

NATIONS AFTER DEMOCRACY:
POLITICS OF STORYTELLING IN SOUTH KOREA
AND TAIWAN

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Eun A Jo

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Eun A Jo, Ph.D.

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The decolonizing states of Asia told many stories—about the colonial trauma they endured and the violence that followed in the wake of independence. Seeking to build legitimacy at home, autocrats in the emergent Republics of Korea and China propagated their own stories with fervor. They spoke of sovereign, even civilizational, “recovery”—that is, the salvation of their divided nations from the fatal rise of communism and immoral vestiges of the Japanese empire. By the end of the 20th century, however, these founding narratives were deeply contested and threatened the very political orders that they once justified. How did these narratives become so disputed? And what consequences did such revisionism have on nation-building in the aftermath of colonial, wartime, and authoritarian violence?

I address these questions through a comparative historical study of national stories in South Korea and Taiwan. Both democracies came to jettison important, yet different features of their national stories. In South Korea, narratives of “One Korea” remained surprisingly persistent across political parties and sustained longing for unification; meanwhile in Taiwan, narratives of “One China” gradually atrophied into a social—and electoral—taboo. And though South Korean progressives recast pro-Japan narratives as at once collaborationist and authoritarian, Taiwanese progressives opted over time to efface colonial grievances. These alternate narrative patterns offer a unique opportunity to explicate the

mutually constitutive processes of political democratization and narrative contestation and illustrate the mechanisms by which new storytellers helped reimagine the nations' sovereign beginnings and thus, their "democratic" futures.

Using primary sources collected over 12 months of archival research in Seoul and Daejeon (South Korea) and Taipei (Taiwan), and in-depth interviews of "storytelling elites"—such as historians, civil society leaders, and journalists—I show that progressive dissenters in South Korea and Taiwan anchored their democratic legitimacy on narratives that helped differentiate them from their autocratic counterparts. Their revisionist efforts, in turn, helped re-found nations after democracy.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eun A Jo was born in Jinju, South Korea. She is the first woman in her family to go to college and undertake a PhD. Prior to her doctoral studies at Cornell University, she obtained a BA in Law and Politics at University College Utrecht, and an MPP at the Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University. In 2024, she will be a postdoctoral fellow at Dartmouth College, and in 2025, she will begin as an Assistant Professor at William and Mary.

In memory of Ha Soon-nyeo

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My path to graduate school was a surprising one. Not least because I was diagnosed with an acute form of leukemia a year prior to starting, for which I would continue to receive treatment. The decision had been a logistical wager. There was, my doctors had said, less than forty percent chance that I would live to finish the degree.

Six years on, writing these acknowledgements feels remarkable for many reasons. I beat cancer. I learned new things. I taught what I learned. And I met some of the most kind and smart people, who have profoundly reshaped the ways I think about and experience the world.

My committee has been a source of immense moral and intellectual support. Jessica Chen Weiss taught me to stay grounded as a scholar, to think conscientiously about my work's real-life implications and speak to broader audiences for genuine impact. Peter Katzenstein encouraged me to do the type of work that excited me—however unconventional by the field's standards—and to research creatively and honestly. Tom Pepinsky pushed me to become the best version of the scholar I aspired to be; his generosity of time and engagement helped me grow at every stage of my career. Aram Hur was an integral addition to the committee as an external member; her work has deeply inspired my own, and her advice—both personal and professional—supported me when I needed it most. I owe my successes to each one of them.

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Adalet, Oumar Ba, and Steven Ward shared vital insights on my work at different stages of its maturity. The administrative staff at Cornell—Jerrica Brown, Laurie Dorsey, Danielle O'Connor, and Dinnie Sloman—helped me navigate academia. Tina Slater deserves a special thanks for her unending encouragement and patience as I tackled the job market.

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even when they did not fully comprehend my decisions, including returning to school as a patient. My mother spent many teary and sleepless nights worrying about me; for that alone, I am forever in her debt. My brothers Jo Yukjeung and Jo Wonho have always been my heroes. Their sacrifices—big and small—made this life possible; they rooted for me in every endeavor even when the same opportunities were not afforded to them. And last but not least, Matías Oviedo has been my partner-in-crime and my rock. Everyday I learn from his love of life and love for me.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my late grandmother, Ha Soon-nyeo. One of my fondest memories is of her practising writing her name in the Korean alphabet, *hangul*. She never once received formal education; and made a living as a single mother selling anything she could make on the streets. As I type these words—in a language that is not my mother-tongue—the gulf of opportunity between our lifetimes is not lost on me. Yet, it is her tenacity and sense of duty I watched growing up that I aspire to most. Though she is not here with us, I know she would have been proud.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

All words in Korean and Mandarin Chinese have been romanized according to the Revised Romanization (RR) and Hanyu Pinyin systems, respectively, for their wider accessibility. Exceptions are made with those authors and works published in English using different spellings, as well as well-known historical names such as Park Chung Hee and Chiang Kai-shek and geographic sites such as Taipei. East Asian names are written according to the standard usage in East Asia, with surnames preceding given names. I provide full translations of the titles of Korean and Mandarin Chinese material in the bibliography. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Notes on Transliteration and Translation	ix
Table of Contents	x
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xiii
Figure Sources	xiv
 I Politics of Storytelling	 1
1 Violence, Memory, and Democracy in Asia	2
1.1 Argument	6
1.2 Stakes	10
1.3 Contributions	13
1.4 Organization of the Chapters	15
 2 Contestation under Democracy	 19
2.1 The What	22
2.2 The Who	26
2.3 The How	28
2.4 Why Not Why?	37
 3 Research Design	 39
3.1 Aims	39
3.2 Mechanisms	41
3.3 Case Comparisons	43
3.4 Methods	47
 II Postwar Boundaries	 48
4 Postwar Boundaries	49
4.1 Empirical Approach	53
4.2 Comparison	58
 5 South Korea	 69
5.1 "One Korea" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988	71
5.2 "One Korea" in Transition, 1988-1998	85
5.3 "One Korea" and Democracy, 1998–	100

6	Taiwan	110
6.1	"One China" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988	112
6.2	"One China" in Transition, 1988-1992	126
6.3	"One China" and Democracy, 1992-	136
III	Postcolonial Relations	150
7	Postcolonial Relations	151
7.1	Empirical Approach	155
7.2	Comparison	159
8	South Korea	168
8.1	"Anti-Japan" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988	168
8.2	"Anti-Japan" in Transition, 1988-1998	181
8.3	"Anti-Japan" and Democracy, 1998-	190
9	Taiwan	202
9.1	"Anti-Japan" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988	202
9.2	"Anti-Japan" in Transition, 1988-1992	214
9.3	"Anti-Japan" and Democracy, 1992-	222
IV	Nations After Democracy	233
10	Conclusion	234
10.1	Nationalist Competition?	236
10.2	Democratic Cooperation?	238
10.3	Autocratization?	241
V	Appendix	244
A	Chapter 3	245
A.1	Archival and Primary Sources	245
B	Chapter 4	248
B.1	Coding Examples	248
C	Chapter 7	252
C.1	Alternative Explanations	252
	References	254

LIST OF TABLES

2.1	<i>Mechanisms of Narrative Contestation</i>	31
2.2	<i>Implications of Narrative Contestation</i>	33
2.3	<i>Implications of Narrative Contestation under Democracy</i>	36
3.1	<i>Case Study Objects</i>	44
3.2	<i>Case Comparison Design</i>	45
3.3	<i>Overview of Qualitative Data</i>	47
4.1	<i>Overview of Commemorative Speeches</i>	54
4.2	<i>Coding Scheme</i>	56
6.1	<i>Diplomatic Recognition of China</i>	117
7.1	<i>Overview of Interviewees</i>	157
C.1	<i>Japanese Official Apologies</i>	252

LIST OF FIGURES

4.1	National Boundaries in Official Narratives (1948 - 2022)	60
4.2	National Objectives in Official Narratives (1948 - 2022)	67
5.1	National Boundaries: South Korea (1948 - 2022)	70
5.2	National Objectives: South Korea (1948 - 2022)	70
5.3	<i>Ilminjooeui</i> Propaganda Poster (1951)	74
5.4	<i>Jeongyojo</i> (1989)	95
6.1	National Boundaries: Taiwan (1948 - 2022)	111
6.2	National Objectives: Taiwan (1948 - 2022)	111
6.3	Pro-Independence Declaration by the Presbyterian Church (1977)	120
6.4	Wild Lily Movement (1990)	128
7.1	Yasukuni Shrine (2012)	151
7.2	First Wednesday Demonstration, January 8, 1992 (1992)	160
8.1	Anti-Treaty Demonstration (1964)	175
8.2	Demolition of Joseon-Governor Building (1995)	187
9.1	"Defend Diaoyutai" Protests, Taipei (1971)	209
9.2	"Comfort Women" in <i>On Taiwan</i> (2001)	226
B.1	Coding Examples: Oneness	248
B.2	Coding Examples: Twoness	249
B.3	Coding Examples: Unification	250
B.4	Coding Examples: Independence	251

FIGURE SOURCES

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Figure 6.3: Courtesy of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.

Figure 7.2: Courtesy of War and Women's Human Rights Archive.

Figure 8.1: Courtesy of *Kyunghyang Shinmun*.

Figure 8.2: Courtesy of Kim Tae-hyun, Korean Democracy Foundation.

Figure 9.2: Fujitani [2016](#).

Part I

Politics of Storytelling

CHAPTER 1

VIOLENCE, MEMORY, AND DEMOCRACY IN ASIA

"Peace is guaranteed when countries that value freedom and human rights come together as one. Korea's own journey is a living testament to this truth," South Korea's foreign minister Cho Tae-yul spoke to thundering applause at the 2024 Third Democracy Summit.¹ The three-day summit was held in Seoul under the theme "democracy for future generations," hosting over 300 participants, including delegates from the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. In his welcoming speech, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted the symbolic significance of gathering in South Korea—a "champion of democracy"—and sounded a call to democratic arms. "Democratic governance has reached... an inflection point," he declared, "safeguarding and accelerating our democratic renewal at home requires that we help shape a world in which democracies can thrive."²

This narrative of democratic solidarity has hardened in East Asia under the Biden administration's ideological activism.³ To counter China's rise and Russia's aggression, the administration has promoted building a "coalition of democracies." Rush Doshi, one of the ideational architects of this vision, had once described that such coalitions "would effectively function as "cartels" that provide "club goods" for their members but few benefits for those who choose

1. *The Korea Times*, March 18, 2024.

2. "Secretary Antony J. Blinken At the Opening Ceremony of the Third Summit for Democracy," March 17, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-third-summit-for-democracy/>

3. Carothers and Brown 2024, 3.

to stay outside the group.”⁴ An example of this was the UK-initiated “D10”—a grouping of 10 democracies to coordinate policies around the development and use of telecom technologies and, by implication, reduce dependence on China.⁵ These institutions would be “liberal in composition and would work to organize elements of the international system around liberal states.”⁶

Underpinning these narratives—and indeed, policies—is a presumption of intrinsic and shared *national* interests among democracies. Conditioning cooperation on democratic values, the narrative goes, provides moral authority the United States and its partners need for protecting and rebuilding the liberal international order.⁷ In fact, many East Asian leaders have embraced this narrative. South Korea’s president Yoon Suk-yeol entered office in 2022 promising “values-based” diplomacy and cooperation with like-minded partners to defend democracy.⁸ His pledge echoed the words of Taiwan’s outgoing president Tsai Ing-wen who warned of global authoritarian revival, bolstered by China’s rise.⁹ Much like those speaking at the Democracy Summit, they concluded: Only together can democracies create a world safe for democracy.

These narratives raise broader questions about the role of democracy in shaping nations and nationalism in international politics: Does democracy indeed overwrite national differences? And more specifically, *how* does democracy figure into processes of nation-building?

4. Doshi [2021](#), 307-8.

5. Ibid, 327.

6. Ibid, 327-8.

7. Cooper and Rosenberger [2020](#).

8. S. Y. Yoon [2022](#).

9. I.-W. Tsai [2021](#).

In this project, I show that democracy reshapes, rather than overpowers, nationalism. This is because contestation over national stories—the cultural content of nationalism—takes a particular function under democracy: it unsettles whose stories are heard and reveals which stories resonate. Crucially, democracy ruptures nation-building processes by empowering a new class of narrators beyond the state and thus, a new range of narratives besides state-sanctioned accounts. As democratization opens space for contestation over nationhood, existing national stories can become reinforced or repudiated, reshaping what people take to be the “nation” and thus in the “national” interest.

In centering on democratic processes, I highlight the critical role that “storytelling elites” play in (re)shaping national stories. Storytelling elites are those with the rhetorical and institutional resources to create and market their versions of the story. The stories they mobilize during democratization carry strong resonance, because they justify a new structure of power relations in which actors beyond the state have a say in how their story is told. In this critical juncture, storytelling elites have the unique ability to imbue the nation with new cultural content; and the stories they forge can provide new templates—beyond those previously proffered by the state—around which people may register their own narratives. In other words, storytelling elites are the key agents of narrative contestation.

I also focus on the international dimension of nation-building. In comparative politics scholarship, nation-building policies have been more narrowly applied to how states “manage social diversity” at home.¹⁰ For example, Harris Mylonas states: “Legitimate authority in modern national states is connected

10. Mylonas [2013](#), 2.

to popular rule, to majorities. Nation-building is the process through which these majorities are constructed.”¹¹ But such majorities are not just constructed at home. In today’s world of nation-states, states also redefine national boundaries with the significant “others” that surround them—from beyond the borders they control—and relations with the historical “others” that once comprised them. How they demarcate postwar boundaries and define postcolonial relations are critical components of nation-building abroad.

To unpack the relationship between democracy and nation-building in international relations, I trace and compare the evolution of national narratives in two places of critical importance to international security: South Korea and Taiwan. For places like South Korea and Taiwan, nationhood formed through successive traumatic injuries, in overlapping stages of colonial, wartime, and authoritarian violence. This compounding of founding trauma has meant that South Korean and Taiwanese peoples have had competing demands by which to nation-build. What was, for some, a righteous fight against colonial violence was remembered by others as an attempt to justify authoritarian power. And what was, for some, a heroic war to protect the nation’s sovereignty was construed by others as capitulation to foreign rule. Depending on which story prevailed, a different tenor of nationalism sounded.

How are we to make sense of these contending stories at home, and how they shape foreign policy? Memories of liberation from imperial Japan and break from communist North Korea and China provide the necessary cultural content that make South Korea and Taiwan viable and coherent as nations. Yet, their stories have been far from uniform. I argue that storytelling elites in South

11. Ibid, 17.

Korea and Taiwan—with differing aims for narrative revision—were pivotal for re-scripting them. Today, their foreign policy agendas are structured by those divergent national stories, with contrasting implications for inter-Korean and cross-strait peace as well as the broader regional order in which Japan is increasingly playing a leadership role. What it means to be a democracy and how to act as a democracy in international politics carries distinctive *nationalist* interpretations and thus, accompanies different—sometimes even surprising—prescriptions for policy.

1.1 Argument

Examining postwar narratives in Europe and Asia, Serge Schmemmann once remarked: “[M]emories depend less on history than on how a people wants to see itself at any given moment.”¹² This is the point of departure for this project. I contend, first and foremost, that the content of national stories shapes how states present themselves and behave abroad, sometimes against powerful geopolitical headwinds. National stories are not simple artefacts of the past—that is, reproducing “truths” about how historical events transpired. Instead, they are political projects, intended to legitimize a particular political arrangement based on a particular conception of nationhood. Geopolitics often provides the impetus to nation-build, but how they do so depends on which and whose stories define nationhood.

Second and as a result, national stories are a site of relentless contestation. Contestation occurs along three dimensions. People fight over the legitimate frames by which to interpret their shared past (“framing”) and which narrators

12. Schmemmann [2005](#).

have the authority to speak about the past ("accrediting"). Crucially, I argue that democracy helps structure these competing stories and storytellers into narrative boundaries to which people must conform ("binding"). As nations transition to and consolidate democracies, they break old narrative boundaries and build new ones to mold their democratic nationalisms. The resulting narrative boundaries are what condition how states nation-build abroad: how they seek to reclaim historical borders and peoples or reconcile with past enemies.

Using this framework of narrative contestation, I explicate the divergence in South Korean and Taiwanese postcolonial and postwar nation-building policies. I argue that these patterns cannot be fully explicated without considering how their memories of "dark pasts" became bound up in broader struggles for democracy.¹³ In South Korea, "history problems" with Japan and unification with the North became emblematic of the authoritarian legacies that it must now confront as a democracy, precisely because they had been neglected in service of autocratic rule. By contrast, in Taiwan, these problems came to signify the tools of authoritarian control that it must now eschew as a democracy, because those issues were mobilized to legitimize an otherwise illegitimate rule. Today, as a result, South Korea and Taiwan promote vastly different nationalist projects abroad, in the name of democracy.

This explication departs from existing arguments in at least three ways. First, democracy theorists have often pointed to a unifying national identity as a necessary condition for democratic consolidation.¹⁴ They have explained why, for example, ethnically and nationally divided societies have struggled to stabi-

13. Dixon [2018](#).

14. Rustow [1970](#).

lize democratic gains.¹⁵ Simply put, nations *precede* regimes in these accounts. Instead, I argue that regime change can sustain as well as alter nations, by empowering a new class of narrators beyond the state and thus a new range of permissible narratives. In doing so, I treat “nations” under democracy as a subject of inquiry, unpacking the narrative processes by which they evolve rather than assuming any self-evident agency.

Second, there is an overwhelming consensus that democracy, whether on one side or on both sides, engenders reconciliation by fostering norms of peaceful conflict resolution and transparency in cooperation.¹⁶ These accounts, however, cannot sufficiently explicate the divergent patterns of South Korean and Taiwanese postures on postwar unification or postcolonial reconciliation. Ideologically, South Korea and Taiwan are comparably opposed to their communist “others” and compatible with their imperial “other.” Their own transitions to democracy happened around the same time, under shared regional contexts. I argue, instead, that democracies have differing nationalist roots, the contents of which crucially condition how they narrate and behave toward their national “others.”

Third, ongoing disputes and hostilities are known to worsen nationalist competition; by the same token, settlements over contested territories and signs of contrition over historical wrongdoings are thought to dampen it.¹⁷ Scholars have found, for instance, that public apologies can address lingering concerns about future behavior by tying hands—making it difficult for the perpetrator

15. Dahl, [2008 \[1971\]](#), 1971, 114-18.

16. See for example Miller [2001](#); Bayer [2010](#); Wu and Yang [2016](#).

17. On border settlements, see Owsiak, Diehl, and Goertz [2017](#). On contrition, see Cunningham [2016](#); Kitagawa and Chu [2021](#).

to mobilize support for repeat offense¹⁸—and build trust by reassuring victims through consistent and emotional displays of remorse.¹⁹ These accounts, too, fall short in clarifying South Korean and Taiwanese nationalisms, however. South Korea has suffered far more hostilities from the North and received dozens of apologies from Japan for its colonial and wartime crimes. Taiwan has encountered fewer such provocations from China, and no direct apology from Japan.

Instead, focusing on the politics of national storytelling provides several useful insights for understanding how South Korea and Taiwan nation-build abroad today. First, national stories are a product of social contest. Despite shared experiences of colonial rule and civil wars, South Korean and Taiwanese societies had differing nationalist visions with which to contest state-imposed nationalist projects. In South Korea, "peace" became the keyword to challenge the authoritarian program of unification-by-force, while in Taiwan, "independence" fulfilled that role. At the same time, "justice" for the past was the organizing theme in South Korean demands from Japan, while in Taiwan, "cooperation" for the future performed the task. Such narratives reveal that these nation-building projects abroad are also more connected than disparate.

Second and relatedly, I highlight the narrative power of "storytelling elites," those with the rhetorical and institutional resources to create and market their versions of the story. The stories that progressive storytellers mobilized during democratic struggles carried strong resonance, because they justified and were justified by broader institutional reform. It was in this process of narrative contestation, over the stories and institutions that profess to represent the

18. Lind [2008](#), 11.

19. Hall [2015](#), 18.

people, that their nationalisms were (re)constituted in democratic South Korea and Taiwan. Today, their nation-building projects abroad reflect continued contestations at home about how South Korea and Taiwan wish to remember and identify themselves—not only as nations, but as democracies.

In short, democracy both opens space for and structures narrative contestation over nationhood. How competing national stories settle in this process is key to understanding how democracies nation-build abroad, in seeking new boundaries and relations with their historical others.

1.2 Stakes

National stories are, as Rogers Smith calls them, “stories of peoplehood.”²⁰ These stories articulate which people constitute the nation; they tell people who they are and what unites them, by weaving together past feats and failures, present challenges, and possible futures in a coherent and resonant manner. If nations are an “imagined community,”²¹ then national stories are the building blocks of imagination that assemble a people into a cohesive unit.

National stories are not trivial. Wars,²² secessionist movements,²³ and partitions²⁴ can erupt when the rules of belonging they impart are seen to be violated. After the collapse of communism, for instance, post-Soviet satellite states such

20. R. M. Smith 2003, chapter 1.

21. Anderson 1983.

22. Wimmer 2012; Straus 2015.

23. Walter 2006.

24. Chapman and Roeder 2007.

as Armenia, Croatia, and Serbia undertook costly, irredentist efforts, based on a sense of obligation to reunite kinships that had been severed by new territorial boundaries.²⁵ Homelands themselves play a constitutive role in founding stories, fomenting resistance against illegitimate occupants.²⁶ As the founder of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine Nayef Hawatmeh once declared: "We [the Palestinians] are fighting for what is our homeland, even if it were a barren desert in which only thorns grew."²⁷ People can go remarkably far to protect what gives them a sense of identity.

This appears especially pertinent in Asia today, where questions of national identity have continued to foment antagonism and impede cooperation among historical others. Rana Mitter observes, for instance: "China's historical revisionism seeks to provide an alternative genealogy for the contemporary order in Asia, rejecting the America-centered "present at the creation" discourse."²⁸ This narrative quest is largely underpinned by the Chinese Communist Party's desire to claim moral authority at home and buttressed by an outburst of justice claims on the international stage.²⁹ Yet, the hardening of nationalist rhetoric and sentiments in China have raised alarm over its intentions to subvert the liberal international order and replace the United States as a regional hegemon.³⁰ This has exacerbated Taiwan's anxiety over its contested sovereignty.

Meanwhile, the Japanese government has continued to decry "apology fa-

25. Saideman and Ayres [2008](#), chapters 2 and 3.

26. Toft [2006](#); Shelef [2016](#).

27. Quoted in Shelef [2016](#), 37.

28. Mitter [2020](#), 10.

29. Ibid, see chapter 6.

30. Jo and Weiss [2022](#), 343-4.

tigue” and sought to erase, whitewash, and even glorify its imperial history.³¹ Controversies over its territorial claims and textbook revisionism have repeatedly instigated protests and suspicions of militaristic revival, even from its democratic neighbor—South Korea. In fact, despite the “quasi-alliance” status the two have enjoyed,³² by virtue of shared alliance with the United States, their partnership has been far from stable. In the last spate of diplomatic crisis, South Korea even threatened to repeal existing military agreements in spite of the mutual interests they advance. To the extent that “history problems” obstruct a deepening of democratic cooperation, national stories carry important implications for the regional order in which Japan increasingly seeks a leadership role.

In many ways, South Korea and Taiwan are at the center of the geopolitical dynamics unfolding in Asia today. If in the past, they served as bulwarks against communism, today they are “flashpoints” where mounting ideological tensions may precipitously erupt into war.³³ In this light, understanding how South Korea and Taiwan seek to nation-build abroad, as democracies, is key to clarifying their prospects of nationalist competition with North Korea and China, as well as the limits of democratic cooperation with Japan and the United States. How South Korea and Taiwan see themselves and what they do on the international stage can reshape Asia in consequential ways.

31. See, for example, Lind 2008; Y. He 2009; Berger 2012.

32. V. D. Cha 1999.

33. B. Taylor 2018, chapters 2 and 5.

1.3 Contributions

This project's approach to storytelling in democratic Asia offers several contributions. First and theoretically, it probes how stories and storytellers change when democratization re-opens nationhood for debate. A growing scholarship examines the conditions under which previously entrenched national stories become displaced in the face of existential crises.³⁴ I focus instead on the changing dynamics of state-society relations and the interaction between institutional and cultural politics—specifically, how storytellers mobilize counter-stories in the wake of institutional opening and provide the a new referent by which nationhood can be renegotiated. In doing so, I treat nationhood as fundamentally relational, rather than a stable property of a people, and trace more explicitly the dynamics of narrative contestation.

This approach also allows me to pay better attention to the contested meanings of national stories. National stories are "living beliefs."³⁵ As Jill Lepore documents, these stories can exist in different and often contradictory forms: in the case of post-revolutionary United States, they traversed from a radically secular kind to a religiously fervent one and even blended the melting-pot metaphor with racist overtones.³⁶ In this long-duree of contestation, the narrative conflicts we witness today may not be unusual. Yet, this history also imbues today's contestation with new political salience, raising attendant questions about what "democracy" means—or should mean—in America.³⁷ My aim is to show this

34. See, for example, Aktürk [2012](#); Brand [2014](#); Legro [2016](#).

35. Hur [2022](#), 10.

36. Lepore [2018](#), chapter 9.

37. Ibid, chapter 15.

dynamic in the context of post-authoritarian South Korea and Taiwan.

Second and methodologically, I engage in debates about how to research the politics of *national* storytelling, namely whose and which stories to highlight and how to trace the mechanisms of narrative contestation.³⁸ I note, in particular, that the “containers” of national stories 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. At the same time, I contend that politically powerful actors are structurally positioned to (re)produce national stories. This has implications for empirically tracing the mechanisms of narrative contestation: what agents believe to be the “official” narrative becomes the key referent against which they register their own version of collective memory, and the resulting contestation is what makes national storytelling social.

Last and empirically, I illustrate the democratic underpinnings of Asian nationalisms. The conventional explanations for South Korean and Taiwanese nationalisms have too often pointed to dynamics outside of those polities. I seek to reinsert South Korean and Taiwanese agency. This is not to deny the role that geopolitics plays in nation-building.³⁹ Rather, it is to unpack the politics of national storytelling, given geopolitical incentives and constraints. Comparing South Korea and Taiwan is, in this sense, apposite as both places face enduring nationalist competition from beyond their *de facto* borders. At the same time, they serve as two critical nodes in the postwar security architecture that the United States has built in Asia. By anchoring the study in their shared trajectories of domestic institutional transformation, I prioritize how South Korean and

38. Jo [2022b](#), 778.

39. Mylonas [2013](#), 5-9.

Taiwanese peoples mobilized national stories in service of political change and how certain conceptions of nationhood thus became bound up in their understandings of democracy.

1.4 Organization of the Chapters

In this project, I seek to clarify the politics of national storytelling through the cases of postwar, postcolonial, and post-authoritarian South Korea and Taiwan. By nesting the analysis in two formative moments in their national lifetimes, I examine how state and societal actors compete over national stories and structure their narrative contestation by breaking old narrative boundaries and building new ones. These boundaries bind people to what are legitimate narratives and who are authoritative narrators in their democratic national community, with implications for their nation-building pursuits abroad—whether that is unification or reconciliation, in South Korean and Taiwanese cases. I have introduced the broader argument, stakes, and contributions in this chapter.

In Chapter 2, I develop my theory of narrative contestation in the context of democratization. To do so, I elaborate on the concept of national stories (“the what”), the entity of storytelling elites (“the who”), and the processes and consequences of narrative contestation (“the how”). I make the case that democracy structures nationalist contest by drawing the narrative boundaries and that how these boundaries are structured depends on the narrative choices of storytellers during key moments of institutional reform. These counter-stories carry particularly stronger resonance because they justify a new structure of power relations; thus they become the dominant alternative frames by which nationhood

is renegotiated in the wake of democracy. Finally and briefly, I address the why this framework cannot specify a set of pre-determined outcomes ("the why not why?").

In Chapter 3, I discuss my research design. I share my analytical objectives, which are at once to study the local causality of narrative contestation in South Korea and Taiwan and to produce analytically general mechanisms that may travel beyond the contexts of my study. I then introduce the two cases and the trends in their nation-building projects abroad. I explain how I structure the comparisons, both across cases in each set of postwar and postcolonial policies, and within cases over the course of South Korean and Taiwanese democratization. Lastly, I detail the multi-qualitative-method strategy I adopt in each case comparison, both in the collection of data (archival and field research) and their analysis (content analysis and process tracing).

In Chapters 4 to 6, I trace nation-building projects in South Korea and Taiwan, specifically with regard to their postwar boundaries. I compare the evolution of "One Korea" and "One China" narratives, leveraging a hand-coded content analysis of an original dataset of founding stories, drawing from the contents of 549 commemorative speeches from 1948 to 2022, with process tracing of archival data, including opposition manifestos, protest pamphlets, and oral histories of democracy activists. In South Korea, storytelling opposition provided themes of anti-imperialism to the existing "One Korea" orthodoxy. By contrast, in Taiwan, storytelling opposition rejected the "One China" narrative in favor of entirely new themes centered around "indigenous Taiwan." As democracy consolidated, narrative contestations settled along partisan lines, in which "One Korea" orthodoxy remained surprisingly persistent and "One

China” orthodoxy became a social taboo. This resulted in increasingly divergent support for unification as a national objective.

In Chapters 7 to 9, I trace nation-building projects in South Korea and Taiwan, specifically with regard to their postcolonial relations. Drawing on 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with “storytelling” elites—such as historians, civil society leaders, and journalists—and process tracing of relevant archival data, I show how counter-narratives forged during democratic transition restructured relations with Japan. In South Korea, storytelling opposition shifted from state-directed narratives of pragmatism and recast cooperation with Japan as both collaborationist and authoritarian. Meanwhile in Taiwan, storytelling opposition offered stories of indigenous resistance, which were overshadowed by the autocrats’ own account of anti-colonial struggle. This forced them to resort, over time, to silence. This explicates the differing patterns of partisan support for democratic cooperation in Asia.

In Chapter 10, I conclude by situating South Korea and Taiwan’s moral reckonings over their own authoritarian pasts within the context of their evolving memories of war and colonialism. I then use these insights to draw broader implications of South Korean and Taiwanese “democratic” national stories for their foreign policy as well as the regional and international orders within which they are embedded. In doing so, I illustrate how the meaning of democracy has different nationalist content, and how the study of international relations could benefit from paying closer attention to the narrative dynamics underlying the making of democracies.

I also consider briefly the implications of my findings for the politics of national storytelling beyond Asia. In particular, I consider the trends in demo-

cratic backsliding and their consequences for nation-building abroad. From Donald Trump's United States, Victor Orban's Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey, to Narendra Modi's India, state actors have sought to manipulate the narrative boundaries and mobilize nationalist contest in service of parochial political interests. These narrative maneuvers have far-reaching implications for democratic politics in the twentieth-first century, by instigating exclusionary dynamics at home and isolationist impulses abroad. In this chapter, I consider the unraveling of narrative boundaries, as democratic publics increasingly operate in disjointed narrative environments.

CHAPTER 2

CONTESTATION UNDER DEMOCRACY

All modern states have national stories that articulate a collective identity and goals that justify the state's right to rule.¹ Whether born of empire, dynasties, or tribes, states have narrated into existence a national community to which peoples belong.² These stories are sometimes drawn from existing ties—based on religion, caste, race, or ethnicity. They can also center around "civic creed," to absorb prevailing social cleavages under a superordinate national identity.³ Whether framed around "Han centrality" in China, the "Hindu state" in India, or "popular sovereignty" in the United States, national stories share the same political purpose: they shape how people understand the rules of belonging, which the state is entrusted to protect and the society, to perform.

But what happens to these stories when those who rule and the rules by which they do change? If producing and propagating national stories is a fundamentally political act, intended to legitimize sovereignty, then who is in power and how this is decided are questions of utmost relevance. On the one hand, stories that find limited resonance may cast into doubt the symbolic authority of the rulers—as when Americans flooded the streets chanting "Not My President" in the wake of Donald Trump's election in 2016. On the other hand, those seeking to unseat the ruler—whether by coups, revolutions, or elections—must challenge his narrative in some way to unsettle the prevailing political order and justify change.

1. Bensel [2022](#), 3.

2. Wimmer [2012](#), chapter 3.

3. See, for example, Aktürk [2012](#); Grzymala-Busse [2015](#); Tudor [2013](#).

National stories can be powerful. When they resonate and citizens feel attached to the national collective, they are more likely to vote⁴ or pay taxes⁵ that allow the state to build, for instance, more roads and schools.⁶ This is true even in ethnically fragmented societies: nation-building efforts—including, first and foremost, crafting a founding story for the nation—can help generate trust⁷ and mitigate distributional problems among diverse groups.⁸ How national stories ameliorate existing social conflicts and generate a sense of national unity is thus key to the very functioning of the state.

Certain forms of national narratives and nationalisms they inspire are also better for democracy. Valerie Bunce once observed that “nationalism provided the foundations for not just the collapse of state socialism, but also the construction and sustainability of both democracy and capitalism [in Poland].”⁹ Where national narratives helped tame existing social divisions (as in India) democracy proved strong, but where they accentuated them (as in Malaysia) autocracy prevailed.¹⁰ In mature democracies, narratives that positively identified with the state (as in South Korea) engendered a greater sense of civic duty, whereas narratives that negatively identified with the state (as in Taiwan) dampened it.¹¹ How national narratives foster unity and mutual obligations is also key to the survival and quality of democracy.

4. Hur [2022](#).

5. Lieberman [2003](#).

6. Thies [2009](#).

7. On the difference between “generalized” and “particularized” trust, see Reeskens and Wright [2013](#), 157.

8. Miguel [2004](#).

9. Bunce [2001](#), 794.

10. Tudor and Slater [2021](#), 710-717.

11. Hur [2022](#).

Yet, what happens to national narratives when the introduction of democracy upends existing institutional configurations is less straightforward. What were once considered arbitrary territorial borders came to be a crucial component of national identity in many postcolonial African states—even after democracy.¹² Seven decades of territorial division have not dissuaded Koreans from abandoning ethno-nationalist stories of “One Peopleism,” not even in the democratic South.¹³ Meanwhile, stories of America’s founding have transformed enormously during the civil rights movement, recovering distortions and omissions surrounding the genocides of Native Americans and the slavery of African Americans.¹⁴ Founding stories of the *Yamato minzoku*, proclaiming Japan’s racial superiority, have largely vanished in post-imperial, democratic Japan.

My basic argument is that democracy opens space for and structures narrative contestation and, in doing so, reshapes rather than overpowers nationalism. Democratization provides a conducive condition for narrative revision, but it alone cannot predict which narrative finds resonance or predict in which direction the narrative orthodoxy will change. This, I argue, depends on the narrative strategies of the storytelling opposition with differing narrative aims. The choices they make at this critical juncture not only “unsettles” the dominant story; they also shape how contestations unfold by revealing which stories resonate. This is key: by structuring the bounds of what can be said (“framing”), who has a say (“accrediting”), and who can say what (“binding”), storytelling elites mold the fates of national stories under democracy and their attendant nation-building projects.

12. Young [2012](#).

13. Shin [2006](#), chapter 10.

14. Lepore [2018](#), chapter 14.

To make this argument, I undertake four sets of interventions in studies of nationalism and national identity. First, I bridge conceptual understandings of nationalism as ideology and as practice by examining their relationality in the context of narrative contestation. Second, I introduce “storytelling elites” as a useful category of actors in narrative contestation. This group of actors have the unique ability to influence narrative contestation, given their institutional access and rhetorical resources. Third, I consider the inter-operation of top-down and bottom-up narrative processes by leveraging democratization as an analytic anchor. I then combine these insights to formulate a theoretical framework of narrative contestation under democracy. I use this framework to unveil the democratic underpinnings of Asian nationalisms and their implications for peace and reconciliation in the region.

2.1 The What

Narratives are accounts—real and imagined—of events, things, and peoples. In nation-building, narratives serve as a key mechanism for collectivizing memory, history, and identity: dialogical interactions allow different people to organize and interpret their experiences in an intersubjective manner. Without dialogues—production and communication of meaning in collective action—there is no “reciprocal imputation and avowal of identities.”¹⁵ To the extent that a collective identity is a social construction rather than a property of a given group, and this process of social construction is facilitated—even directed—by dialogues, narratives provide a core vehicle through which a community imagines a sense of “we” and sustains a corresponding sense of collective duty.¹⁶

15. Snow [2001](#), 1.

16. Hur [2022](#).

I define national narratives as collective and constitutive articulations about the nation's boundaries and relations. They are collective, because they are more than the sum of individual, subjective beliefs.¹⁷ And as constitutive knowledge, national narratives provide a set of ideas by which to assert political sovereignty of a national community¹⁸ as well as a repertoire of social practices that help mobilize loyalties to that nation.¹⁹ In this way, national narratives act "like moulds into which we are forced to cast our actions," providing an ontological basis for agency in the international arena.²⁰

This definition aims at bridging two dominant conceptions of nationalism: as ideology and as practice.²¹ As ideology, national narratives provide "a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."²² The primary purpose of nationalism-as-ideology is thus to legitimize a given institutional order. As practice, by contrast, national narratives depict "a heterogeneous set of 'nation'-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available."²³ Nationalism-as-practice thus highlight how societies leverage political claims by evoking meanings of the nation—through organized actions, symbolic rituals, and routine interactions with the state.

These conceptualizations are more related and reconcilable than they may appear at first. How the state legitimates the nation-state as a political entity

17. Durkheim [1982](#), 109-111.

18. Gellner [2008](#), 1.

19. Brubaker [1996](#), 10.

20. Durkheim [1982](#), 70.

21. Bonikowski [2016](#), 430.

22. Gellner [2008](#), 1.

23. Brubaker [1996](#), 10.

shapes both the attitudes and behaviors of its members—inculcating, at times, “a perception of national superiority,” wherein the nation-state is deemed the only meaningful social category.²⁴ Meanwhile, habituated modes of thought, speech, and practice can crystallize into more self-conscious ideologies, which can validate or defy existing institutional configurations. Ideologies without practices render the nation-state symbolically incoherent; practices without ideologies render it politically tenuous. This relationality is key to unpacking how political democratization can structure narrative contestation.

I focus on national stories from the state’s most formative moments. These stories often involve dominant “others” against which people fought and sought autonomy. These provide key referents for demarcating the nation’s territorial and membership boundaries, pitching the nation—a protagonist—against these “others” in a meaningfully structured plot,²⁵ defining the values, beliefs, and practices that distinguish the self.²⁶ In so doing, they help invent common traditions by which people can practice loyalty to the nation,²⁷ memorialize national heroes who exemplify the ideal national subject,²⁸ and erase inconvenient pasts—especially those that suggest alternative allegiances.²⁹ From this perspective, these “imagined communities” are necessarily social: they determine

24. Kosterman and Feshbach 1989, 271.

25. Ricoeur 1984.

26. Gellner 2008, 53.

27. Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012.

28. Schwartz 2000.

29. Some scholars, thus, see national memory as inevitably “repressive,” forcing a “false unity of a self-same, national subject moving through time.” Duara 1996, 4. For other empirical examples, see Connerton 1989; Gillis 1996; Trouillot 2000.

attributes of shared identity through *othering*.³⁰

Yet, who becomes the dominant “other” is far from predetermined. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, for instance, national stories in the United States branched out in two opposing streams: one that portrayed the United States as a “beacon of freedom” against Soviet imperialism, and another that cast the United States itself as an unconstrained imperial power.³¹ Such interpretive struggles were also found in post-communist Poland, pitting Catholics and Jews over the troubling memories of Auschwitz,³² and in post-revolutionary United States, where the rules of citizenship were defined by competing civic, religious, and ethno-racial values.³³ Consensus over who should constitute the “other” is often difficult to reach, especially when the events around which the stories form are morally ambiguous.

It is for this reason, however, that focusing on national stories from key historical moments is analytically helpful. It helps anchor the study of national stories on a particular referent, allowing us to more closely trace competing dynamics underlying storytelling. It also emphasizes the contestation between the state and the broader society over how to think about and behave toward the prescribed “other.” Rather than privilege either conceptions of national story—as ideology or as practice—this conceptualization considers their relationality by highlighting at once competing stories about the “other” as well as how such contestation itself reshapes understandings of the national “self.”

30. Caruth [2014](#), 3-4. Tajfel and Turner [2004](#), 283-286.

31. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz [1991](#).

32. Zubrzycki [2019](#).

33. Gerstle [2017](#), chapter 2.

2.2 The Who

Ernest Gellner had once posited that the modern state seeks to create social and political order through the "plough, sword, and book."³⁴ Indeed, states construct national narratives for the very simple reason that it helps to rule.³⁵ National stories are, in this way, designed to be institutionally, behaviorally, and rhetorically sticky.³⁶ Once settled, these stories can become "axiomatic," setting a set of internalized assumptions about the nation that, through habit and institutionalization, may come to espouse a taken-for-granted character.³⁷ These narrative orthodoxies then circumscribe what can be collectively imagined and legitimately articulated in public, setting the discursive terrain on which people fight political battles. As Michael Billig notes, nationalism can become an "endemic condition."³⁸

States do much to propagate these stories. They write constitutions, which establish the legal basis of a polity and the ideational grounds for national identification.³⁹ The US Constitution begins, for instance, with the opening words "We the People" that align with the revolutionary narrative of the founding fathers. States can also oversee the civics curriculum and the production of history textbooks, which are then circulated via mass schooling to inculcate a

34. Gellner [1989](#).

35. Or in Jonathan Boyarin's words, states invoke "rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative control." Boyarin [1994](#), 15-6.

36. Bonikowski [2016](#), 440.

37. May [1962](#).

38. Billig [1995](#), 6.

39. Markell [2000](#).

particular version of the nation's founding and history since.⁴⁰ In Mexico and Peru, state-sanctioned textbooks promote stories of popular nationalism that cast lower classes as the "true" national subjects—a narrative that has resonated broadly with the public.⁴¹ These efforts to reify national identities are the basic duty of a modern nation-state.

Still, national stories that states propagate do not always resonate with the broader publics in ways that bolster the state's internal legitimacy. As Mark Beissinger notes, "the tidal character of nationalist politics was conspicuous in the spread of nationalism within and across cultural groups within the USSR and in the politics that ultimately led to the disintegration of the Soviet state."⁴² Indeed, people are not mere audiences for national stories; they articulate their own and use them, too, as focal points for collective action—to challenge the state's stories, policies, and even rule.

In studying this politics of national storytelling, I thus introduce a new category of actors—"storytelling elites." Storytelling elites are those with the rhetorical and institutional resources to create and market their versions of the story. The stories they mobilize during moments of institutional change carry strong resonance as they provide alternative templates—beyond those previously proffered by the state—around which people may register their own narratives. In other words, storytelling elites have a unique ability and opportunity to rewrite the cultural content of nationhood in the context of democratization. They are the key agents of narrative contestation.

40. Darden and Mylonas [2016](#); Balcells [2013](#).

41. Kyriazi and Vom Hau [2020](#), 518.

42. Beissinger [2002](#), 35.

In sum, the actors who engage in narrative contestation are both social and strategic: they are vested in shaping official narratives and deploy available resources within a shared pool of resources to achieve their objectives.⁴³ State actors—especially the reigning regime—seek legitimation; they publicly rationalize their policy decisions in an attempt to secure support and minimize dissent among their audiences.⁴⁴ As Ronald Krebs and Patrick Jackson argue, the preservation of their rule and authority is itself be contingent on perceived legitimacy, which “can be established only through rhetorical action.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, storytelling elites—from political opposition to 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.⁴⁶ They fuel nationalist contest not just to unsettle the prevailing narratives and narrators, but to shift the broader structure of power relations in which narrative contestation occurs.

2.3 The How

The political power of national stories is shaped by the history of their contestation.⁴⁷ Narrative contestation entails public and intentional efforts by actors to replace dominant national narratives. This contestation—a “narrative-generative” practice⁴⁸—is a necessary condition for structuring national stories

43. Goddard and Krebs [2015](#).

44. Uhl and Golsan [2006](#).

45. Krebs and Jackson [2007](#), 38.

46. Hinton and O’Neill [2020](#).

47. Jo [2022b](#).

48. Wiener [2014](#).

because it reveals otherwise unobservable rifts between competing narratives, allowing people to clarify key points of contention around which to mobilize. The growing salience of counter-narratives can generate pressure for renegotiation over narrative orthodoxies that are deemed no longer representative.

Actors engage in narrative contestation in three ways (see Table 2.1). First, they engage in *framing*, which I define as a social process 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.⁴⁹ Framing shapes the interpretive work in narrative contestation 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.⁵⁰ When employed, framing generates counter-narratives that embody versions of history which are alternatives to the prevailing narrative.⁵¹ In this process, actors shape the boundaries of what is politically acceptable and salient for the state to claim—and thus the range of permissible narratives that can be deployed.⁵²

Second, actors engage in *accrediting*, which I define as a social process that involves redefining which narrators have the authority to speak about the past.⁵³

49. Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2008.

50. Benford and Snow 2000.

51. Y. He 2009.

52. To be sure, a permissible narrative is not necessarily an official one. On official narratives, see Brand 2014; Dixon 2018. While official narratives clearly mark the narrative orthodoxy, the degree to which alternative narratives are tolerated or even encouraged is a separate question.

53. 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,

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 storytelling.⁵⁴ Accrediting is thus an attempt to diffuse the narrative authority of the state by marking actors other than the state as “representative”; this requires challenging the rules and procedures that intermediate public discourse and transforming the range of recognized actors that can participate in narrative contestation. As more people become recognized as storytellers, the process and meaning of narrative contestation shift to accommodate growing and varied demands for representation.⁵⁵

Third, actors engage in *binding*—a social process that involves enforcing the narrative bounds to which narrators must conform. Crucially, this process combines framing and accrediting, imposing different narrative bounds on different narrators.⁵⁶ 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 and reconstitute their “menu of

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 1975. On certification, see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2003.

54. Olick and Robbins 1998, 127.

55. On agents of memory, see Bernhard and Kubik 2016.

56. 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.

policy options.”⁵⁷ Through binding, state and societal actors become routinely and differentially compelled by national stories.

Table 2.1: *Mechanisms of Narrative Contestation*

<i>Mechanism</i>	
<i>Framing</i>	Negotiating how the past can be interpreted
<i>Accrediting</i>	Redefining who has the authority to speak about the past
<i>Binding</i>	Enforcing the narrative boundaries to which actors must conform

These narrative mechanisms have practical implications.⁵⁸ In fact, because narrative politics is prone to over-determination—in which everything matters—it is critical to further specify such standards for finding and interpreting evidence (see Table 2.2). First, framing entails public efforts by actors to establish or challenge the “official,” or state-sanctioned terms of a given debate, charting “what can be said.” This strategy generates narrative rifts in the public discourse, revealing the gaps and breaks between official narratives and counter-narratives and clarifying demands for the nature and scope of revision. 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 pub-

57. Goddard and Krebs 2015.

58. These include observable as well as unobservable implications.

lic 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 narrative contestation. Crucially, while there may be struggles among actors about who gets to speak for the broader society—memories are seldom homogeneous⁵⁹—the key point here is that actors beyond the state become accredited voices in narrative contestation. Accrediting is, in this sense, a parallel process by which symbolic, substantive, 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 narrative politics in different ways. Some are forced into operating within the narrative boundaries 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.⁶⁰ By way of challenging and defending certain narrative frames, actors also reveal and refine the bounds within which they must operate.

59. On heterogeneous responses to historical grievances, see Kitagawa and Chu [2021](#).

60. On narratives and legitimacy, see Goddard [2006](#).

Table 2.2: *Implications of Narrative Contestation*

	<i>Key Concern</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
<i>Framing</i>	What can be said	Generates narrative rifts between official narratives and counter-narratives
<i>Accrediting</i>	Who has a say	Generates narrative feedback as substantive grievances about representation become fused with broader procedural grievances
<i>Binding</i>	Who can say what	Generates narrative coercion as narrators conform to their narrative bounds or risk punishment

It is worth highlighting that not everyone participates in narrative contestation; and not everyone is empowered to do so. It is for this reason that democracy plays an outsize role in (re)shaping national stories. While the very point of democracy is to allow differing narratives to coexist, it is also democracy—and its central institution of equality and fairness in voice opportunities⁶¹—that makes visible which stories resonate and which not. In this process of narrative contestation, as the introduction and development of democratic institutions open space for and structure contestations over nationhood, people break existing narrative boundaries and build new ones to mediate what can be said, who has a say, and thus, who can say what. Put differently, democracy *structures* competing narrators and narratives, making binding more efficacious as democracy matures.

61. See Dalton 2017, chapter 1; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995.

Narrative boundaries constitute the scope of legitimate narratives and narrators, which people can enforce. Breaking those boundaries thus entails displacing existing and dominant narratives and narrators, such that what is enforced becomes contested. Consider, for example, Argentina. Narrative contestation under the last military dictatorship (1976–1983) clarified the fissures between the collective memory of political violence and the state’s narrative, which framed the terror as an unfortunate excess.⁶² This played a crucial role in the construction of Argentine democracy because it set the narrative context under which the emerging civil society could structure competing narratives under the campaign *Nunca más* (Never Again) and displace both the dictatorship and its narrative of necessary—if disproportionate—evil.

Building narrative boundaries, meanwhile, involves reinforcing new narratives and narrators that have been introduced, such that what is enforced is altered. Take the same example from Argentina. During their decade-long progressive rule, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner made concerted efforts to sustain narrative contestation; 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.⁶³ In this way, they sought to reinforce new narrative boundaries, deriving much of their democratic legitimacy from sustaining debates over transitional justice. Against this backdrop, the successive conservative leadership of Mauricio Macri had little choice but to downplay the issue, decrying “No más venganza” (No more revenge).⁶⁴

62. Jelin 1994, 50.

63. 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.

64. Blejmar 2016.

To be sure, democratization provides a conducive condition for rewriting nationhood, but it does not determine which or whose stories will prevail. This is, in part, because the incentives and capacities for narrative revision vary between the state and societal actors, depending on the institutional and rhetorical contexts. For the state, narrative change is a far riskier and more difficult task. Unsettling an existing source of legitimacy—a coherent founding story—can introduce unwelcome ontological crisis. In fact, the state during democratic transition may be tempted to do the opposite: to seek a sense of continuity by reinforcing ideologies and nationalism, even of the belligerent kind.⁶⁵ For the broader society, there may be competing counter-narratives with which to mobilize against the state. Depending on their relative resonance, this may impede collective action or result in a more widely acceptable narrative around which people can mobilize.

For this reason, implications of narrative contestation vary at different stages of democratization (see Table 2.3). In transitional rule, leaders may cling to narrative orthodoxies and legacies of repression may continue to reverberate in public discourse, limiting access to voice opportunities and even promoting self-censorship.⁶⁶ What this means is that, despite growing press freedoms and civil society mobilization during democratic transition, non-state actors with more rhetorical and institutional resources, like opposition leaders or dissident intellectuals, more readily emerge as “storytelling elites.” Reigning institutions tolerate, but rarely seriously engage with, alternative narratives or narrators. As

65. Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000.

66. Shinar Levanon 2017. This may be especially so for states that undergo authoritarian-led democratization, wherein autocrats reshape the narrative landscape in ways that would continue to favor the state’s story post-transition. See Riedl et al. 2020.

a result, existing and dominant narratives and narrators are displaced.

Meanwhile, in consolidated rule, narrative contestation is freer and fairer. Leaders are incentivized to reinvent narrative orthodoxies in ways that better resonate with the broader society to be more electorally competitive. The stabilization of political institutions encourages even the general populace to participate in narrative contestation; alternative narratives and narrators proliferate in this environment. As democratic institutions mature—from civil societies that broaden the scope of legitimate narrators, elections that hold state actors accountable to narrative breach, to trials that establish the boundaries of legitimate narratives—the patterns of narrative politics become more stable. In this context, different stories and storytellers not only co-exist, but co-influence.

Table 2.3: *Implications of Narrative Contestation under Democracy*

	Transition	Consolidation
<i>Framing</i>	Alternative narratives begin to emerge, but signs of self-censorship linger	Alternative narratives proliferate, even those that were sanctioned
<i>Accrediting</i>	Storytelling elites, particularly those with more institutional and rhetorical resources such as opposition leaders and dissident intellectuals, emerge	Storytelling elites, even among the general populace, emerge
<i>Binding</i>	Reigning institutions tolerate the co-existence of alternative narratives and narrators, at times even co-opting them	Democratic institutions encourage the co-existence and co-influence of alternative narratives and narrators

In sum, democratization opens space for and structures narrative contestation. The opening of political institutions authorizes the emergence of new storytelling elites, who have both the opportunity and resources to contest the state's story—and thus, its attendant policy. Their narrative choices at this critical juncture provide key frames by which competing national stories are structured as democratic institutions mature, creating the conditions of possibilities for both narrative change and continuity.

2.4 Why Not Why?

This project brackets "the why" in favor of "the how." Given its contingent and dialogic nature, narrative politics makes "if-then" types of theorizing inappropriate. Instead, I focus on unpacking the conditions of possibilities under democratic development for narrative continuity and change, and specifying the social mechanisms that take agency and history seriously.

In narrative politics, agency matters especially. There is no finite set of narratives that actors can "choose" from; the possibilities are endless. It is for this reason that the narrative outcomes I trace here are not specified *ex-ante* in a deductive manner—as potential "values" on a variable—but rather, identified concretely from the contexts I study.⁶⁷ History, too, matters greatly. National stories change in both form and function—that is, not simply what they articulate, but also what they mean. Thus the political salience of national stories depends entirely on the history of contestation that compel such change.

Studying narrative politics, then, necessarily rests on understandings of causal-

67. Falletti and Lynch 2009.

ity that go beyond determinants of empirical regularities.⁶⁸ Instead, I treat my framework of narrative contestation as causal in a “pragmatic” sense, explicating the patterns of narrative continuity and change by tracing *how* they came about.⁶⁹ “Causation, in this sense, is connected to a strategy of the disciplined use of counterfactuals,” as Patrick Thaddeus Jackson writes, “not as a way of elucidating the implications of lawlike generalizations, but as a way of imagining alternate historical trajectories.”⁷⁰ This is the causal—not merely descriptive—approach of this project: it provides an open explanation, without “if-then” predictions, but with analytically transferable claims about the politics of national storytelling.

What this means is that the mechanisms I propose—framing, accrediting, and binding—operate only locally.⁷¹ Rather than producing predictable and bounded set of outcomes, they generate “instantiations” of the mechanisms that operate within the particular contexts of one’s study.⁷² This resonates with definitions of social mechanisms, which acknowledge that causal patterns do not demand general laws, knowing *a priori* the conditions under which they arise and the consequences they yield.⁷³ Simply put, my mechanisms are multifinal.⁷⁴ I elaborate this further in the following sections on Research Design.

68. This “causal” program is defined by the Humean conception of “efficient” causality. See Kurki 2008, 33-40.

69. Jackson 2017, 691-2.

70. Jackson 2010, 10.

71. Pouliot 2015, 252-3.

72. Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1147.

73. Elster 1998, 45.

74. Meegdenburg 2023, 410. For illustration, see Guzzini 2017, 432.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Aims

For long, scholars of democracy contended that national unity¹ or a certain civic culture²—consensual,³ post-materialist,⁴ and other “ways of life”—undergirded the viability of democratic institutions. Scholars of deliberative democracy examined the nature of participation and contestation that underlay a political decision—such as a vote—to assess the quality of democracy.⁵ The critical premise underlying these studies is that protocols of dialogue, and other forms of civic engagement, control the efficacy of political institutions. Indeed, national narratives serve as a “cultural toolkit” for legitimating as well as resisting a given political arrangement and the institutions required to enforce it.⁶

My argument, instead, details the democratic origins and workings of national storytelling and their implications for nation-building abroad. In building this argument, I challenge both the primordial notion that nations are fixed and ancient,⁷ and the perennial idea that narratives are powerfully path-dependent.⁸ By contrast, my argument focuses on the process of narrative contestation that

1. Rustow [1970](#).

2. Almond and Verba [1989](#).

3. Inglehart [1997](#).

4. Thompson et al. [2019](#).

5. Goodin [2003](#), 9.

6. Swidler [1986](#), 273.

7. A. Smith [2013](#).

8. Connor [2004](#).

hinges on the narrative choices of the storytelling elites at critical junctures of institutional change. Democracy structures narrative contestation, giving way to democratic nationalisms that shape how states behave as democracies abroad.

My analytical aims are thus two-fold. First, I seek to situate the constitutive force of narrative contestation within the local contexts of my study. Storytelling is a social practice. Along with their particular form and content, the roles these stories play within social relations also change over time. Take for instance, the revolutionary narrative of the American colonists that “all men are created equal”: what constitutes “all men,” which rights make them “equal,” and what purpose this narrative serves—from the founding of the American state to the civil rights movement—have all varied over time.⁹ The dynamics of such narrative change cannot be understood separately from the complex history of the narrative itself and the shifting identities of the narrators in and over time. Any account of narrative change must thus be local.¹⁰

Second, I seek to produce analytically transferable insights beyond the contexts of my study. To do so, I anchor the process of narrative contestation in the more discrete shifts in political institutions. This helps draw practical implications of narrative contestation in varying stages of democratization which can be useful for tracing narrative contestation across cases. As analytical constructs, the narrative mechanisms of framing, accrediting, and binding capture how relations among narrators (state and society) and narratives (orthodoxy versus heterodoxy) are altered in the co-constitutive processes of narrative contestation and political democratization. I elaborate further on these mechanisms and how they can be traced in the next section.

9. Bensel [2022](#), chapter 3.

10. Pouliot [2015](#), 243. See also Wedeen [2010](#).

3.2 Mechanisms

As shown earlier, narrative contestation is carried out through three narrative mechanisms—framing, accrediting, and binding—which operate at different stages of democratization. What this means is that depending on the narrative strategies of the storytelling elites in any given context, the nature and scope of narrative boundaries, as well as how they are broken and built, will differ. In short, these mechanisms are social, and therefore, multifinal.¹¹

This may be an unfamiliar understanding of “mechanism” for some. Though not without disagreements, many political scientists tend to think of a causal mechanism as an objective empirical reality¹²: “sequences of causally linked events that occur repeatedly in reality if certain conditions are given.”¹³ From this perspective, actors will behave in similar ways and bring about similar outcomes under given scope conditions.¹⁴ Take, for instance, the influential work by John Owen on the liberal mechanism of democratic peace. He asserts, “Liberals will trust states they consider liberal... [and] agitate for [peaceful] policies.”¹⁵ The causal story here is that under conditions of democracy (scope condition), the state’s liberal ideology (mechanism) will lead to peaceful policies (outcome). In short, the mechanism makes his “democratic peace” thesis empirically generalizable.

11. Guzzini [2012](#), 435.

12. See for example Beach and Pedersen [2019](#), 6; Bennett and Checkel [2015](#), 207; Goertz and Mahoney [2012](#), 101.

13. Mayntz [2004](#), 24.

14. Meegdenburg [2023](#), 408.

15. Owen [1994](#), 103, as analyzed by Meegdenburg [2023](#).

By contrast, my social mechanisms—framing, accrediting, and binding—are analytic constructs.¹⁶ Like Weberian ideal-types, these mechanisms operate as abstractions that capture what agents do under a given context.¹⁷ The crucial difference is that, even under largely similar conditions, the same mechanism is expected to produce different outcomes depending on the agency of the actors. As Tulia Falleti and Julia Lynch write: “[B]ecause mechanisms interact with the contexts in which they operate, the outcomes of the process cannot be determined a priori by knowing the type of mechanism that is at work.”¹⁸ Returning to the example, then, what I show—through the social mechanisms I introduce—is that the instantiations of democratic peace depend on the history of narrative contestation that underlies the making of *that* democracy.

What does this mean for generalizability? Understanding mechanisms as constructs means that their generalizability occurs at the level of abstraction, rather than at the level of instantiation. For example, “framing” as a mechanism does not specify whose or which narrative will replace the orthodoxy. The specific identity of narrators and content of narratives depend entirely on the contexts in which boundaries have been erected—and broken. In this sense, my mechanisms are portable only in an abstract sense and ultimately indeterminate, substantively speaking. They do not produce the same or predictable (set of) narratives, even if they allow us to make better sense of the process of contestation that underlies narrative change and continuity.¹⁹

16. Jackson 2006, 43. Pouliot 2007, 379.

17. This conceptualization is akin to one provided in McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 24.

18. Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1147.

19. Ibid.

3.3 Case Comparisons

I conduct a paired historical comparison of national stories in South Korea and Taiwan. Few sets of nations are better suited for explicating empirically the mechanisms and implications of narrative contestation than South Korea and Taiwan. Both previously colonies of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan underwent significant instability during wars against their communist others—within and beyond their borders. Given the longevity and magnitude of such overlapping traumas, national stories from these moments feature prominently in public discourse. To this day, questions of national identity dominate debates over postwar unification and postcolonial reconciliation. From the standpoint of historic significance and contemporary relevance, then, South Korea and Taiwan make ideal candidates for studying national storytelling.

The comparison is substantively and methodologically nested. Substantively, I present two sets of conjunctive case studies, on national narratives from two overlapping, formative moments in South Korea and Taiwan: wartime division and colonial rule (see Table 3.1). The comparison is structured in this way because I see these national stories as nested. As Peter Katzenstein writes, identities—and the stories that embody them—“cannot be stipulated deductively. They must be investigated empirically in concrete historical settings.”²⁰ South Korean and Taiwanese national stories have centered around their most significant others, North Korea and China respectively, which have in turn impacted stories about their historical other, Japan. For this reason, I begin studying national stories with a focus on the postwar period and layer them with themes from the more distant colonial rule.

20. Katzenstein 1996, 24.

Methodologically, the case comparisons allow for complementary analysis. First, I study the changes in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects on postwar boundaries with North Korea and China, respectively. To do so, I trace the trajectories of “One Korea” and “One China” narratives, which came to sustain a longing for unification in South Korea but an aspiration for independence in Taiwan. Second, I investigate the changes in their nation-building projects on postcolonial relations with about Japan. I trace the re-emergence of “anti-Japan” narratives and the hardening pursuit of justice in South Korea, and the emergence of “pro-Japan” narratives and growing demands for cooperation in Taiwan. Together, these trends and patterns in these nation-building projects show how South Korea and Taiwan have sought to re-establish their postwar boundaries and postcolonial relations as democracies.

Table 3.1: *Case Study Objects*

	South Korea	Taiwan
<i>Postwar Boundaries</i>	Unification and sustained narratives of “One Korea”	Independence and suspended narratives of “One China”
<i>Postcolonial Relations</i>	Justice and re-emergence of “anti-Japan” narratives	Cooperation and emergence of “pro-Japan” narratives

Analytically, South Korea and Taiwan also constitute useful cases for comparison as I can leverage the similarities in their postwar institutional trajectories to trace each phase of narrative contestation more systematically. Both South Korea and Taiwan transitioned from military dictatorships and matured into stable democracies following their independence from Japan. This allows

me to more closely trace and compare the dynamics of narrative contestation under shifting institutional contexts, as autocrats seek to define official narratives, storytelling elites attempt to redefine them, and competing narratives become structured under democracy. Each subcase thus traces the changes and continuities in national narratives, between the state and the non-state storytelling elites, given a shared institutional and rhetorical context (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: *Case Comparison Design*

		<i>Within-Case</i>		
		Defining	Redefining	Structuring
<i>Across-Case</i>	South Korea	1945-1988	1988-1998	1998-Present
	Taiwan	1945-1988	1988-1992	1992-Present

To conduct comparisons from each founding moment, I triangulate various primary and secondary materials collected over 12 months of fieldwork (see Appendix A : Chapter 3). For state narratives, I consult a range of sources including presidential speeches, executive and legislative decisions, and state-sanctioned accounts in government publications including textbooks. I focus on those public speech acts that seek to legitimize the government’s policies on unification, reconciliation, and transitional justice. I also pay particular attention to official discourse during emotionally salient moments, including commemorations—such as Independence Day or National (Foundation) Day—and diplomatic or political controversies. These are analytically important because they capture official characterizations of national traumas through recurring, programmed events as well as during unexpected incidents.

For societal narratives, I consult a similarly wide-ranging set of sources, including in-depth interview data, editorials of key newspapers, civil society publications, and oral histories by activists and scholars. Where relevant, I also complement these sources with organic narratives in the form of protest slogans and pamphlets. Though these sources 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, societal narratives as mobilized by storytelling elites carry 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.²¹ These provide narrative substance to broader signs of public disapproval, such as opinion polls, which I survey complementarily.

21. Robert [1998](#).

Table 3.3: *Overview of Qualitative Data*

	<i>Sources</i>
State	Presidential commemorative speeches Executive orders Auto-biographies of leaders and close associates Legislative documents State-sanctioned publications (e.g. party manifestos and text-books)
Societal	In-depth interview data Editorials of opposition newspapers and magazines Civil society publications Oral histories of victims, activists, and opinion leaders Organic narratives (e.g. protest slogans and pamphlets) Public opinion surveys

3.4 Methods

In each set of narrative comparisons, I adopt a multi-qualitative-method approach to analyze these data. In the first set of comparisons, I combine a hand-coded content analysis of presidential commemorative speeches and process tracing of other qualitative data. In the second set of comparisons, I combine process tracing with a narrative analysis of in-depth interview data. The goal in each comparison is to trace the mechanisms of narrative contestation alongside competing explanations centered around geopolitical incentives and constraints. I discuss the specifics of the data collection and analysis procedures in the “empirical approach” sections of the case studies themselves.

Part II

Postwar Boundaries

CHAPTER 4

POSTWAR BOUNDARIES

Our wish is unification

The hope in my dream is unification

A unification carried out with all my heart and soul

Let's achieve unification

Unification will revive our people

Unification will revive our nation

Unification, come quickly!

Unification, come!

"Our wish is unification" (uriui sowoneun tongil), 1947.

On February 11, 2018, amid the Pyeongchang Olympics, singers from both Koreas took the stage in National Theater in Seoul. "Our wish is unification," they sang, holding each other's hands and sharing longing glances. Playing in the background were videos from past family reunions, typically of older Koreans in teary embrace. Many in the audience were mouthing the lyrics along, sometimes visibly overcome by emotion. It is a familiar song for Koreans across the borders. Composed by Ahn Byung-won in 1947, it was originally sung as a song for independence from Japanese colonial rule—"our wish is independence (*dongnip*)."¹ Following the division of the Korean peninsula, however, the song was repurposed to call for national unity. Unification, in this way, served as an enduring element in the Korean national story.

If the idea of unification can generate such a sense of profound yearning in South Korea, it stirs a very different response in Taiwan today. That same month in February 2018, Taiwan's independence activists instituted a new political outfit called the Formosa Alliance, with the backing of prominent politicians Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian. The group would go on to organize the country's first large-scale pro-independence demonstration later that year, with posters and banners that read "don't lean toward China, safeguard sovereignty," and "we are Taiwanese, not Chinese." One of the key demands from the demonstration was to push for a public referendum on independence. The group's founder George Kuo declared, ahead of the rally: "Taiwanese people [have a right to] to express their desire to achieve Taiwanese independence through votes."¹ It is aspirations for independence, not unification, that mark Taiwanese nationalism today.

These patterns are noteworthy given their shared histories. In the wake of independence from Japanese colonial rule, both nations were plagued by internal turmoil as the emergent republics fought against Soviet-backed communists in North Korea and China. For the autocrats that established rule in South Korea and Taiwan—with American help—sovereign recovery thus entailed saving their divided nations from the fatal rise of communism as much as removing any lingering vestiges of the Japanese empire. The republics' first constitutions declared them as the sole legitimate sovereigns over the entire Korea and China, respectively.² The governments also published maps that clearly demarcated communist-held territories as their own, even if stripped from their control.³

1. W. Yang [2018](#).

2. Constitution of the Republic of Korea, 1948, Articles 9 & 11(2). Constitution of the Republic of China, 1947, Articles 4 & 26.

3. In the Republic of China, this included territorial claims over the mainland, Taiwan, Mon-

The message had been simple and consistent: there were only "One Korea" and "One China," and it was the duty of their nations to reunify. To this day, neither formally recognizes the other's sovereignty.

To be sure, governments in both South Korea and Taiwan have oftentimes prioritized peace as a more immediate foreign policy objective. But it is not difficult to recognize that their overarching nation-building projects diverge. In South Korea, recent administrations—across partisan lines—have promised peace as a step toward unification; whether in Lee Myung-bak's "Vision 3000," Park Geun-hye's "trustpolitik," or Moon Jae-in's "Moonshine" policies, leaders have argued unification could only be achieved peacefully. Meanwhile, Taiwanese governments have, at times, even risked peace for independence. And while Chen Shui-bian, Ma Ying-jeou, and Tsai Ing-wen have all spoken about maintaining peace through the "status quo," what they meant by status quo have varied drastically, from *de facto* independence to "One China, respective interpretations" (*yige Zhongguo gezi biaoshu*). Whatever the imperatives for peace, Taiwan has sought to separate from, rather than unite with, their significant other—China.

Intuitively, one might argue that these patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects can be explained by their power and standing, in relation to their counterparts. Specifically, South Korea continues to pursue unification precisely because it is stronger and wealthier than the North, whereas the ambition has atrophied in Taiwan, because there is no plausible scenario in which the two entities across the Straits could reunite under its democratic rule. Lee Teng-hui admitted as much when, in 1991, his adminis-

golia, and Tibet.

tration instituted Additional Articles to the original constitution, which distinguish Taiwan from mainland China as a "Free Area" (*ziyou diqu*) that is under the republic's effective political control. From this perspective, geopolitical realities impose different concerns about feasibility and stakes of defeat that, in turn, provide strategic rationales for nation-building abroad.

But this perspective misses a crucial point—namely, that these geopolitical realities are not given; rather, they are shaped by the intentions and interactions of the parties involved. Although South Korea and Taiwan may face different geopolitical incentives and constraints today, these have themselves evolved over the postwar period: it was only in the late 1960s that South Korea overtook the North as the more prosperous Korea, and the late 1970s that Taiwan lost international—in particular, American—recognition as the legitimate China. What is perhaps more consequential is then unpacking how South Korea and Taiwan have navigated these contingencies and still exercised agency in building their nations—toward "One Korea" and away from "One China." This is the objective of this chapter.

This nested case study provides two critical findings about South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building abroad, as it relates to postwar boundaries with their most significant others, North Korea and China. First, the across-case comparison illustrates that democracy helped sustain "One Korea" narratives in South Korea but suspend "One China" narratives in Taiwan, resulting in increasingly divergent support for unification as a national objective. Second, within-case comparisons show that South Korean and Taiwanese storytelling elites challenged the narrative orthodoxy of oneness with radically different counter-narratives—the former layered on themes of peace as a necessary step

to unification while the latter replaced unification with independence as the national purpose. These counter-narratives became new focal points for structuring competing narratives as democratic institutions matured, rendering unification imaginable in democratic South Korea but unthinkable in democratic Taiwan.

4.1 Empirical Approach

In this chapter, I adopt a multi-qualitative-method approach to study this question. My answers are organized in two parts. First, I trace the overall trends and patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects abroad. Situating the results of a hand-coded content analysis in a broader comparative historical analysis, I show how they have varied over time and when the significant shifts occurred. Second, I process-trace a range of archival data to illustrate the mechanisms of narrative contestation in each case, anchoring the study of narrative contestation in the more discrete shifts in political institutions. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the shifting geopolitical incentives and constraints that the South Korean and Taiwanese states, as well as societies, faced. In short, my aim is to explicate the changes in their postwar boundaries by unpacking the narrative practices underlying them.

I begin with a hand-coded content analysis of subsets of presidential commemorative speeches. This is to establish the trends in official narratives, which I argue provide the key reference against which the broader society registers their own narratives. I leverage an original dataset of national stories from South Korea and Taiwan, drawing from presidential commemorative speeches

from 1948 (earliest record) to 2022 (latest record), totaling 549 (see Table 4.1). To narrow the scope of analysis to national stories concerning their most significant others,⁴ I focus on commemorations of founding moments, such as National Day and Independence Day. Centering around particular referents—North Korea and China—helps study the dynamics of narrative change, which is often multifaceted and multivalent, in a more purposive manner.

Table 4.1: *Overview of Commemorative Speeches*

	Dates	Commemoration	Speeches
South Korea	March 1	Independence Movement Day	273
	June 6	Memorial Day	
	June 25	Korean War Day	
	July 17	Constitution Day	
	August 15	Independence Day	
	October 3	National Foundation Day	
Taiwan	January 1	Republic Day	329
	September 3	Armed Forces Day	
	October 10	National Day	
	October 25	Taiwan Retrocession Day	
	December 25	Constitution Day	

Focusing on presidential commemorative speeches is analytically useful for two other reasons. First, they are comparable in that they reflect an intentional political message, in terms of the position of the speaker and intended audiences. Second, commemorative speeches in these cases pertain specifically to

4. Wendt 1999, 327-336.

the subjects of my interest—national stories about their significant others, North Korea and China. These speeches help trace any changes to national stories as the dominant narrator—the state—utilizes recurring, programmed opportunities during commemorative events to revise and consolidate their own “official” narratives. As democracy regularizes turnovers in “who speaks” for the state, the narrative boundaries become clearer.

To systematically analyze these speeches, I construct a three-point coding protocol on two items of interest: *oneness* and *objective* (see Table 4.2). *Oneness* depicts the use of “One Korea” or “One China” narrative and records whether leaders portray South Korea and Taiwan as one with or separate from North Korea and China, respectively. *Objective* depicts the support for nationalist policies—ranging from unification, status quo, to independence—as expressed in the speeches (see Appendix B: Chapter 4 for demonstration and examples). For replicability, I formalize principles of clarity in my coding practice: only when a speech explicitly supports a category, it is coded as such. Otherwise, it is coded as “mixed” or “status quo.” This original dataset thus encapsulates the most visible pattern of changes in the state’s narratives.

I hand-code each speech in the database. Hand coding of text-based data in content analysis is useful in several ways. First, it helps observe subtle changes in meaning by situating the text in a wider context for interpretation.⁵ This is particularly important when dealing with earlier source materials that often utilize culturally specific or temporally confined modes of speech, as I do here.⁶ Second, hand coding allows minimizing textual noise in favor of more mean-

5. Elkins and Ginsburg 2021.

6. I also resolved issues of inter-coder reliability by co-coding and cross-checking items with 8 research assistants.

ingful content. By relying on a systematic coding protocol, I can observe discursive patterns across cases and over time. Given the purpose of this content analysis—that is, to paint the overall trends in official narratives—this degree of generality is appropriate. Overall, my approach to nonautomated content analysis aims to bridge the interpretive foundations of discourse analysis and narrative comparability afforded by content analysis.⁷

Table 4.2: *Coding Scheme*

<i>Oneness</i>	One	They are part of One Korea or China.
	Mixed	They are part of One Korea or China but the other is a legitimate sovereign.
	Two	They are not part of One Korea or China.
<i>Objective</i>	Unification	Achieving unification, whether by annexation, incorporation, or federation, is the objective.
	Status quo	Maintaining the status quo is the objective.
	Independence	Achieving independence, whether by secession or self-governance, is the objective.

Once the trends in official narratives have been drawn through content analysis, I process-trace each period to provide thick descriptions of the processes of narrative contestation. To do so, I triangulate various primary and secondary sources collected through archival research in South Korea and Taiwan. For state narratives, I consult official executive statements, auto-biographies of leaders and their close associates, legislative documents, and other state-sanctioned accounts including party manifestos and textbooks. For counter-narratives by

7. This is akin to “content analysis in a discourse analytic approach.” See Hardy, Harley, and Phillips 2004, 20-21.

the storytelling elites, I look to opposition party manifestos, editorials of opposition newspapers, and civil society publications. Where relevant, I also complement these sources with organic narratives in the form of protest slogans and pamphlets as well as public opinion surveys.

To facilitate process tracing, I establish the practical implications of narrative contestation. First, the opening of political institutions allows the storytelling elites in South Korea and Taiwan to craft and disseminate alternative stories, alongside state-sanctioned ones. Second, these stories provide competing nationalist frames, around which their societies mobilize for democracy. Third, as democratic institutions mature, narrative contestation becomes structured, clarifying the boundaries of what is possible—and salient—to say. In this process of narrative sorting, some stories come to acquire a taken-for-granted character, as “One Korea” narrative did in South Korea; other stories are rendered off-the-bounds, as “One China” narrative is in Taiwan. National stories that breach these boundaries are sanctioned, not only because they no longer resonate but because of their anti-democratic connotations.

I also establish the practical implications of a key alternative explanation that storytelling is epiphenomenal. From this perspective, people adopt national stories in an *ad hoc* manner to justify their policies. For South Korea and Taiwan, which are embroiled in broader geopolitical competition, this means their stories might shift depending on the feasibility of their nationalist pursuits: unification. Yet, as I will demonstrate, changing balance of power in inter-Korean or cross-strait relations did not dictate how South Korea and Taiwan would come to re-narrate their postwar boundaries. Instead, new stories steered their nation-building projects, against geopolitical headwinds.

4.2 Comparison

In 2008 in Taiwan, then president Chen Shui-bian mounted a full-fledged independence campaign, heightening his criticism of China. In one emotionally charged interview, he stated, “The Communist Party of China’s authoritarian regime emphasizes one-party totalitarian rule and repression, which means that it has absolutely no concept of democracy, and no respect for others [...] who live in the community of democracies, especially the 23 million people of Taiwan.”⁸ In a “deliberate nation-building effort”⁹—from renaming of streets to rewriting history textbooks—Chen sought to de-Sinicize state institutions and reassert Taiwan’s political status as an independent, democratic entity.

That same year, by contrast, South Korea’s president Roh Moo-hyun was rallying a peace initiative with North Korea. He remarked in a speech commemorating the May 18 Democratic Uprising: “Inter-Korean relations are clearly headed in the path of reconciliation and cooperation... This could not have been achieved without a democratic government.”¹⁰ In his Policy for Peace and Prosperity (*pyeonghwa beonyeong jeongchaek*), Roh removed unification as the final step, prioritizing peace as the objective itself.¹¹ When asked to reflect on his vision for inter-Korean relations in 2008, Roh shared that “the value of peace

8. *The New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

9. Dittmer 2004, 475.

10. “O-il-pal minjuhwa undong 27 joonyeon ginyeomsa [27th Commemorative Speech for 5.18 Democracy Movement],” May 18, 2007. Daetongnyeong Girokgwan [Presidential Archive], Speech Collection [hereafter Presidential Speech Collection].

11. The three-step process in his proposal included: (1) resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, (2) improving inter-Korean economic cooperation, and (3) instituting a peace regime.

precedes reunification,” and that “reunification is largely a symbolic goal.”¹² For him, peace was a more immediate and imperative goal that democracy now made possible.

In this section, I trace the overall trends and patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects abroad, situating the results of a hand-coded content analysis in a broader comparative historical analysis. The content analysis yields several important insights about the narratives in South Korea and Taiwan. To begin, leaders from South Korea and Taiwan continued to emphasize the intrinsic “oneness” of the two Koreas and the two Chinas until the mid-1990s, well after the Cold War had ended. Nearly all commemorative speeches between 1945 and 1995 utilized the frame of “oneness” in describing their nationhood, although South Korean speeches were not as consistently disambiguous (see Figure 4.3). Oneness of Korea and China remained a central marker of national identity in official narratives.

12. H. A. Kim 2017, 289.

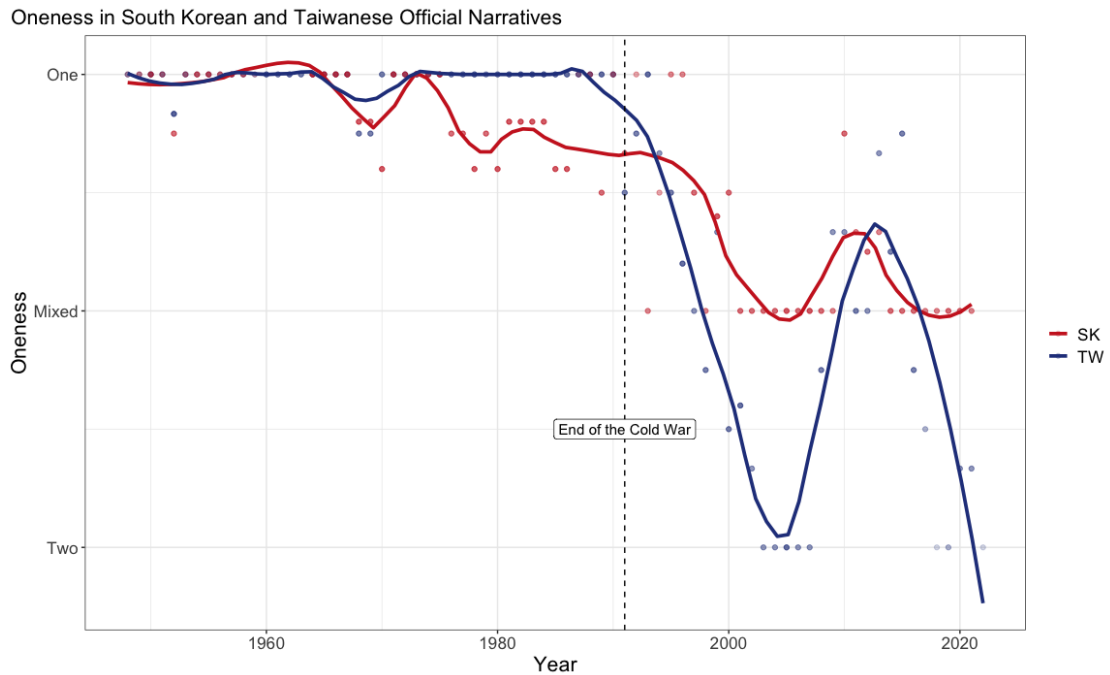


Figure 4.1: National Boundaries in Official Narratives (1948 - 2022)

Postwar autocrats in South Korea emphasized ethno-nationalist notions of pan-Korean unity. From Rhee Syngman's "One People-ism" (*Ilminjuui*) to Park Chung-hee's "Han superiority," South Koreans held on to myths of belonging to a unitary nation that was deemed indivisible, formed by a people of an exceptional bloodline.¹³ Given the geopolitical challenges of the Cold War, this founding story of "One Korea" was accompanied by a staunch anti-communist campaign to differentiate the South from and expunge—by force if necessary—the Northern "traitors." In a lengthy speech commemorating the Independence Day in 1953, less than a month after the Korean armistice was signed, Rhee declared warily: "If the purpose of establishing a free, unified, democratic Korea is lost in this war (to the extent that all of us and the UN nations have worked and sac-

13. Shin 2006, 102.

rificed for this), the communist world will have its own way and will advance indefinitely.”¹⁴ The First Curriculum, the state-mandated high school history textbook, written by historian Hong Yi-seop and used between 1957 and 1970, similarly concludes: “The unification of the nation can only be achieved through the unity of the people... This is the supreme task of the Korean nation.”¹⁵

Likewise, postwar leaders in Taiwan crafted a singular founding story of pan-Chinese unity. The first yearbook in 1951—an official annual record of national objectives and achievements—also depicted the Republic of China as the “original” Chinese regime, whose legitimacy had been temporarily usurped by the “communist bandits.”¹⁶ Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo promoted the notion of “the Great Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu*) and the political and cultural mandate of the *guomindang*. The premise of the “One China” narrative was thus intensely ideological: the GMD was to “free” China from communist degeneracy—just as the forefathers of the Xinhai Revolution had overthrown the Qing imperial rule—and Taiwan would serve as the righteous base from which to revive the country. The resulting narrative was as anti-Taiwan as anti-communist, depicting Taiwan as a fragment of China’s inherent (*guyou*) territory and claiming the Republic of China (ROC) as the sole inheritor of Confucian orthodoxy (*daotong*). This narrative persisted even as diplomatic support for the ROC in this sovereign competition waned, first with its expulsion from the United Nations in 1971 and later withdrawal of diplomatic recognition by the United States in 1979. As Hsiao A-chin writes, “the *raison d’être*

14. “Dongnipjeol Ginyeomsa [Independence Day Commemorative Speech],” August 15, 1953. Presidential Speech Collection.

15. Y. S. Hong 1957, 193.

16. B.-Y. Chang 2015, 30.

of Taiwan was China's future reunification"¹⁷—under its own terms.

Much of this would begin to change with transitions to democracy. In South Korea, leaders maintained the broader "One Korea" narrative while departing from the more coercive orientation of prior unification agenda in their policies. In a Special Declaration on July 7, 1988, president Roh Tae-woo announced his signature foreign policy, Nordpolitik. Unlike the more militant narratives of his predecessors, Roh underscored ethnic reconciliation (*minjok hwahae*) and promised co-prosperity via a "commonwealth" as the foundation for peaceful unification. Unification, in his narrative, remained a national imperative and a "holy will of the ancestors."¹⁸ Similarly, Kim introduced the National Community Unification Formula (*minjok gongdongche tongilbangan*), which systematized Roh's unification-by-peace program into three distinct phases: (1) reconciliation and cooperation, (2) establishment of a transitional commonwealth, and (3) unification. Both Roh and Kim continued to rely heavily on the "One Korea" framework to push for unification: in a total of 27 commemorative speeches they delivered during their tenures, 22 specified unification as a central objective and 19 appealed explicitly to the orthodox "One Korea" narrative.¹⁹

In Taiwan, too, transitional leader Lee Teng-hui upheld the "One China" narrative even as he softened militant frames of the earlier unification agenda. In his inaugural speech on May 20, 1990, Lee—a native Taiwanese and GMD leader—maintained that "Taiwan and the mainland are indivisible parts of China's

17. Hsiau 2003, 149.

18. "Je 69juneon samiljeol ginyeomsa [69th Independence Movement Day Commemorative Speech]," March 1, 1988. Presidential Speech Collection.

19. These speeches meet the scope conditions of the content analysis.

territory, and all Chinese are compatriots of the same flesh and blood.”²⁰ Still, he called for a gradual cross-strait dialogue on the issue. The 1991 National Unification Guidelines, published under his directive, formalized this narrative: “China’s unification, its timing and method, must first respect the rights of the people of the Taiwan region.”²¹ This position was further institutionalized in the “1992 Consensus,” when representatives from China and Taiwan adopted the formula of “One China, respective interpretations (*yige Zhongguo gezi biao shu*), in which they agreed that there was “one China” but disagreed as to what that meant.²²

These initial shifts diverged more markedly as democracy matured. Once elected, progressive leaders, who were previously the political opposition, revised narrative orthodoxies of oneness in the official narratives to varying degrees. In South Korea, progressive leaders Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun re-framed the “One Korea” narrative to justify engagement. While Kim never formally relinquished the long-term objective of unification in his signature Sunshine policy (*haetbyeot jeongchaek*), he so de-emphasized the possibility—in fa-

20. Academia Historica Presidential Database, May 20, 1990. Official translation.

21. The National Unification Guidelines, February 23, 1991, 83.

22. The precise wording did not appear in the 1992 correspondences. Taiwan’s official interpretation was specified in a contemporaneous resolution titled “Definition of One China” by the National Unification Council (NUC), which stipulated that “One China” refers to “the Republic of China that was founded in 1912 and have been in existence ever since; and that its sovereignty includes all China, though its administration currently is limited to Taiwan, Penghu, Jinmen, and Mazu.” National Unification Council, August 1, 1992. [Official translation.] Beijing provided their own interpretation, in a formal letter to the SEF: “both sides of the strait uphold the principle of One China, and actively seek national unification, but the political interpretation of the One China principle will not be referred to in the cross-strait negotiations on functional issues.” But since 1996, Beijing has expressly rejected the principle.

vor of preserving peace and the status quo of “one nation, two states”—that he practically jettisoned the program.²³ In fact, Kim ordered that “unification” be removed from all depictions of his policy toward the North, employing instead more neutral terms such as “constructive engagement policies.”²⁴ In his Policy for Peace and Prosperity (*pyeonghwa beonyeong jeongchaek*), Roh Moo-hyun also removed unification as the final step, prioritizing peace as the objective itself. In this way, though Kim and Roh did not explicitly advocate for a two-state solution, they had come to acknowledge the status quo of *de facto* division and mobilized the “One Korea” narrative in service of building a peace regime.

These counter-narratives also reshaped conservative narratives under presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye. Indeed, while the overarching “One Korea” theme and emphasis on peace endured, conservative administrations stressed regime change as a core conditionality of peaceful unification and relied more heavily on coercive tactics such as international sanctions to tame the North’s transgressions. In their narrative, “peace” was a structural problem rather than a bilateral aspiration; without the North’s denuclearization and international integration, peace could not be guaranteed. Lee and Park thus underscored the principle of reciprocity in their dealings with North Korea. In his “denuclearization, openness, 3000 vision,” Lee promised to uplift the North’s living standards to an income of \$ 3,000 per capita within 10 years, should the North abandon their nuclear program and open up their system. Park similarly promoted a policy of trustpolitik (*silloe oegyo*)—a system of carrots and sticks aimed at transforming North Korea into a responsible stakeholder of the

23. As his foreign minister wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, “Seoul’s constructive engagement policies aim for peaceful coexistence. The longer-term goal of unification can wait.” S.-Y. Hong 1999, 10.

24. Levin and Han 2003, 23.

international community.²⁵ Unification that follows, she promised, would be a “jackpot” (*daebak*).²⁶

In Taiwan, by contrast, progressive leaders deployed a far more drastic counter-narrative, jettisoning the “One China” theme in favor of an “indigenous Taiwan” narrative. If Lee, as a transitional leader, had accepted separation as the *de facto* cross-strait status quo without undermining the overall goal of unification, he openly championed Taiwan’s separate statehood as democracy consolidated. The most conspicuous change in Lee’s official narrative came in 1999 when, in an interview with Deutsche Welle (German Radio), he characterized cross-strait relations as a “special state-to-state relationship” (*teshu de guoyuguo de guanxi*),²⁷ which the GMD formally incorporated in its party platform.²⁸ This was a momentous decision. According to the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), Lee and various cabinet-level officials discussed the formulation in at least 23 major events between July 9—when the interview was held—and the end of the year.²⁹ The MAC dropped the expression “one country” in all official documents and replaced references to “two equal political entities” with “two countries” (*guojia*).³⁰

Government policy reflected the “two state theory” (*liangguo lun*) as well, with corresponding changes in domestic laws governing nationality, security,

25. G.-H. Park 2011.

26. *The Korea Times*, January 6, 2014.

27. Lee has since argued that the statement was intended to discourage Wang Daohan’s visit to Taiwan in 1999, which he suspected would be used to bolster unification narratives in PRC. See C. Su 2008, Ch. 3.

28. Jacobs and Liu 2007, 389, 392.

29. “Major Events Across the Taiwan Straits: 1999,” Mainland Affairs Council.

30. Sheng 2002, 11.

and cross-strait relations. Abroad, Taiwan relied on this new narrative basis to expand its diplomatic representation. If prior GMD strategy to re-enter the United Nations (UN) was by mobilizing support for the repeal of UN Resolution 2758 (1971) that recognized the PRC as China's representative, the GMD under Lee now sought permission to join as a new and separate state. Though Lee clarified on various occasions that he was not seeking independence—asserting that Taiwan's new sovereign status was necessary for peaceful unification—he had, by this point, discarded the orthodox “One China” framework.

Under Chen Shui-bian, the first president from the opposition DPP, the official narrative veered further in the direction of independence. Initially, Chen pursued more moderate—often ambiguous or even contradictory—postures in an effort to reassure Beijing and Washington. Yet, his stance on Taiwan's independence was never seriously questioned. In a “deliberate nation-building effort”³¹—from renaming of streets to rewriting history textbooks—Chen sought to Taiwanize and de-Sinicize state institutions. He also made regular rhetorical reminders, such as claiming “one country on each side” (*yibian yiguo*) since 2002, that promoted the normalization of *de facto* independence. By 2003, Chen's administration was mobilizing support for a replacement of the GMD-designed constitution, and by 2006, it shuttered the National Unification Council as well as nullified the National Unification Guidelines.

That said, compared with the patterns in official narratives about “oneness,” those surrounding policy objectives are in fact more divisive in South Korea whereas they become more moderate in Taiwan. (see Figure 4.4). In South Korea, where “One Korea” narratives persisted, the contours of the contestation

31. Dittmer [2004](#), 475.

have centered more around what policies best reflect this narrative. Progressive leaders during democratic consolidation prioritized peace and stability as the core objective of inter-Korean relations, even at the expense of unification. Meanwhile, though “One China” narratives were increasingly displaced in favor of “indigenous Taiwan” narratives, progressive leaders in Taiwan were often reticent—though not always—to publicly support independence as a policy objective; instead, they framed independence as the status quo, one which they already enjoyed and thus need not pursue. Crucially, although unification remained an orthodox policy objective in South Korea, it became increasingly a narrative taboo in Taiwan. Indeed, no conservative incumbent in Taiwan during democratic consolidation has explicitly pursued unification as a policy agenda since progressive rule.

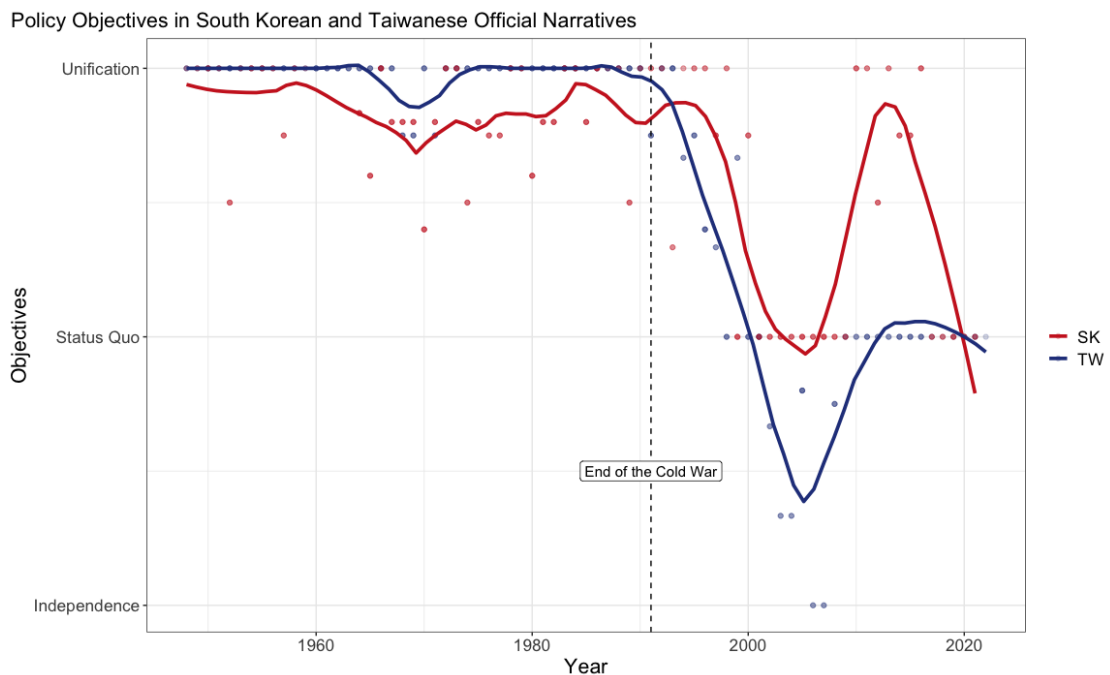


Figure 4.2: National Objectives in Official Narratives (1948 - 2022)

In sum, South Korea and Taiwan have, over time, pursued diverging nation-building projects that redraw their contested postwar boundaries. In South Korea, "One Korea" narrative remained a consensual feature of partisan narrative politics, with neither side denying pan-Korean unity as a basis for eventual unification. Narratives diverged, instead, on how best to recover "oneness," from a conservative focus on containment to a progressive emphasis on engagement. Meanwhile, "One China" narrative became a far more contentious feature in partisan narrative politics. Correspondingly, even as leaders from both sides call for maintaining the status quo, there is little consensus on what that means for policy.

CHAPTER 5

SOUTH KOREA

A closer look at the South Korean narrative trajectory highlights three further findings. First, “One Korea” narratives under autocratic rule found widespread resonance; unification thus also featured as a key theme in pro-democracy movements. Second, leaders during democratic transition reinforced the orthodoxy of “One Korea” narratives (see Figure 5.1), while storytelling elites—dissident intellectuals and political opponents—reframed unification as an anti-imperial and thus anti-American project. Finally, as democratic institutions matured, narrative boundaries became clearer. Though “One Korea” theme remained dominant, narrative contestation became structured around competing rationales for unification and settled along partisan lines (see Figure 5.2): a conservative narrative centered around anticommunism and a progressive one, around anti-imperialism.

In the rest of this section, I process-trace a range of qualitative data to illustrate the mechanisms of narrative contestation underlying these changes and ruptures in South Korean nation-building project, centered around “One Korea” narrative and its attendant program of unification. Anchoring the study of narrative contestation in the more discrete shifts in political institutions, I trace the revisionist efforts by storytelling elites, who emerge more assertive in the wake of democracy, and how these efforts reshaped the narrative boundaries in ways that allowed “One Korea” narratives to outlast the regimes and regime elites that they once legitimized. This helped consolidate unification as a national objective.

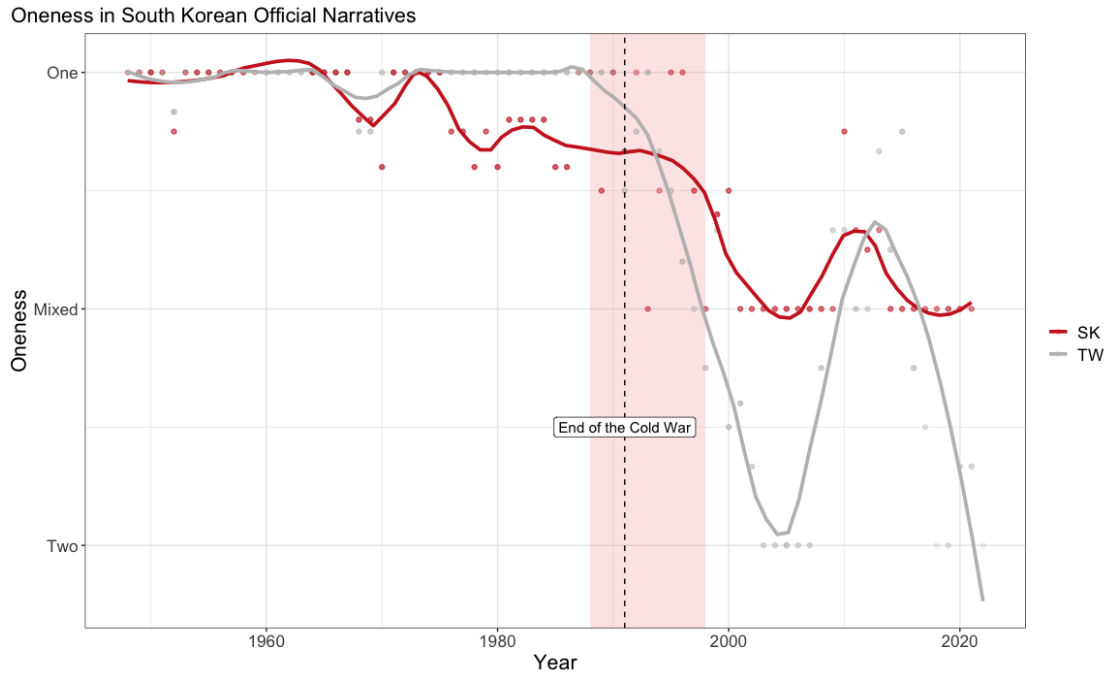


Figure 5.1: National Boundaries: South Korea (1948 - 2022)

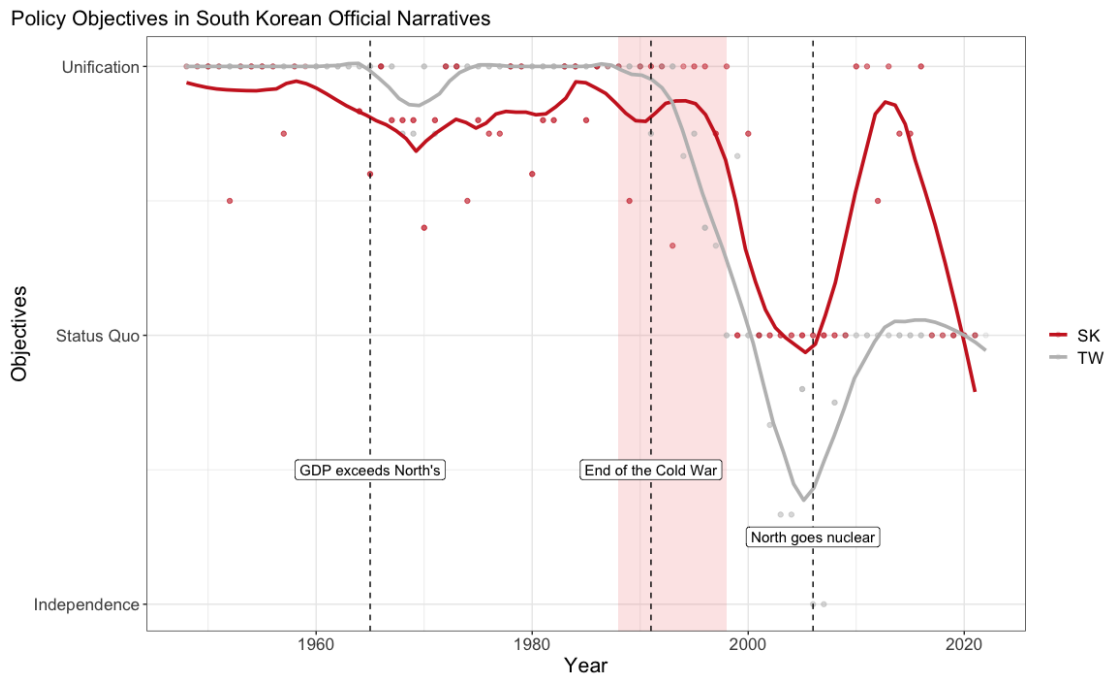


Figure 5.2: National Objectives: South Korea (1948 - 2022)

5.1 “One Korea” under Dictatorship, 1945-1988

Under authoritarian rule, “One Korea” narrative congealed as a foundation for the country’s nation-building project: unification. This was largely a top-down process, as the ruling elites sought to justify authoritarianism through an anti-communist ideology. The Rhee, Park, and Chun regimes sought to censor the alternative narratives in public discourse and silenced non-state narrators on account of the ongoing communist insurgency; and at times, the state co-opted certain themes of the opposition to weaken its narrative foundation. The *jaeya*, the key opposition storytellers of this time, mobilized around an alternative “One Korea” narrative to demand at once democracy and unification, through the exercise of Korean—and thus anti-American—sovereignty. Over several decades of democratic struggle, many who participated in the *jaeya* movement perished in state-orchestrated violence; but their stories would live on to shape the narrative underpinnings of South Korean democracy.

Under the Rhee Syngman regime, “One Korea” narrative served as the primary nation-building tool. Rhee had even refused to sign a peace treaty, arguing that any such agreement could formalize the division of Korea and legitimize the communist North. Still, “One Korea” narrative was not always anti-communist in character. In the immediate postwar period, in fact, Rhee’s anti-communist rhetoric had been more tamed given the large peasant population that was more sympathetic to communist ideology and suspicious of the landed gentry that comprised Rhee’s ruling party.¹ The anti-communist frame

1. B. G. Kim 2018, 60-61. The occupying US forces refused to recognize indigenous parties and factions—whether right- or left-wing—and preferred to establish their own interim government. S. Yang 2023, 76-7; 105. Also see USAFIK 1988, 101-6.

had only become more pronounced as the South lagged behind the North in postwar recovery and Rhee grew impatient with his agenda for unification by force (*bukjin tongil*).

Besides framing unification as an anti-communist nation-building project, the Rhee regime sought to tighten control over non-state narrators who disagreed in any way. He instituted far-reaching control over the country's education system. In 1949, the regime purged "teachers who are Communist or lean left or who do not make their beliefs clear," and codified such practices into the Basic Education Law, authorizing the state to intervene in hiring of teachers and administrators in schools.² The regime also mandated the use of either state-produced (*gukjeong*) or state-sanctioned (*geomjeong*) textbooks and hardened state inspection in school curriculum to censor leftist content.³ Amid the Korean War, the regime sought to engender "fighting education (*ssaunun gyoyuk*) [for a] fighting nation (*ssaunun gukmin*)"⁴—calling for ideological unity to overcome the national crisis.

Another vehicle through which Rhee sought to control public discourse was the National Security Law (NSL, *gukga boanbop*), which still remains in effect today. Passed in 1948—shortly after unrest and subsequent massacre in Jeju Island⁵—the NSL outlawed communism and targeted anyone that disturbed the "tranquility" of the state. The law was so broad in its language that anybody could be arrested for voicing anti-regime sentiments; by the beginning of 1950, between 50-80 percent of all prisoners in South Korea had been jailed for violat-

2. Seth 2002, 195.

3. S. H. Kim 2018, 406.

4. Paek 1953, 57.

5. Estimates of the number of people killed range from 15,000 to 60,000. Kraft 2006, 627-8.

ing the NSL.⁶ Rhee relied on the law to repress political opponents and prominent dissident intellectuals that challenged his nation-building project. Notably, in 1958, he arrested key individuals from the opposition Progressive Party (*jinbodang*) for collusion with the North and outlawed the party; a year after, he executed its leader Cho Bong-am under charges of espionage.⁷

Meanwhile, the regime's Bureau of Public Information—and its civilian partner group Propaganda Countermeasure Committee (*seonjeon daecheaek wiwon-hoi*)—oversaw the production and circulation of public information in service of psychological warfare against the North. Their activities included spreading Rhee's ideology of "One People-ism" (*Ilminjuui*) and anti-communist program of unification through publications in state-controlled magazine *Jubo* (see Figure 4.3).⁸ These publications were later turned into a pamphlet with the title "Summarizing One People-ism" (*Ilminjuui Gaesul*).⁹ The regime also established the Institute for the Guidance of National Thought (*Gookmin Sasang Jidowon*) in 1951 to co-opt public intellectuals and published a quarterly journal *Sasang* to disseminate Rhee's anticommunist nationalism.¹⁰ Meanwhile, through the media permit system, the state also regularly shut down newspapers for publishing unfavorable content—as in *Gookmin Shinmun* in 1948, *Daegu Shibo* in 1949, and *Kyunghyang Shinmun* in 1959—or nationalized them into a government organ under a regime-friendly administration, as in *Seoul Shinmun* in 1949.¹¹

6. Henderson 1991, 137-8.

7. Han 1974, 85-6.

8. S. Yang 2023, 185.

9. Rhee, 1954 [1949].

10. At the same time, the Rhee regime did not close down public sphere in a totalitarian manner. For examples of continued opposition media activity, see Brazinsky 2009, 49-50.

11. J. Cha 2005, 129.



Figure 5.3: *Ilminjooeui* Propaganda Poster (1951)

The Rhee regime collapsed in 1960 in the wake of April Revolution, as new storytelling elites challenged his rule and mobilized around counter-narratives about peaceful unification. For example, the Central Association for National Unification (*minjok tongil bonbu*) declared a new unification agenda based on principles of self-reliance, peace, and democracy, while the National Alliance

for Self-Reliant Unification (*minjok jajju tongil joongang hyeopeuihoi*) and the Alliance of Students for National Unification (*minjok tongil jeonguk haksaeng yeongmaeng*) promoted inter-Korean student talks and exchanges.¹² On September 3, 1960, activists launched the National Alliance for Self-Reliant Unification, with an opening statement that read¹³:

The excitement and jubilation of the liberation on August 15 was like a daydream, and for 15 years, we have been suffering from oppression, poverty, and even the tragedy of the loss of our own people. This is largely due to... the lack of national autonomy. The greater root cause is that our nation has been bisected and our people divided. Therefore, if we do not fulfill the task of unification and reunification, which is our nation's highest command and greatest desire, we will only face more hardships and national shame, and we cannot say that there will be no more tragedy like the June 25 War again.

But the twilight of democracy proved tenuous. Barely a year since the Revolution in 1961, the Second Republic fell to a coup orchestrated by Park Chung-hee, replacing the government with the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (*gukga jaegwon choego hoeui*). In 1963, Park narrowly prevailed in the elections, but with much tempering.¹⁴ Already by February 1963, U.S. officers stationed in Korea reported it was "apparent" that Park "will find it difficult to win a fair election."¹⁵ In this way, the Park regime established nominally democratic institutions but repressed meaningful opposition activity. Then in 1972, Park threw a self-coup and declared himself president for life, introducing the

12. Koo 2011, 95.

13. For the original statement, see Jung 2019.

14. C. E. Kim 1964, 767-8.

15. "Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State," February 13, 1963. Foreign Relations of the United States [hereafter FRUS], 1961-1963, Volume XXII, Northeast Asia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 289.

Yushin Constitution, dissolving the National Assembly, and placing the entire country under martial law.¹⁶

Much like Rhee, Park endorsed “One Korea” narratives and unification as a nation-building project, but with a developmental flavor.¹⁷ Park argued that unification was better achieved by growth rather than by force (*bukjin tongil*) and adopted slogans of “overcoming communism” (*seunggong*) rather than merely “anti-communism” (*bangong*). To that end, between 1960s and 1970s, the Ministry of Culture and Education (*munkkyobu*) published a series of middle school textbooks titled *Path to Unification by Overcoming Communism* (*seunggong tongileu gil*) and since 1974, mandated its use. These textbooks characterized the Korean nation as divided between the “democratic patriotic group” (*minjujooeui aeguk jinyong*) and the “communist traitorous group” (*gongsanjooeui maeguk jinyong*),¹⁸ and argued that without unification, the threat of fratricide could not be eliminated.¹⁹ The North’s attempted assassination of Park and the seizure of *USS Pueblo* in 1968 only bolstered Park’s narrative campaign.

Interestingly, the Park regime co-opted the “peaceful unification” frame that had been central to the progressive opposition. On August 15—Independence Day—in 1970, Park appealed to the public’s sense of longing: “No matter how desperate our nation is to reunify the country, we must avoid wars that force the bloodshed of our own people, and no matter how difficult the road to re-

16. For political developments in the lead up to the coup, see C. E. Kim 1972.

17. C. H. Park 1962. His political philosophy—marrying developmentalism and nationalism—is best depicted in another monograph of his, published in 1970, titled *Gukkawa Hyeokmyongkwa Na* [The Country, the Revolution, and I]. C. H. Park 1963.

18. Munkkyobu [Ministry of Culture and Education] 1968, 19.

19. Munkkyobu [Ministry of Culture and Education] 1968, 187.

unification is, it must be resolved peacefully with steadfast patience and the utmost moderation.”²⁰ Following a series of secret meetings thereafter, the two Koreas issued the Joint Communiqué in 1972, which stipulated that unification be sought independently, peacefully, and by transcending differences of ideology.²¹ Yet, this was little more than a public relations stunt for Park, who was keenly aware of the opposition’s unification platform.²² In private communication with then Assistant Secretary Marshall Green, Park relayed that Kim Il-sung was insincere in his motivations and requested that the United States refrain from any language that might suggest its recognition of the North, such as calling it the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.²³ Unsurprisingly, détente was short-lived: within the year, the Park regime reverted to anti-communist rhetoric, referring to the North as “northern puppets” (*bukgoe*)—a label that was only briefly abandoned after the Communiqué.²⁴

Much as under Rhee, the opposition storytelling elites during this period were highly varied in background and only loosely connected by their shared objectives of democratization and unification. The “dissident intelligentsia” (*jaeya*) was a coalition of activists with varying ideological commitments, rang-

20. “Je 25 joonyeon gwanbokjeol gyeongchuksa [25th Anniversary Speech for Independence Day],” August 15, 1970. Presidential Speech Collection.

21. For the full statement, see “The July 4 South-North Joint Communiqué,” July 4, 1972, United Nations Peacemaker: <https://peacemaker.un.org/korea-4july-communicue72>.

22. McCormack 1982, 6-7.

23. “It makes the North Koreans happy and the South Koreans unhappy and he hopes that there is no reason to make North Koreans happy. He asked that we refrain from high official recognition of North Korea.” “Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State,” July 7, 1972. FRUS 1969–1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969–1972 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2009), Document 150.

24. S. Yang 2023, 682.

ing from anti-communist pro-democracy activists to anti-Japanese or -American nationalists.²⁵ The group came together amid Park's drive to normalize relations with Japan in 1964 and consolidated with his plan to seek constitutional revision in 1969.²⁶ To counter Park's tightening control against civil society, *jaeya* formed a horizontal network of Christian, labor, media, and other interest groups to coordinate opposition activity under an evolving umbrella organization: the National Council for the Safeguard of Democracy (*minju jooeui gukmin yeonhap*) in 1971, the People's Congress for the Restoration of Democracy (*minju hwoibok gukmin hoieui*) in 1974, and the National Coalition for Democracy and Unification (*minju jooeuiwa minjok tongileul wihan gukmin yeonhap*) in 1978.²⁷ Importantly, though *jaeya* often cooperated with the opposition New Democratic Party (*Shinhan Minju Dang*), it remained an independent, extra-institutional coalition of actors with diverse—at times conflicting—visions for post-Park South Korea.

Notably, the *jaeya* was formed and led by anti-communist and anti-regime activists who saw democracy as the answer, rather than a distraction, to the problem of national division. Thus, they co-opted the Park regime's "over-

25. M. L. Park 2011, 374-377.

26. Chapter 5 will deal with the group's engagement with the normalization issue.

27. There were 12 member organizations under the National Coalition, including the Council for Korean Human Rights Movement; the Catholic Priests Body for the Realization of Justice; the Council of Ousted Professors; the Council of Literary Men for the Realization of Freedom; the Council of Families of Conscientious Prisoners; the Council of Korean Christian Social Mission; the Council of Democratic Youth for Human Rights; the Committee of *Donga Ilbo* for the Struggle of Safeguarding Free Press; the Committee of *Chosun Ilbo* for the Struggle of Safeguarding Free Press; the Council of Prisoners for the Restoration of Democracy; the National Committee of Workers for Human Rights; and the National Committee of Farmers for Human Rights.

coming communism” (*seunggong*) frame to demand parallel objectives of unification and democratization. On July 17—Constitution Day—in 1969, *jaeya* formed the National Committee for Struggle against Constitutional Revision (NCSCR, *samseon gaeheon bandae beongukmin toojaeng wiwonhoi*) with the following pledge: “Our anti-communism is not anti-communism for the sake of being anti-communist, but for the sake of establishing and strengthening the liberal democratic system to overcome communism (*seunggong*), and the unification we aspire to is the unification under the liberal democratic system, which is the noble code of our people.”²⁸ In doing so, the opposition storytelling elites sought to distinguish popular (*minjung*) nationalism from state-centric imaginaries even as the Park regime co-opted its core frames.

To be sure, the Park regime was similarly, if not more, repressive in its control of public discourse as Rhee had been. Arrests were rampant. Between 1961 and 1980, 6,735 people are known to have been detained for violating the National Security Law and the Anticommunist Law.²⁹ In 1973, shortly after the introduction of *yushin* constitution, Park even kidnapped the opposition frontrunner Kim Dae-jung in what then U.S. Ambassador to South Korea described—in private correspondence—as “stupid governmental thuggery”³⁰ and *The New York Times* reported was “Park Chung Hee’s Watergate.”³¹ Indiscriminate ar-

28. “Urineun whoe samseon gaeheone bandae hanunga?” [Why do we oppose the third constitutional revision?], NCSCR, July 17, 1969. Korea Democracy Foundation Archives, Document 00479762.

29. W. Park, [2012 \[1989\]](#), 30.

30. “Telegram 5409 From the Embassy in the Republic of Korea to the Department of State,” August 15, 1973. FRUS 1969–1976, Volume E–12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973–1976 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 244.

31. Halloran [1973](#).

rests were so pervasive that people derided the laws as “rice wine” (*makgeolli*) laws, referring to a popular myth that a drunken farmer was imprisoned for complaining about the state.³²

By 1975, tensions were reaching new heights. Park had issued Emergency Decree no. 7, sending troops to universities to monitor anti-regime activity, and Emergency Decree no. 9, prohibiting any activity that “denies, opposes, distorts, slanders, revises or abrogates the *yushin* constitution.” Against this backdrop, the *jaeya* took a particularly bold initiative and gathered at the Myeongdong Cathedral on March 1—Independence Day—in 1976; in the Declaration of National Democratic Salvation (or “Myeongdong Declaration”), they demanded democratic reform, peaceful unification, and for the first time in public, Park’s removal.³³ Dozens were arrested and prosecuted for violating Decree no. 9.

Yet, the counter-narrative forged during these episodes proved deeply resonant. Indeed, the political uses of red scares—especially in the aftermath of South Vietnam’s collapse—were not lost on the *jaeya* intellectuals; the broader context of the Cold War and communist advances elsewhere had provided the country’s dictators a geostrategic cover as they sought power at the expense of democracy and unification. A series of opposition writings titled *Perceptions of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*haebang jeonhusaeui inshik*) from 1979 to 1989 detailed the inglorious and imperial origins of the South Korean state: Song Geon-ho, a political dissident and later the founder of a progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh*, wrote in his essay of Rhee Syngman’s failure to form a unified government in Korea, in favor of a puppet regime and fake democracy, funded

32. J. O. Yi, 2012 [1984], 30.

33. Hanguk Gidokkyo Gyohoe Hyopeuihoi [National Council for Korean Churches] 1963, 687.

and secured by the United States.³⁴ The *jaeya*'s counter-narrative had thus come to see democratization and unification as two sides of the same coin. To democratize, in their account, was to complete "One Korea."

Yet, these narratives circulated only narrowly until they became entirely banned under the martial law imposed by Park's successor Chun Doo-hwan. Park's assassination and successive coups by then military general Chun had intensified calls for democracy and unification, which the Chun regime suppressed violently. One particularly bloody episode was in Gwangju—later called the "Gwangju Uprising" or the "May 18 Incident" (*o-il-pal*)—in 1980: according to recent estimates by the 5.18 Memorial Foundation, at least 606 civilians were confirmed killed and another 1,394, arrested.³⁵ Unlike during the April Revolution in 1960, when the Eisenhower administration refused to deploy Korean troops under US command to suppress the protesters, the Carter administration approved the troop release to support the incipient Chun regime³⁶—for fear of South Korea turning into "another Iran."³⁷ News of American complicity spread like wildfire in Gwangju; after all, the South Korean opposition had trusted that Carter's "moral politics" would lead to support for democracy in the South. One American citizen living in South Korea noted at the time:

34. Song 1979.

35. Son 2005. The government claims that no more than 200 died in the incident; the opposition argues that the number lies between 2,000-3,000. Shorrock 1986, 1203, note 7.

36. J. E. Lee, 2017 [1999], 103, 139-141.

37. Brazinsky 2009, 237.

'Shock' is an insufficient word to describe the reaction when people read these words in black and white in the newspapers. And 'anti-Americanism' is a simplistic label for the emotions that have been generated out of that shock, the intense feeling of having been deceived and betrayed by somebody you trusted and had high hopes in.³⁸

In the years that followed, the Chun regime continued to repress any form of dissent. Like Rhee and Park before him, Chun relied on similar—if not more violent—tactics to control public discourse. He purged key government institutions, including the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and the National Assembly, of his political rivals; by 1982, more than half the Assemblymen were from the military. Under the "purification" program, he also banned 172 newspapers, fired some 400 journalists, and shunned dozens of anti-regime academics from their posts.³⁹ If he had not been restrained by the United States' "quiet diplomacy"—first under Carter and later under Reagan—Chun would have likely executed Kim Dae-jung, a key figure of the *jaeya* movement and the leader of the opposition.⁴⁰ In return for commuting his death sentence, Chun was rewarded the honor of being the first foreign head of state to visit Reagan's White House, a prized mark of legitimacy abroad that Chun knew so well he lacked at home.⁴¹

38. Shorrock 1986, 1203.

39. "Purification in Korean Universities," August 8, 1980. 5.18 *Gwangju minjuhwa undong jaryochongseo* [5.18 Gwangju Democracy Movement Sourcebook], volume 10, 5.18 Saryo Pyeonchan Wiwonhoi [5.18 Documents Compilation Committee], 1997, 40-42. See also Lie 1998, 122-24.

40. Carter's then National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski told South Korean ambassador Kim Yong shik that the consequences of Kim's execution for US-South Korean relations would be "more than marginal." National Security Archive [hereafter NSA] RG 59, Subject Files of Edmund S. Muskie, 1963-1981, Box 3, Document 22890.

41. Allen 1998.

It was in recognizing Washington's support for the dictatorship—whatever its actual intentions and influence—that counter-narratives of the opposition storytelling elites came to emphasize anti-Americanism. To be sure, grievances against the United States, particularly its role in the Korean division, had long predated the Gwangju massacre. Yet, it was through this watershed event that a more coherent frame centered around American complicity and hypocrisy began to develop.⁴² "All roads led to Gwangju"—as newspapers and journals often invoked. In 1985, the National Council for Korean Churches (*hanguk gidokyo gyohoe hyopoeuihoi*) began criticizing the harms posed by American military presence and in particular its nuclear weapons in the South; one statement read that the United States "threatened the survival of the Korean people, making our survival dependent on a foreign power."⁴³ In 1986, two university students Kim Se-jin and Yi Chae-ho set themselves on fire in anti-America, antiwar protest.⁴⁴ Leaflets with slogans like "Down with American Imperialism" and "Yankee Go Home" littered college campuses.⁴⁵ During the trial of university students who trespassed and occupied the United States Information Services (USIS) building in 1985 to demand U.S. apology for the Gwangju massacre, one student-defendant claimed⁴⁶:

With its support for military regimes, the United States, for its own political and military interests, has more often than not played a role that has been antithetical to the true democratic demands of the people (*minjung*)....The more specific wrong of the United States during Gwangju is that it had tacitly consented to the use of the military

42. See for example S. Yi [1988](#).

43. Quoted in Shorrock [1986](#), 1209.

44. N. Lee [2011](#), 91, note 88.

45. Ibid, 1207, note 12; 1208, note 13.

46. Quoted in Ibid, 123. Revised in part to translate "minjung."

under the Combined Forces Command. In other words, the United States watched over the massacre with its eyes open because of its own political interests.

As under the Rhee and Park regimes, the opposition storytelling elites during this period formed a network of diverse civil society groups, under the umbrella organization People's Coalition for Democracy and Reunification (*minju-tongil minjung undong yonhap*). As the name suggests, their organizing narrative married the dual objectives of democracy and unification with the underlying premise that the United States was a barrier to both.⁴⁷

In this context, dissident intellectuals sought more forcefully to recast South Korea's history as one of failure and lack, forged by toxic dependence on the United States.⁴⁸ Early prominent examples were in the second volume of *Perceptions of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*haebang jeonhusaeui inshik*), published in 1985; historian Kang Man-gil wrote in its introduction that Korean history was an "obstacle to overcome," by moving from the dominant "divided statist view" (*bundan gukkajooeuijeok shigak*) to a "unified nationalist stage" (*tongil minjokjooeuijeok dangye*).⁴⁹ Amid deepening narrative contestation, counter-narratives became increasingly layered with another meaning, centered around anti-imperialism. "One Korea," in this incipient frame, was the pursuit of "true" national sovereignty—first and foremost by setting it free from the neo-colonial grips of the United States.

47. De Ceuster 2010, 16-17.

48. M. Park 2005, 271.

49. Kang, M.G. et al., 2006 [1985], 19-20.

5.2 “One Korea” in Transition, 1988-1998

It was not until after transition to democracy began in earnest that the narrative boundaries around “One Korea” orthodoxy began to break. With the introduction of elections and removal of institutional constraints on civil society, alternative narratives were better heard in public and new storytellers—particularly those with *jaeya* credentials—became more visible. This meant that the transitional regimes of Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam were, to a degree, bound by the narrative demands of the broader society; this was best reflected in their co-optation of “peaceful unification” narratives, which they adopted even as they retained the anti-communist orientations of past military dictatorships. As a result, anti-imperial frames consolidated as a key feature of counter-narratives, with new storytellers—in particular the opposition party elites and unification-centered non-governmental organizations—pinning the United States as the primary spoiler in South Korea’s nation-building project.

Despite the overall continuity of their “One Korea” narrative, transitional leaders allowed for the emergence of new narrators and narratives, even those that differed from their official positions. Civil societies flourished as a result: of 843 NGOs surveyed in 2000, a striking 76 percent had been formed in the decade since 1987.⁵⁰ Many dealt explicitly with inter-Korean issues, which was made possible by Roh’s Special Declaration just ahead of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, in which he promised to “actively promote exchanges of visits between the people of South and North Korea.”⁵¹ In one speech, Roh had nullified a critical element

50. S. S. Kim 2003, 58.

51. “Minjokjajongwa tongilbeonyeongeul wihan teukbyeolseoneon [Special Declaration on National Self-Reliance and Unified Prosperity],” July 7, 1988. Presidential Speech Collection.

of the National Security Law, which had prohibited inter-Korean contact of any kind.⁵² Key civil society actors were provided amnesty, including those from the Pan-National Alliance for the Reunification of Korea (*choguk tongil bumminjok yeonhap*) that were imprisoned for their visit to the North as well as members of the Seoul Regional Alliance of the National People's Fine Arts Movement (*somiryon*) that were arrested for "praising the North."⁵³ As one scholar notes: "The more tolerant and less restrictive approach toward the North meant that the boundaries of what was permissible in the discourse on reunification and Korean national identity, as defined by the state, came under severe and very public testing."⁵⁴

In this way, the late 1980s came to be dubbed—in the words of one activist—as the "era of the great circulation of texts."⁵⁵ By 1987, dissident intellectuals established at least twenty-four publishing houses that were exclusively dedicated to "movement literature" (*undong munhak*).⁵⁶ One such press, Nanam Shinseo, was founded by Cho Sang-ho, a former student activist who was expelled from university for his dissident activity.⁵⁷ Another prominent press Hangilsa was founded and run by Kim Eon-ho, a former journalist from *Donga Ilbo* who was similarly fired for his stories.⁵⁸ With the liberalization of public

52. D. J. Kim 2019, 95-96.

53. Amnesty International 1992, 163, 167.

54. C.-P. Chung 2003, 22.

55. N. Lee 2011, 163.

56. Ibid, 165.

57. On the origins of the press, see Cho 1999.

58. On the origins of the press, see E. Kim 1997, 50. This press is known for publishing the opposition writings *Perceptions of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*haebang jeonhusaewi inshik*).

discourse, opposition storytelling—which had been dispersed and discreet in the past—became more free and conspicuous.

Against this backdrop, opposition storytelling elites mobilized around the long-suppressed narrative of *minjung* nationalism, with a renewed focus on unification as a “moral compass” to restore national spirit from the vestiges of American-backed—as well as Japan-inspired (see Chapter 5)—authoritarianism, rather than communism.⁵⁹ As one scholar notes, “unification became a buzzword for every sector of the [democracy] movement.”⁶⁰ Key organizations supporting this dual objective included the United People’s Movement for Democracy and Reunification (*minju tongil minjung undong yeonhap*), the Korean Federation of Student Associations (*hanguk daehak chonghaksaenghoi yeonhap*), the Citizen’s Coalition for Economic Justice (*kyeongjae jeongui shilchoen shimin yeonhap*), and the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (*chamyeo yeondae*). While championing other, more narrowly-defined domestic political issues including labor rights and land reform, these activist organizations converged on the revisionist narrative that inter-Korean reconciliation was the first step to seeking true constitutional revision and political liberalization at home. After all, it was this “special security situation” of national division to which autocrats appealed when resorting to repression—with American help.⁶¹

The rise of these new storytellers paved the way for two parallel developments. First, it called into question the nature of South Korea’s relations with the United States. Prior to this point, the United States was largely considered a “blood ally” that freed South Korea from the Japanese empire and protected

59. C.-P. Chung 2003, 16.

60. Koo 2011, 100-1.

61. C.-P. Chung 2003, 18; S. Kim 2000, 39-40, 46-7, 102.

it against communist North Korea.⁶² In the emergent counter-narrative, however, the United States was seen as an imperial patron, and South Korean authoritarianism, its tool of domination. Then US Ambassador James R. Lilley noted in 1988: "Korea's political transition is giving the public a greater political voice than ever before, and the public is using that freedom to question its relationship with the United States."⁶³ Second, counter-narratives eroded the anti-communist underpinnings of South Korea's democracy movement. The *jaeya* activists under dictatorship were often strident anti-communists from religious and civic organizations who believed in one "free" Korea. By contrast, the opposition storytelling elites in the transition period were more openly sympathetic to socialism and in particular, the North's ideology of self-reliance (*juche sasang*).

This is not to say anti-Americanism as a counter-narrative frame was uncontested. This was particularly noticeable within the student movement, which was coordinated along two—at times competing—factions: the Committee for Anti-American Self-reliance and Anti-fascist Democratization (*banmi jajuhwa banpasyo minjuhwa tujaeng wiwonhoi*, or *jamintu*) and the Committee for Anti-imperial, Anti-fascist National Democracy (*banje banpasyo minjok minju tujaeng wiwonhoi*, or *minmintu*). While both Committees of student activists aimed for militant revolution, *minmintu* focused on authoritarianism whereas *jamintu* emphasized imperialism as the root of South Korea's ills.⁶⁴ Indeed, *jamintu* painted a profoundly cynical picture of South Korea as a semi-feudal neo-colony of the

62. Oh and Arrington 2007, 336.

63. Quoted in H. Kim 1988, 754-5.

64. *Joongang Ilbo*, August 29, 1986.

United States.⁶⁵ Throughout the late 1980s, it produced and circulated a well-known series of pamphlets, titled “Overtures to Liberation” (*haebang seoshi*), which declared that “the main enemy of our [South Korea’s] struggle should be the United States.”⁶⁶

This messaging resonated with the more radical elements of the democracy movement. For them, South Korea’s pursuit of self-reliance (*juche*) was only normal; after all, Korean people had been subject to foreign domination and subversion for centuries.⁶⁷ *Juche* was, in this view, fundamentally a nationalist narrative. Importantly, it was in this context of narrative contestation that more fringe groups like the South Korean Liberation Front (*namjoseon minjok haebang jeonseon joonbi wiwonhoi*) and the Followers of Juche Ideology (*jusapa*) became normalized—even dominant. In June 1988, *Jusapa* organized the One Million March for unification with much fanfare, in time for the Seoul Summer Olympics. Their growing visibility also gave rise to new, more militant groups such as the the Anti-American Youth League (*banmi cheongnyeon hoieui*), which was founded in 1988 with a declaration that employed particularly stark language⁶⁸:

65. Kang, S.C. et al. 1989, 143-147.

66. J. K. Lee 1993, 130.

67. N. Lee 2011, 127-142.

68. Lee Wan-yong was the prime minister of Joseon, who supported and signed the Eulsa Treaty (also known as the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty in 1910). “Beotdeuliyeh! Banmi cheongnyeonhoineun youngwonhada!” [Friends! Anti-American Youth League is Forever!], Anti-American Youth League, March 11, 1988. Korea Democracy Foundation Archives, Document No. 00526660, 5.

Young man! Ignite the flame of hope for a new generation!
United States is Roh Tae-woo! Drive out the Americans!
Roh Tae-woo is the modern version of Lee Wan-yong, the Korean
version of Hitler!
Let's crush the feast of repression, massacre, and lies, and bring in
the dawn of democracy and self-reliant unification!
The victorious march has begun! Let's stand in the vanguard of the
old country, militant patriots!

More broadly, these counter-narratives found their political expression by mobilizing opposition against U.S. military presence in South Korea. Time and again, controversies surrounding American troops, their criminal and otherwise improper conduct, discrimination against Korean soldiers, and unequal burden-sharing for base upkeep inflamed debates surrounding South Korean sovereignty. The opposition continued to point to the "exploitative" terms of the US-Korea Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which shielded misbehaving U.S. servicemen. In fact, between 1966—when the SOFA was signed—and 1987, the Korean authorities handled a mere 0.7% of all crimes committed by U.S. soldiers and their dependents on South Korean soil (39,453 in total).⁶⁹ And in 1988, the South Korean government had adjudicated only 6 out of 297 cases involving crimes by U.S. servicemen in 1988.⁷⁰ Then in 1989, demands for renegotiating the SOFA spiked when U.S. soldiers killed two Korean civilians and injured another in one month.⁷¹ Protesters gathered outside the U.S. embassy, chanting "Yankee, Go Home!"

Indeed, by the late 1980s, broader sentiments toward the United States had soured.⁷² A series of opinion surveys conducted by the *Donga Ilbo* in the 1980s

69. J. Kim 1989, 758.

70. *Hankyoreh*, October 22, 1988.

71. *Korea Herald*, February 28, 1989.

72. For a more comprehensive analysis of public opinion of anti-Americanism in the transition

is telling: the percentage of respondents who claimed they “liked” the United States declined precipitously from 69.9% in 1984, to 37.4% in 1988, and finally, 30.1% in 1989.⁷³ In another opinion poll in 1988, of 1,824 South Koreans, over 42 percent regarded the alliance as “unfair.”⁷⁴ Among the students, surveyed that same year, more than half regarded the United States as “neither a friend nor an enemy, but just a foreign country pursuing its own interest,” and 41.2 percent claimed that the United States was “responsible for the division of Korea in 1945 and is the greatest impediment to Korea’s unification.”⁷⁵ As the editorial of the progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* noted at the time, anti-Americanism had seeped “beyond college campuses, and into the general society.”⁷⁶

It was in this context of boundary-breaking that the transitional Roh regime introduced *Nordpolitik* (*bukbang jeongchaek*)—a campaign for peaceful unification. In his inauguration speech in 1988, Roh implored: “We must pave the way for reunification by building democratic capacity and strengthening our security posture on the basis of national pride... To the countries concerned: the affairs on the Korean Peninsula will be resolved peacefully by the parties of the two Koreas through democratic means.”⁷⁷ Shortly thereafter, he delivered the aforementioned Special Declaration (also called the “July 7 Declaration”), and took various unilateral measures including suspending broadcasting pro-

period, see Shin 1996, 795-801.

73. Y. J. Jang 2023.

74. *Hankyoreh*, October 14, 1988.

75. H. Kim 1988, 753.

76. *Hankyoreh*, June 7, 1988.

77. “Je 13dae Daetongryeong Choimsa [13th Presidential Inauguration Speech],” February 25, 1988. Presidential Speech Collection.

paganda, revising North-related contents in national history textbooks,⁷⁸ promoting family reunions, and permitting the production and circulation of materials concerning North Korea or other communist countries. In this way, Roh borrowed the frames of “peaceful unification”—much as Park had done before him—but this time, he also adopted corresponding policies.

Yet, even as the Roh administration allowed and co-opted counter-narratives, it also sought to tame the more critical segments of the new storytelling opposition. The most noteworthy example in this regard was the banning of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (*jeonguk gyojikwon nodong johap* or *jeongyojo*) and subsequent dismissal of more than 1,500 affiliated teachers in 1989. In March that year, when the National Assembly voted in favor of revising the Labor Union Act to allow then Korean Teachers Association to form a union, Roh vetoed the bill on account of the union’s potential to subvert the state.⁷⁹ Subsequently, the administration launched a public campaign to label *jeongyojo* teachers as “violent revolutionary forces,” funded and supported by the North, that sought to spread communist ideology among students.⁸⁰ Education was one area in which Roh was unwilling to concede the state’s narrative dominance; on June 17, 1989, Roh himself pronounced that a teacher’s union would be never tolerated in Korea.⁸¹

78. Roh instituted the Fifth Curriculum, adopted in 1990 and used until 1996, which concludes with the following plea: “The biggest challenge facing our nation, unification and reconciliation, will be solved as long as we have a strong sense of history.” Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoi [National Institute of Korean History] 1990, 221.

79. Synott 2017, 16.

80. *The Korea Herald*, April 7, 1989, 1.

81. *The Korea Herald*, July 17, 1989, 1.

Since their (unauthorized) formation, the Union had sought to correct history textbooks, which had been manufactured, mandated, or otherwise modified by the state. During one of the provincial opening ceremonies, the Union declared⁸²:

Just as national education during the Japanese colonial period had to take on the task of liberating the nation and preparing independent workers for the homeland, today's education has to perform the national historical task of building the capacity to end the decades of military dictatorship, bring about democratization, and advance the reunification of the divided homeland.

The *chunkyojo* blamed the militarization of the South Korean school curriculum to US-backed dictatorships and centered its narrative around Korean sovereignty. As one scholar noted then, the *chunkyojo* believed "people should be educated so that they can liberate their country from the illegitimate influence of the foreign powers [the United States] which have been involved in the partition of the nation and the later development of dependent capitalism."⁸³ In this manner, they argued that South Korea's education system had so long inculcated a warped sense of history, in service of American occupation and Korean division. In one internal document, teacher-activist Shin Byeong-cheol explained⁸⁴:

82. "jeonguk gyojikwon nodong johap jeonnamjibu gyeolseongdaehoi jaryojip [Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union Jeonnam Branch Opening Meeting Factsheet], Jeongyojo, June 10, 1989. Korea Democracy Foundation Archive, Document No. 00006021, 3.

83. Jee-Hun Lee 1990, 164-65.

84. "Gihoikjaryo: Junghakkyo guksa gyogwaseo gaejeongbon bunseok" [Source Document: Analyzing Revisions to Middle School History Textbooks], Jeongyojo, February 17, 1989. Korea Democracy Foundation Archive, Document No. 00002225, 11.

The U.S. military, which entered South Korea as a new ruler rather than a liberator, sought to use South Korea as an outpost of the U.S. imperialist strategy in the global Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union... National history education was also implemented for the purpose of legitimizing the domination of the U.S. military administration and the pro-American indigenous, landowning class that they chose as their partners in carrying out their policies.

Though such explicit, anti-American frames were rarer in their public-facing registers, the Union members continued to raise alarm about the anti-communist underpinnings of the state's unification agenda. In 1990, one teacher-reporter wrote in *Jeongyojo Shinmun*—the Union's (unauthorized) newspaper—that state-sanctioned accounts in history textbooks too heavily emphasized the war's origins, "thereby defining North Korea as an "enemy" that must always be guarded against and defeated."⁸⁵ This distorted historiography only accentuated the "logic of power," which correspondingly supported the "logic of dictatorship and perpetuation of division." Later that year, *Jeongyojo Shinmun* carried another article by a researcher, titled "The People's Way of Unification," in which he used the language of self-reliance (*juche*)⁸⁶:

If the current government's unification of Korea is a product of collaboration between the domestic ruling power and foreign powers, the most important characteristic of the *minjung* unification is that the people themselves take the lead in achieving a unification that improves their lives. The most important thing here is the people's self-reliance (*minjung juche*).

Thus under Roh, while the range of permissible narratives around "One

85. Jeon, Hyesook. "Tongil gyoyukeul wihan gongchenghoi" [Public Hearing for Unification Education], *Jeongyojo Shinmun*, July 1, 1990, 5.

86. Jeong, Daehwa. "Minjung-i jihyanghaneun tongilbangan" [The People's Way of Unification], *Jeongyojo Shinmun*, November 1, 1990, 6.

Korea” and unification agenda seemed to expand to some extent, in key sectors of society, alternative narratives and narrators were still being censored. In another important example, even as the Roh administration relaxed some of the more authoritarian provisions in the National Security Law in 1991⁸⁷—following five consecutive self-immolation by student-activists in protest⁸⁸—it also refused to free many Koreans who had been imprisoned for criticizing the state and the United States.⁸⁹ In this manner, the Roh administration engaged with the narrative demands of the broader society in partial and selective ways, co-opting certain counter-frames and stifling some storytellers they deemed threatening to the reigning anti-communist version of “One Korea” narratives.



Figure 5.4: *Jeongyojo* (1989)

87. Article 7 of the National Security Law, which prohibits any praise or sympathy toward an “anti-state” organization, had long been used by autocrats to imprison political opponents.

88. “South Korea Softens a Tough Security Law,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 1991, 3.

89. Amnesty International 1991, 5. The report includes case files of 14 prisoners of conscience.

Contrary to early expectations, the Kim Young-sam administration was not much different in his approach toward alternative narratives and narrators. As international pressure mounted on the legalization of *jeongyojo*, the Kim administration set up a reinstatement process for dismissed teachers, which required the teachers to sign a form that renounced the Union and their participation. A portion of this form read⁹⁰:

It [was] a clear violation of the law when teachers formed the trade union. It [was] against the *national sentiments* and our views on education that teachers pretended to be workers and forwarded their demands through trade unions.

Thus the reinstatement process sought to quell criticisms of the state and silence counter-narratives that challenged the dominant, anti-communist frames in national history education. Given the stipulation, it was unsurprising that only 5.8% of all dismissed teachers applied for reinstatement, even as the deadline approached at the end of 1993.⁹¹

Moreover, Kim's civilian (*munmin*) administration opted against dismantling the military-intelligence apparatus he had once championed against as an opposition leader. While Kim was the first elected president with a civilian background from the opposition Unification Democratic Party (*tongil minjudang*), he had also seized power by forging a coalition with Roh and Kim Jong-pil, one of the chief figures in the authoritarian Park regime.⁹² In this sense,

90. Human Rights Watch 1995. Emphasis added. Here, the term "national sentiments" refers to anti-communism.

91. Synott 2017, 27.

92. It would be later revealed that Roh had created a political slush fund of around \$600 million, which also supported Kim's campaign. Kristof 1996, 6.

despite having been a leading critic of the country's military dictatorships, Kim Yong-sam represented continuity of—rather than departure from—South Korea's authoritarian past. This also meant that he was at once bound by the narrative demands of the broader society he once represented, and those of the anti-communist establishment to which he was now indebted.

As a result, "One Korea" narratives and unification policies under Kim were erratic. Despite his rhetoric of "peaceful unification," he protested the Clinton administration's engagement policies with the North.⁹³ And though he agreed to a summit with Kim Il-sung following the 1994 nuclear crisis, he refused to offer any condolences when the North Korean leader suddenly died—just three weeks before the scheduled summit—and threatened to arrest any civic group that seeks to send delegations to the North.⁹⁴ Finally, despite their shared history in democratic activism, Kim Young-sam often labeled his *jaeya*-credentialed opponent Kim Dae-jung as a "crypto-communist,"⁹⁵ in what many saw as an attempt to deflect criticisms from the conservative establishment that he was "soft on communism."

Due in part to the selective liberalization of the public sphere, new storytellers were as discordant as they were diverse during the early transition years. As one scholar noted, the civil societies were "fragmented and even chaotic," ranging from those with specific policy agendas and others dedicated

93. "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, President William J. Clinton and South Korea President Kim Young Sam, re North Korea," October 14, 1994. NSA, New Evidence on Clinton Administration Negotiations with North Korea, (Washington: George Washington University, 2020), Document 08. See also Sterngold [1994b](#), 3.

94. "How S. Korea responded to Kim Il Sung's death in '94," *Donga Ilbo*, December 21, 2011.

95. Gray [2018](#), 248.

to grander "revolutionary" purpose.⁹⁶ Organizations fell along a spectrum of citizen's movements (*shimin undong*) on one end, and people's movements (*minjung undong*) on the other, with significant differences in philosophy and thus strategy.⁹⁷ In general, these groups coexisted—if at times competitively—with shared goals in democratization and unification, and increasingly, shared attitudes in anti-Americanism.⁹⁸

One of the most active among these groups was the Korean Federation of University Student Councils (*hankuk daejak chonghaksaenghoi yonhap*, or *hanchongryeon*), whose membership had grown to 180 member universities by 1993, and which stood at the forefront of anti-American unification agenda. Student activists in this group spearheaded various activities in coordination with the Pan-National Alliance for National Unification (*joguk tongil beomminjok yonhap*, or *beomminryeon*). Since 1990, the *hanchongryeon* has, for example, hosted the Pan-National Convention (*beomminjok daehoi*), which has consistently demanded the removal of U.S. troops and unification under Korean terms. In 1993, after Pyongyang withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and tensions between the United States and North Korea worsened, the Kim administration cracked down on their activities, resulting in the arrests of 5,700 some students associated with *hanchongryeon* in 1996. By 1997, both *hanchongryeon* and *beomminryeon* were designated "anti-state organizations."

Still, the transitional regime under Kim's leadership tolerated these groups so long as they were not explicitly pro-North. A good example in this regard is the formation of the National Campaign for Eradication of Crime by U.S.

96. S. Kim 1996, 94-5.

97. S. Kim 2000, 130.

98. Moon 2003, 144-5.

Troops in Korea (*juhan migun beomjoi geunjeol undong bonbu*) in 1993 after an American soldier killed a bar waitress. The group came together as more than 100 other organizations began cooperating to provide legal assistance for the victims of crimes perpetrated by Americans on South Korean soil, and launch publicity campaigns for the revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Unlike the more radical student organizations, these civic groups sought “to engage through democratic means—rather than to dismiss, bypass, overthrow, or challenge the legitimacy of—their own government with regard to grievances against the U.S.”⁹⁹ Because their activities were more programmatic in character, centered around voicing the legitimate concerns of the public and particularly the families of the victims, their anti-American positions gained broader acceptance in Korea.

In short, with the liberalization of political institutions—however partial—new storytellers proliferated. Among them, opposition elites from the *jaeya* movement were best prepared to take advantage of the more tolerant narrative landscape. Their growing influence and visibility inspired the rise of more radical groups whose counter-narratives on “One Korea” were staunchly anti-American (*banmi*) and explicitly pro-North (*chinbuk*). Though these opposition storytelling elites represented diverse segments of the society—at times, with competing programmatic demands—they also converged on the national objectives of democratization, unification, and increasingly, sovereignty from the United States. This emerging consensus meant that the transitional regimes of Roh and Kim were partly bound to the narrative demands of the broader society, to maintain a measure of democratic legitimacy they now needed. Thus even as they held onto the anti-communist foundation of their unification agendas, they

99. Moon 2003, 140.

adopted—at least in public—a peace-oriented paradigm that resonated with the broader populace. By the end of 1990s, the narrative boundaries surrounding “One Korea” had eroded, de-tabooing critiques of anti-communism and pro-Americanism.

5.3 “One Korea” and Democracy, 1998–

As democracy consolidated, new narrative boundaries formed around “One Korea.” The scope of new storytellers broadened and their activities regularized, giving rise to the New Right backlash-movements that sought to challenge the narrative orthodoxy of progressive movements. Over time, democratic institutions helped structure these competing narrative demands into partisan cleavages and programmatic demands—between a progressive narrative that prioritized peaceful coexistence with North Korea and a conservative narrative that was more decidedly committed to regime change in the North as a precondition for unification. Most notably, these competing narratives diverged on the role that the United States played in South Korea’s nation-building project abroad: a spoiler of inter-Korean peace in the former and an indispensable partner for unification in the latter. “One Korea” narrative and the program of unification thus remained resilient against time, even as pathways to this national objective became contested.

Progressive narrators, once in power, reframed the “One Korea” narrative to justify engagement. Both *jaeya*-credentialed Kim Dae-jung and his successor Roh Moo-hyun supported a nation-building project that prioritized peace, even at the expense of unification. Sunshine policy (*haetbyeot jeongchaek*) under Kim,

and later, Policy for Peace and Prosperity (*pyeonghwa bonyong jeongchaek*) under Roh both recognized the de facto separation of the two Koreas, and mobilized “One Korea” narrative in service of building a peace regime. Shortly after the inter-Korean summit in 2000—the first between the leaders of both Koreas since division—Kim stated: “[In going to Pyongyang, my wish] was to never go to war again, to bring lasting peace to the Korean peninsula, and to cooperate with each other, *even if reunification was delayed*, so that the entire Korean people could enjoy peace of mind, security of life, and common prosperity.”¹⁰⁰

This narrative was bolstered by narratives within the peace movement that challenged the prior imperial and authoritarian underpinnings of the unification agenda. One notable example is the reform movement led by (*chunkyojo*), newly legalized in 1999.¹⁰¹ In seeking broader institutional reform, the Union asserted that “the approved and authorized textbook system may be seen unconstitutional, as it allows the political and factional control on textbooks.”¹⁰² In this regard, they pointed to three sets of “distorted contents” in state-led national history curriculum: (1) on democracy, by emphasizing militarism and feudalism; (2) on national autonomy, by inculcating pro-American and pro-Japanese attitudes as well as West-centric views; and (3) on national unification, by cementing Cold War ideology, militaristic unification agendas, and hatred of North Korea. Instead, the Union wanted teachers to have professional autonomy over the design and content of their teaching materials, including those

100. “6.25 Je 50joonyeon Ginyeomsa (Tonghaneui 6wol, hwoimangeui 6wol) [6.25 50th anniversary remarks (June of Hope, June of Thought)],” June 25, 2000. Presidential Speech Collection. My emphasis.

101. The *chunkyojo* was identified in 1989 as one of 126 “anti-state,” leftist groups that promoted unification under communist rule.

102. Jeongyojo [Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union] 1994, section 8.

that highlight two Korea's common cultural origins and correct previously hostile teachings about North Korea.¹⁰³

In fact, the peace movement was widespread. According to government data, the number of registered unification-centered non-governmental organizations spiked from 50 in 1998 to 95 in 2001, nearly doubling under the first half of the Kim administration.¹⁰⁴ With the announcement of the Sunshine Policy, various civic groups also volunteered to provide humanitarian assistance and arrange North-South exchanges. For example, pro-unification groups formed a coalition called "North Korea Emergency Advance," which campaigned to raise relief funds and supplies for the North after the long famine in 1998.¹⁰⁵ A total of 3,580 South Koreans, through unification-centered non-governmental organizations, visited North Korea and delivered humanitarian aid under Kim's tenure, from 1998 to 2003.¹⁰⁶

The progressive approach to nation-building abroad—one that prioritized peace with the Northern brethren—also accompanied efforts at home to address South Korea's history of authoritarian violence, one that was justified through anti-communist, anti-North narratives. To this end, Kim established the National Human Rights Commission (*gukga ingwon euiwonhoi*) and the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths (*euimoonsa jinsang gyumyeong wiwonhoi*). In addition, Roh instituted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a broad mandate to investigate colonial and state violence, including cases of disappearance and execution of innocent Koreans. In *A Hard Jour-*

103. Synott 2017, 42.

104. Jonsson 2017, 141.

105. S. L.-W. Chung 2011, 272.

106. Jonsson 2017, 183.

ney to Justice, the first-term report by the Presidential Truth Commission, the head commissioner Han Sang-bum described the report as a "contribution to rebuilding the nation,"¹⁰⁷ first and foremost by rewriting stories about the victims of state violence, who were often conveniently labeled as "pro-North" or "pro-communist," arrested, tortured, and killed.¹⁰⁸ These democratic institutions helped question the long-standing anti-communist orthodoxy and validate the counter-narratives that North Korean threats had been, in large part, manufactured to preserve dictatorship.

As the "enemy" image of North Korea waned in public discourse, the "friend" image of the United States deteriorated. In part, this was due to the enduring and unresolved grievances against the United States forces in South Korea, which brought together a diverse coalition of civic groups. In 1966, for example, environmental organizations like Green Korea United began working with the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crime by the U.S. Troops in Korea and the People's Action to Reform the SOFA to investigate the environmental damage incurred by U.S. base activities. By 2001, the coalition had grown to include the Lawyers for a Democratic Society (*minjusahoireul wihan byeonhosamoim* or *minbyon*), which provided legal assistance to victims residing near U.S. bases. The Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) also challenged the SOFA in the constitutional court on behalf of the victims of American soldiers and bases more generally.¹⁰⁹ Then starting in 2001, these anti-base activists staged a

107. Euimoonisa Jinsang Gyumyeong Wiwonhoi [Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths] 2004, 14.

108. Ibid, 39, 43, 52, 134, 145, 147, 158, 166, 169, 192, 212, 231, 314, 323, 438, 455, 463, for specific examples.

109. Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, "SOFA Constitutional Review/Claim Request," July 19, 2000.

one-person relay rally outside the U.S. embassy in protest of the ratification of the revised SOFA.¹¹⁰ Though these types of programmatic movements were not radical in their anti-American rhetoric, they provided tangible evidence of the harms perpetrated by continued U.S. presence and sought legal recourse.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, two specific incidents raised the emotional salience of these long-standing grievances against the United States: the Yangju highway incident in 2002 and the Iraq war in 2003. On June 13, 2002, an armored vehicle of the U.S. army struck and killed two school girls, Shin Hyosun and Shim Miseon. Once again, due to the provisions of SOFA, the U.S. military court in Seoul had jurisdiction over the case and, and not long after, acquitted the commander and driver on the charge of negligent manslaughter. This led to an almost year-long candlelight vigil outside the U.S. embassy; people tore up American flags in protest and chanted "Bring Justice to Hyosun and Miseon," and "Retry the GIs at a Korean Court."¹¹² They also increasingly adopted anti-war narratives as it became known that Korean soldiers would be sent to Iraq at the request of the Bush administration. In this way, as the demonstration grew in scale and scope of demands, the Yangju incident became a symbol of broader movement against American militarism. One of the leading organizations of the protest, Korean Federation of Trade Unions (*jeonguk minju nodong johap chongyeonmaeng* or *minjunochong*), declared in their petition¹¹³:

110. Demonstrations of more than two people within 100 meters of government or foreign governmental buildings are illegal.

111. On the shifting rhetoric and strategies of anti-American movements in South Korea during this period, see Moon 2003, 148-9.

112. Kang 2012, 330.

113. "Je 2eui Vietnam-doil migukeui Iraq chimryak, hangukgun pabyeong cheolhoihara [U.S. invasion of Iraq will become Vietnam 2.0, withdraw decision to send South Korean troops],

We remember the U.S. waging the Vietnam War in the midst of the anti-war fervor of the 1970s, and the Park Chung-hee dictatorship that sent young people to fight that dirty war. Today, we are once again seeing the shadow of those dictatorships that lied to their people and participated in that dirty war with the Roh Moo-hyun administration's decision to send troops to Iraq, claiming to represent the people's desire for reform. But the South Korean government must realize. In the face of U.S. hegemony, which does not hesitate to wage war at the cost of the Iraqi people's blood for oil, the present in Iraq could become the future of the Korean Peninsula.

Against this backdrop, popular sentiments around the North Korean threat, and correspondingly, the U.S.-South Korean alliance, also began to shift. An opinion poll in 2004 showed that South Koreans saw the United States as the "greatest threat" to South Korea's security, at 39 percent, ahead of North Korea at 33 percent.¹¹⁴ Notably, these shifts occurred even after the completion of the North's first uranium enrichment facility and withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003.

Yet, the institutionalization of these counter-narratives through progressive rule also instigated the "New Right" counter-movement, which espoused a new frame of "statism."¹¹⁵ Following two consecutive electoral defeats, conservative intellectuals became acutely aware of the national narrative dominance of the progressives.¹¹⁶ Now as the *opposition* storytellers, the conservatives needed not only a way to discredit the progressive national story, but to forge anew their own. In this effort, they emulated much of the accrediting and

March 22, 2003. Minjunochong [Korean Federation of Trade Unions], Statement Collections.

114. *Chosun Ilbo*, January 11, 2004.

115. S. Yang 2021, 890.

116. Tikhonov 2019.

framing practices of the progressives during democratic transition, establishing conservative-oriented publishing houses, civic organizations, and publications to mobilize the now-sidelined conservative storytellers and revise their story.¹¹⁷

What resulted was a national story that sought to replace the progressive theme of people's democracy (*minjung minjujooeui*) with a conservative one of "liberal democracy" (*jayu minjujooeui*), which in turn supported pro-American and pro-Japanese nation-building agendas. In a prominent example, conservative storytelling elites published a series of essays in 2006, titled *Reconsiderations of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*Haebang Chonhusaeui Chaeinsik*),¹¹⁸ detailing what they claimed were distorted "leftist" narratives. This two-volume collection brought together contributions from 18 scholars, including chapters on Korea's division that discounted the roles played by the US military government and South Korean autocrat Rhee, instead blaming it on Soviet-backed Kim Il-sung regime.¹¹⁹ The editors also portrayed the progressive administrations' narratives—and attendant measures for transitional justice, including investigations of colonial era collaboration and wartime civilian killings by US and South Korean forces—as a parochial, partisan maneuver.¹²⁰ Conservative dailies celebrated the writings, calling them "necessary,"¹²¹ "right-

117. M. Yang 2021, 349.

118. The title takes after the opposition essays published in 1970s and 1980s under the series *Considerations of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*Haebang Chonhusaeui Insik*).

119. Kim et al. 2006, chapter 5.

120. Kim et al. 2006, 14. This was because conservative elites were more likely to have collaborated with the Japanese imperial government and served in the South Korean authoritarian regimes. See Em 2013, 157.

121. *Chosun Ilbo*, February 2, 2006.

teous,"¹²² and "a welcome corrective."¹²³

These developments undergirded changes in official narratives under the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye. Indeed, while the overarching "One Korea" theme and emphasis on peace endured, they stressed regime change as a core conditionality of unification and relied more heavily on coercive tactics such as international sanctions to tame the North's transgressions. For this reason, Lee's "Vision 3000" policy and Park's "trustpolitik" (*shinroi woigyō*) relied on a system of rewards and punishment to shape the North's behavior—especially concerning its nuclear development. Lee had made this conditionality clear in his inauguration speech: "As I stated in the "denuclearization, openness, 3000 initiative," *if North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons and takes the path of opening up*, it will open a new horizon for inter-Korean cooperation. We will work with the international community to help North Koreans reach an income of \$3,000 within 10 years. I believe that is the way to serve our people and advance reunification."¹²⁴

This "tit-for-tat" approach meant was that, with each provocation from the North, conservative policies of unification militarized, in coordination with the United States and increasingly, Japan. Following the killing of a South Korean tourist in Mount Geumgang in 2008 and the sinking of the South Korean navy ship Cheonan in 2010, inter-Korean contact had virtually vanished; toward the end of his tenure, Lee openly discussed regime change in the North, introduc-

122. *Donga Ilbo*, February 2, 2006.

123. *Joongang Ilbo*, February 2, 2006.

124. "Je 17dae Daetongryeong Chuiimsa [17th Presidential Inauguration Speech]," February 25, 2008. Presidential Speech Collection. My emphasis.

ing policies such as “unification tax” to prepare for absorption.¹²⁵ Park’s administration, too, gradually shifted from a focus on trust-building to military solutions. In her address to the National Assembly in 2016, Park vowed to “change the North Korean regime so that there can be real peace on the Korean Peninsula.”¹²⁶ Later that year, she agreed to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), an American anti-ballistic missile defense system, and signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan. “One Korea” and the “unification bonanza” that Park had promised thus became increasingly premised on toppling the Kim regime.¹²⁷

In this way, “One Korea” narratives survived as an organizing theme in narrative contestation in democratic South Korea. It is unsurprising, then, that aspirations for unification in South Korea have remained consistently strong during this period: the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) notes that large majorities of the public, 67 percent and above, saw unification as somewhat or very necessary from 2003 to 2012, spanning both progressive and conservative governments¹²⁸; another survey in the subsequent period by the Asan Institute echoes this finding, with 80 percent of its respondents expressing support since 2012.¹²⁹ Even at the height of North Korean provocations under the Park administration in South Korea, majorities (58.1 percent and above) saw the North

125. *Hankyoreh*, August 15, 2010. *Donga Ilbo*, August 16, 2010.

126. “Gukjeongae gwanhan gukhoi yeonseol [State of the Union Address],” February 15, 2016. Presidential Speech Collection.

127. Lee and Moon 2020, 187.

128. Korean General Social Survey: <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/series/288>.

129. Asan Institute for Policy Studies 2008, 6.

as “one of us.”¹³⁰

Instead, contestation had centered around competing pathways to unification, which over time settled along partisan lines: between a progressive narrative that prioritized peace and therefore promoted engagement policies, and a conservative one that was more explicitly committed regime change and thus endorsed policies of containment. Notably, these competing narratives diverged on the role that the United States played in the inter-Korean peace and unification agenda—an implicit spoiler in the former and an indispensable partner in the latter. As the narrative boundaries consolidated, what emerged was an institutionally entrenched stasis in both the discourse and policies surrounding unification. Today, “One Korea” narrative serves a truism that binds South Korean democratic nationhood.

130. Ibid, 5.

CHAPTER 6

TAIWAN

A focused study of Taiwan's narrative trajectory similarly generates three findings. First, "One China" narratives under autocratic rule was deeply contested: pro-democracy movements often—but not uniformly—featured independence as an alternative theme. Second, while state actors during democratic transition continued to rely on "One China" narratives (see Figure 6.1), prominent groups within the democratic movement rejected unification as at once colonial and authoritarian. In this way, the opposition storytelling elites shifted away from the "One China" orthodoxy in favor of an "indigenous Taiwan" narrative. Lastly, counter-narratives of the progressive leaders conditioned the responses of their conservative counterparts as party politics consolidated. With the growth of Taiwanese consciousness (*Taiwan yishi*) in public discourse, pro-unification narratives gradually atrophied into a social, thus an electoral, taboo (see Figure 6.2).

In this section, I process-trace a range of qualitative data to illustrate the mechanisms of narrative contestation underlying these changes and ruptures in Taiwanese nation-building project, defying "One China" narrative and its attendant program of unification. Anchoring the study of narrative contestation in the more discrete shifts in political institutions, I trace the revisionist efforts by storytelling elites, who emerge more assertive in the wake of democracy, and how these efforts reshaped the narrative boundaries in ways that helped banish "One China" narratives along with the regimes and regime elites that they once legitimized. This helped consolidate independence as a national aspiration.

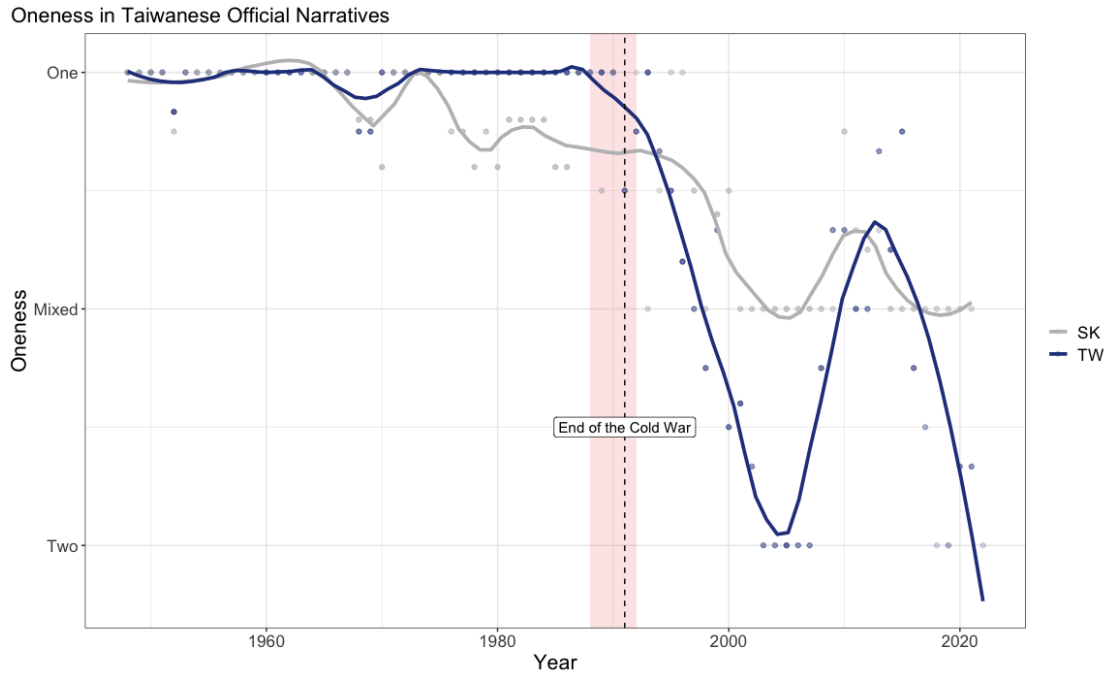


Figure 6.1: National Boundaries: Taiwan (1948 - 2022)

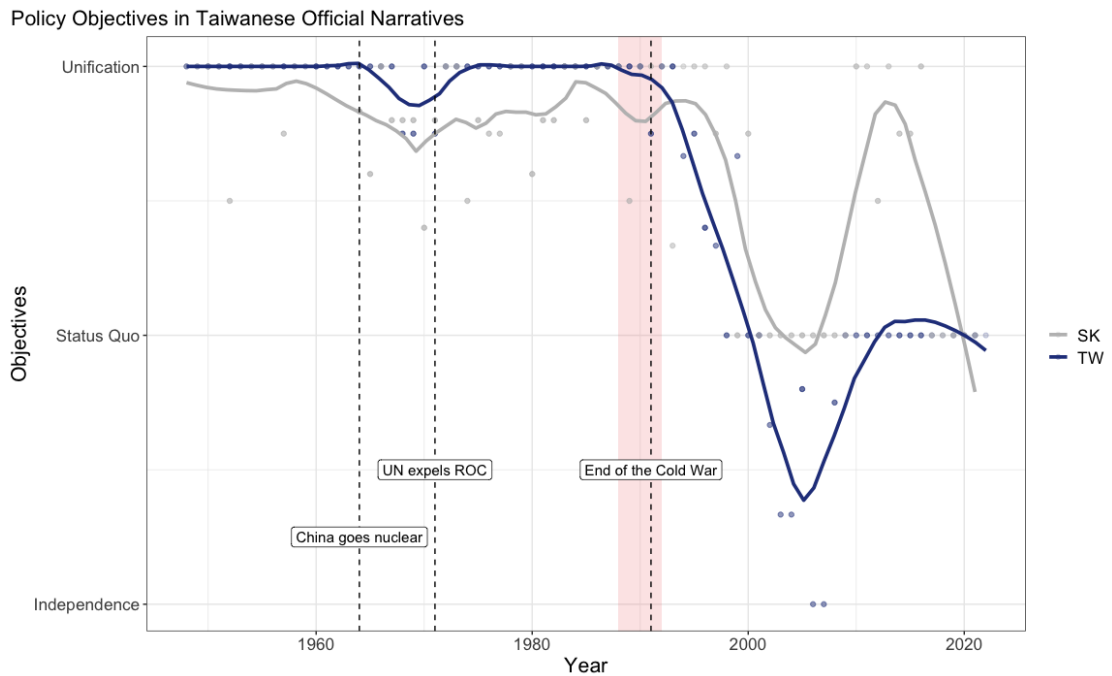


Figure 6.2: National Objectives: Taiwan (1948 - 2022)

6.1 “One China” under Dictatorship, 1945-1988

Under authoritarian rule, “One China” narratives were forged to lay a foundation for the country’s nation-building project: unification. Much as in South Korea, this was a top-down process, as the ruling elites sought to justify authoritarianism through an anti-communist ideology. The Jiang regimes sought to censor the alternative narratives in public discourse and silenced non-state narrators on account of the ongoing communist insurgency—most starkly through the imposition of martial law that lasted 38 years. The *dangwai*, the key opposition storytellers of this time, mobilized around an alternative narrative of “indigenous Taiwan” to demand at once democracy and independence, through the exercise of Taiwanese sovereignty that was separate from China. Over several decades of democratic struggle, many who participated in the *dangwai* movement perished in state-orchestrated violence; but their stories would live on to shape the narrative underpinnings of Taiwanese democracy.

Under the Chiang Kai-shek regime, “One China” narrative was ubiquitous, both to reclaim the residents of the island as Chinese and to seek unification with the mainland. The resulting narrative was as anti-Taiwan as anti-communist, depicting Taiwan as a mere fragment of China’s inherent (*guyou*) territory and claiming the Republic of China (ROC) as the sole inheritor of Confucian orthodoxy (*daotong*). The post-independence years in Taiwan thus ushered in a severe identity crisis: the influx of some two million mainlanders to the island—which at that point had just over six million residents—and the subsequent sinicization campaign by the Chinese nationalist party (*guomindang* or GMD) meant that the native Taiwanese were forced to reconfigure their collective memories, from Japanese colonial subjects to Chinese national ones.

Yet, the notion of “One China” remained deeply contested between mainlanders (*waishengren*) and native or resident populations prior to GMD rule (*benshengren*). For the mainland exiles, “One China” narrative sustained a “sojourner mentality” and a yearning for unification¹; meanwhile, the natives—a diverse population composed of migrants and aborigines—came to see it as a smokescreen for Chinese colonialism. The lack of cross-strait collective identity and the violence that had followed the nationalist takeover of Taiwan made this narrative divide difficult, if not impossible, to bridge. In what became euphemistically known as the “February 28 Incident,” the Jiang regime slaughtered a substantial segment of the local population to stymie anti-government riots and stomp out pro-communist sentiments.² Thus a peculiar form of violent minority rule settled in Taiwan, as the emigre *guomindang* sought to build “One Chinese” nation under its terms.

This entailed painstaking efforts to instill “One China” narratives by legal, cultural, and educational means. Along with the Constitution, the Jiang regime passed the “Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion” in 1948, which provided the legal basis for authoritarian rule³: since Taiwan was a province of the Republic, the ruling elites who had been elected on the mainland prior to exile were “frozen in office” until unification.⁴ The martial law, passed through emergency decree in 1949, also banned the formation of new political parties, denied the rights of free assembly and speech (especially in Taiwanese local dialects), and instituted a system of collective punishment (*lianzuofa*), in which

1. D. M. H. Yang 2020, 18.

2. Though official death toll is contested, it is expected to fall between 18,000 and 28,000.

3. Tsang and Tien 1999, 7-8. The Temporary Provisions were amended thrice, in 1960, 1966 and 1972.

4. Hughes 2013, 26-7.

people were held responsible for the conduct of others. In his Retrocession Day speech on October 25, 1949—shortly after the martial law was reactivated—Jiang relied on anti-communist frames to invoke a sense of national crisis⁵:

The communist armed rebellion is essentially a general war... Therefore, our anti-communist war must be driven by comprehensive mobilization... [I]n this way, Taiwan will not only be a bastion of independence and freedom for the Republic of China, but also a base for the salvation and revival of our Chinese nation.

Culturally and educationally, the Jiang regime sought to co-opt various segments of the Taiwanese society while suppressing expressions of local Taiwanese narratives. Styling itself as a Leninist party, the GMD sought to enlarge and entrench the party's presence in much of the cultural life.⁶ Since establishing Mandarin as an official language, use of local dialects were banned in public, especially schools.⁷ The GMD also relied on its control over mass media, literary societies, and formal education system to sinicize the national story. One telling example in this regard is the foundation of various state-backed literary journals during this period, such as *Military Literature* (*Junshi Wenxue*), which specified that the purpose of literature was, in fact, fighting communism⁸:

5. "Letter to Compatriots of Taiwan Province on the Fourth Anniversary of Taiwan's Restoration," October 25, 1949. Jiangzhong Zhengtong Wenwu [Artifacts of President Chiang Kai-shek, hereafter Chiang Kai-shek Library], Guoshiguancang [Collection of the National Museum of History], Document 002-060100-00257-025.

6. Tien 1989, 64-73. On the broader reorganization of the GMD in Taiwan, see Dickson 1993.

7. Shiau 1999, 106.

8. "Inaugural Preface to *Military Literature*: Establishing a Modernized, Populist, Revolutionary and Combative National Literature," *Military Literature* (January 1951): 1, translated by Christopher Lupke. Chang, Yeh, and Fan 2014, 164-166.

What kind of literature do we need today? Simply put, we need nationalist literature... Today, in our effort to oppose the Communists and resist the Soviets, the most important thing is to inspire the hearts and minds of the people so that they will be unified, and to strengthen the people's nationalist thought so that they will be united. Only then can we fully exercise the strength of our people to resist the encroachment of the Soviet imperialists and destroy the sellouts of our nation, Zhu De and Mao Zedong.

The Chinese Writers Association during this period also explicitly supported the "One China" narrative and facilitated the censorship and marginalization of alternative stories on account of their "un-Chineseness." In an announcement published by the *guomindang's* official newspaper *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang Ribao*) in 1963, the Association declared⁹:

The objectives of our association are: to unite writers of the nation, research literary theory, create literature, advance literary movements, develop literary enterprises, comply with current national policies, and contribute art's strengths to the grand project of recovering the mainland and rebuilding our country...

[Thus] based on the guidance of President Chiang Kai-shek's "Chapters on Education and Entertainment: A Supplement to the Principle of People's Livelihood," we have launched a cultural cleansing movement to eradicate pernicious red [Communist] literature and black [nihilist] literature.

Besides framing unification as an anti-communist (and more implicitly, anti-Taiwan) nation-building project, the Jiang regime sought to tighten control over Taiwanese narrators. The subsequent four decades of "White Terror" (*Baise Kongbu*) had thus accompanied a brutal purge of indigenous dissidents and a

9. "An Announcement from the Chinese Writers Association," *Central Daily News*, November 5, 1963, translated by Tze-Ian Deborah Sang. Chang, Yeh, and Fan 2014, 206. The newspaper remains active, albeit online, as of 2024.

blanket system of political repression aimed at enforcing centralized authority. Among the prominent victims was Lei Chen, a democracy activist who ran the *Free China Journal* (*Ziyou Zhongguo*), which was already advocating the concept of “Two Chinas.”¹⁰ The GMD thus sought to control public discourse that could undermine its “One China” narrative, including standardizing textbooks in 1968,¹¹ and targeted cultural platforms supported by the opposition *dangwai*, which began to call for Taiwanization—through democracy and localization (*bentuhua*) at home, and sovereignty abroad.

In the early 1970s, as Chiang Kai-shek’s health deteriorated and his son Chiang Ching-kuo took on greater responsibilities, the state undertook some political reforms to localize (*bentuhua*) the GMD and provincial politics in Taiwan. This was in part motivated by the Republic’s legitimacy crisis abroad. In 1970, a diplomatic controversy broke out as Japan declared sovereignty over the disputed territories of Diaoyutai (Senkaku in Japanese) islands, which the United States eventually returned to Japan in 1972 (see chapter 9).¹² Then in 1971, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) overtook the seat representing China at the United Nations. For the first time since the Chinese Civil War, the PRC’s diplomatic ties outnumbered those of the ROC: of the 147 countries registered with the United Nations at the time, 65 recognized the PRC and only 55, the ROC (see Table 6.1).¹³ Richard Nixon’s very public meeting with Mao Zedong in 1972 cemented the growing sense in Taiwan of its diplomatic isolation and erosion of sovereignty.

10. Tien 1975, 640-1. Note, however, that the journal was founded in 1949 with funding from the GMD. See F. Wang 2013, 150, note 23.

11. F. Wang 2005.

12. For a detailed overview, see Shaw 1999.

13. F. Wang 2013, 138.

Table 6.1: *Diplomatic Recognition of China*

Year	Total # of Countries	ROC	PRC	Notable Developments
1950	87	37	18	UK switches from ROC to PRC
1951	89	37	19	
1952	89	39	19	Japan and ROC normalize relations
1953	90	39	19	
1954	91	39	20	First Taiwan Strait Crisis begins
1955	92	41	23	US and ROC enter mutual defense treaty
1956	95	41	26	
1957	97	45	27	
1958	97	44	30	Second Taiwan Strait Crisis begins
1959	97	45	32	
1960	114	53	36	
1961	118	54	38	
1962	125	59	40	
1963	127	63	43	
1964	129	59	48	China gains nuclear weapons
1965	132	57	48	
1966	136	62	45	
1967	137	64	44	
1968	141	67	44	
1969	141	68	44	
1970	143	66	47	
1971	147	55	65	ROC is expelled from the UN
1972	147	42	86	Japan switches from ROC to PRC
1973	149	38	89	
1974	150	32	97	
1975	156	27	106	
1976	157	26	111	
1977	158	23	114	
1978	161	22	116	
1979	164	22	120	US switches from ROC to PRC
1980	166	22	124	
1981	168	23	124	
1982	168	23	125	
1983	169	24	129	
1984	170	25	130	
1985	170	23	133	
1986	171	23	133	
1987	171	23	133	
1988	171	22	136	

Note: This table is adapted from F. Wang [2013](#), 138.

These events helped galvanize a new cohort of storytellers, which the Taiwanese sociologist Hsiao A-chin called the "back-to-reality" (*huigui xianshi*) generation.¹⁴ Notably, these storytellers were from the post-war, college-educated generation that went through the nationalist curriculum imposed by the GMD and had thus largely internalized sinocentric national narratives. This was evident in their counter-narratives, which criticized the state for its failures, but still propagated "One China" nationalism. For instance, during a demonstration for the "Defend the Diaoyutai Movement" (*baowei diaoyutai yundong*) in 1971, Taiwanese students-activists circulated a pamphlet titled, "Letter to Compatriots of the Whole Nation," which decried "national shame" (*guochi*) and implored¹⁵:

Over the past 120 years, the imperial aggression against China has made us cry without tears. We know this is not the right time to cry. We must hold back our tears and defeat all the invaders, restore the mainland and reconstruct the country, and only then will it be time for us to cry and pay tribute to the Yellow Emperor's Tomb!

In some sense, these emergent counter-narratives were *allowed* to enter the public sphere precisely for this reason. A good example in this regard is the formation in 1968 and dissolution in 1973 of *The Intellectual* (*Daxue Zazhi*), a political magazine which was at least tacitly approved by the GMD and run by scholar-activists of the "back-to-reality" generation. During a debate at the National Taiwan University in 1971, then editor-in-chief of the magazine Chen Shaoting publicly demanded the full-scale replacement of the National Congress through a fresh election.¹⁶ Despite such radical demands, the state did not ban or disrupt the intellectual enterprise in part because Chen and others writing for

14. Hsiao 2005.

15. Mao 1971, 25.

16. S. Chen 1971, 13-16.

the magazine had consistently advocated "One [Free] China" narratives, which helped bolster the Jiang regime's dwindling symbolic authority.¹⁷ The magazine only disbanded in 1973 due to internal conflicts on programmatic issues—most prominently, whether to support student movements, which were still forbidden by the martial law.¹⁸

To be sure, liberalization of the public sphere remained highly selective. While *dangwai*-affiliated politicians won a record number of seats in provincial governments in the 1970s, their representation was restricted to local politics. And though dissident intellectuals began to found alternative outlets, they were often swiftly banned, like the *Taiwan Political Review* (*Taiwan zhenglun*), which was established in 1975 and cut off circulation by its fifth issue.¹⁹ According to one estimate, between 1973 and 1989, the *dangwai* published at least 50 different dissident magazines—often under slightly different titles to evade existing bans on publication—as well as over 200 books.²⁰

The crackdown on independence movements was especially intense. Following a pro-independence declaration by the Taiwan Presbyterian Church in 1977—urging the government to "take effective measures whereby Taiwan may become a new and independent country"²¹—the Ministry of Interior pressured the Church to correct its anti-nationalist position.²² Those voicing support for independence were publicly derided as "domesticated lackeys" (*huanying yingquan*)

17. C. Chang 1971, 1.

18. Hsiau 2005, 34-37.

19. F. Wang 2013, 157, note 46.

20. C.-L. Chen 2004.

21. "A Declaration on Human Rights by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan," August 16, 1977, Taiwan Documents Project, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/pct04.htm>.

22. Jacobs 2016, 11.

of Chinese communists²³ and opposition platforms like *Taiwan Daily News* (*Taiwan Ribao*) were threatened with closure unless they sold to a government-supported owner.²⁴

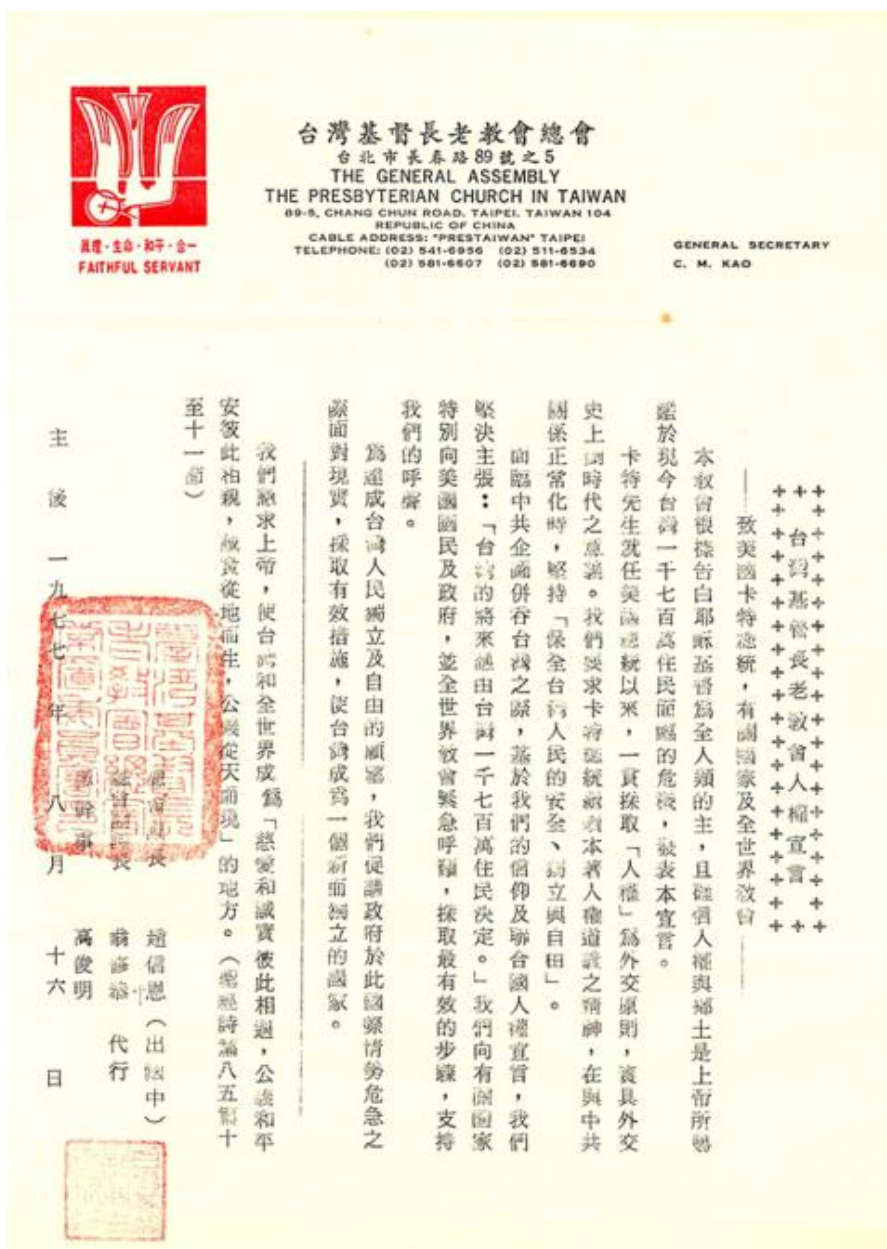


Figure 6.3: Pro-Independence Declaration by the Presbyterian Church (1977)

23. Ibid.

24. Jacobs 1979, 29.

It was against this backdrop of growing contention, especially over issues of national identity, that *dangwai*-affiliated intellectuals established another opposition magazine *Formosa* (*Meilidao*) on August 16, 1979. Though the magazine would be short-lived, it also proved immensely popular, its early issues selling out. In their very first issue, they carried an article titled, "Long Live Democracy: A *Dangwai* Political Commentary," which vowed to challenge the legality and authority of the GMD and forge a new Taiwan for 18 million Taiwanese people.²⁵ The magazine also gained visibility from helping organize *dangwai* rallies. One such event was held on December 10, 1979 in Kaohsiung, on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day; to a roaring crowd, one staffer of the magazine Lu Hsiu-lien (also known as Annette Lu, and who would later serve as the country's vice president under Chen Shui-bian) vented²⁶:

Lu: I would like to ask whether "the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits" includes *us here*. If it does, then by what body or organization, and through what channel has our opinion been consulted?

Crowd: None at all! None at all!

This rally and the clampdown on *Formosa* that followed—the "Kaohsiung Incident"—came to serve as a key inflection point in Taiwan's democratic struggles. The morning after the clash, the pro-*guomindang* newspaper *United Daily News* (*Lianhebao*) blamed the demonstrators for their unlawful behavior and applauded the police for their tolerance, stating they neither hit nor cursed back

25. Editors of *Meilidao* 1979, translated in Kung 2021.

26. International Committee for Human Rights in Taiwan 1981, 3, my emphasis. *The Kaohsiung Tapes* contains transcripts of tape recordings from the rally.

(*dabuhuanshou, mabuhuankou*).²⁷ The party's own newspaper *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang Ribao*) characterized the rally was disorderly and violent, reporting the injury of security personnel at 40 on December 11 and at 182 the next day.²⁸ Virtually all prominent opposition politicians—the "Kaohsiung Eight"—were tried in military court on charges of sedition (*panluan*) for spreading communism and inciting secession.²⁹ One day after the mother of one defendant Lin I-hsiung contacted Amnesty International to report his apparent torture in prison, she was murdered along with Lin's two six-year-old twin daughters; only the oldest daughter, aged nine, survived the stabbings.³⁰

Despite the chilling effect, the state's toughened response also animated the opposition storytelling elites—if not always in unison. Some dissident intellectuals and student-activists became more vocal in denouncing the GMD, including its "One China" narratives, which had long helped it to justify authoritarianism. They began calling the *guomindang* an "alien regime" (*wailai chengchuan*), coined by Taiwanese independence activist Shi Ming (or Su Beng, his pen name) in his book, *Taiwanren Sibai-nian Shi* [Taiwan's Four Hundred Year History].³¹ Others, however, were more reticent to challenge the "One China" orthodoxy and even critical of those who tried. For example, an open statement signed by 801 professors in response to the Kaohsiung incident condemned the organizers for "forgetting of one's own origin" (*shutien wangtsu*).³²

27. *Lianhebao* [United Daily News], December 11, 1979, 2.

28. *Zhongyang Ribao* [Central Daily News], December 11, 1979, 2; *Zhongyang Ribao* [Central Daily News], December 12, 1979, 2.

29. On their indictments, see Jacobs 2016, 33-9.

30. *Taipei Shibao* [Taipei Times], February 3, 2000, 3.

31. F. Wang 2013, 159-60, note 56.

32. *Lianhebao* [United Daily News], June 2, 1980, 2.

In this way, independence had been a divisive, rather than rallying, factor within the democracy movement. This fracture had long been evident in the emergence of and debate over “Taiwanese consciousness” (*Taiwan yishi*) in the public sphere, on the degree to which cultural Taiwanization necessitated political de-sinicization.³³ The split between radicals and moderates on their long-term visions for Taiwan, in terms of aspirations for independence from China, had simply been cast aside for a more immediate goal of sovereignty from the *guomintang*. It was only as the *dangwai* movement formally organized the Democratic Progressive Party (*minjindang*) or DPP) in 1986 that a more expansive and exclusive vision of Taiwanese self-determination, from GMD as well as the PRC, emerged as an opposition nation-building project.³⁴ Mass rallies broke out across the country and anti-*guomintang* narratives abounded, recalling the February 28 and Kaohsiung incidents; in one symbolic move, protesters also used slogans and songs in Hoklo—a native language—to elevate Taiwanese consciousness.³⁵

Meanwhile, efforts to re-write Taiwan’s national story gained a new momentum among dissident intellectuals. Earlier works by prominent Taiwanese historians in Japan, such as Su Beng and Ong Joktik, began to circulate more widely. Though not as yet uniform, alternative narratives centered around Taiwanese sovereignty were taking shape, discrediting the GMD as an agent of Chinese chauvinism. Su wrote in *Taiwanren Sibai-nian Shi* [Taiwan’s Four Hundred Year History], for instance: “In the past four hundred years during which Taiwanese

33. Hsiau 2003, 92-95, 97-99, 156.

34. Jacobs 2005, 22-34.

35. F. Wang 1996, 174-88. More than 3,000 demonstrations organized either by the DPP or other social movement organizations occurred in the 1980s. F. Wang 2005, 69.

history has been written, several 'foreign invaders' took turns colonizing Taiwan. As a result, the so-called 'official history' has almost become the words spoken for those foreigners."³⁶ Ong echoed this view in his monograph *Taiwan: Kumen de Lishi* [Taiwan: A History of Agonies], asserting that "Taiwan belongs to the Taiwanese" (*Taiwan shi Taiwanren de Taiwan*).³⁷ Palpable in these counter-narratives was a tightening link between democracy and independence: if to democratize was to Taiwanize, as Lan Yiping wrote in 1983,³⁸ to Taiwanize was to de-sinicize.

Mobilization of the opposition storytellers leaped in scale with the announcement by the Jiang regime of its plans to lift the martial law and enact a new National Security Law (NSL). When questioned by the GMD lawmakers, the Jiang regime responded with a two-pronged answer: first, that the martial law had outlived its purpose as the Chinese communists are "no longer as able to engage in sabotage," given Taiwan's growth and prosperity; and second, that the new NSL will "be in conformity with the Constitution, anti-Communist, and anti-Taiwan independence."³⁹ Despite this assurance, hardliners in the GMD saw Jiang's decision as a sign of "losing the war."⁴⁰ At the same time, political dissidents responded with "cautious welcome"; Hsieh Chang-ting, a core

36. B. Su 1980, 3, translated in Ni 2008, 181.

37. Ong, 2015 [2000]. It is important to note that Su and Ong had Han settlers—rather than aboriginals—in mind in speaking about "Taiwanese." Ni 2008, 183-4.

38. "Democratization is precisely Taiwanization" (*minzhuhua jiu shi Taiwanhua*). Lan 1983, 11-12.

39. *Guoji Ribao* [International Daily News], November 6, 1986, 7.

40. *Huayu Kuaipa* [Sino Express], November 17, 1986. For coverage in other Chinese-language outlets, also see "Comments from the Chinese-language press on lifting martial law and the formation of new political parties in Taiwan," 1987, Far Eastern Law Division, Library of Congress Archives [hereafter FELD-LCA].

member of the *dangwai* movement and founder of the DPP then dismissed the declaration as an electoral maneuver.⁴¹

In fact, the new NSL, combined with other repressive laws such as the "Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion," made the repeal of the martial law more symbolic than advertised. Repression and censorship of political dissidents continued in practice, including the arrests of independence activists Hsu Tsao-te and Tsai Yu-chuan.⁴² The two had helped establish the Taiwan Political Victims Association (*Taiwan zhengzhi shounanzhe lianyi zonghui*) in August 1987, and supported the inclusion of an independence clause in the Association's by-laws. Within two months, they were arrested and sentenced to 10 and 11 years, respectively, for sedition.⁴³ But the harsh responses of the regime only helped to cement the authoritarian connotations of the GMD's unification agenda, bringing together pro-independence and pro-democracy activists as they organized the political opposition. "One China," in their incipient counter-narratives, was at once the abrogation of Taiwanese sovereignty and democracy.

41. The New York Times [1986](#), 13.

42. Seymour [1988](#), 75, note 11.

43. Cheung [2020](#), 8.

6.2 “One China” in Transition, 1988-1992

With transition to democracy, the narrative boundaries around “One China” orthodoxy began to break. With the introduction of elections and removal of institutional constraints on civil society, alternative narratives began to circulate more freely in public and new storytellers—particularly those with *dangwai* credentials—became more visible. This meant that the transitional regime of Lee Teng-hui was, to a degree, bound by the narrative demands of the broader society; this was best reflected in his co-optation of “sovereignty first” narratives, which he adopted even as he retained the sinocentric orientations of the authoritarian *guomindang*—culminating in the “1992 Consensus” with PRC. As a result, pro-independence frames consolidated as a key feature of counter-narratives, with new storytellers—in particular the opposition party elites and independence-centered non-governmental organizations—pinning the GMD and China as the primary spoilers in Taiwan’s nation-building project.

As a transitional leader, Lee was playing an intricate balancing act to sustain Chinese consciousness that had long defined the GMD—to which hardliners within the party remained committed—and respond to the rise of Taiwanese consciousness on which support for the opposition DPP hinged.⁴⁴ This manifested in his somewhat incongruous nation-building policy: while Lee maintained the “three no’s” policy toward the PRC—no contacts, no negotiations, and no compromises—he also liberalized policies on people-to-people exchanges and family visits.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the GMD under his leadership increasingly adopted a dual narrative, which at once emphasized Taiwanese con-

44. On Lee’s early constraints in office, see S. Tsai [2005](#), 163-165.

45. *Ibid*, 166.

sciousness and Chinese heritage. In this vein, Lee, too, often spoke of "Taiwan experience" (*Taiwan jingyan*) but only within the broader framework of "One China" narratives. In one such message in 1989, he stated: "the Chinese people's wish for unification on both sides of the Taiwan Strait has finally dawned on the basis of the "Taiwan Experience.""⁴⁶

Undeniably, however, Lee's administration also permitted—with caution—new national stories and storytellers who questioned the "One China" orthodoxy. With the first signs of liberalization, a plethora of protesters began mobilizing. According to one estimate, there were 1,433 demonstrations in Taiwan in 1988; a figure that grew to 5,431 by 1989 and 7,775 by 1990, marking a five-fold increase in just two years.⁴⁷ The demands in these protests varied from constitutional and electoral reforms, amnesties for political dissidents, to rights for various marginalized groups in Taiwanese society, including aborigines, the working class, and women; but though the programmatic demands differed, they were similarly buttressed by a narrative of Taiwanization. Leader of the Wild Lily Movement in 1990 Hsin-Hsing Chen later recalled of the activists during this period: "We were all sectors of a larger movement that [was] challenging injustice in the Taiwanese society. Anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist tendencies, though still not well-articulated, increasingly appeared as the mainstream beliefs."⁴⁸

46. "President's speech on New Year's Day of the Republic of China in Year 78," January 1, 1989. Lee Denghui Xiansheng Yanlunji [Collection of Lee Teng-hui's Remarks], Liren Zongtong Ziliaoku [Presidential Library], Guoshiguancang [Collection of the National Museum of History], Document 00055326.

47. S. Tsai 2005, 170.

48. H.-H. Chen 2005, 598.



Figure 6.4: Wild Lily Movement (1990)

During this period, the *dangwai* storytellers also began to articulate the logics and objectives of Taiwan's independence movement. In 1988, the general-secretary of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chang Chun-hong had penned an article titled "On Taiwanese Independence" for the *Independence Morning Post* (*Zili Chenbao*), in which he wrote⁴⁹:

First, Taiwanese independence refers to the demarcation between Mainland China and Taiwan, the latter of which refuses to be ruled by the Communist mainland regime. Second, Taiwanese independence means the master of Taiwan should be the majority of indigenous Taiwanese. Third, *Taiwanese independence connotes the democratization of all of Taiwan's politics*. Only through democracy can the Taiwanese eventually and eternally become the "Master of Taiwan." And fourth, Taiwanese independence means striving for Taiwan's international status, identity, and dignity.

49. C.-H. Chang 1988, 5, translated and discussed in Wei 1999, 29. My emphasis.

In this way, the opposition storytellers cast the goals of democratization and independence as mutually supportive, by blaming Taiwan's diminishing international status on its domestic ills—that is, authoritarianism. But the lines between the two were sometimes not clear. As Antonio Chiang, a dissident journalist, noted at the time: "Some people believe in Taiwan independence, but for most people, independence is just a code word for more democracy."⁵⁰

Intellectuals and movement activists tended to espouse more radical counter-narratives. For example, left-leaning scholar-activists, who ran the dissident magazine *Human World* (*Renjian*), published an opposition manifesto titled "Liberation and Dignity" (*jiefang yu zunyan*) in January 1989, calling for "serious introspection": "After the martial law system is lifted, what more can you do?"⁵¹ The editors argued that Taiwan had developed a "martial law subculture" that prevented its peoples from reconstructing their "personal, cultural, intellectual—and ethno-national—dignity."⁵² Though the editors did not spell out what such a reconstructed and liberated Taiwan would look like, particularly in relation to China, they pointedly criticized American hegemony and the Cold War structures that inculcated in Taiwan a culture of complacency and compromise, as well as the "compradors" (*maiban*) at home who served Western powers.⁵³

As the boundaries surrounding "One China" were being broken—however slowly and tenuously—the transitional Lee regime responded with three nar-

50. Haberman 1988, 3. As will be illustrated later, aforementioned Chang Chun-hong also believed that democracy was a more immediate goal.

51. Editors of *Renjian* 1989, 8, translated in Shen 2021.

52. Ibid.

53. A Portuguese word, the term was often used to describe native Chinese servants who supported Western business.

rative concessions in 1991.⁵⁴ First, Lee's administration terminated the "Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion," which had long impeded debates on the "national question" in Taiwan. According to the 1991 yearbook—an annual government record published by the executive office—"[in repealing the provisions,] the ROC government recognized the fact that two equal political entities exist in two independent areas of one country."⁵⁵ Second and concurrently, Lee's administration instituted the Additional Articles of the Constitution—"to meet the requisites of the nation prior to national unification"—which restricted the ROC's *de facto* jurisdiction to the "free area" (*ziyou diqu*).⁵⁶ Lastly, the National Unification Council (*Guojia tongyi weiyuanhui*), established in 1990, released the Guidelines for National Unification (*Guojia tongyi gangling*) in the following year, stipulating that "both the mainland and Taiwan areas are parts of Chinese territory," and that "the timing and manner of China's unification should first respect the rights and interests of the people in the Taiwan area."⁵⁷ In this way, the Lee regime removed barriers to pro-independence narratives even as it clung to the "One China" framework that had defined the GMD.

The lifting of temporary provisions and the constitutional amendments in 1991, combined with the revision of the Criminal Code in 1992 to permit non-violent protests, emboldened independence activists—especially those who had been in exile. Indeed, the Taiwan independence movement had deep organizational roots abroad. The Society of Taiwan Independence (*Taiwan duli hui*) and the League of Taiwanese Youths for Taiwan Independence (*Taiwan qingnian duli*

54. Jacobs 2005, 36.

55. Xingzheng Yuan [Executive Yuan (Government Information Office)] 1991, 141.

56. "Additional Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of China (Taiwan)," Office of the President, <https://english.president.gov.tw/Page/95>.

57. Xingzheng Yuan [Executive Yuan (Government Information Office)] 1991, 583–584.

lianmeng) in Japan, as well as the World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI) in the United States had long spearheaded the lobbying efforts to support Taiwanese sovereignty.⁵⁸ Though members of these organizations were often blacklisted in Taiwan and, thus, arrested on arrival, they began returning to Taiwan in droves in the early 1990s. As Linda Arrigo, a human rights activist who had been deported from Taiwan in 1979 for her involvement in the Kaohsiung incident later recounted⁵⁹:

Originally, everybody was so afraid of the GMD. If you went back to Taiwan, they would arrest you, and you would get tortured and sentenced to 15 years. And now, all of a sudden, it was the GMD that was afraid of the overseas people. People's perception of the threat and the prestige of the Taiwan government and the security agencies just dropped, and dropped quickly.

As it turned out, they were not wrong about the changing atmosphere. When the WUFI hosted their first public conference in Taipei on October 20, 1991, attendees were arrested on the spot. But less than a year later, on June 27, 1992, when the WUFI held their second public conference, they were not met with any state intervention. By this point, as Bruce Jacobs notes, the "last taboo" of Taiwan independence had been broken.⁶⁰

It was against this backdrop that the Democratic Progressive Party (*minzhu jinbudang*, or *minjindang*/DPP) began to formalize its stance on independence. On August 24-25, 1991, the DPP hosted a "People's Constitution-Making Conference" in Taipei, in the hopes of campaigning for constitutional revision and

58. The WUFI was blacklisted as an overseas "terrorist organization" for supporting violence, including assassinations of GMD officials. Fleischauer 2016, 75.

59. Ibid, 76.

60. Jacobs 2005, 38.

reaching consensus on core issues for the party ahead of the parliamentary elections. The resulting "draft" constitution called for establishment of the "Republic of Taiwan," including by withdrawing the Taiwanese armed forces in Kinmen and Matsu islands.⁶¹ This position was further cemented when, during the fifth Party Congress a month later, the DPP adopted the "Basic Program for a Sovereign, Independent, and Self-governing Republic of Taiwan," resulting in prominent pro-unification members such as Fei Xiping to exit the party in protest.⁶² The charter declared⁶³:

The sovereignty and independence of Taiwan does not belong to the People's Republic of China (PRC), nor does Taiwan's sovereignty extend to mainland China. This is not only a historical fact but a reality... The nationalist party's practice of violating the reality of Taiwan's sovereignty not only has created an impasse in constitutional reform at home, but abroad has stirred up Communist China's ambition to take over Taiwan.

To be sure, independence had been a contentious issue. Already in its inception, the DPP was divided into two factions over the degree to which independence should drive opposition platform. The moderate Formosa (*Meilidao Xi*) members were reticent to mobilize around independence, while the radical New Tide (*Xin Chaoliu Xi*) members wanted an explicit commitment to it. This

61. The "draft" constitution argues: "[t]heir political function has been to demonstrate that the Republic of China on Taiwan still controls a small portion of Chinese territory outside of Taiwan and that the Chinese civil war still continues." Taiwan Opposition Party's Draft Constitution," September 1991, FELD-LCA, File No. LRA-D-PUB-001916, 4.

62. Rigger 2001, 27.

63. "Items in the Chinese Press regarding the Basic Program for a Sovereign, Independent, and Self-Governing Republic of Taiwan," October 31, 1991. FELD-LCA, File No. 1992-0262, LRA-D-PUB-000904, 1.

was widely known. On August 26, 1988, for example, leaders from each faction Yao Chia-wen (New Tide) and Chang Chun-hong (Formosa) wrote diverging opinions on independence and democracy in *China Times* (*Zhongguo Shibao*): Yao expressed that Taiwan's independence is inseparable from its pursuit of democracy, while Chang, without denying the significance of independence, emphasized democracy as a prior, more urgent objective.⁶⁴ Some clashes during the deliberations at the Party Congress were, therefore, not unexpected: some members openly opposed the inclusion of an independence clause in the party charter, stating that "the majority of people on Taiwan want stability."⁶⁵ Yet, with electoral losses of the Formosa faction and the return of the more radical and organized independence activists from abroad, pro-independence voices grew within the DPP.

The rise of these new opposition storytellers paved the way for two important developments. First, it called into question the political status of Taiwan: "One China" orthodoxy had become increasingly difficult to sustain amid growing calls for independence and the GMD's diminishing domestic authority. By early 1993, elected officials from the opposition DPP were petitioning the Constitutional Court to interpret the concept of "inherent (*guyou*) territory,"⁶⁶ which the Court clarified in its ruling as a political question and thus, "beyond the reach of judicial review."⁶⁷ Second, the opposition storytelling elites began to develop more tangible counter-narratives surrounding Taiwanese sovereignty

64. Wei 1999, 42.

65. *Minzhung Ribao* [The Commons Daily], October 14, 1991.

66. B.-Y. Chang 2015, 35.

67. "Shizi di 328 hao" [Interpretation No. 328], November 26, 1993. Xianfa Fating [Constitutional Court of the Republic of China], Sifa Yuan [Judicial Yuan, hereafter Court Decisions Collection], <https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/docdata.aspx?fid=100id=310509>.

and independence. If the *dangwai* activists had been formerly less unified on questions of nation-building abroad, clarifying a more tangible program for independence appeared as a bigger priority in the 1990s.

In response to these counter-narratives, Lee and the GMD began a narrative campaign to slow the spread of Taiwan-centric narratives and promote Chinese unification. First, the Lee administration pushed for the amendment of the Civil Associations Act in 1989, which stipulated that "[t]he organization and activities of a civil association shall not advocate Communism or secession from the State."⁶⁸ This meant, among other things, that any organization with "Taiwan" in its name had to remove or change it before the group could be formally registered—a requirement that Taiwanese writers considered "officially renouncing Taiwan."⁶⁹ In this manner, even as they allowed for new storytellers, the transitional Lee regime continued to monitor for and censor any "seditious" activity through legal channels. Second and concurrently, the GMD continued to propagate pro-unification narratives. Ahead of the 1991 parliamentary election, for example, the GMD ran a weeks-long broadcast advertising campaign that contended⁷⁰:

68. Article 2, Renmin Tuanti Fa [Civil Associations Act], Quanguo Fagui Ziliaoku [Laws and Regulations Database of the Republic of China], <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=D0050091>. This article was later voided by "Shizi di 644 hao" [Interpretation No. 644], June 20, 2000. Court Decisions Collection, <https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/en/docdata.aspx?fid=100id=310825>.

69. Peng 1989, 4-5, translated in Chang, Yeh, and Fan 2014, 382-3.

70. Cited in Jacobs 2005, 37-8.

The Chinese Communists are not China and China is not the Chinese Communists. No one among Taiwan's twenty million people wants to unify with the Chinese Communists. But no one wants to be separated from China forever. The Chinese Communists are the same as the Russian Communists and can disappear at any time. But China will always exist.

These maneuvers were effect in part because a majority of the public still saw themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese during this period. According to one poll, 46.4 percent of the respondents identified themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese in 1992, compared with 25.5 percent who saw themselves as solely Chinese and 17.6 percent, solely Taiwanese.⁷¹ While it was not unlikely that these figures represented some amount of self-censorship, it was not until 2005—well after democracy had consolidated—that those who identified as solely Taiwanese overtook the other two groups in size. Against this background, the GMD continued to win significant majorities in the national assembly elections in 1991 and 1992.

The DPP's early electoral failures—largely due to a lack of mainlander support⁷²—prompted the party to fine-tune its narrative toward a more inclusive vision of Taiwan as a community among the “four great ethnic groups” (*sida tsuchun*). Indeed, a stark majority of 95 percent of votes for the DPP in various local elections in the late 1980s had come from the native Taiwanese. It was only with the establishment of pro-independence civil society groups like Mainlanders for the Taiwanese Independence Association (*waishengjen Taiwan tuli hsiehchinhui*) that the image of the DPP as a “Taiwanese-only” party began to wade, and an alternative narrative centered around indigeneity began to res-

71. “Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese,” Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/upload/44/doc/6961/People202312.jpg>.

72. F. Wang 1994.

onate more broadly.⁷³

Much as in South Korea, the liberalization of political institutions—however partial—helped engender new storytellers and stories during this period. Opposition elites from the *dangwai* movement were best equipped to take advantage of the changing narrative landscape, and their growing influence and visibility inspired the rise of more radical groups whose counter-narratives on “One China” were staunchly anti-Chinese and anti-*guomindang*. Though these opposition storytelling elites represented diverse segments of the society—at times, with competing programmatic demands—they also converged on the broader national ambitions for democratization and independence. This emerging consensus meant that the transitional regime of Lee was partly bound to the narrative demands of the broader society, to maintain a measure of democratic legitimacy he now needed. Thus even as he held onto the sinocentric foundation of the GMD’s unification agenda, the government increasingly adapted their narratives with dual identity frames that resonated with the broader populace. Still, the narrative boundaries surrounding “One China” had eroded as Taiwan-centric narratives—even those that envisioned independence—abounded.

6.3 “One China” and Democracy, 1992–

As democracy consolidated, new narrative boundaries were built against “One China.” The scope of new storytellers broadened and their activities regularized as democratic institutions helped structure these competing narrative demands into partisan cleavages and programmatic demands—between a pro-

73. Ibid, 8.

gressive narrative that sought to protect and elevate Taiwanese sovereignty and a conservative narrative that continued to aspire to unification, if on increasingly ambiguous terms. Most notably, these competing narratives diverged on the meaning of the "status quo" in Taiwan's nation-building project abroad: independence for the former and a lack of resolution for the latter. "One China" narrative and the program of unification were thus rendered increasingly taboo, even as pathways to the new national objective—independence—remained contested.

By 1992, the changes in the institutional landscape were undeniable. In April 1992, city-wide demonstrations broke out in Taipei over the issue of direct election for the president, which lasted 6 days.⁷⁴ In response, the Legislative Yuan (*ilfa yuan*) pledged to decide on the issue before May 20, 1995. Later that year, Taiwan also held its first direct and full-scale election of the Legislative Yuan (*ilfa yuan*), which drastically shifted the make-up of the assembly: following the election, the proportion of the mainlanders in the assembly declined from 60 percent to 22 percent.⁷⁵ This, as Andrew Nathan noted at the time, was the first time in Taiwanese history that an election was shaping the country's party system, solidifying "a tacit pact of peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition between a former authoritarian ruling party and a former anti-system opposition movement."⁷⁶

It was amid such institutional change that the so-called "1992 Consensus" was adopted during a semi-official meeting between the Straits Exchange Foun-

74. S. Tsai 2005, 170.

75. Nathan 1993, 435.

76. Nathan 1993, 437.

dation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS).⁷⁷ During this meeting, the two bodies agreed to respect and accept the SEF's proposal that "each side 'verbally states' its respective principles on 'one China.'"⁷⁸ Prior to the meeting, the Mainland Affairs Council (*Dalu Weiyuanhui*) had laid out the ROC's "One China" principle, which was later adopted by the National Unification Council (*Guojia Tongyi Weiyuanhui*). Its statement read⁷⁹:

Both sides of the Taiwan Strait agree that there is only one China. However, the two sides of the Strait have different opinions as to the meaning of one China. To Peking, "one China" means the "People's Republic of China (PRC)," with Taiwan to become a "Special Administration Region" after unification. Taipei, on the other hand, considers "one China" to mean the Republic of China (ROC), founded in 1911 and with *de jure* sovereignty over all of China. The ROC, however, currently has jurisdiction only over Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu. *Taiwan is part of China, and the Chinese mainland is part of China as well.*

In this way, the GMD reframed "One China" narratives as "One China, respective interpretations" (*yige Zhongguo gezi biaoshu*), in which they agreed there was "one China" but disagreed with the PRC as to what that meant.

At home, too, the Lee administration continued to revise "One China" narratives, framing Taiwan's democratic reforms as an instrument for unification. On Constitution Day in 1992, for example, he compared the democratic progress on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and asserted that "Taiwan experience" (*Taiwan*

77. The agreement reached during this meeting was not officially termed "1992 Consensus." It was later labeled as such by a former GMD official Su Chi. Su and Cheng 2002.

78. For SEF summary of meeting, *Zhongyang Tongxunshe* [Central News Agency], November 18, 1992. For ARATS summary, *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], November 6, 1992.

79. Cited in Chao and Myers 2000, 23. My emphasis.

jingyan) was “already a beacon for the future course of China.”⁸⁰ This narrative shift was bolstered by the surprisingly poor showing of the DPP in the legislative elections, which suggested that independence—though an important mobilizing tool for the politically charged—was too radical a demand for most voters. In this context, the GMD began formulating new frames centered around the “New Taiwanese” (*xin Taiwanren*), an inclusive conception of the “Taiwanese” that included both mainlanders (*waishengren*) and indigenous peoples (*benshengren*). The revised narrative began to take more tangible shape by 1994: *Global Views* magazine (*Yuanjian zazhi*)—an affiliate of pro-guomintang *United Daily News* (*Lianhebao*)—dedicated a whole special issue to the concept. One article, penned by the magazine’s editor-in-chief Gao Xijun, commended the efforts to reconceptualize Taiwanese identity⁸¹:

The appearance of the “New Taiwanese” brings a fresh start for the Taiwan society that is dangerously lacking in having a common ground... The foundation of their common fate is no longer limited to the same dialogue or coming from the same province, but is based on the same language, same culture, same bloodline, or even the same dream.

In this way, “One China” narratives in the early 1990s were more Taiwan-centric, even as they continued to advocate for unification as the ultimate nation-building project. This often resulted in ambiguous—if not contradictory—frames. On the one hand, Lee continued to walk a fine line in discussing Taiwanese sovereignty: for example, the government’s yearbook in 1994 described Taiwan as a “political entity” (*zhengzhi shiti*) rather than a “state.”⁸² On the other hand,

80. Zongtongfu [Office of the President] 1992.

81. *Lianhebao* [United Daily News], October 15, 1994, 11, translated in Chang and Holt 2009, 264-5.

82. Xingzheng Yuan [Executive Yuan (Government Information Office)] 1994, 147.

Lee took a far more revisionist stance, as when he appropriated the term "alien regime" (*wailai zhengquan*) to describe the GMD, in an interview with a Japanese journalist Ryotaro Shiba, which was published under the title "The Pity of Being Taiwanese."⁸³ This generated much controversy: Lee's lack of enmity toward the Japanese—something that should unite the two Chinas—angered observers at home and abroad. One Chinese scholar Lee Jaiquan protested⁸⁴:

The pity of being born Taiwanese should be the same as the pity of being born Chinese, hence [the sense of pity] is shared by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits share the same mind set. It is backward and biased to see only the pity of being born Taiwan.

The tension continued to escalate in 1995. In his speech to the National Unification Council on April 8, 1995, Lee once again emphasized Taiwanese sovereignty within the context of unification: "China's unification [must be] based on the reality that the two sides are governed respectively by two governments [that] in no way are subordinate to each other."⁸⁵ Colloquially known as "Lee's six points," the speech was a response to Jiang Zemin's "eight points" speech, which clarified China's "one country, two systems" proposal for Taiwan.⁸⁶ It was amid such heated contest between the two Chinas that Lee was

83. *Asahi Weekly*, May 5, 1994. The interview translated and published in Taiwan in *Zili Wanbao* [Independence Evening Post], April 30-May 2, 1994, 2. The full translated transcript can be also found in "Taiwan Policy," July 21, 1994. Congressional Record Volume 140, Number 96, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-1994-07-21/html/CREC-1994-07-21-pt1-PgS7.htm>.

84. Cited in Shih 1995, 550.

85. Cited in Jacobs and Liu 2007, 384.

86. Jiang's original speech was published in *Renmin Ribao*, January 31, 1995, 1-2. Translated speech can be found in "Reunification Speech," Daily Report: China, January 30, 1995, Foreign

granted a US visa to visit his alma mater, Cornell University.⁸⁷ The news triggered the third Taiwan Strait crisis, as the PRC responded with a barrage of missile launches and live-fire exercises.⁸⁸ Criticisms of Lee flooded the Chinese media as well, such as in *Xinhua* on June 7, 1995, which cast Lee's visit as a "political scheme," intended to "internationalize the Taiwan issue and make the current separation of the two shores "fixed" or even "permanent."⁸⁹

Much to China's ire, Lee's "One China" narrative had increasingly co-opted the "Taiwan consciousness" frame—typically associated with the independence movements—which rendered his commitment to unification more suspect. This dual narrative, emphasizing at once Taiwan consciousness and Chinese heritage, had consolidated by the first direct presidential election in 1996. In his acceptance speech for the party's nomination, Lee once again stressed⁹⁰:

One only needs those who identify with Taiwan and sympathize with Taiwan, who are willing to strive and struggle for Taiwan, it is they who are Taiwanese. We must encourage a new concept of 'New Taiwanese.' At the same time, those who cherish nationalist feelings, uphold Chinese culture and do not forget the ideals of China's unification, they are Chinese.

Broadcast Information Service [hereafter FBIS], File No. FBIS-CHI-95-019, 84-86.

87. The issue was addressed in Concurrent Resolution 53, which was adopted with near-unanimity in the House and the Senate. "Regarding the visit by president Lee Teng-hui of the Republic of China on Taiwan to the United States," May 9, 1995. Congressional Record Vol. 141, No. 76, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/volume-141/issue-76/senate-section/article/S6306-3>.

88. See Scobell 2000.

89. Laidi 1996. On coverage of Lee's visit, see "Xinhua commentaries view Lee Teng-hui," Daily Report: China, June 7, 1995, FBIS, File No. FBIS-CHI-95-109, 84-88.

90. T.-H. Li 1999, 76.

Lee did not emphasize this “national question” in his election campaign for fear of provoking China. But the “new Taiwanese” narratives were not only problematic abroad: they had created ruptures within the GMD on the party’s “One China” platform and attendant program of unification, as will be demonstrated.

The unsettling of “One China” narrative in the broader society was also evident in public opinion surveys during this period, which marked a sea change in Taiwanese/Chinese consciousness: if those who saw themselves as solely Taiwanese rose from 16.5 percent in 1991 to 33.1 percent in 1996, those who identified as solely Chinese dropped in equal measure, from 32.5 percent to 16.6 percent.⁹¹ This worked in Lee’s favor during the country’s first direct presidential election in 1996: Lee was able to secure 54 percent of the votes, from across pro-unification and pro-independence camps. What it meant to be Taiwanese, in the shadow of the enduring “One China” narrative under Lee’s first truly democratic leadership, remained deeply contested.

If the GMD sought to co-opt Taiwan-centric themes in their revised “One China” narratives, the DPP shifted away from independence as a programmatic agenda. Signs of moderation were evident even before the 1996 presidential election: the party chairman Shih Ming-teh had begun to make the case that Taiwan was *already* independent, and hence need not pursue independence as policy.⁹² This was echoed by Peng Ming-min, the DPP’s presidential candidate and long-time hero of the independence movement, who claimed: “Taiwan has been independent for decades; therefore, supporting the status quo is supporting Taiwan independence; it is unification that will change the status quo, not

91. “Trends in Core Political Attitudes,” Election Study Center, National Chengchi University: <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/eng>.

92. *Zhongguo Shibao* [China Times], September 15, 1995.

Taiwan independence.”⁹³

Still, relative to Lee’s muted message, Peng had run with a more explicit nationalist appeal, with newspaper advertisements that read: “we want independence and oppose unification.”⁹⁴ His disastrous defeat was thus a stark reminder to the DPP that voters prioritized stability over independence. Though the DPP did not formally relinquish the independence clause in its party platform, it no longer called for the creation of the “Republic of Taiwan.”⁹⁵ This new counter-narrative would later become formalized in the party’s 1999 *Resolution on Taiwan’s Future* (*Taiwan qiantu jueyiwen*), which stated⁹⁶:

(1) Taiwan is an independent and sovereign state. Changes in the status quo of independence should be decided by all residents in Taiwan via a referendum.

(2) Taiwan does not belong to the People’s Republic of China. China’s unilateral advocacy of the “One China Principle” and “One Country, Two Systems” fundamentally does not apply to Taiwan.

In this way, new narrative boundaries were being built against “One China,” with shared emphasis on Taiwan’s sovereignty, as both sides recalibrated their narrative strategies. Elections, combined with public debates that accompanied them, revealed not only the marginalization of “One China” narratives, but also the limits of “One Taiwan” narratives. This was most evident in the formation of various splinter parties that espoused more radical national stories. In 1993, dissatisfied by Lee’s Taiwan-centric nation-building agenda, hardliners

93. *Shijie Ribao* [World Journal], October 1, 1995.

94. Rich and Sullivan 2016, 125.

95. Fell 2018, 155.

96. Minzhu Jinbudang [Democratic Progressive Party] 1999, 62-67.

within the *guomindang* formed the New Party (*xindang*), which explicitly supported unification under the "one China, two systems" framework proposed by the PRC. Not long after in 1996, similarly disaffected by the DPP's narrative compromises, movement activists within the party formed the Taiwan Independence Party (*jianguodang*, literally "nation-building party"), which endorsed *de jure* independence. These more polarizing counter-narratives thus became institutionalized under new representative entities, allowing the two dominant parties to mainstream their narratives.

In this process, democracy structured competing narratives along partisan cleavages, the Lee administration adopted a new set of textbooks titled *Knowing Taiwan* (*Renshi Taiwan*). Prior to this point, the old curriculum had centered around two objectives: re-sinicizing Taiwan and "retaking the mainland" (*fan-gong dalu*).⁹⁷ As a result, it underscored the development of mainland China, with little attention paid to the culture and history of Taiwan. Yet, the indigenization (*bentuhua*) of public discourse had created demand for more Taiwan-centric education. According to sociologist Wang Fu-chang, the number of Taiwan-related books published annually rose from fewer than 30 before 1987 to nearly 100 in 1990, and 450 by 1995.⁹⁸ It was in this context that *Knowing Taiwan* textbooks were incorporated into high school curricula. Key differences lay in its depiction of Taiwan's historical ties to China, colonial legacies by other foreign powers (such as Spain, the Netherlands, and Japan), as well as the nature of GMD rule after 1945.⁹⁹ The new curriculum was broadly welcomed, except by *xindang* supporters who protested it for its unpatriotic and collaborationist

97. F. Wang 2005, 59, 60.

98. Ibid, 70.

99. Hughes and Stone 1999, 985-8.

contents.

These narrative trends deepened under the progressive leadership of Chen Shui-bian, whose two-term presidency helped consolidate the new narrative orthodoxy of "One Taiwan." By this point, Lee's "two state theory" (*liangguo lun*) had reshaped much of Taiwan's governing discourse: most notably, the Mainland Affairs Council had erased all references to "one country" and replaced "two equal political entities" with "two countries" (*guojia*).¹⁰⁰ From this perspective, Chen's nation-building project was largely a continuation of Lee's: abroad, Chen emphasized Taiwan's *de facto* independence, while at home, he sought to rebuild Taiwan's national identity—apart from China's—through a series of de-sinicization efforts. This included, for example, elevating Taiwan in the politics of naming. Rather than choosing between Republic of China and Republic of Taiwan, which previously divided pro-independence groups, Chen combined them into one political entity¹⁰¹:

The sovereignty of the Republic of China is vested with the 23 million people of Taiwan. The Republic of China is Taiwan, and Taiwan is the Republic of China. This is an indisputable fact.

If Chen had been restrained in his "One Taiwan" narratives in his first term, he was far more proactive in his second term. Among the "four noes and one without" (*sibu yimeiyou*) commitments—his inaugural pledge in 2000—Chen had reneged on all aside from not declaring independence; he (1) changed the national title to include "Taiwan," (2) pursued a referendum on independence

100. Sheng 2002, 11.

101. "President Chen's Address to the National Day Rally," October 10, 2004. Office of the President, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/1824>. Official translation.

in 2004, (3) sought constitutional reform in 2006, and (4) shuttered the National Unification Council as well as nullified the National Unification Guidelines in 2006.¹⁰² By 2007, the original pledge had been replaced by another declaration of “four wants and one without” (*siyao yimeiyou*), in which Chen stated that Taiwan wants independence, rectification of its name, a new constitution, and development.¹⁰³ In Taiwanese politics, he added, there was no left versus right beyond independence versus unification.

Amid increasing pressures from Beijing—including notably by the passage of anti-secession law in 2005—maintaining the “status quo” had become the primary descriptor for Taiwan’s nation-building agenda. In fact, by the end of Chen’s tenure in 2008, public’s support for the “status quo” had increased to a striking 82 percent.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, there was also more disagreement as to what the “status quo” is and what it should aim: while a considerable force, at 16 percent, favored status quo with a view to achieving independence, a far stronger majority of 57.3 percent preferred to postpone the decision (35.8 percent) and “indefinitely” so (21.5 percent).¹⁰⁵ Given that a similar proportion of the public, 91.5 percent, saw themselves as either Taiwanese only (48.4 percent) or both Taiwanese and Chinese (43.1 percent), their preference for the status

102. See “Taiwan Stands Up: Presidential Inauguration Address,” May 20, 2000, USC US-China Institute, <https://china.usc.edu/chen-shui-bian-“taiwan-stands-presidential-inauguration-address”-may-20-2000>. But also see Chen’s interview with the *Financial Times* on how his administration did not violate the “four noes and one without” commitments. *Financial Times* 2006.

103. *Yingwen Zhongguo Youbao* [The China Post], March 5, 2007.

104. “Changes in Unification/Independence Stances of Taiwanese,” Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/upload/44/doc/6963/Tondu202312.jpg>.

105. *Ibid.*

quo suggested implicit support for independence rather than unification. In this sense, while China's growing assertiveness may have dampened support for more explicit gestures toward independence, the term "status quo" was not necessarily a negation of "One Taiwan" narratives.

Indeed, emerging narrative boundaries around "One Taiwan" defied the "One China" orthodoxy in important ways. First, pro-unification narratives became electorally untenable. Already by 2000 presidential elections, the public discourse had so shifted that none of the presidential candidates, whether from the GMT or the DPP, defended the "One China" principle in their campaign platforms and explicitly rejected the idea of "one country, two systems." Even in the aftermath of Chen's exit and post-office disgrace, GMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou was unable to publicly support unification as a national objective. Second, narratives of Taiwanization (*Bentuhua*) became increasingly entrenched in official narratives. In 2003—barely months before the 2004 elections—the conservative "pan-blue" alliance co-opted the *bentu* frame, calling itself the "moderate Taiwan group" (*wenhede bentu pai*) as opposed to its progressive counterpart, which it labeled "radical Taiwan group" (*jijinde bentu pai*).¹⁰⁶ Finally, the "status quo" became the *modus vivendi* for cross-strait relations in Taiwanese narratives, albeit with divergent emphases across partisan lines. For the pro-independence camp, the status quo came to underscore the *de facto* independence of the island, whereas for the pro-unification camp, it highlighted a lack of resolution on Taiwan's political status.

In this process, "One China" narrative became taboo. This was particularly clear following the election of GMD candidate Ma Ying-jeou. In several in-

106. Jacobs 2005, 47.

stances where Ma breached the prevailing narrative boundaries of “one China, one Taiwan,” he was met with popular resistance. In 2008, when Ma suppressed protests in advance of a visit by China’s top cross-strait negotiator Chen Yunlin, including banning publicly waving Taiwan’s national flag or chanting “Taiwan does not belong to China” (*Taiwan bu shuyu zhongguo*), some 200 university students staged a series of sit-in demonstrations in what became known as the “Wild Strawberry Movement.”¹⁰⁷ Then in 2014, after the ruling GMT party announced the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA), which would drastically liberalize cross-strait contact,¹⁰⁸ various civil society groups and student organizations stormed the Legislative Yuan in a guerrilla-style protest. The so-called “Sunflower Movement” coalitions included the Democratic Front Against Cross-Strait Trade in Services Agreement—a group of NGOs on labor, gender, human and environmental rights—as well as the Black Island Nation Youth Front (*heisedao guo qingnian lianmeng*).¹⁰⁹ Crucially, these new narrators portrayed GMT actions as not only appeasement of the PRC, but “trampling of the rule of law.”¹¹⁰ Pro-Chinese actions by the GMT were treated, thus, as anti-democratic.

In this way, “One China” narratives became suspended as an organizing theme in narrative contestation in democratic Taiwan. It is unsurprising, then, that aspirations for unification in Taiwan have virtually vanished in Taiwan—

107. Y. Lee 2014, 425.

108. According to the Taiwan Social Change Survey conducted in late 2013, skepticism over cross-strait economic integration was prevalent: 73.7 percent of respondents held negative attitudes toward “Chinese working in Taiwan.” Taiwan Social Change Survey: <https://www2.ios.sinica.edu.tw/sc/en/home2.php>.

109. Ho 2015.

110. Ibid, 83.

from 20 percent in 1994 to 7.3 percent in 2023.¹¹¹ Instead, contestation had centered around competing pathways to maintain Taiwan's sovereignty, which over time settled along partisan lines: between a progressive narrative that saw the status quo as independence and therefore promoted policies to elevate Taiwan's sovereignty abroad, and a conservative one that saw the status quo as a lack of resolution to the political status of Taiwan—as formulated in the "1992 consensus"—and thus endorsed stability-seeking policies with China. Notably, these competing narratives diverged on the meaning of the "status quo" in Taiwan's nation-building project. As the narrative boundaries consolidated, what emerged was the tabooization of "One China" narratives and the program of unification. Today, even as Taiwan has become increasingly isolated, "One Taiwan" narratives define its democratic nationalism and sustain aspirations for independence.

111. "Changes in Unification/Independence Stances of Taiwanese."

Part III

Postcolonial Relations

CHAPTER 7

POSTCOLONIAL RELATIONS

To those less familiar with Japanese imperial history, the Yasukuni Shrine—meaning literally a “peaceful country shrine”—is just another tourist stop in Tokyo. The main sanctuary sits atop the Kudan hill; midway, a wooden gate opens to the worship hall adorned in chrysanthemum seals where, to this day, imperial rites are held. Scattered around the site are statues of widows and fatherless children and kamikaze pilots, commemorating the personal sacrifices made to Japan’s war effort. It is easy to mistake the shrine as just another national cemetery, with the mystique of Shinto culture—something like Japan’s Arlington.



Figure 7.1: Yasukuni Shrine (2012)

What distinguishes the Yasukuni from other Shinto shrines in Japan is that it enshrines nearly 2.5 million soldiers who died in service of the Japanese empire. Among them are fourteen Class A war criminals convicted for their roles in the "Asian Holocaust,"¹ including Tojo Hideki, Japanese prime minister during World War II who presided over the most violent periods of Japanese imperial rule. Over ten million civilians and prisoners of war are thought to have perished between 1937 and 1945, through massacres, starvation, human experimentation, biological and chemical warfare, torture, forced labor, rape, and cannibalism.² Following an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Tojo was sentenced and hanged to death on December 23, 1948. Today, he and 1,068 others who were convicted for war crimes are venerated as *kami*—holy spirits worthy of worship—at Yasukuni.

Around the corner from the shrine is the Yushukan, the country's first and oldest military-history museum. The exhibits spell out what is only symbolized by the shrine: the glory and heroism of those who suffered for Japan's imperial cause. They trace Japan's military victories and whitewash its conquest of East and Southeast Asia as noble pursuits to protect the servile nations from Western imperial advances. Meanwhile, each wartime artefact on display elides crucial details. A plaque showcasing the Class C56 steam locomotive that ran the Thai-Burma railway during World War II reads: "The building of the railway was difficult in the extreme." What it does not say is that 90,000 prisoners and wartime laborers were killed in its making, earning it the name the "Death Rail-

1. Blumenthal [1999](#).

2. The exact figure of civilian casualty by the Japanese imperial army is disputed. More recent counts place civilian deaths between 10 and 30 million. See Dear and Foot [2001](#), 181; Carmichael and Maguire [2015](#), 105.

way.”³ Other notable instances of Japanese colonial and wartime violence are sanitized—the Nanking “incident” rather than “massacre,” for which “Chinese terrorists” are blamed⁴—or omitted in entirety.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that visits to the Yasukuni by prominent Japanese politicians generate controversy. Since taking office in 2001, then prime minister Koizumi Junichiro paid an annual visit to the contested site. His pilgrimage was timed for a symbolically explosive date—August 15, the day of Japanese surrender in World War II—and fueled fierce diplomatic protests from South Korea (and China). When Koizumi arrived in Seoul for a 2001 summit, angry crowds took to the streets, burning Japanese flags and effigies. Twenty Korean men from a civil organization, Save the Nation, gathered at the Independence Gate of a former prison where freedom fighters had been held, and each cut off a finger to protest his visit.⁵ According to a joint poll by *Hankook Ilbo* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* in June 2005—a year before Koizumi’s departure from office—ninety percent of South Koreans reported that they did not trust Japan.⁶

In this light, what may be more surprising is the visit to the Yasukuni in 2007 by Taiwan’s former president Lee Teng-hui. Though he had explained that the decision was personal—Lee’s elder brother had died serving the Japanese Imperial Navy in 1945 and is enshrined there—the visit stoked criticisms of colonial amnesia.⁷ Upon arrival in Tokyo, Lee lamented the politicization of his visit: “Yasukuni issues have been made up just because China and Korea could not

3. Sturma 2020, 516.

4. Lind 2008, 68.

5. Kirk 2001.

6. “South Korean Mistrust of Japan: Poll” 2005.

7. Ching 2019, 80. Also see J. Lin 2022, 2.

handle their own domestic problems.”⁸ Lee was not the only Taiwanese politician to pay respects at the Yasukuni. In 2005, a member of the parliament Su Chin-chiang, along with members of his Taiwan Solidarity Union Party, made their pilgrimage to the shrine in a gesture of friendship to the Japanese.⁹

In fact, these developments are emblematic of a broader pattern of divergence in South Korea and Taiwan over reconciliation with their former colonial ruler, Japan. In South Korea, grievances about Japanese colonial crimes and postcolonial impenitence continue to plague relations between the two countries. 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; the ruling culminated in tit-for-tat diplomatic and economic sanctions that lasted for four years and cost them over 1.3 billion dollars.¹⁰

Such grievances are difficult to find in Taiwan. Even though Japan has no formal ties with Taiwan (since switching diplomatic recognition to China in 1972), their relations have only deepened in the postwar period. In the 1990s, Taiwan revised its history textbooks to present a more nuanced account of the legacies of Japanese empire—one that acknowledged its role in modernizing Taiwan.¹¹ Correspondingly, mentions of “comfort women” or forced laborers are few and far between in any commemorative events and establishments. These trends are consistent with broader sentiments of affinity with Japan—

8. “Lee Raps China, South Korea Over Yasukuni” [2007](#).

9. Kushner [2007](#), 792-3.

10. Shin and Balistreri [2022](#), 9.

11. Y. He [2014](#), 484.

especially among those who experienced colonial rule. According to a 2006 study of Taiwanese elderly who received colonial education, 95% recalled their Japanese teachers as "good" or "quite good."¹²

This nested case study provides two critical findings about South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building abroad, as it relates to postcolonial relations with another significant other, Japan. First, the across-case comparison illustrates that democracy helped sustain "anti-Japan" narratives in South Korea but suspend them in Taiwan, resulting in increasingly divergent support for justice as a national objective. Second, within-case comparisons show that anti-colonial narratives became emblematic of progressive politics in South Korea, while pro-colonial narratives emerged as a corrective to the narrative legacies of authoritarianism in Taiwan. These counter-narratives became new focal points for structuring competing narratives and narrators as democratic institutions matured, paving way for the outbursts of colonial grievances in South Korea and their erasure in Taiwan.

7.1 Empirical Approach

I adopt a multi-qualitative-method approach to study this question. My answers are organized in two parts. Once I trace the overall trends and patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects abroad, I then process-trace a range of qualitative data to illustrate the mechanisms of narrative contestation in each case. As in the previous chapters, I anchor the study of narrative contestation in the more discrete shifts in political institutions. To conduct

12. Sun [2007](#), 796-7.

this comparative historical analysis, I weave together various sources—both primary and secondary—including archival documents, transcripts of in-depth interviews with 40 storytelling elites, and 90 victim-activist testimonies. Overall, my aim is to explicate the changes in their postcolonial relations by unpacking the narrative practices underlying them.

In each set of comparisons—both across- and within-cases—I process-trace the mechanisms of narrative contestation to provide thick descriptions in each period. To do so, I once again triangulate various primary and secondary sources collected through archival research and semi-structured interviews in South Korea and Taiwan. I refer to comparable data: for state narratives, I consult official executive statements, auto-biographies of leaders and their close associates, legislative documents, and other state-sanctioned accounts including party manifestos and textbooks. For counter-narratives by the storytelling elites, I look to opposition party manifestos, editorials of opposition newspapers, and civil society publications. I add to these 9 testimonies by victim-activists. Where relevant, I also complement these sources with organic narratives in the form of protest slogans and pamphlets as well as public opinion surveys.

To supplement, I also draw from 40 interviews conducted between 2019 and 2022 in Seoul (South Korea), Taipei (Taiwan), and online. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and all were conducted in English aside from eight, which were fully in Korean or Mandarin Chinese.¹³ I combined (1) purposive sampling strategy, identifying members of former opposition parties, civil society leaders, historians (and other scholars), as well as journalists; and (2) snowball sampling strategy, identifying other possible interviewees through refer-

13. For the two interviews conducted in Mandarin Chinese, I relied on a translator for more detailed communication and had the transcripts translated.

rals. The interviewees served as “storytelling elites” in each context, as they led in narrative contestation, challenging the state’s frames, mobilizing other non-state narrators, and holding state actors accountable for any breach of narrative boundaries (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: *Overview of Interviewees*

	Occupation	Number	Total
South Korea	Former democracy activists	6	20
	Civil society leaders	3	
	Historians	7	
	Other scholars	1	
	Journalists	3	
Taiwan	Former democracy activists	4	20
	Civil society leaders	6	
	Historians	4	
	Other scholars	3	
	Journalists	3	

To facilitate process tracing, I establish the practical implications of narrative contestation. First, the opening of political institutions allows the storytelling elites in South Korea and Taiwan to craft and disseminate alternative stories, alongside state-sanctioned ones. In the former, this led to the burgeoning of “anti-Japan” narratives, while in the latter, it led to their interrogation. Second, these stories provide competing nationalist frames, around which their societies mobilize for democracy. In South Korea, “anti-Japan” narratives were used to delegitimize the authoritarian elites, whereas in Taiwan, they were cast aside

as a dubious authoritarian project. Third, as democratic institutions mature, narrative contestation becomes structured, clarifying the boundaries of what is possible—and salient—to say. In this process of narrative sorting, some stories come to acquire a taken-for-granted character, as “anti-Japan” narrative did in South Korea; other stories are rendered less politically salient, as “anti-Japan” narrative is in Taiwan. What breached these narrative boundaries were sanctioned, not only because they no longer resonated but because of their anti-democratic connotations.

I also establish the practical implications of three key alternative explanations that stem from the same premise—that storytelling is epiphenomenal. For one, one may argue that it is Japanese postwar conduct that shaped South Korean and Taiwanese “responses.” From this perspective, one might expect Japan to be more contrite toward Taiwan. For another, one may assert that it is the mounting threat of China and the imperative to contain it that dampened Taiwanese (and to a lesser extent, South Korean) incentives to politicize colonial grievances. For both South Korea and Taiwan, which are embroiled in broader geopolitical competition, this means their stories might shift depending on their relative position in the regional order in which Japan has increasingly embraced a leadership role. Yet, as I will demonstrate, neither developments dictated how they would come to re-narrate their postcolonial relations. Instead, new stories steered their nation-building projects, at times in spite of geopolitical incentives.

7.2 Comparison

Every Wednesday at noon, there is a demonstration outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul, demanding justice for the “comfort women,” who suffered sexual slavery under Japanese colonial rule. Starting in 1992, people have been gathering on the same spot, every week, wearing yellow vests and holding banners shaped like butterflies to remember the violence against colonized women in Asia and rectify this history. “We are here to listen to *halmonis*’ stories,” one college student said, “and make Japan hear them, too.”¹⁴ This was the first time she had participated in a “political event,” she told me, citing a series of court decisions that ordered Japanese companies to pay the victims of wartime forced labor the year before. “I was not happy with Japan’s reaction. If one does something wrong, you should pay. Isn’t that obvious in a democracy?”

The so-called “Wednesday demonstrations” have been a site of much contention. On December 14, 2011, on the occasion of the 1,000th demonstration, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (*hanguk jeongsindae munje daechaek hyeobuihoe*, or the Korean Council) installed the Peace Statue (*pyeonghwauui sonyeosang*) in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Sculpted by Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, the statue is of a small, bare-footed Korean girl wearing traditional dress; she sits facing the embassy, her shadow shaped as a *halmoni*. The sculptors have since begun the “little statue of peace” project, to protest the 2015 Comfort Women Agreement, and continue to internationalize the issue.¹⁵ Today, there are estimated 177 (little)

14. “Halmoni” means grandmother or an elderly woman in Korean. Author interview, May 29, 2019.

15. Korea Verband [2016](#), 39.



Figure 7.2: First Wednesday Demonstration, January 8, 1992 (1992)

Such sentiments are hardly perceptible in Taiwan. In the 2000s, Taiwanese public intellectuals published four books under the series titled “Pride of the Japanese,” blaming Japan’s postwar legitimacy crisis on the fabrication and manipulation of its legacies by left-leaning institutions in Japan—the Teacher’s Union and *Asahi Shimbun*—and nationalist regimes in South Korea and China.¹⁷ Conspicuous in these critiques was a sense of longing for Japan, which they argued had been forcibly excised from the Taiwanese society by the authori-

16. Japan considers them illegal and insists on their removal.

17. Ching 2019, 86-7. The four books are: Yang Suqiu’s *Nihonjin wa totemo subarashikatta* [The Japanese Were Wonderful] (2003), Cai Minsan’s *Kaerazaru Nihonjin* [The Unreturned Japanese] (2004), Ke Desan’s *Bokoku wa Nihon, Sokoku wa Taiwan* [Motherland is Japan, Fatherland is Taiwan] (2005), and Yang Yingyin’s *Subarashikatta Nihon no sensei to sono kyōiku* [Wonderful! Japanese Teachers and their Education] (2006).

tarian *guomindang*, but which today provides a unique ontological basis for a Taiwanese identity—separate from that of China.¹⁸

In his opening note, the editor of the “Pride of the Japanese” series compared the experiences of South Korea and Taiwan.¹⁹ Describing anti-Japanism in South Korea as a byproduct of US postwar occupation, the editor condemned the Korean nationalists for denying and distorting Japanese colonial contributions, without which South Korea would have remained an ignorant and backward country. At the same time, he argued that South Korea had lacked the kind of ethnic violence that allowed the Taiwanese to truly understand the benevolence of Japanese colonial rule. He ended his note with an excerpt from a 1995 letter that the former Thai prime minister Kukrit Pramoj wrote to Nakamura Aketo, the former Japanese military commander who had been stationed in Thailand²⁰:

Thanks to Japan, all Asian nations have gained independence. Japan, the mother, has had complications during this difficult birth. However, all the children are growing up quickly and healthily. Whom should we thank today that peoples of Southeast Asia can speak to the United States and England as equals? It is due to our mother, Japan, who sacrificed herself for the benefit of all. The eighth of December [the attack on Pearl Harbor] is the day mother revealed to us this important truth when she wagered her life on a critical decision. August fifteenth [Japan’s surrender] is when our dear mother rested in her sick bed. We should never forget these two dates.

Was it the US occupation or the absence of oppression that gave rise to anti-Japanism in South Korea? Despite his fervent hatred of the Japanese, South

18. Y. He 2014, 472.

19. For the full opening note, see “shiri-zu” nipponjin no hokori” kanko ni yosete” [Prologue to the Publication of the Series “Pride of the Japanese People], November 9, 2008, <https://www.sakuranohana.jp/books/hokori/>

20. Translated and cited in Ching 2019, 88.

Korea's first president Rhee Syngman chose not to purge any known collaborators from his provisional government, *precisely* because the American authorities deemed them a loyal ally against communist forces.²¹ And it had been under Rhee's American-backed leadership that one of the most violent civilian massacres took place in 1948, known as the "April 3 Incident" in Jeju. Approximately 30,000 people were killed by the Rhee regime for their illusory sympathies with the communist North—just a year after the "February 28 Incident" unfolded in Taiwan. Life in postcolonial, postwar South Korea had been just as cruel and unjust.

What existing perspectives miss is that memories of Japanese colonial violence proved politically useful for nation-building under democracy in opposite ways. For South Korean storytellers who emerged in the wake of democratization, frames of colonial justice were instrumental for highlighting the collaborationist histories of the autocrats. For Taiwanese narrators, meanwhile, such frames themselves were a tool of legitimation of the autocrats that needed to be cross-examined. What is more pertinent to unpack, therefore, is how new storytellers and stories emerged and bound the South Korean and Taiwanese elites to differing narrative boundaries about their colonial pasts and post-colonial present and future.

With this goal in mind, I trace the overall trends and patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese nation-building projects abroad, situating the results of a discourse analysis in a broader comparative historical analysis. The discourse analysis yields several important insights about the narratives in South Korea and Taiwan. To begin, leaders from South Korea and Taiwan often criticized

21. H. Kim 1988, 64.

Japan for their lack of penitence. Nearly all commemorative speeches between 1945 and 1991 utilized the frame of justice in their demands for apology and reparations from Japan, although South Korean speeches were not as consistently critical. Anti-Japanism remained a central marker of national identity in official narratives until democracy.

Contrary to popular depictions of “pro-colonial sellouts,” autocrats in South Korea were not all uniformly pro-Japanese. South Korea’s official relations with Japan remained troubled for more than 15 years since the Japanese surrender, given in part the political utility of “Japan-bashing” in post-liberation Korea.²² Rhee Syngman resisted mounting geostrategic incentives to reconcile with Japan, making normalization of relations conditional on Japanese apology and reparations. Over time, however, his neglect of economic woes and growing authoritarian tendencies intensified the domestic opposition and eventually led to his demise; as a result, many who aspired to power sharpened their focus on the country’s need for economic rehabilitation. This created a narrative opportunity for subsequent administrations to frame reconciliation with Japan as an economic imperative.

Indeed, it was only under Park Chung-hee’s rule and forced normalization with Japan that official narratives and policy began to emphasize reconciliation. Unlike Rhee, who harbored strong anti-Japanese sentiments, Park admired Japan for its impressive economic ascent and saw Japan’s model of development as a blueprint for South Korea’s future.²³ In that sense, the change in leadership from Rhee to Park—and the shifts in the ruling regime’s underlying attitudes toward Japan—was pivotal for the normalization of South Korea-Japan relations

22. On the political uses of anti-Japanese sentiments, see Cheong 1991, chapter 1.

23. Jeong and Shin 2018, 67-71.

in 1965.²⁴ Both Park and his successor Chun sought to deepen relations with Japan, with narratives of pragmatism and appeals to South Korean magnanimity, which the wider society condemned and resisted. In this process of narrative contestation, colonial grievances against Japan became co-opted in broader struggles for democracy in South Korea.

Similarly, contrary to common portrayals of "anti-colonial avengers" and nationalists, autocrats in Taiwan did not always act on their anti-Japanese sentiments. Despite Jiang's continued appeal to his anti-colonial credentials, he relied on a narrative of "repaying malice with virtue" (*yide baoyuan*), thereby allowing the repatriation Japanese prisoners of war and civilians from China, the preservation of Japanese imperial institutions, and the withdrawal of the ROC's claims to war reparations. The narrative was introduced in a radio broadcast by Jiang in 1945, which the ROC representative and foreign minister George Yeh recalled in his peace negotiations with Japan²⁵:

President Jiang urged the Chinese nation to remember not evil against others (*bunian jiue*) and return virtue for malice (*yide baoyuan*)... In a speech on June 18, 1951, President Jiang also restated the policy advocated by Mr. Sun Yat-sen that stability in Asia can only be achieved if China and Japan—the two great powers of Asia—sincerely cooperate with each other."

Even under Chiang Ching-guo, whose anti-Japanese sentiments were well-known,²⁶ pragmatism prevailed. Crucially, Jiang continued to promote reconciliation even

24. Jung-Hoon Lee [2011](#), 431-2.

25. Zhonghua Minguo Waijiao Wenti Yanjiuhui [The Research Association on Diplomatic Issues of the Republic of China] [1966](#), 4-5.

26. Jiang's mother had been killed by a Japanese bombing. J. Taylor [2009](#), 96. See also H.-T. Lin [2009](#).

after Japan—along with twenty-five others—switched diplomatic recognition to PRC in 1972.

As South Korea transitioned to democracy, the leaders—Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam—became increasingly constrained in manufacturing an official narrative of reconciliation with Japan. Notably, the rise of civil society groups like the Korean Council (*jeongeuiyeon*) and consolidation of opposition parties had lasting effects on how South Korea came to view its colonial history. Under these conditions, conciliatory policies toward Japan—as in Roh’s case—needed to be framed as a display of South Korean magnanimity, while attempts to confront South Korea’s authoritarian past—as in Kim’s case—required tackling the country’s colonial vestiges. In this manner, the anti-Japan narratives that had developed during South Korea’s early modernity came to shape South Korea’s national story in regards to both its authoritarian and colonial histories.

By contrast, transition to democracy in Taiwan helped popularize pro-colonial narratives as *dangwai* intellectuals began to interrogate the anti-colonial legacies of the *guomindang*. Despite the lack of formal diplomatic relations, this narrative development allowed transitional leader Lee Teng-hui to deepen the ROC’s informal ties with Japan. This was visible in Tokyo’s public support for Taiwan’s engagement in multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and growing quasi-official presence in Taiwan, including through private entities such as the Interchange Association. As one scholar described, their relations by this point were “unofficial in name only.”²⁷

As South Korea’s democracy matured and anti-Japan narratives dominated public discourse, patterns of binding began to bifurcate along partisan identi-

27. Sun 2007, 790.

ties. For the progressives, who had long fought in the opposition, new narratives centering on both Japanese culpability and South Korean complicity bolstered their democratic credibility. By contrast, the same history posed an enduring predicament for the conservatives, for whom the label of pro-Japanese party (*chinilpa*) and colonial-authoritarian narratives continued to expose and highlight their checkered lineages; it was, after all, under conservative leadership that normalization had been forced and dissent, quashed. In this way, the South Korean political elite became differentially bound by narrative contestation: progressives sustained narratives of shame to signal their democratic virtue, while conservatives fell back on narratives of pragmatism in the hopes of overcoming narrative constraints on cooperation with Japan.

In Taiwan, such competing narratives also consolidated along partisan lines, though in an opposite direction. Because the *guomindang* had long insisted on sinocentric narratives, using anti-colonial frames to cement their nationalist credentials, counter-narratives shed a more positive light on Japanese colonial legacies. As democratic institutions matured, opposition storytellers mobilized the history of Japanese colonial rule as a crucial narrative foil for separating Taiwan from mainland China and imagining Taiwan's own, unique nationhood. Over time, these narrative trends culminated in pro-colonial revisionism in Taiwan as independence activists and leftist intellectuals began to question the veracity and extent of Japanese crimes, including most prominently the use of wartime sexual slavery. A good example in this regard is an interview then presidential advisor Hsu Wen-lung gave in 2001, in which he claimed that comfort women were, in fact, voluntary prostitutes who wanted to "stand out among others."²⁸

28. Suzuki [2011](#), 241.

These patterns in South Korean and Taiwanese postcolonial narratives are particularly surprising when we consider the Japanese side of the story. During the post-independence period, Japan apologized to South Korea 22 times for its colonial atrocities and yet, never exclusively to Taiwan (for a list of Japanese official apologies, see Table C.1 in Appendix C : Chapter 7). Even Emperors have personally apologized. On May 24, 1990, then Emperor Akihito expressed his “deep remorse” for Korean suffering,²⁹ reiterating the words of his late father Emperor Hirohito, who had once professed his regrets about the “unfortunate past” between Korea and Japan.³⁰ If expressions of contrition are either necessary for or conducive to reconciliation, it is unclear how Taiwanese narratives about Japan came to reflect such nostalgia while South Korean narratives came to propagate deep-seated animosity.

In the chapters that follow, I process-trace how South Korea and Taiwan have, over time, pursued diverging nation-building projects that reconfigured their postcolonial identities. In South Korea, “anti-Japan” narratives became ascendant, providing a useful narrative weapon for the progressives. On various occasions, they mobilized these narratives to undermine pro-Japan policies of conservative administrations. Meanwhile, “anti-Japan” narratives were, over time, rendered politically toothless in Taiwan; the progressives cast them aside as an obsolete relic of the autocratic past, making deeper reconciliation possible. If, for the South Korean progressives, “anti-Japan” narratives signified a much-warranted pursuit of justice, for Taiwanese progressives, they symbolized an unfortunate legacy of authoritarianism, raising differing implications for democratic cooperation in Asia today.

29. Hiatt 1990.

30. “Emperor’s Remarks to Chun on Korea Ties” 1984, 9.

CHAPTER 8

SOUTH KOREA

To highlight the processes of narrative contestation, I divide my case study into three periods to mark the distinct stages of contestation: (1) "anti-Japan" under dictatorship, 1945-1988; (2) "anti-Japan" in transition, 1988-1998; and (3) "anti-Japan" and democracy, 1998-. Each period is marked by a shift in the nature of the interactive process between competing official and counter narratives vis-à-vis Japan over "history issues." I leverage these subcases to systematically examine the role of storytelling elites and the narrative strategies they deployed to contest the conciliatory narratives and policies; 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 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 "anti-Japan" narratives in South Korea over time.

8.1 "Anti-Japan" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988

Under authoritarian rule, "anti-Japan" narratives posed as an enduring obstacle for the ruling elites who—despite varying degrees of personal antipathy—sought Japanese help to counter the more immediate threat of communism. In a top-down fashion, the Rhee, Park, and Chun regimes promulgated narratives of pragmatism to justify reconciliation and cooperation, at once discrediting rival narrators as "followers of the North" (*jongbuk*) and discrediting "anti-Japan" narratives as "communist propaganda." The *jaeya*, meanwhile, criticized the governments for betraying national duty and public trust. In this long process

of narrative contestation, alternative narratives began to congeal around histories of collaboration, compounding frames of Japanese culpability with those of South Korean—as well as American—complicity.

Following colonial liberation and the civil war that followed, Rhee was engrossed in unification (see Chapter 5). He pursued a strategy of *bukjin tongil*, which promoted resumption of war and unification by force. Rhee was unsatisfied by the armistice and feared the growing clout of the Soviet Union and China, both staunch sponsors of North Korea. For Rhee, a military resolution on Korea's division was the paramount objective, but he was convinced that Washington would abandon South Korea in a conventional—never mind a nuclear—war.¹ Despite multiple reassurances, Rhee continued to distrust US commitment to South Korean security and, following the failure of the Geneva Conference in 1954, began to demand extreme measures including a preemptive attack on the Soviet Union and China and the transfer of nuclear weapons.² Though Rhee eventually agreed to a limited modernization plan, his dealings with the United States demonstrated Rhee's paranoia about the resurgent North Korean threat and suspicion of US security guarantees.

Domestically, Rhee's focus on security came at the expense of economic recovery. With the conclusion of the Korean War, many—including the United States—had hoped that the Rhee regime would devote to rebuilding the country's war-torn economy with help from Japan. Yet, he made little progress. Liv-

1. "Francesca Rhee's Diary Entries." December 12, 1950 & January 1, 1951. Taehan Minguksa Jaryojip [Collection of Documents on the History of the Republic of Korea], Rhee Syngman Gwankye Suhgan Jaryojip [Documents related to Syngman Rhee], Goonsaboo [Military History Division], Jeonjaeng Ginyeomkwan [War Memorial].

2. S. J.-W. Kim 1999, 34.

ing standards remained stagnant at wartime levels and inflation became rife as the costs of military upkeep ballooned. According to one estimate, the consumer price index increased by 26.4 percent, 51 percent, and 43 percent, consecutively from 1954 to 1956.³ Despite receiving \$840 million in economic aid from 1945 to 1953, the country's per capita income stood remarkably low—at \$67—in 1953.⁴ Worse, the situation contrasted starkly with North Korea's economic progress: from 1953 to 1960, the average growth rates of the North's national and per capita incomes exceeded those of the South by 16.1 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively.⁵ Rhee was insecure about the divergent trajectories of the two economies; he stated defensively: "We do not intend to restore Korea to economic strength only to be forced to give it all to the Communists and put on the shackles of slavery."⁶ Relying on narratives of anti-communism, Rhee justified—mostly unsuccessfully—his failure to address the country's most pressing economic problems.

Despite the mounting incentives, Rhee resented the idea of cooperating with Japan and saw US pressure in this regard as undue meddling. Having led South Korea's government-in-exile and independence movement during the colonial era, Rhee espoused deep anti-Japanese sentiments. During the war, when the United States proposed accepting military assistance from Japan, Rhee famously retorted that he would rather stop fighting the communists than fight alongside the Japanese.⁷ With such profound distrust, Rhee saw US requirements to spend its aid monies on Japanese goods as a form of economic imperi-

3. Hanguk Eunhaeng [The Bank of Korea] 1962, 12-3.

4. Hanguk Eunhaeng [The Bank of Korea] 1982, 354.

5. P. S. Lee 1972, 518-26.

6. Hongkee 1956, 239.

7. Tanaka 1981, 30.

alism. For Rhee, this policy harkened back to Japan's destructive pursuit of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere—only this time, it was led and sponsored by Washington. Though his hatred of Japan was in many ways genuine, Rhee also recognized the political utility of anti-Japanism in post-liberation Korea. At home, it provided a sense of social cohesion to the war-ravaged society. Abroad, Rhee understood that South Korea's cooperation with Japan was instrumental to Washington's Far East strategy—he thus utilized his antipathy toward Japan as a bargaining chip for attaining greater independence over the terms of American economic and military aid. In this sense, anti-Japanism served as a tool for extortion, however historically grounded.

Rhee's compromises on Japan were, therefore, highly selective. The most telling example is his refusal to purge the government of known collaborators. In 1948, lawmakers from opposition parties formed the Anti-Japanese Fighting Committee (*banil tujaeng wiwonhoi*), in an attempt to oppose rearming Japan and to remove pro-Japan factions (*chinilpa*) from key positions in the government, most importantly the security sector. An editorial in *Kyunghyang Shinmun* commended their proposal to draft a so-called "national traitors law"⁸:

Since liberation, politicians have disregarded a national demand that notorious pro-Japanese Koreans, national traitors, and Koreans who had engaged in torture and sold their nation to Japan be expelled. Under the rule of the American military government, pro-Japanese have penetrated every part of society and become factory managers and government bureaucrats. They now exercise enormous social power... Now the assemblymen who were selected by our own power are dealing with this problem, and we salute their activities.

The bill would have targeted more than half of all high-ranking officers in the

8. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, August 7, 1948.

national police force⁹—the very people whose support Rhee needed to maintain his as-yet flimsy grip on power. Rhee thus declared the law “unconstitutional,”¹⁰ arrested the lawmakers on charges of collusion with the North, and staged demonstrations with right-wing groups such as the National Enlightenment Society (*gukmin gyemong hyeophoi*) to demand the expulsion of “red” politicians, to which the National Police obliged.¹¹

Still, normalization talks with Japan achieved very little under Rhee. When the talks began in 1951, the South Korean delegation demanded that Japan formally apologize for their “immoral” past and pay reparations. The Japanese side refused—they wanted to settle, instead, certain legal issues like the return of ethnic Koreans in Japan and the jurisdiction over territorial waters. Talks regularly broke down. The first round fell apart in 1952, when Rhee—angered by Japanese reluctance to deal with history issues—declared the “Rhee line,” which established the 60-mile zone of waters surrounding the peninsula as “sovereign” territory; this far exceeded international demarcation norms and prompted the Japanese to decry an “act of war.”¹² Another round failed the same year when, outraged by Japan’s paltry offer of restitution, Rhee imprisoned 1,000 Japanese

9. Lawmaker Cho Byeongok stated: “53 percent of all posts above that of lieutenant in the Korean Police Force were held by officers trained under the Japanese, including nine out of the ten Commanders of the Seoul Metropolitan Police.” Cheong 1991, 13.

10. *Donga Ilbo*, January 11, 1949.

11. Records of the Department of State related to the Internal Affairs of Korea, 1945-52, Record Group 59, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration), File No. 895.00/7-1149.

12. Cheong 1991, 22-5. The first note verbale, sent on January 28, 1952, stated: “The Japanese Government does not recognize any such assumption or claim by the Republic of Korea concerning these islets, which are without question Japanese territory.” Research Committee for the Office of Policy Planning and Coordination on Territory and Sovereignty 2019, 92.

fishermen for violating the “Rhee line”; talks were suspended for a year.¹³ Yet another round then stalled in 1953 over statements by Japan’s chief negotiator Kubota Kenichiro in which he asserted that Japan had a right to compensation for spurring development in Korea and that “Korea would have been in a much worse situation if Japan had not colonized it.”¹⁴ Incensed, South Koreans walked out of the conference and did not return for another five years. Following Japan’s tacit retraction of Kubota’s statements, a final round (under Rhee) resumed in 1958 but soon dissolved when the Kishi administration agreed with Pyongyang to repatriate 80,000 Koreans residing in Japan to the North.¹⁵

No tangible progress on normalization was made until Park Chung-hee came to power in 1961. In large part, it was to Park’s credit: his immediate objective was the country’s economic recovery, which he believed necessitated cooperating with Japan. Shortly after the April Revolution that ousted Rhee, Park wrote in his 1963 memoir-manifesto: “One must eat and breathe before concerning himself with politics, social affairs, and culture... Without economic reconstruction, there would be no such things as triumph over Communism or attaining independence.”¹⁶ And it was this narrative of pragmatism that he wielded in forcing reconciliation with Japan: “Though there is no doubt that Japan could be conceived as our foe of yesterday, we must join hands with the Japanese because we need them for our present and future. Isn’t this the direction our

13. V. D. Cha [1996](#), 130.

14. Korea-Japan Relations: Korean Views, Related Documents, Proposed Agreements and Statements, Confidential Reference Materials, (Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1957), FPA Document No. 15, 145-146.

15. Ibid, 131.

16. C. H. Park [1963](#), 156.

country should be heading for the sake of our prosperity?”¹⁷ In 157 speeches Park delivered with a mention of 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.

Opposition storytellers 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 so-called “June 3 resistance movement” was initiated by university and high school students, with slogans such as “stop the humiliating diplomacy” and “stop the government that ignores the people.”¹⁸ The students made clear their collective resentment toward Japan. Student protests also led to the mobilization of the broader public. One estimate suggests that over 3.5 million people participated in anti-Japanese movements from March 1964 to September 1965.¹⁹ Some opposition commentators even compared the normalization treaty to the Eulsa treaty, which Japan used to deprive Korea of its sovereignty in 1905.²⁰

Notably, these opposition storytellers saw postcolonial sovereignty and justice as a key vehicle for postwar unification—the overarching nation-building project. One of the main organizers of the anti-treaty demonstrations Kim Jeongnam later recalled in an oral history series on the movement²¹:

17. “Hanilhoidam tagyeolae jeueumhan teukbyeoldamhwamun [Special statement on the conclusion of the Korea-Japan talks],” June 23, 1965. Presidential Speech Collection.

18. K.-S. Kim 2005, 60.

19. K. B. Kim 1971.

20. V. D. Cha 1996, 141.

21. Hyun 2015, 56-7.

The motive was to oppose the Park regime and to oppose the humiliating diplomacy of the Korea-Japan talks, but I think the thought that the nation would be divided forever after the Korea-Japan talks was subconsciously inside us, so it was a struggle against the fact that the way to unite the nation was getting further and further away... We had just been liberated from Japan, so there was a strong sense of rejection, and the idea of struggling for sovereignty as a continuation of the independence movement of our fathers was strong.



Figure 8.1: Anti-Treaty Demonstration (1964)

On numerous occasions, Park had to deploy the military to disband the anti-treaty demonstrations across the country and restore order. In his emergency address on August 28, 1965, he chastised the student demonstrators—calling them “immature,” “incompetent,” “lazy,” and “thuggish”—and blamed the opposition for their intransigence.²² In this manner, narratives about colonial atroc-

22. “Hakseng daemoe daehan teokbyeoldamhwamun [Special statement on the student demonstrations],” August 28, 1965. Presidential Speech Collection.

ities was forcefully silenced as Park sought, for various strategic purposes, “reconciliation” with Japan.

Although the Park regime was able to override the public, the normalization process demonstrated significant contestation over pro-Japan narratives and policies. The so-called Kim Jong-pil controversy is particularly revealing in this regard. Kim was a powerful official within the Park regime, having engineered the coup, founded the country’s first intelligence agency, and chaired the ruling party. Frustrated by the lack of progress in the treaty talks, Kim had traveled to Tokyo in 1962 as the chief negotiator for the South Korean side, and agreed, in secret, to a financial package with the Japanese foreign minister Masayoshi Ohira. This secret agreement stipulated that Japan pay a total of \$600 million to South Korea, in the form of economic aid and loans but not colonial restitution. When the Kim-Ohira memo was leaked in 1963, however, it triggered severe public outcry.²³ Even though Kim was eventually removed from the negotiations and “exiled,” many came to view the normalization process with intense suspicion and fear that the Park regime would secretly cut a deal with Japan, at the expense of the nation’s honor.

Notably, Japanese apologies had limited impact in transforming 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.²⁴ 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

23. V. D. Cha [1996](#), 135.

24. Fifield [2015](#).

effect,” noting that he had been the first Japanese official to ever apologize.²⁵ Notwithstanding the state’s efforts to aggrandize Shiina’s apology, the wider society continued to view Japan as immoral and dangerous. A series of surveys demonstrated the public’s strong and lasting antagonism of Japan. Ten years after normalization in a 1975 poll by *Joongang Ilbo*, South Koreans rated Japan as the third most “reviled” country—after the Soviet Union and China.²⁶ Another three years later in a 1978 poll by *Chosun Ilbo*, more than half of the respondents said they distrusted Japan; a third were unsure.²⁷

The link between anti-Japanese and anti-authoritarian forces grew even more salient under the Chun Doo-hwan regime. Chun seized power after orchestrating a particularly brutal crackdown of the Kwangju Democratic Movement in May 1980. Amid growing domestic instability, Chun imposed martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, and banned all forms of political activity, including periodically enforcing a media blackout. Under the banner of “clean-up campaign,” Chun closed down 172 magazines and journals for promoting “social decay.”²⁸ By the time he was officially inaugurated as the president, more than 800 politicians, 8,500 bureaucrats, and 1,200 trade unionists had been purged.²⁹ By resorting to strict—and at times inhumane—measures to suppress his political opposition, Chun failed to expand his parochial selectorate and win broader civilian support.³⁰ As a result, Chun was continually challenged by

25. “Memorandum of Conversation,” March 15, 1965, Current Korean Problems, Declassified Documents Collection, Department of State, Document No. CK3100006064, 5.

26. *Joongang Ilbo*, August 14, 1975.

27. *Chosun Ilbo*, December 29, 1978.

28. C.-S. Lee 1981, 137.

29. Nagorski 1980.

30. C.-S. Lee 1981, 133-7.

a swarm of opposition storytellers—political dissidents, student activists, and disgruntled intellectuals—who deemed his rule despotic and illegitimate.

Against this backdrop, the contending frames of humiliation and Japanese immorality began to influence the narrative strategies of Chun Doo-hwan, who initiated a campaign of *geug-il*—literally, “overcoming Japan.” Chun had coined the concept in order 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 on January 1, 1983, *Chosun Ilbo* ran 47 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.³¹ On December 17, 1983, the last article of the series showcased the headlines “the need to learn what should be learned.” This, in Chun’s words, 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.”³²

Yet, Chun’s narrative revision found little resonance in the face of repeated controversy over “history issues” in Japan.³³ 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 move-

31. Isozaki 2015, 8. The series ran for a full year over 47 separate issues in *Chosun Ilbo* from January 1, 1983.

32. “Hirohito ilbon-cheonhwang joochoi manchan dapsa [Speech during Dinner with Emperor Hirohito],” September 6, 1984. Presidential Speech Collection.

33. For an overview of the textbook controversy, see C.-S. Lee 1985, 141–53.

ment as a “riot.”³⁴ Moreover, a number of high-ranking Japanese officials made incendiary remarks about the nature of Japanese aggression. Among the most contentious was when the education minister Fujio Masayuki remarked that “Japan’s annexation of Korea rested on mutual agreement both in form and in fact.”³⁵ While the Chun regime’s response to these controversies was largely tamed—most expressed hurt and confusion—popular reaction was far more punishing. One editorial from Yonhap labeled Fujio’s remarks as “abusive,” “absurd,” and “outrageous.”³⁶ Another editorial from *Kyungghyang* opined that “Japan’s arrogant attitude toward Korea” suggested “a likelihood of Japan’s repetition of crimes.”³⁷ Anti-Japanese petitions and rallies broke out across the country and the Japanese ambassador to South Korea received multiple death threats.

Moreover, societal actors criticized the Chun regime for abandoning the pursuit of historic justice for political and economic expedience,³⁸ or more cynically, the survival of his collaborationist regime. To many, that a regime so repressive as Chun’s was *apologized to* by the Japanese—however circuitously³⁹—was a bitter irony. In this light, democracy activists such as Im Jongguk began calling for the “eradication of vestiges of Japanese imperialism and the restoration of national righteousness,” referring both to neo-colonial thought in Japan and

34. H. N. Kim 1987, 500.

35. Lind 2008, 48

36. Yonhap, September 8, 1986.

37. *Kyungghyang Shinmun*, August 8, 1982.

38. C.-J. Lee 1984, 118.

39. On September 6, 1984, Emperor Hirohito said: “it is indeed regrettable that there was an unfortunate past between us for a period in this century, and I believe it should not be repeated.” *Japan Times*, September 7, 1984.

colonial mentality at home.⁴⁰

Narrative contestation during this period generated an enduring 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 storytelling 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 was dependent on the very imperial forces from which it was meant to escape. As scholar Thomas Berger once 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.”⁴¹ *Asahi Shimbun*, too, noted at the time that anti-Japan protests had erupted within the broader scene of popular resistance against authoritarianism.⁴² As a consequence, 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.⁴³

40. Im 1982.

41. Berger 2012, 196.

42. Isozaki 2015, 5.

43. De Ceuster 2001.

8.2 “Anti-Japan” in Transition, 1988-1998

Narrative contestation during the transition to democracy saw two parallel developments: the opposition storytelling elites became more organized on the heels of civil societal development and new frames entered public discourse. Specific issues related to Japan, including justice for the victims of its wartime sexual slavery and forced labor, became focal points for organizing dissent. Transitional leaders Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam were more constrained in pursuing “pro-Japan” policies than ever before, even as they relied on appeals to mercy. Kim would, in fact, resort to “anti-Japan” narratives in an attempt to win back his lost legitimacy. Meanwhile, the *jaeyu* began mobilizing around narratives of South Korean complicity to consolidate postcolonial and transitional justice as a nation-building project.

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 and strength of South Korea’s civil society groups for the first time since their appearance. Just three days after the Peace Parade that mobilized over one million protesters across the country,⁴⁴ a raft of democratic reforms was instituted, spawning a spectacular rise of civil society.⁴⁵ Most notable among Roh’s democratic concessions were the revision of laws pertaining to freedom of assembly and speech—including freeing hundreds of prisoners of conscience—and the introduction of local elections at district levels. The resulting wave of accrediting would prove consequential for reframing “anti-Japan” narratives: not only did the new narrators normalize narratives of

44. Adesnik et al. 2013, 266.

45. S. Kim 1996, 84.

humiliation regarding Japanese impenitence, 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 earlier dominated. 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, "[b]ecause the miseries of war were committed in the name of the Emperor, only the Emperor can provide a lasting apology."⁴⁶ Despite extensive schism among the Japanese elites, Emperor Akihito eventually obliged. Yet, the South Korean public was discontented with the emperor's use of word *tsuseki* to express regret⁴⁷ But when the public found the apology wanting, if not insulting, 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."⁴⁸ Compared to the eager acceptance of Japanese apologies in the years prior, Roh's response was evidently more subdued, shifting the prior emphasis on a need for pragmatism to an appeal to mercy.

Roh's summit with the Japanese prime minister Kiichi Miyazawa in 1992 was equally revealing. A week prior to his arrival in Seoul, a university professor named Yoshiaki Yoshimi asserted that there existed government docu-

46. Weisman 1990, 11.

47. "Tsuseki," meaning "to lament," is a highly unusual and archaic expression in Japanese; it was officially translated to "tongseokeui yeom" in Korean, the meaning of which was widely contested. The expression is not found in Korean dictionary.

48. The New York Times 1990, 17.

ments proving direct involvement of the Japanese imperial army in capturing and coercing women into sexual slavery.⁴⁹ This prompted intense public outcry in South Korea; protesters gathered in Seoul as Miyazawa arrived, demanding him to formally apologize and compensate the surviving women.⁵⁰ Although the summit was intended to address the two countries' growing trade imbalance and North Korea's nuclear development, these issues were completely overshadowed. As one scholar noted, "Instead of launching his Asian initiative, Miyazawa found himself apologizing for Japan's exploitation of comfort women."⁵¹ The public's resentment toward Japan also precluded Roh from extending an invitation to the emperor to visit South Korea. Demonstrably, the country's official narrative about and policy toward Japan was beginning to shift with increasing bottom-up pressures to hold Japan accountable for its past.

Meanwhile, colonial and collaborationist memories became highly visible and salient in public discourse as civil societies proliferated.⁵² Among the new authoritative voices was the Korean Council (*jeongeuiyeon*)—a civil society group founded in 1990. As shown earlier, the group 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.⁵³ In December 1991, it also helped—alongside Japanese civil society—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 United Nations' categorical condemnation of Japan for its wartime abuses

49. See Yoshimi 2000 for the full account.

50. The Los Angeles Times 1992.

51. Hasegawa 2007, 70.

52. S. S. Kim 2003, 81-106.

53. For an overview, see Soh 2013, 42-56.

of Korean women in 1996.⁵⁴ The UN recommendations resembled so closely the demands of the Korean Council that its influence was unmistakable.⁵⁵

These efforts were as much about retelling the victims' stories as seeking Japanese apologies. "Comfort women" victims, some of whom later became activists, often discussed feelings of shame when they first testified in public; but they also mentioned a greater imperative to set the record straight, which they believed the Japanese government was knowingly perverting and the South Korean government, knowingly downplaying. In 1996, victim-activist Jeong Seo-Oon (1937-2004) shared⁵⁶:

I had cut off the articles on the issues of "comfort women" from news papers. I could not bear the attitude of the Japanese government when they said that we were not the responsibility of the government and they did not use any force. I declared to myself. I was once ashamed of myself, but now, I have realized that it should not be me, but the Japanese government which should really be ashamed.

Civil societal activists echoed these sentiments with a more forceful critique of the South Korean government. As one senior member of a Council-affiliate women's rights organization described: "When we first came out, the [South Korean] government didn't listen to us... This made *halmonis* hide even more."⁵⁷ A lawyer-activist also commented that one of the key initiatives of the Korean

54. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Radhika Coomaraswamy, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/45," January 4, 1996, United Nations, E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1.

55. Soh 2013, 42.

56. "Jinsileun balkhyeojeyoya hapnida [The truth must be told]," March 28, 1996. Hanguk saengjonja jeungeon [Testimony by living Korean victims], War and Women's Human Rights Archive, Document No. IT00001570-C15 (6321), 22.

57. Author interview, May 29, 2019.

Council was to demand the government to recognize and assist living “comfort women” victims and their families.⁵⁸ A legislation to this effect eventually passed in 1993.⁵⁹

Another important new storyteller in this period was the Institute for Research on Collaborationist Activities (*minjok munje yeonguso*). Founded in 1991, the Institute’s main endeavor was to expose those—particularly active politicians—who collaborated during the colonial period. To this end, it published biographies of ninety-nine members of the “pro-Japan faction” (*chinilpa*) in 1993, which invigorated memory debates about the colonial residues of contemporary South Korea.⁶⁰ (In 2009, three volumes would be published under the title *Biographic Dictionary of Pro-Japanese Figures* (*chinil inmyeong sajeon*), covering 4,389 individuals.⁶¹) The Institute’s success in galvanizing public interest also elicited adjacent efforts toward shedding light on colonial-era collaboration, including the Pro-Japan Research Institute (*chinil munje yeonguhui*), which brought together scholars and journalists to “popularize” histories of collaboration in public discourse. Together, these groups held public seminars on questions of decolonization, including on collaboration (1992, 1993), illegitimacy of normalization (1995), veterans policy (1996), and Japan policy (1997).⁶²

58. Author interview, June 11, 2019.

59. Iljaeha ilbongoon wianbuae daehan saenghwalanjeong jiwonbop [Act on Livelihood Stability and Memorial Services for Sexual Slavery Victims for the Japanese Imperial Army], June 11, 1993. Act No. 4565.

60. Caprio 2006.

61. Kim and Fine 2013, 131. The institute had originally announced an increase to 4,776 individuals in 2008. R. Kim 2008. But upon further review, 3 cases were excluded and 384 cases were classified as “controversial.”

62. The Center for Historical Truth and Justice 2024.

Underlying the widening and deepening of anti-collaborationist narratives was a larger movement for “historical settlement” (*yeoksa cheongsan*) in the wake of democracy. One historian noted in this regard: “It was a very complicated situation, and people wanted to point fingers at everybody—the Japanese, the Americans, the traitors (*maegugno*). I think it was seen as a necessary step towards becoming a modern country (*seonjinguk*).”⁶³ Others also described the shared feeling within the academic community of growing “voice opportunities” (*malhal gihoi*).⁶⁴ Yet, as one scholar put it more critically, this was a false desire to label “who was a hero and who was a traitor... In a way, this was also historical revisionism, because collaboration had been so widespread in the colonial period. But people wanted to believe otherwise.”⁶⁵

As new storytelling elites rekindled—and in many ways redirected—debates about Japan, South Korea’s official 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 prison⁶⁶—and a series of institutional reform that removed the government’s ties to the military, curbed the authority of the country’s central intelligence agency, and revised the controversial National Security Law. At the same time, the campaign involved symbolic measures including the dismantling of the former imperial Japanese building and restoring Korean-language names

63. Author interview, June 12, 2019, in Korean.

64. Author interview, October 7, 2022, in Korean.

65. Author interview, October 5, 2022.

66. V. D. Cha [1993](#), 854.

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 the unfortunate and backward legacy... [In this effort,] we began to demolish the former Joseon-Governor Building—a remnant of Japanese colonial rule—to correct history and establish national spirit.”⁶⁷ 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.



Figure 8.2: Demolition of Joseon-Governor Building (1995)

Crucially, renewed controversies over Japanese impenitence and domestic political crises in 1995 forced Kim to intensify his campaign, but neither initiated it. Abroad, provocative statements by senior Japanese officials were steadily

67. “Saehae gukjeong oonyeongae gwanhan yeonseol (yeoksa baroseoogiwa sarlmeui jil gae-seon) [New Year’s address (Historical rectification and improving quality of life)],” January 9, 1996. Presidential Speech Collection.

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.⁶⁸ At home, the “slush fund” scandal incriminated Kim in a massive corruption case involving his predecessor Roh.⁶⁹ According to a *Donga* opinion poll in December 1995, Kim’s record-high approval rating had plunged to 33.4 percent as a result; the opposition was now leading the ruling party by a margin of 16.6 percent just four months before the general elections.⁷⁰ In this context, the escalation of “historical rectification” was far from surprising. Kim’s lukewarm responses to Japanese provocations and decision to forego legal action against his predecessors were being reinterpreted signs of his complicity and moral compromise.⁷¹

To recover his legitimacy, Kim announced a string of policy reversals in 1995-1996. In 1995—barely months after the landmark Murayama statement⁷²—Kim issued a joint declaration with then Chinese president Jiang Zemin, which criticized Japan for its continuing lack of contrition.⁷³ Later that same year, Kim also arrested his predecessors, Chun and Roh, on various charges including insurrection, despite formerly arguing that use of force during a national emergency is “a typical act of government.”⁷⁴ Then in 1996, Kim resumed military exer-

68. Kristof 1995, 14.

69. Koh 1996, 54-5.

70. *Donga Ilbo*, December 26-27, 1996.

71. Choi 2005, 479.

72. This statement by then Japanese prime minister Murayama Tomiichi is considered the most extensive apology by a sitting Japanese official to date. Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, “On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war’s end,” August 15, 1995, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html>.

73. Betzler and Austin 1997, 590.

74. “Charges Dropped in Kwangju Insurrection Case,” Daily Report: East Asia, July 18, 1995,

cises near the disputed islands of Dokdo (Takeshima), vowing to “sternly deal with” Japan.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

The downward spiral in South Korea-Japan relations under the Kim administration was noticeable in growing popular resentment of Japan. In a 1996 joint survey by RAND and *Joongang Ilbo*, South Koreans ranked Japan as the second most disliked country after North Korea—next to Libya and Iran.⁷⁷ This was notable, particularly as the conservative elites had begun pointing to the looming threat of China: in another poll by *Joongang Ilbo* that same year, 60% of respondents said Japan posed the gravest threat to South Korea, followed by China at 18.9%.⁷⁸ A RAND poll confirmed these results, with the public ranking Japan as the greatest future danger to Korea’s military security at 54%.⁷⁹

Narrative contestation during this period was marked by dynamic and conjoint processes of framing and accrediting. The emergence of civil society rekindled debates that had once been stifled, emboldening the public to seek greater representation of their counter-narratives and, in the process, re-scoping the pool of authoritative narrators. These newly accredited voices, then, began to reshape the narrative boundaries by tying narratives of humiliation (about

FBIS, File No. FBIS-EAS-95-137, 34.

75. The expression Kim used was to “fix the unruly hair” (*beoreujangmeorireul gochida*).

76. S. Yoon 1996, 517-8.

77. Lind 2008, 80.

78. Lind 2008, 83-4.

79. Levin 1999, 18.

Japanese impenitence) with those of shame (about South Korean complicity). In this new colonial-authoritarian frame, grievances against Japan and grievances against the state were mutually supportive; post-colonial reckoning required post-authoritarian justice. It was as new narrators entered stage and their narratives of humiliation and shame found broader traction that, for the first time in South Korean history, "anti-Japan" narratives truly began to bind.

8.3 "Anti-Japan" and Democracy, 1998-

As democracy consolidated, new narrative boundaries formed around "anti-Japan," which bound narrators in different ways. Progressive storytellers relied on narratives of colonial-authoritarian collusion to underscore the tainted legacies of conservative elites, while conservative storytellers sought to overcome these narrative constraints by dealing with Japan in secrecy. Time and again, efforts to deepen cooperation with Japan—despite overwhelming geostrategic incentives—failed to garner sufficient domestic support. Instead, "anti-Japan" narratives and the attendant pursuit of justice thus became dominant over time. It is only after years of policy failure by the progressives as a governing party that the potency of their "anti-Japan" narratives have waned, as the public increasingly saw them as a partisan weapon rather than a genuine priority.

This pattern of partisan binding is most clearly illustrated under the first progressive administration of Kim Dae-jung, who was arguably the most successful in seeking reconciliation with Japan. Much as his predecessors, Kim faced daunting challenges that drew him closer to Japan. First, Kim inherited the Asian Financial Crisis, which had unraveled in the last year of the Kim Young-

sam administration. In managing the crisis, Japanese financial assistance was critical—in fact, Japan provided the most generous sum of \$10 billion, in the form of a rescue package and loans.⁸⁰ Second, Kim Dae-jung relied on Japan for the success of his “sunshine policy” (*haetbyeot jeongchaek*, see Chapter 5). Two important aspects of Kim’s strategy to break the diplomatic gridlock with North Korea were to facilitate the normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea and to obtain Japanese economic assistance for sustaining the Korean Peninsula Energy Development (KEDO) project. Incentives to improve ties with Japan were paramount.

Unlike his predecessors, however, Kim’s conciliatory narratives and policies toward Japan were far less constrained by the new hegemonic frame—to be pro-Japan was to be “undemocratic.” In 1998, he met with the Japanese prime minister Obuchi Keizo and promised “a future-oriented relationship based on reconciliation.”⁸¹ In their joint declaration, they pledged, among others, increased exchanges in security, economic, and cultural domains; the co-hosting of the World Cup in 2002; and cooperation on North Korea. To facilitate the two countries’ reconciliation, Kim delivered a speech in the Japanese Diet, in which he plainly understated the nature of Korean grievances against Japan: “Japan and Korea have historically had an unhappy relationship, with Japan invading Korea for seven years about 400 years ago and colonizing Korea for 35 years at the beginning of this century. It’s ridiculous to think that less than 50 years of unfortunate history makes an entire 1,500-year history of exchange and cooperation

80. Moon and Suh 2005, 583.

81. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, “Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration A New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-first Century (or “Kim-Obuchi Declaration”),” October 8, 1998, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/korea/joint9810.html>.

meaningless.”⁸² In this manner, Kim attempted to “move past” their unsavory history by downplaying the weight of unsettled historical legacies.

Crucially, Kim encountered similar, if not worse, controversies involving Japanese acts of impenitence during his tenure. In 2000, for example, a group of conservative historians published a *New History Textbook* (*atarashii rekishi kyokasho*), which whitewashed and glorified Japanese imperial history. South Korean media described the “revisionist textbook” (*woegok gyogwaseo*) as a sign of Japan’s growing “chauvinism”⁸³ as well as South Korea’s continuing “lack of self-respect” (*baealyi eopda*).⁸⁴ Starting in 2001, then Japanese prime minister Koizumi Junichiro even began paying annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, to much furor in South Korea.⁸⁵ A *Kyunghyang Shinmun* editorial questioned: “How insignificant must Japan deem South Korea that its prime minister could stir up such national sentiments days before a trip to Seoul?”⁸⁶ Cognizant of the public’s shock and outrage, Kim implored Koizumi to “[express] condolence [to the victims of past wars] without causing political troubles.”⁸⁷

Yet, even as anti-Japan protests were spreading like wildfire, public backlash in South Korea was almost exclusively targeted at Japan. The symbols the public deployed in these protests were strikingly patriotic in fact. In a highly pub-

82. “Ilbongukhoi yeonseol (21segieui saeroun hanil dongbanja gwangye guchuk) [Address to the Japanese Diet (Building a New Japan-Korea Partnership for the 21st Century)],” October 8, 1998, Presidential Speech Collection.

83. *Joongang Ilbo*, July 9, 2001.

84. *Chosun Ilbo*, April 6, 2001.

85. He visited on August 13, 2001, April 21, 2002, January 14, 2003, January 1, 2004, October 17, 2005, and August 15, 2006.

86. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, October 11, 2001.

87. *Asahi Shimbun*, October 15, 2001.

licized protest against Koizumi's visit, for example, twenty Korean men from a civil societal organization "Save the Nation" cut off a finger each.⁸⁸ The act, a common ritual among South Korean gangsters to pledge loyalty, was intended to exhibit devotion to the state. Conspicuously absent in these protests were charges of collusion against Kim for "selling the country"—what 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.⁸⁹

Not all progressives pursued this course, however, opting instead to rally the colonial-authoritarian narrative toward reinforcing their democratic credentials. This was true of Roh Moo-hyun. Less than a year since his inauguration, Roh was impeached by the conservative-held national assembly for a minor violation of election laws.⁹⁰ Battling this affront to his legitimacy, Roh took a drastic executive decision and made public large swaths of confidential documents related to the 1965 normalization treaty and established a Joint Private-Public Committee on Measures Pursuant to the Publication of Documents on South Korea-Japan Talks (*mingwan gondong wiwonhoi*) to revisit the settlements.⁹¹ The

88. Kirk 2001.

89. Ku 2016, 88.

90. Len 2004.

91. The Committee reasoned that "the Claims Settlement Agreement [in the 1965 Treaty] cannot be considered to have fully resolved the inhumane and criminal acts involving state power, such as the Japanese military comfort women issue, and the Japanese government remains liable," *Mingwan Gondong Wiwonhoi* 2005, 1. Also see "Agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims and on economic co-operation (with Protocols, exchanges of notes and agreed minutes)," Japan and Republic of Korea, June 22, 1965, United Nations Treaty Collection, No. 8473.

declassified documents demonstrated that then leader Park Chung-hee had funneled the “compensation” provided by Japan for the victims of its colonial and wartime crimes toward public infrastructural projects.⁹² This was a remarkable narrative maneuver: it redirected 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.⁹³ In his March 1 Independence Movement speech in 2005, Roh strongly pressed on Japan “to discover the truth about their past, reflect on it and make a genuine apology as well as reparations if need be.”⁹⁴ Having urged this just two weeks earlier, Roh had “no choice but to sternly deal” with Japanese impenitence when yet another controversy over the “history issue” emerged.⁹⁵ On March 16, 2005, the local parliament of Shimane Prefecture in Japan announced “Takeshima Day,” marking the disputed territory Japanese. For many in South Korea, Dokdo (Takeshima) was a national symbol of Japan’s colonial violence, because it was the first Korean territory annexed by Japan in 1905.⁹⁶ Incensed, Roh called the move “an act that denies Korea’s complete liberation” and announced various punitive measures that culminated in a “diplomatic war” against Japan.⁹⁷

92. Card 2005, 2.

93. Rozman and Lee 2006, 768-9.

94. “Je 86 joonyeon ginyeomsa [86th Commemorative Speech for 3.1 Independence Movement],” March 1, 2005. Presidential Speech Collection.

95. Rozman and Lee 2006, 779.

96. Choi 2005, 471. Wiegand 2015, 355.

97. “Hanilgwangyewa gwanryeonhayeo gukmin yeoreobunggye deurineun geul [A letter to

These efforts were emboldened by ongoing civil societal initiatives for post-colonial justice. Aside from Roh's activism, "anti-Japan" movement during this period had been "bolstered by anti-war sentiments [amid the Iraq war]"⁹⁸ and "the rise of feminism."⁹⁹ These culminated in outbursts of "anti-imperial" protests, variously targeting the United States and Japan.¹⁰⁰ The confluence of these factors was evident in a speech delivered by the Korean Council spokesperson Yoon Jeong-ok in 2003¹⁰¹:

When we came out with this "comfort women" issue, it was itself a challenge to the values and order on this planet, where men have been driving history. There are still wars in the world, and maybe it's a natural consequence of the values and order that have been mobilized by men...

In 2001, after the simultaneous terrorist attacks in New York City, President Bush seemed eager to go to war. Afghanistan was devastated, and Iraq collapsed in such a futile way. And now Syria is in the cross-hairs, and they are beating the drum for North Korea.

When I think about these wars that are still going on, I think about what *we* should be doing. Is it a good idea to just demand apologies and reparations for our damage and pain, while being indifferent to the pain of the victims of the wars we fought, now that they are over? Or is it a good idea to think of the women and children who are being victimized in Afghanistan and Iraq as our problem, and at the same time demand an apology and compensation from the Japanese government for the damage caused by the war?

Meanwhile, Roh also began to institutionalize colonial-authoritarian nar-

citizens regarding the relationship between Korea and Japan]," March 23, 2005. Presidential Speech Collection.

98. Author interview with a historian, September 30, 2022.

99. Author interview with a civil society activist, October 12, 2022, in Korean.

100. Author interview with a historian, September 30, 2022.

101. Jeongeuiyeon [The Korean Council] 2003, 8-9, my emphasis.

ratives 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 bill for the Basic Act for Coping with Past History for Truth and Reconciliation; with an expansive mandate, its Commission scrutinized century-long abuses against anti-Japan and pro-democracy activists, ranging from death, injury, to disappearance.¹⁰² That same year, two investigative bodies—one presidential, another civil societal¹⁰³—also released reports identifying individuals with collaborationist histories; among the most controversial subjects of inquiry was former president Park Chung-hee. 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.¹⁰⁴ These concerted efforts helped cement the counter-narratives 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 debates.

Predictably, these partisan narrative bounds would come to bind conservative leaders to far more punishing standards. For 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 2012.¹⁰⁵ This

102. For an overview of the bill, see Hanley [2014](#), 156–60.

103. 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.

104. 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.

105. The agreement included the General Security of Military Information Agreement and the

backfired massively when it was discovered that the deal had been negotiated in secret and only made public the day before its signing. Immediately, the public took to the streets and denounced the deal as “selling out the country.”¹⁰⁶ The opposition spokesperson Park Yong-jin railed: “[the Lee administration] is proving pro-Japanese to the bone” (*bbyeotsokkaji chinil*).¹⁰⁷ For the societal actors, that the deal had been struck so quickly and 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.¹⁰⁸ 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.¹⁰⁹

This incident was notable for two reasons. First, it demonstrated how narrative contestation 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, including erecting a statue in front of the Japanese embassy by the year’s end. 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.¹¹⁰ Yet, when the deal proved untenable, he immediately reverted to anti-Japan rhetoric and policy. Barely two months after its breakdown, Lee orchestrated a surprise visit

Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreement.

106. J.-Y. Kim 2018, 49.

107. *Segye Ilbo*, June 29, 2012.

108. Choe 2012b.

109. Hwang, Cho, and Wiegand 2018, 698-9.

110. Choe 2012a.

to Dokdo (Takeshima) and relied, ironically, on his progressive predecessor's narrative of sovereignty to legitimize his about-face on Japan.¹¹¹

Second, it showed the constraints facing the New Right movement in curbing progressive dominance over national storytelling. Besieged by Roh's efforts toward "historical settlements" (*yeoksa cheongsan*), conservative storytelling elites had re-mobilized under the new banner of the New Right to contest the now-hegemonic "anti-Japan" narratives. This culminated in a series of controversial publications, including the aforementioned *Reconsiderations of Korean History Before and After Liberation* (*Haebang Chonhusaewi Chaeinsik*). In its preface, Park Ji-hyang questioned the analytic utility of "colonial collaboration," noting instead its political abuse by the progressive actors.¹¹² In the chapters that followed, writers spoke of Japan's contributions to South Korea's economic miracle—the so-called "colonial modernization theory" (*shikminji geundaehwaron*)—and downplayed Japan's colonial exploitation.¹¹³ Yet, these new frames found limited resonance within the broader populace and did little to shield Lee from allegations of "selling out the country." By 2008, Kim Il-young—a key ideologue within the movement—called it "dead."¹¹⁴

Progressive storytellers also punished Lee's successor Park Geun-hye for seeking conciliatory policies with Japan in breach of her partisan narrative boundaries. After years of distancing from Japan—and consciously so—she reached the "comfort women" deal with then Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo in

111. The ruling party called Lee's visit "a meaningful demonstration of Korea's will to defend its territory." Ser [2012](#).

112. J.-H. Park [2006](#), 11.

113. S. Yang [2021](#), 900-1.

114. Y. Jang [2008](#).

2015.¹¹⁵ Tokyo agreed to pay 1 billion yen toward assisting the 46 living victims, and a joint declaration stated that the issue had been settled in a “final and irreversible” manner. Calling the deal “humiliating diplomacy” and “diplomatic collusion,” the Korean Council for comfort women refused the funds on the grounds that they are not legal reparations but veiled payouts to silence the victims.¹¹⁶ One victim-activist, Kim Bok-dong (1926-2019) criticized both governments¹¹⁷:

Without even talking to us victims about what the two governments have discussed, I really can't understand how they can say that they came to an agreement. We are not beggars... Why would we have been fighting until now if it was going to be settled ambiguously like this? If they are going to apologize, then do it properly, and if the Korean government wants to resolve the issue, then do it properly.

Other victim-activists shared Kim's reproach, stating that “it is not a matter of money,”¹¹⁸ “they made an agreement just between themselves then lied to us,”¹¹⁹ and “we are the victims.”¹²⁰ In demonstrations across the country, protesters compared the “comfort women” deal to the normalization treaty of 1965, which

115. See also “Reply of the Government of Japan to the Letter Sent by the Special Rapporteur for Follow-up to Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee Dated 19 April 2016,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000235398.pdf>.

116. Choe 2015. See also “Position on Reply of the Government of Japan to Letter Sent by the Special Rapporteur for Follow-up to concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee dated 19 April 2016,” The Korean Council, May 12, 2017.

117. The Korean Council, Written submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 63rd Session 63 Session (15 Feb 2016 - 04 Mar 2016), United Nations Treaty Body Database, File No. INT_CEDAW_NGO_JPN_22816_E, 43.

118. Lee Yong-su (1928-), Ibid, 44.

119. Lee Ok-seon (1928-), Ibid.

120. Kim Gun-ja (1928-2017), Ibid.

the president's father and former president Park Chung-hee had similarly rammed through without public consultation.¹²¹ The agreement unraveled in less than two years of its signing 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.¹²²

In this way, the colonial-authoritarian narratives became imprinted in public discourse. With Park ousted from office for corruption, the incoming Moon Jae-in administration condemned the deal as well as the broader *chinilpa*—pro-Japan faction of the South Korean elite—deemed responsible for the deal.¹²³ Upon taking office, Moon appointed a team of independent investigators, which in late 2017, concluded that the deal was made without requisite consultation of the victims.¹²⁴ While Moon did not officially scrap the deal, he took steps to effectively dismantle it, including calling the deal "inconclusive"—as opposed to "final and irreversible," which the deal stipulates—and shuttering the Japanese-funded foundation tasked with disbursing the donation.¹²⁵ In doing so, Moon linked the failure of representation to weak "democratic procedural legitimacy" of the deal, drawing from an earlier frame that such authoritarian deals were invalid because they did not represent the true wishes of the victims or the demo-

121. Y.-H. Park 2015.

122. Le 2019, 631.

123. Choe 2019.

124. Task Force on the Review of the Korea-Japan Agreement on the Issue of "Comfort Women" Victims, "Report on the Review of the Korea-Japan Agreement of December 28, 2015 on the Issue of "Comfort Women" Victims," December 27, 2017, https://www.mofa.go.kr/upload/cntnts/www/result_report_eng.pdf, 24.

125. Yi and Kim 2018.

cratic norms with which South Korea now identified itself.¹²⁶

Today, "anti-Japan" narratives sustain partisan patterns of narrative coercion. For the progressives, they became a narrative tool to galvanize public support and alienate conservatives. Their narrative that past pro-Japan policies were anti-democratic gained wide traction, because of the very historical context in which Japanese impenitence came to be associated with South Korean dictatorship. For the conservatives, on the other hand, 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 contestation, because the public viewed them not only as collaborationist, but deeply authoritarian.

126. Delury [2018](#), 58.

CHAPTER 9

TAIWAN

To highlight the processes of narrative contestation, I divide my case study into three periods to mark the distinct stages of contestation: (1) "anti-Japan" under dictatorship, 1945-1988; (2) "anti-Japan" in transition, 1988-1992; and (3) "anti-Japan" and democracy, 1992-. Each period is marked by a shift in the nature of the interactive process between competing official and counter narratives vis-à-vis Japan over "history issues." I leverage these subcases to systematically examine the role of storytelling elites and the narrative strategies they adopted to contest the official narrative and policy; in doing so, I also consider how perceptions of Chinese threat interplay with my explication. Finally, while the periods serve to demonstrate the mechanisms at play, they must be seen collectively to understand the nature and scope of "colonial nostalgia" in Taiwan today. For this reason, I conclude with a brief and holistic assessment of "pro-Japan" narratives in Taiwan over time.

9.1 "Anti-Japan" under Dictatorship, 1945-1988

Under authoritarian rule, "anti-Japan" narratives were carefully constrained by the GMD to seek Japanese help in countering the more immediate threat of communism. Much like the South Korean dictators, the Jiang regimes promulgated narratives of "repaying malice with virtue" (*yide baoyuan*) to justify reconciliation and cooperation abroad. At the same time, they instituted "cultural restoration" (*wenhua fuxing*) campaigns to de-Japanize Taiwan. From banning Japanese language and symbols in daily life to controlling school curriculum, the GMD sought to reframe Taiwan as a province and accredit itself as the only author-

itative narrator of Taiwanese history. The *dangwai*, meanwhile, criticized the governments for forcing sinicization. In this long process of narrative contestation, alternative narratives began to congeal around histories of Japanese colonial rule, juxtaposing frames of Japanese benevolence from those of *guomindang* violence.

Much as in South Korea, these more immediate nation-building objectives prevented the GMD leaders from insisting on postcolonial justice; instead, they demanded Japan's recognition and cooperation. In the 1952 Sino-Japanese Treaty, the Chiang Kai-shek regime pledged friendship and magnanimity in its post-colonial relations with Japan, including by relinquishing its claims to reparations.¹ This was notable in part because the *guomindang* was in severe financial distress, having fled the mainland in haste; in fact, before the Japanese surrender, the ROC had compiled evidence of war losses and a list of preliminary demands to seek reparations.² Yet, given its weakened strategic position, the Jiang regime opted to shelve its grievances against Japan and relied on a narrative of pragmatism and magnanimity to justify receiving Japan's help. In turn, Japan established diplomatic relations with the ROC, and not PRC.³

At the same time, the Jiang regime sought to de-Japanize the Taiwanese so-

1. Chih 2015, 147.

2. Zhonghua minguo zhuri daibiao tuan [Delegation of the Republic of China in Japan] 1980, 27.

3. This was also to assuage the United States that Japan would not normalize relations with the PRC. In 1951, then Japanese prime minister Yoshida Shigeru sent a letter to John Foster Dulles: "I can assure you that the Japanese Government has no intention to conclude a bilateral Treaty with the Communist regime of China." "Yoshida Letter on Peace with the Republic of China," December 24, 1951. Modern International Relations: Basic Documents, Volume 1, 288-290. Text available at <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPCH/19511224.O1E.html>.

ciety. Following the exodus in 1949, Jiang began celebrating the "Retrocession Day" (*Taiwan guangfujie*) to mark the transfer of sovereignty over Taiwan from Japan to China.⁴ Each year on October 25, Jiang delivered a public speech, casting Taiwan as a "base of recovery" (*fuxing jidi*); on one such occasion in 1951, Jiang declared: "The stability of Asia is the pillar of world peace; the revival of China is the foundation of stability in Asia; the fortress of Taiwan is the key to the restoration of the mainland and the stability of Asia."⁵ Over time, this narrative linking Taiwan's "return" to a broader Cold War ideological competition consolidated as a nationalist frame, as Jiang continued to promote the "dual mission of building Taiwan and restoring the mainland."⁶

The *guomindang*'s efforts to restore Chinese culture in Taiwan were most evident in the restructuring of the education system and the contents of the newly mandated school curriculum. By banning the use of Japanese in public, and especially in teaching, the regime's language policy effectively silenced all opposition storytelling elites, many of whom had been trained in Japanese.⁷ In doing so, the Jiang regime had effectively rendered illiterate large segments of the

4. This position, held by the *guomindang*, is disputed. Independence activists have long claimed that neither the PRC nor the ROC has legitimate claims over Taiwan. See analysis by Ng Chiautong, the former head of World United Formosans for Independence, Ng 1975, chapter 3. Excerpts are available at <https://taiwanbasic.com/lawjrn/historical-legal2c.htm>.

5. "Taiwansheng guangfu liuzhounian jinian gao quan shengtongbao shu [Letter to the compatriots of the province on the sixth anniversary of the restoration of Taiwan]," October 25, 1951. Zongtong Jiang Gongsi Xiangyanlun Zongli [Collection of President Jiang's Thoughts and Speeches, hereafter Jiang Collection], Volume 32 (Taipei: Zhongzheng Wenjiao Jijinhui), 315-8.

6. "Taiwansheng guangfu ershisizhounian jinian gao quan shengtongbao shu [Letter to compatriots of the province on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the restoration of Taiwan]," October 25, 1969. Jiang Collection, Volume 34, 222-4.

7. Wong 2020, 164. The same was true for those who spoke local dialects.

Taiwanese population with social capital, and automatically disqualified them from holding public office. Moreover, by adopting compulsory education (*yiwu jiaoyu*)⁸ and establishing “national schools” (*guomin xiaoxue*), the Jiang regime centralized control over public education.⁹ Many private schools closed down as a result or came under severe government scrutiny.

As for the content, “anti-Japanese” narratives in national history curriculum were as strident as they were discordant. On the one hand, the Jiang regime celebrated the glorious restoration (*guangfu*) of Taiwan and took credit for defeating the Japanese; in doing so, they also condemned the Manchus for failing to resist foreign invaders and the communists for colluding with the Soviet imperialists.¹⁰ Events like the Musha Incident of 1930—during which Taiwanese aborigines rebelled against Japanese colonial rule—were spotlighted as examples of *Chinese* anti-colonial legacy. Various government guidelines for curriculum planning placed patriotism and Chinese national spirit (*Zhonghua minzu jingshen*) as primary deliverables of education, with Japan playing an important role as a national antagonist.¹¹ On the other hand, the Jiang regime had to downplay Japanese colonial rule as an aberrant and insignificant period in Taiwanese history. After all, memories of Japanese rule and the practices of assimilation (*kominka*) it had instituted only helped to highlight the historical and cultural disconnect between mainlanders (*waishengren*) and resident islanders (*benshengren*). For this reason, Japan became a largely hollow figure in the *guomindang*-mandated history, disappearing for large sections of the world-historical time-

8. Zhang 2005, 65-6.

9. Q. He 1980, 65-70.

10. Jones 2014, 173.

11. Jiaoyubu [Ministry of Education] 1952a, 1952b.

line and appearing only in relation to China to underscore its victory and magnanimity.¹²

These narratives—at once “othering” of Japan at home and claiming benevolence toward it abroad—persisted even in the 1970s when the tenor of relations with Japan began to shift. One notable narrative development was the introduction of a new social studies textbook, which included a chapter titled *Fifty Years of Sorrow* (*beizhuang wushinian*), detailing the resistance and sacrifice of Taiwanese compatriots (*Taibao*) in the face of Japanese colonial conquest.¹³ Beyond the economic exploitation by Japan, the chapter notes¹⁴:

The Japanese wanted to destroy our national spirit (*minzu jingshen*). They mandated that all Taiwan compatriots take Japanese nationality, encouraged them to switch to Japanese names, promoted the Japanese language by force and restricted Taiwan compatriots’ access to secondary and university education. In losing the motherland’s protection and falling into Japanese hands, Taiwan compatriots’ freedom of speech and association were restricted and their lives and property were not secure. The lives of Taiwan compatriots at that time were very hard.

This was a more elaborate and antagonistic depiction of Japanese colonial violence that was previously missing and stood in stark contrast to portrayals of Qing rule in Taiwan.¹⁵ In later versions of the same textbook, Qing’s first provincial governor Liu Mingchuan is depicted as an enlightened ruler, who was consequential for the island’s development, and compared generously with other Chinese heroes—Zheng Chenggong and Chiang Kai-shek—who “restored” Tai-

12. Jones 2014, 174-5.

13. Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1970, 11.

14. Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1970, 13-4.

15. Jones 2014, 178.

wan.¹⁶

Given the momentous shifts in the geostrategic environment of the early 1970s, however, these changes in *guomindang* narratives seem trifling. By 1971, the PRC had overtaken the ROC in terms of diplomatic recognition as the legitimate China, and the trends precipitously worsened in the years thereafter (see Table 6.1). Among the first countries to switch recognition following the ROC's exit from the United Nations was Japan in 1972; and as declassified documents later made clear, it was Japan that lobbied to bring the PRC into the international community.¹⁷ Yet, none of Jiang's speeches until his death in 1975—not even on Retrocession Days—faulted Japan for betraying the ROC. Instead, Jiang spoke ambiguously about the “turbulent” and “confused” international “situation,” highlighting a need for “solemn self-reliance” (*zhuang jing ziqiang*).¹⁸ Even in its official response, the Jiang regime struck a balanced tone, separating the Japanese government and its people in attributing blame for their broken diplomatic ties¹⁹:

16. Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1981, 70-3.

17. “Memorandum: Japan Between the Two Chinas,” Office of National Estimates, February 10, 1971, General CIA Records, Document No. CIA-RDP85T00875R002000110009-4, 1-2. At the same time, the memorandum notes Japan's ambivalent stance on Chinese unification: “There is even some evidence of Japanese interest in various so-called “Free Taiwan” movements, presumably as a potential channel for Japanese influence in the event that native Taiwanese find the strength to challenge Nationalist rule of the island,” Ibid, 5.

18. “Taiwansheng guangfu ershiqizhounian jinian gao quan shengtongbao shu [Letter to compatriots of the province on the twenty-seventh anniversary of the restoration of Taiwan], October 25, 1972, Jiang Collection, Volume 34, 278-80. Also see subsequent speeches in 1973 and 1974 from Chiang Kai-shek Library, Document No. 002-110101-00104-023 and 002-110101-00108-018.

19. Zhonghua Minguo Waijiaobu [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] 1973, 3-6, official translation.

In the interest of peace and stability for China and Japan... [President Chiang Kai-shek] adopted the policy of returning malice with virtue (*yide baoyuan*) after Japan's surrender... [but] the Tanaka Government has unilaterally nullified the Sino-Japanese peace treaty, [and] recognized the Chinese Communist regime... these actions not only demonstrate ungratefulness and perfidy (*wangen fuyi*), bringing shame to the Japanese nation, but also run counter to the wishes of the great majority of the Japanese people... The Government of the Republic of China will continue to maintain friendship [with those Japanese people].

Overall, the Jiang regime's official narratives remained restrained, opting against "anti-Japanese" frames in spite of their mobilizing potential.

Within the broader society, however, a new group of storytellers emerged in the wake of the "Defend the Diaoyutai movement" (*Baowei diaoyutai yundong* or *baodiao*). The movement was organized by student- and scholar-activists in response to the US-Japan Okinawa Reversion Agreement. The agreement stipulated that the United States return control of the Ryukyu and Daito Islands—which included the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai islands—to Japan in exchange for a military base in Okinawa.²⁰ During its negotiation and signing, a series of protests broke out in the United States and Taiwan.²¹ In September 1970, a group of *Zhongguo Shibao* (*China Times*) journalists visited the islands in an act of protest, leaving behind an ROC flag and engravings on the rocks that read: "Long Live President Jiang."²² Later in November, two students from National Taiwan University (NTU) Wang Hsiao-Po and Wang Shun penned an article titled, "Defend Diaoyutai" in *Zhonghua Zazhi* (*China Magazine*), calling on

20. On the overview of the dispute, see Bukh 2020, 129-31.

21. While demonstrations in the United States were more extensive, I focus here on *baodiao* demonstrations that took place in Taiwan. For coverage of US protests, see Cheng 2023, 51-6, and Eng 2017, 11-6.

22. Suganuma 1996, 250.

the government to defend the ROC's territorial integrity.²³

This essay became the inspiration for subsequent anti-Japan student demonstrations in Taiwan. On April 17, 1971, the Defend Diaoyutai Permanent Committee was established at NTU; a day later, the Committee organized protest letters—signed in blood by some 2,000 students—to be sent to the American and Japanese embassies.²⁴ On June 17, 1971, when the agreement was signed, students flocked to the embassies with posters and banners that read: “Diaoyutai belongs to us!” (*Diaoyutai shuyu women*). This marked the first public protest that the Jiang government approved under martial law.²⁵



Figure 9.1: “Defend Diaoyutai” Protests, Taipei (1971)

23. The essay is reprinted in H.-P. Wang [1996](#), 1-19.

24. Eng [2017](#), 27.

25. Shao [2013](#), 170.

It is worth noting that the counter-narratives within this movement were highly varied, albeit largely pro-unification in tenor.²⁶ On one end of the spectrum were anti-regime frames of the left-leaning nationalists, which criticized the Jiang government for failing to defend Chinese territory and admired Beijing's stronger responses; on the other end were anti-Japan frames of the right-leaning nationalists, which condemned the Japanese for sovereign encroachment. In between were Taiwan-centric narratives that placed less emphasis on unification altogether. To be sure, this split was less pronounced within Taiwan—in favor of rightist frames—as martial law continued to censor any explicitly anti-regime or anti-unification narratives. By late 1972, however, as debates surrounding Diaoyutai spilled over into questions of independence, the GMD started to crack down on the movement, arresting faculty activists on charges of "united front conspiracy" and firing them from their positions.²⁷ Thirteen professors were dismissed on such grounds.²⁸

Crucially, many of the movement's storytellers became key figures in the *dangwai*, mobilizing these very narratives of sovereignty against Japan to forge an opposition platform against GMD.²⁹ Dissident intellectuals in Taiwan established *The China Tide* (*Xiachao*) magazine in 1976, while diasporic *Baodiao* movement activists, such as Lin Xiao-shin, helped institute the Organization for the Support of Democratic Movement in the United States.³⁰ The experience of the movement, combined with diplomatic setbacks abroad, served to "awaken" the nationalist-educated scholars and students, who began to question the "exilic

26. Hsiau 2017.

27. G.-Y. Chen 1982, 35.

28. Shao 2013, 176.

29. Shao 2013, 185.

30. Bukh 2020, 146-7.

mentality” of the GMD. This was true even for the pro-unification intellectuals like Chen Shaoting, who used anti-Japanism as a means to mobilize Chinese consciousness in Taiwan. As one former democracy activist Wang Tuo recalled³¹:

A lot of my friends and I were those who got their education during this movement, and the national consciousness which is surging through society was inspired by the Defending Diaoyutai Movement in those days.

Others confirmed this view, sharing that the “traumatic experience” of the loss of diplomatic and territorial sovereignty in the 1970s forced young intellectuals to look inward³²; and that the networks forged through this mobilizing experience was key to organizing for democratic reforms.³³

Much as in South Korea, early democracy activists in Taiwan looked to its anti-colonial history for inspiration.³⁴ During this period, scholarship on Taiwanese history abounded in dissident publications, and history of anti-colonial struggle in particular. For example, *New Generation* (*Zheyidai zazhi*), carried eight articles on Taiwan’s anti-colonial movements and leaders, compared to three on topics unrelated to the Japanese period; in *Formosa* (*Meilidao*), too, more than half the articles on Taiwan’s history centered on Japanese colonialism.³⁵ In this way, the anti-Japanese resistance, and especially the nonviolent movement in the 1920-30s, became focal points for rationalizing Taiwan’s contemporary

31. Cited in Hsiao [2013](#), 198.

32. Author interview with a former democracy activist, November 2, 2022.

33. Author interview with a sociologist, November 3, 2022.

34. Author interview with a historian, November 8, 2022.

35. Hsiao [2013](#), 202-3.

democratic struggles.³⁶

The *dangwai* storytellers during this period began forging counter-narratives linking Taiwan's anti-Japanese past and democratic—for many, independent—future. In this narrative, the *guomindang* was an "alien regime" (*wailai chengchuan*) just like Japan; for this reason, understanding why anti-Japanese resistance had failed was deemed critical for liberating Taiwan from the Chinese nationalist, authoritarian reign.³⁷ One author wrote that the purpose of postcolonial scholarship was to examine why "under the oppression by alien regimes Taiwanese gave up their sovereignty."³⁸ Another more directly bemoaned the "captive" mentality of the Taiwanese³⁹:

In the past year, we have given the reader the history of various social movements under the Japanese and provided their background information. From these accounts and criticisms we learn a lesson—every time a turning point in history occurred, Taiwanese were always overcome by hesitation...

Owing to this sort of mentality, the Taiwan Cultural Association, the peasant movement, the labor movement, and the campaign for a parliament of Taiwan [under Japanese colonial rule] all began bravely enough, but had a poor ending.

In this manner, dissident intellectuals also criticized the anti-colonial movements of the past for their tactical moderation.⁴⁰ But they maintained that it was this half-century experience of anti-colonial struggle against Japan—whether through uprisings or bargains—that set Taiwan apart from China.

36. Author interview with a former democracy activist, November 2, 2022.

37. Tien 1989, 98-9.

38. Huang 1984, 59-60.

39. Kao 1984, 61, translated in Hsiao 2003, 159.

40. For early such critiques, see Tsurumi 1980, 4-5.

Meanwhile, the successive Chiang Ching-guo administration refrained from politicizing anti-Japanese sentiments and maintained sinocentric narratives. In his first Retrocession Day Speech in 1978, Jiang mentioned Taiwan's anti-colonial resistance movements only in passing and without any reference to contemporary relations with Japan. Instead, he doubled down on pro-unification and anti-communist frames, stressing Taiwan's national status as a "recovery base" (*fuxing jidi*).⁴¹:

The restoration of Taiwan thirty-three years ago has brought the historical life of each and every one of us Chinese and our national culture closer together, linked by flesh and blood, and with sincere feelings. Therefore, everyone in the Taiwan recovery base today has a strong sense of historical mission and a strong sense of national responsibility for Taiwan and China.

These frames persisted throughout his decade-long tenure. In this way, Retrocession Days served the Jiang regime as an opportunity to remind the public of their national duty toward the mainland—and not toward the island. Accordingly, history of anti-colonial resistance only featured to the extent that it helped play up the historical affinities between the two Chinas.

These official narratives were also reflected in the *guomindang*'s revised school curriculum in 1983. The social studies syllabus for primary and secondary schools stipulated that the goal of education was to "cultivate [Chinese] national consciousness," and that learning history, in particular, was to "understand the

41. "Letter to Compatriots of Taiwan Province on the Thirtieth Anniversary of Taiwan's Restoration," October 25, 1978. Chiang Ching-guo Zhengtong Wenwu [Artifacts of President Chiang Ching-guo, hereafter Chiang Ching-guo Library], Guoshiguancang [Collection of the National Museum of History], Document No. 005-010503-00040-006.

development of the Chinese nation.”⁴² Until the change in curriculum in 1993, mandatory schooling thus focused on teaching students Chinese history, with only one section dedicated to the achievements of Taiwan as a “recovery base” and with simplistic and scattered mentions of Japan.⁴³

Narrative contestation during this period generated an unexpected rift between the state and the societal actors. Shocked by the government’s diminished diplomatic standing abroad, the opposition storytelling elites began to question, more vocally, the legitimacy of the *guomindang* at home. The loss of territorial sovereignty over the Diaoyutai served as a focal point for debating the “national question,” pushing the emergent democracy activists to look to Taiwan’s anti-colonial history for answers. Though they differed on the degrees of Chinese identification, pro-democracy forces that came together during this time came to believe that democracy could not be justified without a stronger local, Taiwanese consciousness (*Taiwan yishi*). It was in this effort that histories of Taiwanese anti-colonial resistance were re-discovered as frameworks for understanding the *guomindang* rule.

9.2 “Anti-Japan” in Transition, 1988-1992

Narrative contestation during the transition to democracy saw the beginnings of a narrative turn on Japan. The political opening had allowed new opposition storytelling elites to emerge among native islanders (*benshengren*), who sought Taiwan consciousness separate from China. In this process, Taiwanese collective

42. Liu, Hung, and Vickers 2013, 577.

43. Ibid, 580.

memories of Japan provided a focal point for differentiating Taiwan from China. Aided by the leadership of Lee Denghui—a known Japanophile—who continued to pursue pragmatic policies toward Japan, the earlier “anti-Japan” impetus quietened. Meanwhile, the *dangwai* began mobilizing around narratives of *guomindang* colonialism—often in comparison to Japanese colonialism—to consolidate support for democracy at home and democratic cooperation abroad. Post-colonial justice as a nation-building objective had been overwhelmed by what they saw as a far more immediate concern—that is, democracy.

The lifting of martial law in 1987, combined with the succession of *guomindang* rule in 1988 by a Taiwanese-born politician Lee Teng-hui, fueled the rise of alternative storytellers in search of Taiwanese stories. Until this point, no new political parties were allowed; even when Jiang had promised a relaxation of this rule in 1986, it had hinged on a critical condition that “new political parties must be anticommunist.”⁴⁴ Then on 21 June 1990, Taiwan’s top court ordered all assemblymen who had been elected in China in 1947 and 1948 to retire by the end of 1991.⁴⁵ This was a momentous decision, as Taiwanese voters by then could only elect about 12 percent of lawmakers at the national level.⁴⁶ Under these prior restrictions, any public discussions of the “[colonial and] national question” had to comply with the strict interpretive rules of the *guomindang*, which portrayed Japan as a national enemy and the *guomindang*, a liberator. It

44. Young, J. et al. 1986, 137. This was similarly stipulated in the new National Security Law (NSL). Article 2 stipulated: “Public assembly and association must not violate the Constitution, advocate Communism or the division of the national territory.” For the full text of the law, see International Committee for Human Rights in Taiwan 1987, 7-9.

45. “Shizi di 261 hao” [Interpretation No. 261], June 21, 1990. Court Decisions Collection, <https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/en/docdata.aspx?fid=100&id=310442>.

46. Jacobs 2019, 169.

also meant that depictions of Taiwan often had to be self-derogatory—as one scholar describes, as if “en-slaved by “poisonous colonial legacy” and badly in need of re-Sinicization.”⁴⁷

Lee was uniquely situated in the emergent debates on the “[colonial and] national question” (*minzu wenti*). Not only was Lee a native islander, he was personally attached to Japan, having served in the imperial army himself—a fact that *guomindang*-led military and secret services did not forget.⁴⁸ In fact, from the very early phase of his tenure, Lee sought to downplay and amend the symbolic significance of Retrocession Days: he gave his televised speech not on the day of, but the day before, and spoke about Taiwan’s independent achievements as a model for China, comparing its wealth to the mainland’s poverty. If, under Chiangs, Retrocession Days were celebrated as opportunities to rekindle Taiwanese people’s sense of duty to the mainland—on account of shared anti-colonial heritage—Lee used them to recognize Taiwan’s distinct democratic trajectory.⁴⁹ By 1992, he was even delivering public speeches in Taiwanese Hokkien, breaking a longstanding taboo against endorsing a unique Taiwanese identity. His narratives, in turn, helped de-emphasize Japan’s historical faults, accentuating instead their shared democratic values.⁵⁰

It was in this broader context of nativization (*bentuhua*)—both in the content of the national stories and the identities of the storytellers—that existing narrative boundaries surrounding *guomindang* rule as anti-colonial and liberatory began to break. This was most notable in the cultural artifacts that began to

47. Liou 2019, 172.

48. Kagan 2014, 112.

49. Phillips 2000, 14, 24.

50. Author interview with a historian, October 26, 2022.

circulate the public sphere post-martial law.⁵¹ Among the first examples was *The Lost Garden* (1990) by Shih Shu-tuan (pen-named Li Ang), which explored the role of Japanese colonial legacies on Taiwanese consciousness (*Taiwan yishi*) through its key character Zhu Zuyan, whose recollections of Japanese colonial rule would morph through the brutal experiences of the White Terror.⁵² As one representative from a Taiwanese cultural institution commented: "The more we thought about Japan, the more we felt they were actually good for Taiwan. Of course, they were our colonial ruler, but *compared to guomintang*, they were not so bad."⁵³ This perception became widely shared, as "people started to talk about *er-er-ba* (February 28)... [and] how everything was better, or at least less chaotic, with Japan."⁵⁴

In fact, this narrative of Japanese benevolence had existed in Taiwan before the White Terror. In 1947, Tang Xian-long, a journalist, had described the *guomintang*'s disruptive arrival, comparing the experience to Japanese rule⁵⁵:

Since Chinese officials took over Taiwan, they've plundered, stole, sold, transferred and smuggled... During the Japanese reign, people never locked their doors and never took money lost on the street. Taiwan was for sure becoming a lawful society. However, after the Chinese officials 'robbed over' Taiwan, it was like a clear calm autumn water suddenly disturbed by several massive rocks.

Indeed, from military violence to general social and economic malaise, "restoration" of Taiwan had been turbulent. Gao Wei-min, then a military comman-

51. Liou 2019, 175.

52. The book was translated into English in 2015. A. Li 2015.

53. Author interview with an activist, November 4, 2022.

54. Author interview with a historian, November 8, 2022.

55. Quoted in S.-F. Lee 2014, 39.

der, had recorded in his memoir the violence of ill-disciplined soldiers, who "became unleashed monsters to rob and rape Taiwanese."⁵⁶ On February 27, 1947—one day before the February 28 massacre—a *Mingbao* editorial lamented: "Although we Taiwanese were exploited by the Japanese, we did not have to live with the fate of the plague and famine... Smallpox, malaria, and plague moved here from the motherland."⁵⁷

Besides recovering these stories of Japanese benevolence, the *dangwai* storytellers mobilized anti-colonial frames to demand self-determination from within the ROC. For example, prominent dissident intellectual Chen Fangming promoted the DPP's 1991 platform to establish the "Republic of Taiwan" as a "natural continuation of the anti-colonial movement's commitment to autonomy."⁵⁸ Others also cast the anti-regime protests that preceded *er-er-ba* massacre as a product of Taiwanese *national* consciousness—one that was shaped under Japan. These contending frames of persistent victimization and resistance, in turn, allowed the *dangwai* narrators to recast anti-colonial leaders as their predecessors and define "their own opposition movement as a part of the local tradition of resistance against alien rulers."⁵⁹ Crucially, the nation-building objective that these narratives raised was not justice from Japan, but sovereignty at home.

For this reason, controversies with Japan did not raise nationalist sentiments in Taiwan the way they did in South Korea. A good example in this regard is the "comfort women" issue. In February 1992, a Japanese lawmaker Hideko Ito discovered and published three telegrams describing the dispatch of Taiwanese

56. Quoted in S.-F. Lee 2014, 41.

57. *Mingbao*, February 27, 1947.

58. F. Chen 1992 in Hsiao 2003, 175, note 32.

59. Hsiao 2003, 170.

"comfort women" in Borneo.⁶⁰ Amid public outrage, the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (*Funu Jinyuan Jijinhui*, TWRF) organized rallies outside the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association—its *de facto* embassy—as the civil societal representative for the 66 victims who were identified at the time. In 1992 alone, four major newspapers in Taiwan carried a total of 172 articles on the "comfort women" issue.⁶¹ Still, the Lee administration did not demand a formal apology from Japan until more than a year after the incident. When it finally responded on August 4, 1993, its statement simply read⁶²:

Japanese government [should] apologize and express its remorse (*biaoshi daoqian ji fanxing zhi yi*) once again to all comfort women... [it] should take humanitarian responsibility... [to] deal with the issue of Taiwanese comfort women... and take concrete measures to compensate as swiftly as possible.

Despite lukewarm responses from the Lee administration, the protests did not gain enough traction to fuel a diplomatic crisis. As one TWRF activist recalled⁶³:

At the height of our campaign, the Japanese representatives at Taipei used to come out to see us when we demonstrated outside their building, saying that they would pass on our message to Tokyo. But now they don't come out to see us at all, because they know that Taiwanese society isn't that interested in this issue any more.

Even though an investigative body was established in 1992, little materialized

60. Q. Wang 1999, 235.

61. The newspapers are *Lianhe Bao* [United Daily News], *Jingji Ribao* [Economic Daily], *Minsheng Bao* [People's Daily], and *Zhongyang Ribao* [Central Daily News]. Suzuki 2011, 228.

62. Funu Jiuyuan Jijinhui [Women's Rescue Foundation] 1999, 202.

63. Quoted in Suzuki 2011, 227.

in terms of redress for the victims.⁶⁴

This is especially noteworthy when compared with the movement for justice for the victims of White Terror. In 1987, dozens of domestic and overseas civil organizations, including the Presbyterian Church and the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (*Taiwanren quancu jinhui*), formed the 228 Justice and Peace Movement.⁶⁵ The movement's stated goals were largely threefold: (1) to set February 28 as a "Peace Day" and organize national commemorations; (2) to institute a fact-finding mission and open the relevant archives; and (3) to provide reparations for surviving victims and their families. The Lee administration was initially reluctant to agree to the demands of the movement. During his first press conference on the matter, on February 22, 1988, he questioned the motives of the activists⁶⁶:

Why, at this time, do we dig up this event to discuss, and agitate people with statements such as "Never forget the 228 Incident," and talk of a "Peace Day?" ... Each year, this tragedy is repeatedly brought up... If it is to be "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," our society will never achieve stability. If this issue is to be used for political mobilization, I am personally opposed to that. Why can we not all be quiet on this, would it not be more rational? ... To make progress, we should look forward and not look back.

Still, with the explosion of public demands for action, the Lee administration began building the groundwork for transitional justice. In 1990, the Executive

64. Author interview with a civil society leader, October 31, 2022; author interview with a journalist, October 27, 2022. For the summary of the report, which was published on October 19, 1993, see Taiwan Weianfu Diaochahui [Taiwanese Comfort Women Investigation Committee] 1993.

65. Ererba Shijian Jinian Jijinhui Weituo [228 Memorial Foundation Commission] 2022, 577.

66. Ibid, 573-4.

Yuan formed a special task force to investigate the February 28 massacre.⁶⁷ That same year, the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (*guoli bianyi guan*) announced that high school history textbooks would include coverage of 228. By 1991, Lee was sharing his own witness account of the incident, saying “[t]he time has arisen to mend the scars of 228.”⁶⁸ Compared to his strident rejection of the movement earlier, Lee’s response was evidently more obliging, supplanting his call for rationality with a promise of justice.

Much as in South Korea, narrative contestation during transition was marked by dynamic process of boundary-braking, through the conjoint mechanisms of framing and accrediting. The emergence of civil society rekindled debates that had once been stifled, most prominently regarding post-Retrocession violence by the *guomindang* regime. These newly accredited voices, then, began to break the orthodox narrative boundaries by tying narratives of Taiwanese resistance against Japanese colonialism with those of Taiwanese consciousness against Chinese colonialism and *guomindang* authoritarianism. Histories of Taiwanese anti-colonial activism thus proved useful for the emergent storytellers in precisely the opposite way in which the *guomindang* had mobilized them: they helped accentuate the similarities between the two émigré regimes and, worse, the differences in their influences on Taiwan. As a result, demands for historical rectification and transitional justice did not encompass more broadly issues of Japanese colonial violence, as they did in South Korea (see Chapter 8), rendering “anti-Japan” narratives politically toothless.

67. International Committee for Human Rights in Taiwan 1991, 2.

68. Ererba Shijian Jinian Jijinhui Weituo [228 Memorial Foundation Commission] 2022, 584.

9.3 “Anti-Japan” and Democracy, 1992-

As democracy consolidated, new narrative boundaries were built against “anti-Japan,” binding narrators in different ways. Progressive storytellers relied on narratives of colonial-authoritarian resistance to underscore the tainted legacies of *guomindang* elites, while right-leaning storytellers sought to overcome these narrative constraints by doubling down on “anti-Japan” narratives. In this context, Taiwan not only continued to deepen cooperation with Japan, but also began to embrace more evasive—if not glorified—narratives of Japanese colonial legacies. Today, despite mounting controversies surrounding Japanese historical revisionism, “anti-Japan” narratives carry limited emotional resonance among the Taiwanese public, who see Japanese support—not penitence—as fundamental to the preservation of their democracy.

Taiwan’s relations with Japan continued to prove resilient against the “history problem.” In 1993, then Japanese prime minister Hosokawa Morihiro—representing the first non-Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government since 1955—made an apology in which he portrayed Japan as the aggressor (*kagaisha*).⁶⁹ Yet, this apology triggered a wave of conservative backlash in Japan⁷⁰: in 1994, Japan’s Justice Minister Nagano Shigeto asserted that Japan had fought for “Asian liberation” and that stories of “Nanjing Massacre” were fabricated to taint Japan’s image.⁷¹ That same year, Minister of International Trade and Industry Hashimoto Ryutaro also paid a visit to the Yasukuni.⁷² Such acts of defiance within the

69. Sterngold [1993](#), 2.

70. For a comprehensive list of statements by Japanese politicians regarding the country’s wartime conduct, see Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Tokyo Office [2014](#), 18-34.

71. Sanger [1994](#), 9. Nanjing Massacre took place under Jiang’s rule on the mainland.

72. Sterngold [1994a](#), 8.

Japanese government raised much ire in South Korea.⁷³ Conspicuously, there were no such signs of protest in Taiwan.

In fact, it was around this time that Lee gave the highly controversial interview with the Japanese writer Ryotaro Shiba. During the conversation, Lee described himself as a Japanese before he was Taiwanese; he also claimed⁷⁴:

What the Japanese left in Taiwan at the end of the colonial era was enormous. In addition to criticizing it, we also have to analyze it from a more scientific viewpoint to understand our history better.

Not long after in 1996, the Lee administration introduced new textbooks under the series titled *Knowing Taiwan* (*Renshi Taiwan*), which revised the official “anti-Japan” narratives to this effect. The *society* volume framed Taiwan as a perpetual colony and Taiwanese consciousness as one of permanent resistance against foreign rulers—Japanese or Chinese.⁷⁵ Unlike the traditional coverage of Japan as a national enemy—the contents of which were as simplistic as they were sparse⁷⁶—the *history* volume included lengthy, detailed descriptions of Japanese developmental projects in Taiwan.⁷⁷ As one historian noted, re-narrating Japan as colonial but ultimately beneficial allowed the progressive narrators to “assert Taiwan’s distinct and modern identity that predated the *guomindang*... [that] is

73. Lind 2008, 80.

74. For the full translated text of the interview, see “Taiwan Policy,” July 21, 1994. Congressional Record Volume 140, Number 96, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-1994-07-21/html/CREC-1994-07-21-pt1-PgS7.htm>

75. Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1997b, 45, 55.

76. See Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1994.

77. Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation] 1997a, chapter 7.

not just different [from China] but better.”⁷⁸

These changes in official narratives surrounding Japan were also noticeable in broader debates over transitional justice. Under Chen Shui-bian’s mayoral leadership, the city of Taipei established the 228 Museum in 1998. The contents of its exhibits were telling: not only was there a limited coverage of Japanese wartime crimes—no mention of “comfort women”—they provided extolling narratives about its colonial reign in Taiwan. One plaque read, for example⁷⁹:

[Japan] believed that it was in its interests to improve the island infrastructure, and thus surveyed natural land resources, learned about local customs, developed roads and railways, provided a modern education, improved public sanitation, and set disease control measures. The Japanese also established a legal system and improved public security, raising the general quality of life.

In this narrative, it was Japan’s modernizing project that—as the plaque goes on to claim—“set [Taiwan] apart from China at the time.”⁸⁰ Similar narratives were found in the National Museum of Taiwan History, which reopened that same year. Unlike the 228 museum, exhibits provided far more extensive coverage of the “Japanese period” (*Riben shidai*),⁸¹ while maintaining the “pro-Japanese” tone. For example, one panel argues that Japan colonized Taiwan to “free itself of the dominance of European and American imperialism and safeguard its national security and interests.”⁸² Once it established rule, it continues, Japan

78. Author interview with a historian, November 1, 2022.

79. Suzuki 2011, 239.

80. Ibid, 40.

81. This was an intentional choice, to avoid more politically loaded terms like “rule” (*rizhi*) or “occupation” (*riju*), in describing the period of Japanese reign in Taiwan. Vickers 2013, 25.

82. Vickers 2013, 26.

governed "on the basis of modern reason and scientific principles (*jindai lixing yu kexue yuanli*)," which later became the basis of Taiwanese consciousness.⁸³

At times, these boundary-building efforts to reclaim Taiwanese identity came at the expense of erasing Japanese colonial crimes. A good example is the Kobayashi controversy in the wake of the first progressive leadership by Chen Shui-bian. In 2001, a comic book titled "On Taiwan" (*Taiwanlun*) by a Japanese cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori had been translated and published in Taiwan.⁸⁴ Kobayashi had been the spokesperson for the controversial group called Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*atarashii rekishi kyokasho wo tsukurukai*), which promoted sanitized narratives of Japanese imperial record. In the book, Kobayashi quotes an interview with Chen's advisor and pro-independence tycoon Shi Wen-long, who denies the forced recruitment of "comfort women" in Taiwan (see Figure 9.2). Instead, Shi claims that they were voluntary prostitutes who lived under lofty conditions thanks to the modern hygienic practices of the Japanese imperial army.⁸⁵ In other pages, Kobayashi portrays former president Lee Teng-hui as a beneficiary of the Japanese spirit⁸⁶—an "authentic Samurai."⁸⁷ Together, the two leading figures urge Taiwanese people to better

83. Ibid, 25, 27.

84. The comic book was derived from a serialized comic, titled New Arrogantist Manifesto (*shin gomanizumu sengen*), which was published in Japanese magazine *Sapio*. For a brief overview, see Landler 2001, 3.

85. Kobayashi 2001, 231.

86. Kobayashi 2001, 206.

87. Hwang 2010, 78. That same year, Lee also co-authored a book with Kobayashi, titled *Lee Teng-hui xuexiao de jiaohui* [Lesson's from Lee Teng-hui School], in which they grieve the state of "masochistic history" and how young Japanese men are only taught to be ashamed of Japan. Li and Kobayashi 2001, 139.

appreciate Japanese colonization.⁸⁸



Figure 9.2: "Comfort Women" in *On Taiwan* (2001)

The comic book became a site of narrative contestation between the two dominant political parties concerning Taiwan's postcolonial relations with Japan. *Guomindang* politicians—for the first time serving as the opposition—capitalized on the controversy to attack the Chen administration.⁸⁹ They called for Shi's apology and resignation, as well as for Chen to open an internal probe into officials engaged in similarly disgraceful practices. A collection of essays titled *The Three-Legged Person (Sanjiaozai)*,⁹⁰ published in the wake of this incident, variously labeled Shi and Lee as a "Japanese dog" and "aged imperial subject."⁹¹

88. Kobayashi 2001, 23, 134-5.

89. *Zhongguo Shibao*, February 24, 2001, 5.

90. *Sanjiaozai* is a derogatory term, referring to native Taiwanese who collaborated with the Japanese during the colonial period. S. Li 2001.

91. Hwang 2010, 82, 94, note 49.

One author in the volume, Zeng Jianmin, argued more pointedly that *On Taiwan* was but one example in the mounting evidence of conspiracy between Taiwan's pro-independence camp and Japan's far right militarist forces.⁹² These partisan criticisms led to a rash—and later abortive—decision by the government to ban Kobayashi's entry to Taiwan.⁹³

Pro-Japan voices within the DPP defended Kobayashi based on "free speech" protections and criticized the GMD for politicizing the issue. In a string of responses in *Taiwan Daily* (*Taiwan Ribao*), prominent pro-independence intellectual Song Zelai argued that the public outrage over Kobayashi was manufactured by nationalist media, such as *China Times* (*Zhongguo Shibao*) and *United Daily News* (*Lianhe Bao*), to deny the Taiwanese its right to remembrance.⁹⁴ Others denounced the government's decision to bar Kobayashi from visiting Taiwan, and the potential harm such an overreaction could exact on Taiwan's hard-earned reputation as a democracy.⁹⁵ One such author and pro-independence activist Huang Fu-san wrote⁹⁶:

Kobayashi is only a cartoonist. Because of this small book, the government has decided to ban him from visiting. I think some might therefore equate Taiwan with a communist country where free speech is banned.

The progressive narratives thus centered around the right of Kobayashi to narrate Taiwanese colonial experience, on account of Taiwan's democratic image.

92. Zeng 2001, 20-32.

93. Chu 2001.

94. Hwang 2010, 85.

95. Sun 2007, 790.

96. Quoted in Hwang 2010, 88.

Ultimately, the diplomatic ban was lifted; and Kobayashi vowed never to return to Taiwan unless *he* was offered a formal apology.⁹⁷

This incident was notable for two reasons. First, it highlighted how competing narratives surrounding Japan had congealed along partisan lines. As one feminist activist explained:⁹⁸

When people talked about Japanese colonialism in the past, they often used it to compare it with GMD rule: so, the GMD rulers were the “regressive” and “uncivilized” ones, in contrast to the “progressive” and “civilized” Japanese rulers. Basically, the history of Japanese colonialism is used for political reasons: it’s a counterpart for the GMD. Japanese colonial history is used to highlight GMD wrongs.

Ironically, this meant that even where DPP support was expected—as in the case of the “comfort women” campaign, given the underlying “progressive” nature of its cause—the boundaries against “anti-Japan” narratives prevented Taiwanese progressive elites from seeking postcolonial justice. Second, as a result of how “pro-Japan” narratives became co-opted in broader struggles for democracy in Taiwan, conservative appeals to postcolonial justice found limited public resonance. Indeed, despite general sympathies with “comfort women,”⁹⁹ successive controversies failed to garner sustained mobilization in ways that allowed South Korean activists to inspire government action.¹⁰⁰

Buttressed by converging narratives on Japan’s colonial legacy, bilateral rela-

97. Sun 2007, 791.

98. Quoted in Suzuki 2011, 240.

99. One Taiwanese journalist recalled from the time, “even people who had pro-Japanese views felt uncomfortable seeing Taiwanese leaders portrayed as a mouthpiece for Japan.” Author interview with a journalist, October 27, 2022.

100. Author interview with a civil society activist, October 31, 2022.

tions continued to deepen even as “history problems” became pervasive under successive LDP-led governments. Chen courted Japan to further institutionalize their informal interactions, proposing at various times during his tenure a free trade agreement, a democracy alliance against China,¹⁰¹ and a Japanese equivalent of the 1979 “Taiwan Relations Act.”¹⁰² In turn, Japan established quasi-official military exchanges by sending a major-general of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) to take a post in the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Office in Taipei in 2002,¹⁰³ advocated for Taiwan’s independent membership in international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2003,¹⁰⁴ and upgraded peace on the Taiwan Strait as a strategic priority in 2005¹⁰⁵—each against vehement protests from Beijing.

The hardening narrative boundaries around pro-Japanism were also visible under the *guomindang* leadership of Ma Ying-jeou. Reputed as a prominent “anti-Japanese” politician—he had been a leading student activist in the “Defend the Diaoyutai” (*Baodiao*) movement in the 1970s¹⁰⁶—many expected Ma’s administration to undo his predecessor’s “pro-Japan” policies.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, upon inauguration, Ma had made every attempt to publicize commemorations of war and resistance against imperial Japan.¹⁰⁸ In 2011, he reconstructed the Monument for the Victory of Anti-Japanese War and Recovery of Taiwan in Taipei

101. Noble 2005, 2.

102. Bridges and Chan 2008, 583.

103. Ibid, 588.

104. Ibid, 586.

105. Roy 2005, 201.

106. Ogasawara 2015, 70-4.

107. Sun 2007, 803.

108. Y. He 2014, 490.

with an inscription narrating Taiwan's contribution to China's struggles against Japan. During its unveiling on Retrocession Day, he emphasized the significance of retrocession, and how the return of "stolen" territories to the Republic allowed it to "exist" on Taiwan.¹⁰⁹ In this way, Ma highlighted narratives about Taiwan's history of anti-Japanese resistance—much as his progressive counterparts had done—but with a different nation-building objective: to bring Taiwan back to its Chinese ancestry.¹¹⁰ And he did so while reiterating that these commemorative efforts were intended to instill a "clear understanding" of history among the younger generation—"not to continue the hatred toward Japan."¹¹¹

Although Ma pushed back against the growing pro-independence connotations of anti-colonial narratives, he maintained the "pro-Japan" policies of prior democratic administrations. Under the banner of a "special partnership,"¹¹² Ma pursued and signed a range of bilateral agreements on investment, open skies, and fisheries.¹¹³ The latter was particularly impressive given that the issue had been mired in broader historical and territorial disputes over the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) islands. In 1996, talks over the management of the disputed area had begun; following 17 rounds of talks and repeated failures, it was Ma who would deliver the agreement.¹¹⁴ In fact, in the lead up to its signing, he had repeatedly pledged that he would not "collaborate with Beijing" on the issue.¹¹⁵ In that sense, Ma was doubly bound by the prevailing narratives against "One China"

109. Zongtongfu [Office of the President] [2011](#).

110. Author interview with a former *guomindang* official and historian, November 2, 2022.

111. Zongtongfu [Office of the President] [2012](#).

112. Zhonghua Minguo Waijiaobu [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] [2009](#).

113. Liff [2022](#), 1081.

114. *Taipei Times*, April 13, 2013.

115. *Taipei Times*, February 20, 2013.

and around “pro-Japan.”

Arguably, the boundaries around “pro-Japan” narratives were even stronger than those against “One China.” Even as the public began to increasingly identify themselves as Taiwanese (and Taiwanese only), their preferences for post-war boundaries with China had favored the “status quo” for fear of offending China. Instead, their implicit preference for independence had manifested through an unequivocal support for democratic Japan, on which they had come to rely for historicizing Taiwan’s lineage¹¹⁶ and defending its sovereignty.¹¹⁷ It is unsurprising, then, that Taiwanese affection for Japan has only grown as pressures from China have intensified. Since the first annual poll carried out by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association in 2009, Japan has consistently ranked number one as Taiwan’s “favorite” and “closest” country—with incomparable margins.¹¹⁸ Against this backdrop, even *guomindang* leaders have come to realize that “there is nothing to be gained from messing with Japan” for the sake of postcolonial justice.¹¹⁹

Today, “pro-Japan” narratives serve as a tool for reclaiming Taiwan’s distinct past and carving out its future as a sovereign democracy. With the parallel processes of democratization and Taiwanization, competing narratives about Japan

116. Author interview with a historian, November 1, 2022; with a former democracy activist, November 8, 2022.

117. Author interview with a journalist, October 27, 2022.

118. In the first poll, for instance, 52 percent of respondents ranked Japan their “favorite,”—followed by the United States as a distant second, at 8 percent—and 62 percent felt “closest” to Japan. “Trends in Japan-Taiwan Relations: 2009,” Riben Taiwan Jiaoliu Xiehui [Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association], <https://www.koryu.or.jp/publications/relation/trend/2009/>. Since then, the figures have steadily gone up, reaching a new record high in 2022. Ishida 2022.

119. Author interview with a journalist, October 27, 2022.

became a focal point of contention for democratic nation-building in Taiwan. "Pro-Japan" narratives thus garnered widespread support, precisely because of the context in which Japanese colonial benevolence—both real and imagined—helped distinguish Taiwan's modern identity, resist *guomindang* authoritarianism, and justify its sovereign existence as "One Taiwan." The resulting narrative boundaries also carried unanticipated consequences, however, rendering the progressives indifferent to what were positively progressive agendas, including truth and justice for colonial crimes. In this way, controversies of Japanese impenitence that rocked the rest of Asia found sparse emotional resonance in Taiwan, because many viewed them as an unfortunate impediment to their otherwise burgeoning relations—and by implication, Taiwan's continued democratic survival.

Part IV

Nations After Democracy

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Scholars have long studied the creation and perpetuation of national stories, how they become standardized,¹ settled,² or "quiet."³ Here, I tell the story about how they become bounded through the introduction and development of democracy. It is about the politics of storytelling by and for democratic change, and the political power of the narrative boundaries that are built in the process. The stories from South Korea and Taiwan show that democratic nationalism is not simply about imagining communities, but about fighting for who gets to imagine such communities and how to negotiate the tensions and contradictions in their stories when they inevitably arise.

Scholars have also shown that contests over national stories become particularly stark in the aftermath of collective traumas⁴: 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 stories that allow them to make sense of who they are (in relation to others) and how to behave (in context of the past).⁵ This was the case in South Korea and Taiwan. Reflecting the successive and overlapping traumas, their stories about postwar boundaries (with communist "others") and postcolonial relations (with former imperial "other") have evolved in mirror image.

1. Liu [2015](#).

2. Bonikowski [2016](#).

3. Beissinger [2002](#), 26-32.

4. Hutchison [2016](#).

5. This, in Jennifer Milliken's words, creates a "regime of truth" that demarcates certain modes of being. Milliken [1999](#), 229.

And it was mirror image in two respects. First, traumas of war and colonialism are interrelated in their stories. In South Korea, progressive storytellers spoke of their division from the North and the lack of justice from Japan as direct consequences of American-backed imperialism. In Taiwan, meanwhile, they narrated a sovereign space—distinct from China’s—through the history of Taiwan’s anti-colonial resistance. As a result, each of these stories came to reflect divergent nationalist ideals for South Korean and Taiwanese progressives, instilling in the former a desire for unified Korean autonomy against Japanese-backed American hegemony, while in the latter, an aspiration for independent Taiwanese autonomy through American and Japanese help.

Second, these stories evince South Korea and Taiwan’s moral reckonings over their own authoritarian pasts. Today, these national stories hold political sway precisely because they were bound up in broader struggles for democracy. When South Korean progressives call for postcolonial justice, it does not only remind of Japanese brutalities and impenitence, but of South Korea’s own collaborationist dictatorship. Similarly, when Taiwanese progressives speak of post-war independence, it evokes memories of oppression by successive imperial regimes—including by the *guomindang*. Implicit in these narratives is that these earlier objectives, whether cooperation with Japan or unification with China, were not only anti-national, but anti-democratic.

These findings emphasize the multi-vocality and mutability of nationalism. Leaders, opposition elites, and publics espouse different narratives at any given point in time. By centering on the dynamics of narrative contestation, this project explicates how the various contending narratives came to coexist and became bounded by democracy. In so doing, this project also advocates for a

more interactive and relational approach to studying “national” narratives, one that is careful not to assume stability in their political meaning, between narrators and over “narrative time.”⁶ At the same time, the politics of storytelling captured here indicate that possibilities for narrative change attenuate when there are no deliberate acts of narrative contestation. Democratization does not necessarily accompany the state’s efforts to revise national stories; this is the work of those who seek to alter the status quo, both in the narratives and the institutions that profess to represent them. Stories they craft help reimagine—and thus, re-found—nations after democracy.

10.1 Nationalist Competition?

These insights speak to ongoing developments in nationalism, peace, and democracy in East Asia. Nationalism has been a rising force in the region since the end of the Cold War, despite globalization.⁷ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has had “no choice but to put aside the banner of communism... [instead] using nationalism as its societal glue.”⁸ The same has been true for North Korea, whose *juche* ideology has increasingly deviated from its Marxist-Leninist underpinnings in favor of nationalistic appeals.⁹ Meanwhile, rightists in Japan have steadily shored up imperial nostalgia as “apology fatigue” has set in.¹⁰ In this context, the boundaries of South Korean and Taiwanese democratic nationalisms do not bode favorably for taming na-

6. Ricoeur 1984, 54.

7. Skya 2015, 42.

8. Z. Wang 2014, 119.

9. G. Lee 2003, 110-1.

10. Richter 2008, 5.

tionalist conflicts in East Asia as they heighten competitions over territory and sovereignty.¹¹

This, in turn, has implications for peace. Even as Taiwan, under successive administrations, has sought to maintain the status quo, its policy options have increasingly winnowed in the face of intensifying US-China competition. And as the impetus for nationalist pandering has grown on all sides, so too has the perception that conflict is inevitable.¹² Meanwhile, even as South Korea, under successive administrations, has rallied for unification, its policies appear to have reached a stasis. Neither engagement through “sunshine” nor containment through sanctions has worked, but partisans continue to argue for more “sunshine” or more sanctions.¹³ It is worth noting that no major figure or party has ever proposed a two state solution on the Korean peninsula—even as public attention to unification issues have attenuated in the last seven decades¹⁴—signifying the embeddedness of “One Korea” narratives.

These nationalist underpinnings of South Korean and Taiwanese democracies also elucidate the “democratic glass ceilings” at home.¹⁵ If, in other advanced democracies, party polarization has more commonly manifested along programmatic cleavages, it has bifurcated along nationalist lines in South Korea and Taiwan.¹⁶ The lack of resolution to these founding nationalist conflicts has

11. Brzezinski 2012, 159.

12. Jo and Weiss 2024. According to a recent poll, 57.6 percent of Taiwanese believe that Xi Jinping is more likely to use force, compared to five years ago. Nachman, Rigger, and Chan 2024.

13. See Rozman, Terry, and Jo 2023, chapters 3, 6, and 9.

14. C.-M. Lee 2020, 19.

15. Yeo 2020, 541.

16. Hur and Yeo 2024, 589.

also meant that progressive parties borne in their midst have continued to rely on nationalist identifiers—rather than progressive agendas—for differentiating themselves from the authoritarian successor parties. As a consequence, even as democratic institutions have matured, party competition has been structured in a narrow identitarian manner, resulting in another kind of stasis. “We have this sad joke in Taiwan,” one scholar shared, “What does the DPP have in common with a pterodactyl?” The answer is as amusing as it is embarrassing: “The first P is silent.”¹⁷

10.2 Democratic Cooperation?

The findings in this research also hold implications for theories of democratic cooperation. Today, US-China relations is often described in terms of ideology.¹⁸ Many argue Marxism-Leninism—the official ideology of the Chinese Communist Party—makes China “impossible to reassure” and, thus, locked in a “ceaseless quest to undermine [...] its capitalist rivals.”¹⁹ To respond to what they see as a growing challenge to liberal international order, they also endorse mobilizing countries along ideological lines to counter China’s power and influence. John Mearsheimer has long urged US policymakers “to form a balancing coalition with as many of China’s neighbors as possible,” with a view to “build[ing] an alliance structure along the lines of NATO” during the Cold War.²⁰ Winning against China is, in this way, seen as hinging on the efficacy of democratic co-

17. Author interview, October 24, 2022.

18. Campbell and Sullivan [2019](#).

19. Brands and Cooper [2021](#).

20. Mearsheimer [2014](#).

operation.

To be sure, others have challenged this view. Thomas Christensen, for example, argues that the current structure of globalized system undermines any prospects of a Cold War-style ideological alignment: even US allies, including South Korea, do not want a zero-sum approach to China given their immediate economic linkages.²¹ Mark Haas goes even further, arguing that many US partners are in fact ideologically closer to China, and that such affinities prevent balancing behavior especially when material incentives work against it.²² In this context, alienating undemocratic partners on account of ideology could embolden *autocratic* cooperation and undercut potential for a peaceful—even productive—coexistence between the United States and China.²³

My research illustrates another oft-overlooked reason why democratic cooperation might falter in East Asia: nationalism. Controversies about Japanese impenitence has, time and again, frustrated collaborative efforts with South Korea—not simply by raising public ire but by sustaining and spreading narrative contestation. Indeed, South Korean responses to Japanese provocations were neither involuntary nor uniform: they were intensely political. This was true even at the height of North Korean provocations.²⁴ Similarly, that such provocations did not affront the Taiwanese people in the same way has to do with the specific narrative processes by which grievances against Japan were erased and contestation over such issues lost political salience. But as I have illustrated, through the Diaoyutai incidents, this was not always the case.

21. Christensen [2021](#).

22. Haas [2022](#), 119-20.

23. Pepinsky and Weiss [2021](#).

24. Jo [2022b](#), 789. See also Kim, Kim, and Kwak [2024](#).

Relatedly, my account sheds light on how national stories can become an expedient tool for partisan politics, at times impeding democratic cooperation. 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.²⁵ It was not a coincidence, then, that leaders accused of democratic deficits—most notably Kim Young-sam—resorted to anti-Japanism as a diversion. Yet, this was not a rhetorical resource that Taiwanese leaders enjoyed. Even Ma Ying-jeou, a reputed anti-Japanese, only mobilized narratives of anti-colonial resistance to assert Taiwan's Chinese ancestry—a direct refutation of the progressive narrative that Japanese colonial rule marked the beginning of an autonomous Taiwanese nationhood. In this way, some narrators have an incentive to propagate stories that keep nationalist flames alive; others do not.

In this manner, tracing the histories of narrative contestation in South Korea and Taiwan offers a fuller account of how and why nationalist competitions at home hinders democratic cooperation abroad in some contexts and not others. Their narrative boundaries, which emerged and consolidated in the course of democratic development, show that regime types do not overwrite *national* identities. Rather, democracy helps structure contestation over the stories that constitute such identities and makes binding political actors to the prevailing boundaries more efficacious. What it means to be a democracy and how to act as one has distinctive *nationalist* roots; democracy, therefore, does not dictate cooperation—even with other democracies.

25. Jo [2022a](#).

10.3 Autocratization?

My theory of narrative contestation also sheds light on the dynamics of narrative contestation in the context of autocratization—a social process by which alternative stories are erased, non-state narrators are silenced, and discursive spaces for narrative engagement are closed. Indeed, just as narrative contestation can engender meaningful deliberation under democracy, it can also generate polarization. Narratives may be wielded in bad faith, often drawing from lies and conspiracy to remove another narrator’s right to speak. Rather than treating national stories as a malleable vision that can be rejected at the ballot box and amended through public reason, bad-faith narrative engagement seeks to abandon the institutional framework for narrative contestation altogether—beginning with eliminating, physically and metaphorically, the dissenting members of the polity.

Crucially, the erosion of political institutions may also distort the landscape of narrative contestation. When they systematically favor the victory of one group, it creates a class of powerful narrators who get to define the “people,” often in ways that represent their parochial interests. Examples of such institutional machinations abound. In the United States, practices of partisan gerrymandering—combined with the first-past-the-post system—have disproportionately boosted the Republican seat share in the legislature²⁶ and dampened intra-party competition in elections.²⁷ Such institutional distortions not only overrepresent a particular concept of the “people” in policymaking but remove incentives for narrative dynamism within the privileged party. A vicious cycle

26. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009.

27. Stephanopoulos and Warshaw 2020.

of disenfranchisement may ensue if the under-represented secede from narrative contestation altogether—hollowing a democracy from within.

These insights speak to the parallel trends in democratic backsliding and nationalist revisionism around the world. From Donald Trump's United States, Victor Orban's Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey, to Narendra Modi's India, state actors have sought to manipulate the narrative boundaries and mobilize nationalist contest in service of parochial political interests. Today, Trump's "America First" narratives are used by nativist movements to close America's borders, just as Modi's "Hindu First" narratives are parroted by religious fanatics to drive out Muslims. In both cases, the trends in democratic backsliding and nationalist conflict have been mutually supportive, fomenting exclusionary dynamics at home and isolationist impulses abroad.

It is easy to dismiss these narratives as cultural byproducts of whatever "crisis" is under way—unsettled times call for unsettling narratives. But these narratives can themselves constitute such crisis. Consider, for example, the aftermath of September 11. The shock of the attacks generated far-reaching support for state institutions and leaders,²⁸ which in turn engendered conditions conducive for sweeping, illiberal policies like the PATRIOT Act.²⁹ But underlying these changes were villainous stories of Islam that well preceded September 11,³⁰ which had long animated militant American nationalism. What was once a fringe narrative only entered the American mainstream through the political mobilization of the far right.³¹ Their narratives, in turn, produced the crisis of

28. Feinstein [2016](#).

29. Kam and Kinder [2007](#).

30. Coen [2017](#), 132.

31. Bail [2015](#).

national security.

In this way, examining the dynamics of narrative contestation can reveal much about the democratizing or autocratizing trajectories of a society. For one, the plurality of narratives in the public sphere may be indicative of democratic cohesion—especially if there appears to be meaningful deliberative mechanisms for dissent. What should be worrisome, instead, are the proliferating attempts to rehabilitate the past in service of a thick narrative consensus. From Russia to Poland, states have increasingly sought to discredit civil societies and independent media, or engaged in mythmaking to justify violence at home and conquest abroad. These are, in essence, a way to unbind—to ensure that the state’s narrative authority stays uncontested, that alternative narratives are erased. A system that does not grant such right of contestation distorts the process of collective self-definition that is the essence of democracy.

Part V

Appendix

APPENDIX A

CHAPTER 3

A.1 Archival and Primary Sources

Archival Collections and Government Databases

Jeonjaenggwa Yeoseongingwon Akaibeu [War and Women's Rights Archive]

Zhonghua Minguo Zongtongfu [Office of the President, Republic of China]

Ererba Shijian Jinian Jijinhui [Memorial Foundation of 228 Collections]

Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Intelligence Agency

Foreign Relations of the United States, Office of the Historian

1961–1963, Volume XXII, Northeast Asia

1969–1976, Volume E–12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia

1969–1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea

Guoshiguanfang [Collection of the National Museum of History]

Jiangzhong Zhengtong Wenwu [Artifacts of President Chiang Kai-shek]

Jiang Jiangguo Zhengtong Wenwu [Artifacts of President Chiang Ching-kuo]

Li Deng-hui Xiansheng Yanlunji [Collection of Lee Teng-hui's Remarks]

General CIA Records, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room

Funu Jiuyuan Jijinhui [Women's Rescue Foundation Collections]

Guksapyeonchan Wiwonhoe Uriyeoksanet [National Institute of Korean History, National History Database]

Library of Congress Archives

Minjuhwaun-dong Ginyeomsaeopoe Saryogwan [Korea Democracy Foundation Documents Collections]

Minjunochong Jaryosil [Korean Federation of Trade Unions Statement Collections]

Sifa Yuan Xianfa Fating Shizi [Judicial Yuan Constitutional Court Decisions Collection]

Taehan Minguksa Jaryojip [Collection of Documents on the History of the Republic of Korea]

Daetongnyeong Girokgwan Yeonseolgirok [Presidential Archive Speech Collection]

United Nations Treaty Collection

United States Armed Forces in Korea (USAFIK) Chuhan Migunsa [History of the United States Armed Forces in Korea]

Zongtong Jiang Gongsì Xiangyanlun Zongli [Collection of President Chiang Kai-shek's Thoughts and Speeches]

Periodicals

Choson Ilbo [The Korea Daily]

Jeongyojo Shinmun [Korean Teachers Union Daily]

Joongang Ilbo [The Central Daily]

Zhngguo Shibao [The China Times]

Zhongyang Ribao [Central Daily News]

Zhongyang Tongxunshe [Central News Agency]

Hankyoreh [One Nation]

Guoji Ribao [International Daily News]

Kyunghyang Shinmun [Urban and Rural Times]

Lianhebao [United Daily News]

Minzhung Ribao [The Commons Daily]

Segye Ilbo [The World Daily]

Taipei Shibao [Taipei Times]

Taiwan Ribao [Taiwan Daily News]

Donga Ilbo [East Asia Daily]

Zili Chenbao [The Independence Morning Post]

Yonhap News [The Coalition News]

Textbooks

Guoli Bianyi Guan [National Institute for Compilation and Translation]

1970. *Shehui* [Social Studies], Vol. 11

1981. *Shehui* [Social Studies], Vol. 7
 1994. *Chuzhong Lishi* [Junior High School History], Vol. 3
 1997. *Renshi Taiwan: lishibian* [Knowing Taiwan: History]
 1997. *Renshi Taiwan: Shehui bian* [Knowing Taiwan: Society]

Gunjeongcheok Hangmuguk [USAMGIK Bureau of Education]

1946. *Guksa Gyobon*[National history textbook]

Munhwa Gyoyukbu [Ministry of Culture and Education, ROK]

1957. *Urinara Munhwasa* [Our Country's Cultural History]
 1968. *Kungmin Yulli* [National ethics]
 1968. *Seunggong Tongileui Gil* [Path to Unification by Overcoming Communism]
 1982. *Godeunghakgyo Guksa* [High School National History (Fourth Curriculum)], Vols. 1 & 2
 1990. *Godeunghakgyo Guksa* [High School National History (Fifth Curriculum)], Vols. 1 & 2

Memoirs and Diaries

- Chen Shui-bian. 2021. *The Son of Taiwan*
 Kim Daejung. 2010. *Kim Daejung Jaseojeon* [Autobiography of Kim Daejung], Vols. 1 & 2
 Lee Teng-hui. 1999. *Taiwan de Zhuzhang* [Advocating for Taiwan]
 Lee Teng-hui. 2001. *Lee Teng-hui Xuexiao de Jiaohui* [Lessons from the Lee Teng-hui School]
 Park Chung hee. 1962. *Uri Minjogui Nagal Gil* [Our Nation's Path]
 Park Chung hee. 1964. *Gukkawa Hyeokmyongkwa Na* [The Country, the Revolution, and I]
 Rhee Syngman. 1954. *Ilminjuui Gaesul* [Summarizing One People-ism]
 Rhee Syngman. 2015. *Rhee Syngman Ilgi* [Diary of Rhee Syngman]
 Roh Moohyun. 2019. *Unmyeongida* [It is Fate]

APPENDIX B

CHAPTER 4

B.1 Coding Examples

Original	Translation
이외에 우리나라 4 천 3 백 여년 역사를 통하여 간단없이 지켜온 특성이 있으니 이것은 우리 민족의 영광스럽고 용맹한 자호(自護) 정신입니다.	In addition, there is a characteristic that we have kept without interruption throughout our country's 4,300-year history, which is the glorious and courageous spirit of self-protection of our nation.
무수한 외침과 전화 속에서도 수천년을 단일민족으로 살아온 우리의 생명력은 우리 민족이 아니면 도저히 가꿀 수 없는 기적의 힘인 것입니다.	Our vitality, which has lived as a single nation for thousands of years despite countless invasions and crises, is a miraculous power that only our people can cultivate.
북한에 계신 동포는 우리와 한 핏줄을 나눈 한 겨레이며 한 동포, 한 형제입니다.	We and the compatriots in North Korea are the same people, same countrymen, and brothers who share one bloodline.
臺灣省의同胞, 都是我們中華民族的兒女; 臺灣省의山河, 自屬於我們中華民國的主權; 無論在種族上、歷史上、文化上, 或是法律和條約上的根據, 在在都有其強固不拔的基礎。	The compatriots of Taiwan are all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation; the mountains and rivers of Taiwan belong to the sovereignty of the ROC; and they have a strong and unbreakable foundation, whether in terms of race, history, culture, or legal and treaty grounds.
中華民國의全部領土, 仍然是在中華民國的主權之下; 中華民國的全體國民, 從來未曾承認一個侵略強權所指使和控制的漢奸組織的統治。	The entire territory of the ROC remains under the sovereignty of the ROC; the entire population of the ROC has never recognized the rule of a traitorous organization under the orders and control of an invading power.
須知臺灣和大陸本屬一體, 骨肉相關, 休戚與共。	It is important to know that Taiwan and the mainland belong to one body.
中華民國政府, 是大陸七億人民的真正代表。	The government of the ROC is the true representative of the 700 million people of the mainland.

Figure B.1: Coding Examples: Oneness

Original	Translation
中華民國是一個主權獨立的國家，兩千三百萬的台灣人民應該擁有主權國家的尊嚴與國際公民的地位，追求自由、民主、人權的普世價值更是我們永遠不可被剝奪的基本權利。	The Republic of China is a sovereign and independent country. The 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to enjoy the dignity of a sovereign state and the status of citizens of the international community.
台灣是一個主權國家，台灣的未來及台灣與中國的關係只有二千三百萬台灣人民才有權決定。	Taiwan is a sovereign country. Only the 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to decide the future of this country and its relationship with China.
拒絕「一國兩制」，是兩千三百萬臺灣人民不分黨派、不分立場，彼此間最大的共識。	The overwhelming consensus among Taiwan's 23 million people is our rejection of "one country, two systems," regardless of party affiliation or political position.
* This only pertains to the Taiwanese case since no South Korean speech was coded in this category.	

Figure B.2: Coding Examples: Twoness

Original	Translation
우리는 남북이 통일된 완전 강토와 완전 국권을 회복할 때까지 쉬지 말고 퇴축(退縮) 말고 분투매진해야 할 것입니다.	We must strive and strive without rest and retreat until the two Koreas recover complete unified territory and complete national sovereignty.
그것은 즉, 한반도에 항구적인 평화를 이룩하고 분단된 조국을 통일하는 것이며, 그 통일의 영광 속에 우리 5 천만 동포가 다 같이 잘 살 수 있는 번영된 복지 사회를 건설하는 것입니다.	That means achieving lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, reunifying our divided nation, and building a prosperous welfare society where all 50 million of us can live well together in the glory of that reunification.
나아가서 민족사적 정통성의 바탕 위에 조국의 평화적 통일을 이룩하는 것이 우리의 역사적 사명입니다.	Furthermore, it is our historical mission to seek the peaceful reunification of our nation on the basis of ethnohistorical orthodoxy.
자주와 주체의식의 행동지표는 무엇보다도 남북 한이 동족으로서 평화와 통일을 이룩해 나가는데 있어 실천되어야 할 제 1 의 가치인 것입니다.	The behavioral indicators of sovereignty and self-determination are the first and foremost values that should be practiced in order to achieve peace and reunification between North and South Korea as kin.
完成我們反攻戰鬥的準備，來承擔我們復國救民的重任！	Complete our preparations for the counter-attack to undertake the important task of restoring our country and saving our people!
但是我們反攻復國的戰爭，乃是保障主權，收復失土的民族戰爭，這一民族戰爭。	But our war of restoration is a national war to protect our sovereignty and recover our lost land.
我們今天的一切戰鬥，乃是要合六億人為一心，合六億人對這血海深仇的毛賊獨夫來決一死鬥！	Our struggle today is to unite 600 million people as one, to unite 600 million people to fight to the death against this bloodthirsty Maoist dictator!
三民主義統一中國已是當前海內外全體中國人一致企求的願望。	The unification of China by the Three Principles of Democracy is now the unanimous wish of all Chinese people at home and abroad.

Figure B.3: Coding Examples: Unification

Original	Translation
在兩岸關係方面：政府將繼續秉持「善意和解」、「積極合作」、「永久和平」的理念，持續推動兩岸關係的正常化。	the government will continue to advocate "goodwill, active cooperation and permanent peace" and promote the normalization of cross-strait relations.
我們要以台灣的名義、要以一個新會員國的名義，重新申請成為聯合國的會員國，我們不是要搶中國的位子，我們是要來爭取 2300 萬台灣人民在聯合國應該要有的代表權，因為中華人民共和國無權、沒能力、也不可能代表台灣、代表 2300 萬台灣人民。	We want to reapply for membership in the United Nations in the name of Taiwan, in the name of a new member state. We are not trying to steal China's seat, we are trying to fight for the right to represent the 23 million Taiwanese people in the United Nations, because the People's Republic of China does not have the right, does not have the ability, and cannot represent Taiwan and the 23 million Taiwanese people.
不管是國民政府遷台後對「反攻大陸、光復國土」的堅持，或是日後的「三民主義統一中國」、「國家統一綱領」，以及所謂的「九二共識」與「終極統一論」等，在本質上都預設了「統一」是未來唯一的選項，不但剝奪並限制了台灣人民自由選擇的權利，更違反了「主權在民」的基本原則。	Be it the former Kuomintang government's resolve, soon after relocating to Taiwan, to counterattack and recover the mainland or, later, its vow to unify China under the Three Principles of the People, its creation of the Guidelines for National Unification, its talk about a so-called 1992 Consensus, or its espousal of an "ultimate unification" dictum—in essence, it all presumes that unification is the only possible option for our future. This mindset not only deprives Taiwan's people of their freedom of choice, but also contravenes the fundamental principle of "sovereignty lies in the people."
* This only pertains to the Taiwanese case since no South Korean speech was coded in this category.	

Figure B.4: Coding Examples: Independence

APPENDIX C
CHAPTER 7

C.1 Alternative Explanations

Table C.1: *Japanese Official Apologies*

#	Year	Position	Name	Addressee
1	1957	PM	Nobusuke Kishi	Myanmar
2	1957	PM	Nobusuke Kishi	Australia
3	1965	FM	Etsusaburo Shiina	South Korea
4	1972	PM	Tanaka Kakuei	China
5	1982	PM	Suzuki Zenko	Asia
6	1982	CS	Miyazawa Kiichi	South Korea
7	1984	EM	Hirohito	South Korea
8	1984	PM	Nakasone Yasuhiro	South Korea
9	1985	PM	Nakasone Yasuhiro	World
10	1989	PM	Noboru Takeshita	South Korea
11	1900	FM	Nakayama Taro	South Korea
12	1990	EM	Akihito	South Korea
13	1990	PM	Kaifu Toshiki	South Korea
14	1992	PM	Miyazawa Kiichi	World
15	1992	PM	Miyazawa Kiichi	South Korea
16	1992	PM	Miyazawa Kiichi	South Korea
17	1992	EM	Akihito	China
18	1992	CS	Kato Koichi	South Korea
19	1993	CS	Kono Yohei	World
20	1993	PM	Hosokawa Morihiro	World

21	1993	PM	Hosokawa Morihiro	World
22	1993	PM	Hosokawa Morihiro	World
23	1994	PM	Murayama Tomiichi	Asia
24	1995	HR	National Diet	Asia
25	1995	PM	Murayama Tomiichi	Asia
26	1995	PM	Murayama Tomiichi	Asia
27	1996	PM	Hashimoto Ryutaro	South Korea
28	1996	EM	Akihito	South Korea
29	1998	PM	Hashimoto Ryutaro	United Kingdom
30	1998	PM	Hashimoto Ryutaro	The Netherlands
31	1998	PM	Obuchi Keizo	South Korea
32	1998	PM	Obuchi Keizo	China
33	1998	EM	Akihito	South Korea
34	2000	CG	Umezu Itaru	Asia
35	2000	FM	Zono Yohei	China
36	2001	CS	Fukuda Yasuo	Asia
37	2001	FM	Tanaka Makiko	World
38	2001	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	Asia
39	2001	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	South Korea
40	2001	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	World
41	2002	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	North Korea
42	2003	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	Asia
43	2005	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	Asia
44	2005	PM	Koizumi Junichiro	World
45	2007	PM	Abe Shinzo	World
46	2009	AM	Fujisaki Ichiro	United States

47	2010	FM	Okada Katsuya	South Korea
48	2010	PM	Kan Naoto	South Korea
49	2010	FM	Okada Katsuya	United States
50	2010	PM	Kan Naoto	South Korea
51	2011	FM	Maehara Seiji	Australia
52	2014	AM	Urabe Toshinao	Philippines
53	2015	PM	Abe Shinzo	World
54	2015	FM	Kishida Fumio	South Korea
55	2015	PM	Abe Shinzo	South Korea
56	2020	EM	Naruhito	World

Note: Surnames first as is customary in Japanese. This only includes apologies by incumbent administration and excludes apologies by former officials and the opposition party.

Positions: EM: Emperor / PM: Prime Minister / FM: Foreign Minister / CS: Cabinet Secretary / HR: House of Representatives / AM: Ambassador / CG: Consul General

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