that involves enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform. Crucially, this process combines framing and accrediting, imposing different narrative bounds (what can be said) on different narrators (who has a say).[61] In this way, it recognizes the importance of narrative histories, reputations, and identities; what is said is always interpreted on the basis of who is saying it. Actors rely on these narrative markers to control the rhetorical resources on which narrators rely for legitimation (that is, who can say what) and reconstitute their "menu of policy options."[62] Through binding, state actors—both those in power and in the opposition—become routinely and differentially compelled by collective-memory frames.

TABLE 1. *Summary of mechanisms in mnemonic contestation*

	Key concern	Process
Framing	What can be said?	A social process of interaction that involves negotiating how the past can be interpreted
Accrediting	Who has a say?	A social process of interaction that involves redefining which narrators have authority to speak about the past
Binding	Who can say what?	A social process of interaction that involves enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform

Together, these mechanisms highlight the causal complexity of memory politics.[63] They portray collective memory as inherently processual, constituted by contestations over what can be said and who has a say, which culminate in patterns of binding that enforce who can say what. What this suggests for the study of collective memory is simple: to understand how collective memory shapes politics—how the past binds—one must understand the history of a given collective memory and the layers of meaning it has accrued over time, as well as the instrumentality of its mobilization in the present. Memory politics is always and wholly contextual.

60. On agents of memory, see Bernhard and Kubik 2014.
61. Binding involves an effort to link demands, much like frame bridging, brokerage, and issue linkage. However, while these mechanisms entail linking "ideologically congruent but structurally disconnected" frames, entities, and issues, binding entails an attribution; the meanings of a given frame vary depending on the narrator. In this view, the linked subjects are embedded rather than "disconnected." On frame processes, see Benford and Snow 2000; on issue linkage, see Poast 2013.
62. Goddard and Krebs 2015.
63. My framework is "causal" in the "pragmatic" sense, responding to a problem situation by clarifying *how* it came about. See Jackson 2017.

Memory Politics: A Methodology

The mechanisms in this framework are conceived of as a set of purposive actions that social actors adopt to effect change in the official discourse; each constitutes a *process*. Accordingly, I rely on process tracing of historical evidence to study the mechanisms of mnemonic contestation. Process tracing, as Levy notes, "involves an intensive analysis of the development of a sequence of events over time, [and] is well-suited to the task of uncovering intervening causal mechanisms."[64] In my empirical study, therefore, I leverage periods of change in the dynamics of mnemonic contestation to probe the mechanisms identified in my theory. By evaluating the sequential chains of events, process tracing enables me to monitor the prevailing explanation, Japanese impenitence, alongside my own: memory politics at home. The objective is to capture the fine-grained relations and distinctions among these contending theories to more fully understand the complex relations between Japan and South Korea today.[65]

To systematically conduct process tracing, I first establish the practices based on which my mechanisms can be considered to be present (Table 2). Because memory politics is prone to over-determination—in which everything matters—it is critical to state the rules for finding and interpreting evidence. First, framing entails public efforts by actors to establish or challenge the "official," or state-sanctioned terms of a given memory debate, charting "what can be said." This strategy generates narrative rifts in the public discourse, revealing the gaps and breaks between official narratives and collective memory and clarifying demands for the nature and scope of revision. Thus the empirical task is to illustrate that (1) the state engaged in framing efforts to legitimize its policy; (2) actors mobilized counter-framing efforts, pushing for contending frames with which to interpret memory debates, and (3) state actors reinforced framing efforts, whether by revising their own narrative strategies or consciously silencing counter-narratives. Framing is an iterative process, involving a discursive back-and-forth among competing frames in search of resonance.

Second, accrediting involves efforts by actors to expand opportunities for representation—both substantively and procedurally—to redefine "who has a say." This strategy cultivates narrative feedback: actors transform the very public sphere that conditions the resources by which the public can mobilize and the constraints the state faces from public demands for representation; this rekindles and sustains mnemonic contestation. Crucially, while there may be struggles among actors about who gets to speak for the broader society—memories are seldom homogeneous[66]—the key point here is that actors *beyond the state* become accredited voices in memory debates. The empirical task is, thus, three-fold: demonstrating (1) that actors sought and seized opportunities to widen institutional channels of representation;

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64. Levy 2008, 6.
65. Checkel 2006.
66. On heterogeneous responses to historical grievances, see Kitagawa and Chu 2021.

(2) that this had an impact on the visibility and salience of memory debates; and (3) that the state acknowledged the emergence of new narrators, whether by discrediting or accepting their narrative authority. Accrediting is, in this sense, a parallel process by which symbolic and procedural demands become co-constitutive.

Lastly, binding entails efforts by actors to enforce a set of narrative bounds, to establish "who can say what." This strategy produces variegated forms of narrative coercion: depending on the actors' narrative reputations, they are compelled by memory politics in different ways. Some are forced into operating within the bounds of collective-memory frames for fear of punishment—for instance, being voted out of office. Others become locked into certain narratives for fear of undermining the narrative foundations of their legitimacy and incurring reputational costs.[67] By way of challenging and defending certain narrative frames, actors also reveal and refine the bounds within which they must operate. Empirically, then, the task is to substantiate (1) that actors sought to hold the state accountable to certain forms of narrative breach; (2) that state actors acknowledged their own narrative bounds and generally conformed to them; and (3) that those who failed to do so were punished.

TABLE 2. *Practical implications*

	Process	*Practices*	*Consequences*
Framing	A social process of interaction that involves negotiating how the past can be interpreted	• Did the state engage in framing efforts to legitimize their policy? • Did actors engage in counter-framing efforts? • Did the state acknowledge this framing contest?	Generates *narrative rifts* between official narratives and collective memory
Accrediting	A social process of interaction that involves redefining which narrators have authority to speak about the past	• Did actors seek to expand institutional channels of representation? • Did these efforts raise the visibility and salience of memory debates? • Did the state acknowledge this accrediting contest?	Generates *narrative feedback* as substantive grievances about representation become fused with broader procedural grievances
Binding	A social process of interaction that involves enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform	• Did actors seek to hold the state accountable for narrative breach? • Did the state acknowledge this binding contest? • Did state actors who failed to conform get punished?	Generates *narrative coercion* as narrators conform to their narrative bounds or risk punishment

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67. On narratives and legitimacy, see Goddard 2006.

Memory Politics: An Operationalization

To facilitate process tracing, I must also define where and how I intend to find "collective memory" and "official narratives." I locate collective memory in publicly circulating discourse, signs, and performances. For collective memory to be intersubjective, it must be socially constructed—it is precisely because of this social nature of collective memory that politically powerful actors are structurally positioned to (re)produce collective memory. This has implications for empirically tracing the mechanisms of mnemonic contestation: what agents believe to be the "official" narrative becomes the key reference against which they register their own version of collective memory, and the resulting contestation—a narrative-generative practice—is what makes collective memory social.[68] I thus locate official narratives—state-sanctioned characterizations of the past—in publicly articulated discourse and practices which are widely considered to represent the government's official position.[69] Contests over memory are most likely operative during periods of emotional salience, when official narratives about the past are perceptibly at odds with collective memory.

In short, actors engage in communicative practices to negotiate the appropriate narrative bounds and the recognized range of narrators in memory politics. This means the "containers" of collective memory should vary depending on the prevailing communicative media at the time. Accordingly, whether one looks to oral, print, online, or social media must be justified on the basis of accessibility and relevance for the period of study. I discuss this further in the context of South Korean memory politics.

South Korean Memory Politics: A Case Study

I conduct a "theory-guided" case study of South Korean memory politics, structured by the analytic assumptions, processual propositions, and practical implications identified in my framework. The subcases in this study are thus illustrative, at once idiographic in nature—describing, interpreting, and explaining a period of mnemonic contestation; and monothetic in orientation—mobilizing the details of specific cases to illustrate a broader theoretical argument.[70] In this manner, I pay attention to historical specificities of the South Korean case as well as highlighting the processual generalities of memory politics.

South Korean Memory Politics: A Case Selection

The South Korean case is illustrative of memory politics for a number of reasons. First, Korea was significantly victimized as a Japanese colony, which makes the representation of collective memory particularly salient from the public's perspective.

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68. Hagström and Gustafsson 2019; Wiener 2014.
69. Breuer and Johnston 2019.
70. Levy 2008, 4.

Since the annexation of Korea in 1910, Japan had brutalized Korea in remarkable ways.[71] The most enduring traumas have involved displacing approximately 750,000 men to serve as forced laborers and 200,000 women as sex slaves, many of whom were maimed and perished as a result. Over the thirty-five-year period, countless people were also killed: on 1 March 1919, in just one day, 7,500 protesters were executed by the Japanese colonial police.[72] Given the longevity and magnitude of Japanese violence and the unsettled disputes over its history, the topic of memory remains prominent in their bilateral relations.

Analytically, South Korea serves as a "crucial" case study because it is among the places where memory politics would be least expected to dominate issues of reconciliation with Japan.[73] The country's contemporary security challenges—emanating from the unresolved war with North Korea, its nuclear advance, and the rise of authoritarian China—should render "history issues" with Japan secondary, based on prevailing theories of national interest.[74] That "history issues" have continued to foil bilateral cooperation, as recently as 2019,[75] suggests a more complex mnemonic process that has allowed them to endure. At the same time, South Korea's institutional transformation over the course of the post-normalization period—from a military dictatorship to a mature democracy—allows me to probe the interaction between memory and institutions as posited in my theoretical framework. From the standpoint of historic significance, contemporary relevance, and analytical leverage, South Korea thus makes an ideal candidate for studying memory politics.

South Korean Memory Politics: An Operationalization

Based on the time- and context-specific parameters of my methodology, I focus on certain manifestations of official narratives and collective memory in South Korea to conduct this case study (Table 3). To trace "official narratives," I look to three indicators: executive statements and actions by leaders; legislative resolutions and bills; and state-sanctioned accounts in government publications, including textbooks. To narrow the scope of analysis, I focus on those speech acts that seek to legitimize the government's policies toward Japan and, in particular, those concerning "history issues." I also pay attention to official narratives during emotionally salient moments, including commemorations—such as Independence Movement Day (1 March) and Liberation Day (15 August)—and diplomatic controversies over "history issues" involving wartime forced labor, sexual slavery of "comfort women," and territorial disputes over Dokdo/Takeshima. These are analytically

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71. For an overview, see Cumings 1984.
72. While contested by Japan, the estimates presented here are commonly accepted in academia and independent reports. Lind 2008.
73. Levy 2008, 12. On the empirical puzzle, see Lind 2008.
74. Krasner 1978.
75. For an overview, see Deacon 2021.

important because they capture official characterizations of national traumas through recurring, programmed events as well as during unexpected incidents.

For "collective memory," I focus on four indicators: verbal and written statements by opinion leaders, including the political opposition and civil organizations; (auto) biographies of key individuals; protest slogans and pamphlets used during social movements; and public opinion on relevant policy issues. Though these manifestations of collective memory are not exhaustive, they are the most salient in the eyes of the state leaders who are interested in policy legitimation. Because these discursive practices are purposely curated and publicly expressed to contest the official narratives, collective memory as mobilized by the opposition and civil society carries particular weight. At the same time, more organic signs and symbols—such as protest slogans and pamphlets—used during social movements can illuminate the nuances in how people choose to narrate their collective memory, particularly in complex, post-traumatic contexts.[76] These provide narrative substance to broader signs of public disapproval, such as opinion polls, which I survey complementarily.

TABLE 3. *Operationalization*

	Indicators
Official narrative	• Executive statements and actions • Legislative resolutions and bills • State-sanctioned publications
Collective memory	• Verbal and written statements by opinion leaders • (Auto)biographies of opinion leaders • Protest slogans and pamphlets • Public opinion surveys

South Korean Memory Politics: Some Findings

To highlight the processes underlying the mobilization of collective memory, I divide my case study into three periods to mark the distinct stages of mnemonic contestation: (1) "between pragmatism and humiliation," 1965–88; (2) "from humiliation to shame," 1988–98; and (3) "trapped in anger," 1998–2017. Each period is marked by a shift in the nature of the interactive process between collective memory and official narrative *vis-à-vis* Japan over "history issues." I leverage these subcases to systematically examine the role of collective memory and the strategies that social actors deployed to contest the official narrative and policy; in doing so, I also consider how various alternative explanations, including Japanese impenitence, interplay with my own. Finally, while the periods serve to demonstrate the mechanisms at play, they

76. Atkinson 1998.

must be seen collectively to understand the nature and scope of anti-Japanism in South Korea today. For this reason, I conclude with a brief and holistic assessment of collective colonial memory in South Korea over time.

Between Pragmatism and Humiliation, 1965–88

The two decades following the 1965 normalization of relations with Japan were marked by an enduring framing contest over how to interpret the past. South Korean dictators framed normalization as "pragmatism," insisting that cooperating with Japan was in South Korea's national interest. Pursuing normalization in 1965, Park Chung-hee, for instance, emphasized the country's pressing need for security and development. He stated in one oft-cited speech: "Though there is no doubt that Japan could be seen as a past enemy, we must join hands with the Japanese, because we need them for our present and future. Isn't this the direction our country should be heading for the sake of our prosperity?"[77] Of the 157 speeches in which Park mentioned Japan during his post-normalization tenure, a majority featured the theme of pragmatism—and its attendant topics such as "survival," "growth," and "mutual benefit"—in describing Japan.[78]

Societal actors contested this narrative of pragmatism with a contending frame of "humiliation." During the negotiations with Japan over normalization, a series of violent demonstrations broke out across the country. The June 3 Resistance movement was initiated by university students, with slogans such as "stop the humiliating diplomacy" and "stop the government that ignores the people."[79] The students made clear their collective resentment of Japan. As recounted in his autobiography, one organizer declared: "We've been humiliated enough already! You [Japan] have refused to recognize your sins and crimes of the past. We also refuse to forgive you."[80] The student protests also led to the mobilization of the broader public. It is estimated that over 3.5 million people participated in anti-Japanese movements from March 1964 to September 1965.[81] Some opposition commentators compared the normalization treaty to the Eulsa Treaty, which Japan had used to deprive Korea of its sovereignty in 1905.[82] On numerous occasions, Park had to deploy the military to disband the demonstrations across the country and restore order.[83] In his emergency address on 28 August 1965, he chastised the student demonstrators—calling them "immature," "incompetent,"

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77. Presidential Speech Archives, 23 June 1965, my translation.
78. These 157 speeches commemorate either Independence Movement Day (1 March) or Independence Day (15 August). See the Presidential Speech Archives for speeches delivered by Park since 22 June 1965, when the Treaty on Basic Relations was signed.
79. Kim 2005, 60; Park 2010.
80. Hyun 2015, 196.
81. Kim 1971.
82. Cha 1996.
83. Berger 2012, 196.

"lazy," and "thuggish"—and blamed the opposition for their intransigence.[84] In this manner, the collective memory of colonial atrocities was forcefully silenced as, for various strategic purposes, Park sought "reconciliation" with Japan.

Notably, Japanese apologies had little effect on public narratives about Japan. As part of the normalization deal, Japanese foreign minister Shiina Etsusaburo had offered an apology, stating that Japan was "deeply remorseful" for the "unfortunate times" in their bilateral relations.[85] The regime elites praised Shiina's apology as a reassuring sign; South Korean foreign minister Lee Dong-won remarked that "[Shiina's] statement had had a most helpful effect," noting that he had been the first Japanese official to ever apologize.[86] But the wider society continued to view Japan as immoral and dangerous. A series of surveys demonstrated the public's strong and lasting antagonism toward Japan. In a 1975 poll by *Joongang*, ten years after normalization, South Koreans rated Japan as the third most "reviled" country, after the Soviet Union and China.[87] Three years later, in a 1978 poll by *Chosun*, more than half of respondents said they distrusted Japan; a third were unsure.[88]

The contending frames of humiliation and Japanese immorality began to influence the narrative strategies of military dictator Chun Doo-hwan, who initiated a campaign of *geug-il*—literally, "overcoming Japan." Chun had coined the phrase to legitimize conciliatory policies with Japan, blending Park's earlier emphasis on pragmatism with a more competitive and nationalistic agenda. The rationale was simple: South Korea should seek to outdo Japan, rather than merely criticize it. In this vein, starting 1 January 1983, *Chosun Ilbo* ran forty-seven articles as part of a series called "The Way of Geug-il," which emphasized the need to better understand Japan in order to surpass it.[89] On 17 December 1983, the last article of the series ran under the headline, "The Need to Learn What Should Be Learned."[90] This, Chun said, required closer contact and even cooperation. On his way to Japan in 1984, he reminded the public: "We cannot establish ourselves as a 'global' country while snubbing our neighbor … Those in a hurry to make progress have no time to find fault with the past."[91]

Yet, Chun's narrative revision found little resonance in the face of continued controversy over "history issues" in Japan.[92] Revisions to Japanese school textbooks in the early 1980s depicted its colonial rule over Korea as justified and, in many ways, beneficial; one textbook portrayed the 1919 independence movement as a "riot."[93] And a number of high-ranking Japanese officials made incendiary remarks about the nature of Japanese aggression. Among the most contentious was when education

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84. Presidential Speech Archives, 28 August 1965, my translation.
85. Yamazaki 2005.
86. US Department of State, "Current Korean Problems," 15 March 1965, CK3100006064.
87. Lind 2008, 55.
88. Ibid.
89. Isozaki 2015.
90. Ibid., 8.
91. Presidential Speech Archives, 6 September 1983, my translation.
92. For an overview of the textbook controversy, see Lee 1985, 141–53.
93. Kim 1987.

minister Fujio Masayuki said that "Japan's annexation of Korea rested on mutual agreement both in form and in fact."[94] The Chun regime's response to these controversies was largely tame—mostly expressing hurt and confusion—but popular reaction was far more punishing. An editorial from the Yonhap News Agency called Fujio's remarks "abusive," "absurd," and "outrageous."[95] Anti-Japanese petitions and rallies broke out across the country, and the Japanese ambassador to South Korea received death threats. Moreover, societal actors criticized the Chun regime for abandoning the pursuit of historic justice for political and economic expedience[96]—or, more cynically, the survival of his "collaborationist" regime.[97] Antigovernment activists such as Im Jongguk began calling for the "eradication of *vestiges* of Japanese imperialism and the restoration of national righteousness," referring to both neocolonial thought in Japan and the colonial mentality at home.[98]

Mnemonic contestation during this period generated an enduring narrative rift between the state and the societal actors. Appalled by the willingness of the state actors to compromise on historic issues and the associated narrative of pragmatism, the opposition elites and the public began to see authoritarian rule as a product of colonial modernity: the development and survival of the modern South Korean state depended on the very imperial forces from which it was meant to escape. As Berger put it, "The same elite sectors of society that had benefited under Japanese rule had been allowed … to perpetuate an oppressive form of government that achieved prosperity through the ruthless exploitation of the people … and that could maintain its control only through the ruthless exercise of state power."[99] *Asahi Shimbun,* too, noted at the time that the anti-Japan protests had erupted within a broader scene of popular resistance to authoritarianism.[100] As a consequence, the pro-democracy forces that emerged during this time believed that true democracy could not be achieved in the absence of historic justice, not only in relation to South Korea's authoritarian past but stretching all the way back to the colonial era.[101]

From Humiliation to Shame, 1988–98

Mnemonic contestation during the decade of democratic transition saw two parallel developments: new narrators emerged on the heels of civil society revival, and new collective-memory frames entered public discourse. Chun's troubled exit and nomination of Roh Tae-woo as the presidential successor in 1987 had triggered a wave of demonstrations—the June Democratic Struggle—that showcased the unity

94. Lind 2008, 48.
95. Ibid., 57.
96. Lee 1984, 118.
97. De Ceuster 2001, 208.
98. Im 1982, emphasis added.
99. Berger 2012, 196.
100. Isozaki 2015, 5.
101. De Ceuster 2001.

and strength of South Korea's civil society groups for the first time since their appearance.[102] Just three days after the Peace Parade, which mobilized over a million protesters across the country,[103] a raft of democratic reforms was instituted, spawning a spectacular rise of civil society. Of 843 NGOs surveyed in 2000, a striking 76 percent had been formed in the decade since 1987.[104] This wave of accrediting would prove consequential for reframing collective colonial memory: the new narrators normalized narratives of humiliation regarding Japanese impenitence, but they also introduced narratives of shame concerning South Korean complicity.

Indeed, narratives of humiliation found increasing resonance in this period and began to overwhelm those of pragmatism that had dominated earlier. Illustrative in this regard was Roh's contentious three-day visit to Tokyo in 1990, during which he stressed that former expressions of "regret" had been tepid and publicly demanded a more contrite apology from the Japanese emperor. A senior official in the Blue House then reasoned, "Because the miseries of war were committed in the name of the Emperor, only the Emperor can provide a lasting apology."[105] But when the South Korean public found his apology wanting, Roh swiftly reframed his narrative strategy to plead for leniency: "Even if we may feel that the Japanese apologies do not fully live up to our expectations, we should accept them with magnanimity and generosity."[106] Compared to the eager acceptance of Japanese apologies in the years prior, Roh's response was evidently more subdued, shifting the emphasis from a need for pragmatism to an appeal to mercy.

Meanwhile, colonial and collaborationist memories became highly visible and salient in public discourse as civil societies proliferated.[107] Among the new authoritative voices was the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (*hanguk jeongsindae munje daechaek hyeobuihoe*, Korean Council), founded in 1990. Members protested outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul every Wednesday at noon to raise the "comfort women" issue and pressured the South Korean government to take legislative action.[108] In December 1991, they also—alongside Japanese civil society—helped three women bring the first-ever lawsuit against the Japanese government. Later, the lobbying efforts of the Korean Council in various international organizations culminated in the UN's categorical condemnation of Japan for its wartime abuse of Korean women in 1996.[109] The UN recommendations so closely resembled the demands of the Korean Council that its influence was unmistakable.[110]

102. Adesnik and Kim 2013.
103. Ibid.
104. Kim 2003, 58.
105. Weisman 1990.
106. Shin 1990.
107. Kim 2003.
108. Ku 2008.
109. United Nations, E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1.
110. Soh 1996, 1226.

Another new voice was the Institute for Research on Collaborationist Activities (*minjok munje yeonguso*). Founded in 1991, the institute's main endeavor was to expose those who collaborated during the colonial period—particularly active politicians.[111] To this end, in 1993 it published three biographic volumes of ninety-nine members of the "pro-Japan faction" (*chinilpa*), which invigorated memory debates about the colonial residues of contemporary South Korea.[112] (This list would grow to 4,776 people by 2008.[113]) The institute's success in galvanizing public interest also elicited adjacent efforts to shed light on colonial-era collaboration, including the Pro-Japan Research Institute (*chinil munje yeonguhoe*), which brought together scholars and journalists to "popularize" histories of collaboration in public discourse.[114]

As new narrators rekindled—and in many ways *redirected*—memory debates, South Korea's official policies and narratives began to confront its own complicity. Under the campaign of "historical rectification" (*yeoksa baroseoogi*), the country's first civilian leader, Kim Young-sam, sought to directly address questions of colonial and transitional justice. The campaign began in 1993 with an extensive political amnesty directive, which released 40,000 political dissidents from prison,[115] and a series of institutional reforms that cut the government's ties to the military, curbed the authority of the country's central intelligence agency, and revised the controversial National Security Law. The campaign also included symbolic measures, including the dismantling of the former Japanese imperial building and restoring Korean-language names for all administrative and geographic sites. Kim remarked in a later address: "We will recover the true honor of the military and national pride by expelling this unfortunate and backward legacy … [In this effort,] we began by demolishing the former Joseon-Governor Building—a remnant of Japanese colonial rule—to correct history and establish national spirit."[116] In this way, Kim's campaign reinforced the entwined histories of South Korean authoritarianism and Japanese colonialism: part of the same "humiliating" past that demanded efforts to confront and repair.

Crucially, the renewed controversies over Japanese impenitence, as well as domestic political crises in 1995, forced Kim to intensify his campaign, but neither initiated it. Abroad, provocative statements by senior Japanese officials were steadily resurfacing; some asserted that "Japan did some good" in Korea during the colonial era, while others claimed that Korea had been annexed in 1910 through a legally valid treaty.[117] At home, the "slush fund" scandal incriminated Kim in a massive corruption case involving his predecessor Roh.[118] As a result, in a *Donga* opinion poll in December 1995, Kim's record-high approval rating had plunged to 33 percent; the

111. Berger 2012, 198.
112. Caprio 2006.
113. Kim 2008.
114. De Ceuster 2001.
115. Cha 1993.
116. Presidential Speech Archives, 9 January 1996, my translation.
117. Kristof 1995.
118. Koh 1996, 54–55.

opposition was now leading the ruling party by a margin of 17 percent, just four months before the general elections.[119] In this context, the escalation of "historical rectification" was far from surprising. Kim's lukewarm responses to Japanese provocations and his decision to forego legal action against his predecessors were reinterpreted as signs of complicity and moral compromise. To recover his legitimacy, Kim announced a string of policy reversals in 1996, from resuming military exercises near the disputed islands to arresting his predecessors on charges of insurrection and corruption.[120] Although Kim maintained that his about-face in seeking colonial and transitional justice stemmed from a "dialogue with history," the public saw these moves as a way to extricate himself from the dictatorial and collaborationist administrations of the past.[121]

Mnemonic contestation during this period was marked by dynamic and conjoint processes of narrative feedback and rifts. The emergence of civil society rekindled memory debates that had once been stifled, emboldening the public to seek greater representation of their collective memory and, in the process, rescoping the pool of authoritative narrators. These newly accredited voices, then, began to reframe memory debates by tying narratives of humiliation (Japanese impenitence) with those of shame (South Korean complicity). In this new colonial-authoritarian frame, grievances against Japan and grievances against the state were mutually supportive; postcolonial reckoning required post-authoritarian justice. It was as new narrators entered the stage and their narratives of humiliation and shame found broader traction that, for the first time in South Korean history, collective memory truly began to bind.

Trapped in Anger, 1998–2017

As South Korea's democracy matured and collective-memory frames dominated public discourse, patterns of binding began to bifurcate along partisan identities.[122] For the progressives, who had long fought in the opposition, the history of collective memory provided a narrative foundation for their democratic credibility. For the conservatives, the same history posed an enduring predicament because the colonial-authoritarian frame continued to expose and highlight their checkered lineage; it was under conservative leadership that normalization had been forced and dissent quashed. In this way, the South Korean political elite became differentially bound by collective colonial-authoritarian memory: progressives sustained the narrative of shame to signal their democratic virtue, while conservatives sought to distance themselves from the narrative.

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119. Choi 2005, 478.
120. Choi 2005.
121. Yoon 1996, 517–18.
122. This is consistent with previous findings that link historical contention with domestic politics: Glosserman and Snyder 2015; Kagotani, Kimura, and Weber 2014; Kimura 2019; Rozman and Lee 2006; You and Kim 2016.

This partisan binding was most clearly illustrated under the leadership of Kim Dae-jung, whose conciliatory narratives and policies toward Japan were far *less* constrained by the collective-memory frame—to be pro-Japan was to be "undemocratic"—that had beleaguered his conservative predecessors.[123] Indeed, while Kim encountered similar, if not worse, controversies involving Japanese acts of impenitence, most memorably the 2000 textbook disputes and the Japanese leaders' repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, public backlash in South Korea was almost exclusively targeted at Japan. In fact, the symbols the public deployed in these protests were strikingly patriotic. In a highly publicized event, twenty Korean men from a civil organization, Save the Nation, gathered by the Independence Gate of a former prison where colonial dissenters had been held, and each cut off a finger.[124] This act, a common loyalty ritual among South Korean gangsters, was intended to exhibit devotion to the state.[125] Conspicuously absent from these protests were charges of collusion against Kim for "selling the country," which had been a common rhetorical trope against leaders who sought to engage Japan. Public outrage notwithstanding, Kim escaped criticism and maintained what many characterized as a "high point" in relations with Japan.[126]

Not all progressives pursued this course, however; some opted to rally the colonial-authoritarian narrative toward reinforcing their democratic credentials. This was true of president Roh Moo-hyun. Less than a year after his inauguration, Roh was impeached by the conservative-held national assembly for a minor violation of election laws. In battling this challenge to his legitimacy, Roh made a drastic executive decision and made public large swaths of confidential documents related to the 1965 normalization treaty.[127] These demonstrated that then-president Park Chung-hee had funneled the "compensation" provided by Japan for the victims of its colonial and wartime crimes toward nation-building projects. This was a remarkable narrative maneuver: it redirected the public outrage against Japan toward "pro-Japan" conservatives who were deemed to have robbed the victims, even at the expense of somewhat validating what had been Japan's enduring rhetorical trope—it had already paid for its past.

Against this backdrop, Roh overturned his initial "soft" approach to Japan and began to take more contentious actions.[128] In his March 1 Independence Movement speech in 2005, Roh strongly pressed Japan "to discover the truth about their past, reflect on it, and make a genuine apology, as well as reparations if need be."[129] Roh had "no choice but to sternly deal" with Japanese impenitence when yet another controversy over the "history issue" emerged just two weeks

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123. This observation is consistent with Minseon Ku's finding that ties with Japan deepened considerably under Kim despite continued problems over history. Ku 2016, 88.
124. Kirk 2001.
125. Ibid.
126. Lam 2002.
127. You and Kim 2016, 66.
128. Rozman and Lee 2006, 768–69.
129. Presidential Speech Archives, 1 March 2005, my translation.

later.[130] On 16 March the local parliament of Shimane Prefecture in Japan announced Takeshima Day, marking the disputed territory as Japanese. For many in South Korea, Dokdo (Takeshima) was a symbol of Japan's colonial violence because it was the first Korean territory annexed by Japan in 1905.[131] Incensed, Roh called the move "an act that denies Korea's complete liberation"[132] and announced various punitive measures that culminated in a "diplomatic war" against Japan.

Meanwhile, Roh also began to institutionalize a narrative of colonial-authoritarian nexus by intensifying official efforts to investigate collaborationist activities and accrediting new voices with narrative authority on this issue. In May 2005, the progressive-majority National Assembly passed the Basic Act for Coping with Past History for Truth and Reconciliation.[133] With an expansive mandate, its commission scrutinized century-long abuses against anti-Japan and pro-democracy activists, including death, injury, and disappearances. That same year, two investigative bodies—one presidential, another civil—also released reports identifying individuals with collaborationist histories; among the most controversial subjects of inquiry was former president Park Chung-hee.[134] Working in parallel with these bodies was the Investigative Commission on Pro-Japanese Collaborators' Property, which confiscated the wealth and real estate of known collaborators.[135] These concerted efforts helped cement the collective memory linking the country's authoritarian and colonial pasts, which came to define contemporary partisan divides as the progressives seized the narrative to signal their democratic credibility and delegitimize the conservatives amid continued memory debates.

Predictably, these partisan narrative bounds would come to bind conservative leaders to far more punishing standards. For president Lee Myung-bak, the coercive influence of collective memory was most conspicuous when he sought to sign a military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan in the summer of 2012.[136] This massively backfired when it was discovered that the deal had been negotiated in secret and made public only the day before its signing. Immediately, the public took to the streets and denounced the deal as "selling out the country."[137] Opposition spokesperson Park Yong-jin railed that the Lee administration "is proving pro-Japanese to the bone."[138] For the societal actors, that the deal had been struck so quickly and

130. Rozman and Lee 2006, 779.

131. Choi 2005, 471; Wiegand 2015, 355.

132. Presidential Speech Archives, 22 March 2005, my translation.

133. For an overview of the bill, see Hanley 2014, 156–60.

134. The public body is the Presidential Committee for Investigating the Conduct of Pro-Japan Collaborators during the Colonial Period, and the private body is the earlier-mentioned Institute for Research in Collaborationist Activities.

135. This commission was established by the Special Act on Asset Confiscation for Pro-Japanese and Anti-National Collaborators to the State, Act No. 7769, 29 December 2005.

136. The agreement included the General Security of Military Information Agreement and the Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreement.

137. Kim 2018, 49.

138. It is important to note that the Korean term for "pro-Japanese" (*chinil*) is used interchangeably with "collaborationist" (*chinil-pa*).

secretly was evidence of the conservatives' collaborationist and autocratic lineages; they also called the deal invalid, pointing to the undemocratic process by which it was negotiated.[139] Ultimately, the signing was canceled at the eleventh hour and Lee promptly reversed his Japan policy, seeking to repair his image through a series of provocative measures.[140]

This incident was notable because it demonstrated how memory debates shaped Lee's decision making in the lead-up to as well as in the aftermath of the abortive deal. Starting in 2011, the Korean Council was intensifying its lobbying and publicity efforts to seek Japanese apology on the "comfort women" issue; by year's end it had erected a statue in front of the Japanese embassy. Caught between public demands for apology and Japan's protest over the statue, Lee had insisted on keeping the negotiations over the security agreements confidential and obscured from public view.[141] Yet, when the deal proved untenable, he immediately reverted to anti-Japan rhetoric and policy. Barely two months later, Lee orchestrated a surprise visit to Dokdo (Takeshima) and relied, ironically, on his progressive predecessor's narrative of sovereignty to legitimize his about-face on Japan.[142]

Societal actors also punished Lee's successor, president Park Geun-hye, for seeking conciliatory policies with Japan in breach of her partisan narrative bounds. After years of keeping some distance from Japan—and consciously so—she reached a "comfort women" deal with then Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo in 2015.[143] Tokyo agreed to pay 1 billion yen toward assisting the forty-six living victims, and a joint declaration stated that the issue had been settled in a "final and irreversible" manner. But the Korean Council called the deal "humiliating diplomacy" and "diplomatic collusion," and refused the funds on the grounds that they were not legal reparations but veiled payoffs to silence the victims.[144] In demonstrations across the country, protesters compared the "comfort women" deal to the normalization treaty of 1965, which the president's father and former president Park Chung-hee had similarly rammed through without public consultation.[145] Less than two years after its signing, the agreement unraveled following Park's ouster for corruption, for the very same reason that the military-intelligence-sharing agreement was abandoned under Lee: the "authoritarian" politics those deals signified.[146]

In this way, the collective colonial-authoritarian memory became imprinted in public discourse. With Park ousted, the incoming Moon Jae-in administration condemned the deal as well as the broader *chinilpa*—the pro-Japan faction of the South Korean elite—deemed responsible for the deal.[147] On taking office, Moon

139. Choe 2012a.
140. Hwang, Cho, and Wiegand 2018.
141. Choe 2012b.
142. Hwang, Cho, and Wiegand 2018.
143. Delury 2018, 52.
144. Choe 2015.
145. Park 2015.
146. Le 2019, 631.
147. Choe 2019.

appointed a team of independent investigators, which concluded in late 2017 that the deal was made without the requisite consultation of the victims. While Moon did not officially scrap the deal, he took steps to effectively dismantle it, including calling it "inconclusive"—as opposed to "final and irreversible," as the deal itself stipulated— and shuttering the Japanese-funded foundation tasked with disbursing the donation. In doing so, Moon linked the failure of representation to the weak "democratic procedural legitimacy" of the deal, drawing from an earlier collective-memory frame that such authoritarian deals were invalid because they did not represent the true wishes of the victims or the democratic norms with which South Korea now identified itself.[148]

Today, collective memory sustains partisan patterns of narrative coercion. For the progressives, it became a narrative tool to galvanize public support and alienate conservatives. Their narrative that past pro-Japan policies were antidemocratic gained wide traction among the public because of the very historical context in which Japanese impenitence came to be associated with South Korean dictatorship. For the conservatives, it became a narrative liability that would persistently challenge the legitimacy of their conciliatory policies. Threatened by the rhetorical authority of the public and the progressive opposition on "history issues," conservative leaders often bypassed open consultation altogether. Yet, those closed processes were emblematic of the broader procedural grievances that the public had come to associate with their colonial memory, triggering an even more intense backlash. In this way, measures to forcibly reconcile with Japan provoked more extensive processes of mnemonic contestation because the public viewed them as not only collaborationist but deeply authoritarian.

Pasts that Bind, 1965–2017

The deepening, widening, and broadening of anti-Japanese collective memory in South Korea cannot be fully understood apart from the ways in which it has been co-opted into partisan politics today and the historical processes that enabled it. Throughout the post-normalization period, state and societal actors mobilized colonial memory for various contemporaneous political exigencies—from justifying or renouncing policies of reconciliation, to exposing and weaponizing histories of collaboration. Indeed, collective colonial memory was continually recast through frames of "pragmatism," "humiliation," and "shame," as new actors like the Korean Council and the progressive party became authoritative narrators of "history issues." It was in these processes of mnemonic contestation that South Korean struggles for democracy became bound up in understandings of Japan. Today, demands for justice abroad and democracy at home are not only concurrent; they are co-constitutive.

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148. Delury 2018, 58.

Conclusion

Memory is a fixture of contemporary politics. As Verovšek observed: "While the politics of memory is rooted in the past, its illocutionary content, that is, the desired communicative effect of these discourses, is motivated by contemporary political considerations. In many cases, memory has real perlocutionary consequences."[149]

I add to this an intuitive yet often overlooked insight: collective memory accrues layers of meaning—a history of its own—through contestation. Thus how memory binds at any given moment depends not only on the contemporary political exigency for which it is mobilized, but also on the historical trajectory through which its meaning came to form. This meaning is, in turn, shaped by contestations over what can be said (framing), who has a say (accrediting), and who can say what (binding). Though presented as analytically distinct, these strategies of mnemonic contestation necessarily interoperate, their effects both manifesting in a given moment and concatenating over time. In this sense, memory *contestation* itself has real perlocutionary consequences: it shapes the "space of reasons" within which collective memory finds meaning, and thus, the power to bind.[150]

My theory of memory politics enriches the study of complex relations between South Korea and Japan in two ways. First, it illustrates how controversies about Japanese impenitence frustrated conciliatory efforts—not simply by raising public ire but by sustaining and spreading mnemonic contestation in South Korea. Indeed, South Korean responses to Japanese provocations were neither involuntary nor uniform: they were intensely political. Second and relatedly, my account demonstrates how anti-Japanism became an increasingly expedient tool for partisan politics. Disputes over Japanese impenitence had forced a reckoning over South Korea's own shameful and repressive moments; in this process, battling narratives over Japan came to reflect broader contestation between the two camps in South Korea about the country's democratic future—and their roles in it. It was not a coincidence, then, that leaders accused of democratic deficits resorted to anti-Japanism as a diversion. But, as I demonstrate, this was not always the case.

The implications of these findings for today's diplomatic deadlock between South Korea and Japan are many, but three are of particular import. First, progressive leaders are better positioned to pursue reconciliation with Japan—if they so desire—because they do not carry the kind of historical burden with which conservatives must reckon. The singular legacy of Kim Dae-jung is instructive in this regard. Second, signals of Japanese impenitence harden the prevailing narratives of humiliation and shame that bind South Korean leaders to antagonism. Efforts toward narrative revision—from "overcoming Japan" to "South Korean magnanimity"—were foiled, in part, by the untimely and misguided cues from Japan. Finally, procedural legitimacy matters. Any deal on "history issues" with Japan must seek careful consultation of the relevant

149. Verovšek 2016, 530.
150. Forst 2005.

civil societies, such as the Korean Council, and the public. Without meaningful efforts to engage them, it will collapse under charges of collusion and illegitimacy.

Beyond the South Korean case, my theory also sheds light on the processual generalities of memory politics, and thus memory struggles elsewhere. Consider, briefly, Argentina. Mnemonic contestation under the last military dictatorship (1976–1983) clarified the fissures between the collective memory of political violence and the state's narrative projects, which framed the terror as an unfortunate excess.[151] This rift played a crucial role in the construction of Argentine democracy because it set the narrative context under which the public could structure memory debates and formulate their demands for representation. At the same time, the campaign Nunca Más (Never Again) initiated a process of accrediting: civil society actors mobilized collective memory to reframe the official narrative of the Dirty War and, correspondingly, generated demands for institutional reform—beginning with the trials of those accountable.

As democracy matured in Argentina, the patterns of binding similarly settled along ideological lines. During their decade-long progressive rule, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner made concerted efforts to restore memory debates; they overturned prior laws offering amnesty for the military junta and even offered official apologies to the public for their predecessors' silence on the atrocities.[152] In this way, they derived much of their democratic legitimacy from sustaining memory debates. Meanwhile, the conservative leadership of Mauricio Macri deliberately downplayed the issue of memory. When he was elected president in 2015, *La Nación* published an editorial titled "*No más venganza*" (No more revenge).[153] Combined with Macri's indifference to memory debates, the emergence of these revisionist narratives suggested an emboldened attempt by the conservatives to reset the narrative context: the trials—and memory debates more broadly—were reframed as an act of revenge, rather than an expression of transitional justice.

What becomes conspicuous in these battles over memory is that they are an indispensable condition of democracy. Jan-Werner Müller said it most cogently: "Democracy itself is a form of contained conflict—and as long as memories remain contested, there will be no simple forgetting or repression *tout court*."[154] In this light, the plurality of memories in the public sphere may be indicative of democratic cohesion; and what should be worrisome, instead, are the proliferating attempts to rehabilitate the past in service of a thick mnemonic consensus. Indeed, from Russia to Turkey to Poland, states have increasingly sought to discredit civil societies and independent media, or engaged in myth making to justify violence at home and conquest abroad. These are, in essence, a way to unbind—to ensure that the state's narrative

151. Jelin 1994, 50.

152. See annual speeches for the Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice. On the apology, see in particular the speech by Néstor Kirchner on 24 March 2004.

153. Blejmar 2016. The same newspaper also called Cristina Kirchner a *máquina de odiar* (hate machine) for capitalizing on memory projects.

154. Müller 2002, 33.

authority stays uncontested, that alternative narratives are erased. This brings me, thus, to the final consideration of memory politics as democracy: to the extent that democracy is about "reiterated acts of accountability," pasts *must* come to bind.[155]

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155. Müller 2002, 34.

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