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Memory politics as a factor of cross-border tension: An analysis of contemporary Asian cases

Abstract. This study aimed to examine the impact of Asian countries' memory politics on the development of regional conflicts. A comparative analysis was conducted alongside a discursive analysis of official memory narratives and a content analysis of political documents and commemorative practices. The research explored key concepts and classifications of memory politics. Case analysis demonstrated that official interpretations of historical events and commemorative practices not only generate contradictions but also directly influence contemporary diplomatic relations. In the case of the partition of British India, divergent historical narratives in India and Pakistan continue to fuel tensions, manifesting in border clashes in Kashmir, diplomatic blockades, and confrontations on international platforms, including the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Japan's aggression in Asia during the twentieth century remains a source of disputes between Japan, Korea, and China, reflected in mutual economic sanctions, ongoing controversies over historical events, and periodic diplomatic *démarches*. Military conflicts between Cambodia and Vietnam illustrate the enduring impact of the colonial past: memories of military actions and occupation are reflected in border tensions, restrictions on trade relations, and political rivalry for influence within Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Importantly, memory politics not only affect domestic political processes but also play a key role in international politics and the foreign policy identity of states. Analysis of current trends indicated that the use of historical memory as a tool for political legitimisation or the mobilisation of nationalist sentiments contributes not only to the escalation of conflicts but also to the creation of long-term barriers to regional integration and international cooperation. The findings of the study may be applied to the development of strategies for managing historical memory, with the aim of reducing interstate tensions, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and shaping policies that prevent the manipulation of historical narratives in both foreign and domestic policy

Keywords: historical narratives; regional conflict; diplomacy; national identity; commemorative practices

Introduction

Memory politics plays a key role in the formation of national identity and influences the socio-political development of states, particularly in regions with a historically conflictual past. In Asia, the issue of interpreting historical events remains a sensitive factor affecting diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, and regional security. Research on this topic is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary international challenges, as the use of historical memory as a foreign policy tool is increasingly becoming a cause of diplomatic crises and sanctions. For instance, in 2024, South Korea boycotted a memorial ceremony at Japan's Sado mines due to the lack of official recognition and apology for the use of Korean forced labourers during the Second World War. This step underscored the long-standing historical contradictions

between the two countries and their impact on contemporary diplomatic relations (Seo, 2024). Furthermore, the memory of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War remains a sensitive issue in relations between China and Vietnam. Although both countries have attempted to minimise mention of this conflict to improve bilateral relations, periodic tensions related to territorial disputes in the South China Sea re-actualise these historical issues (Nguyen, 2024a). An analysis of the relationship between commemorative practices and their political consequences allows for an assessment of how historical memory in the 21st century acts as a factor in exacerbating cross-border tension.

As noted by L. Klymenko (2022), memory is not merely the result of individual or collective experience but also a product of the processes of national identification, state

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ideology, political propaganda, and the social and academic construction of historical narratives. Memory politics becomes the basis for the formation of national identity, influencing public opinion and interstate relations. Commemorative practices, such as national holidays, monuments, and museums, serve as important instruments in constructing collective memory, shaping societal perceptions of the past.

As V. Slyusar *et al.* (2024) observe, historical memory plays a key role in the dynamics of irredentist conflicts, influencing negotiation processes and mediation strategies. Irredentist policy, which aims at integrating ethnic groups within a single state, is based on historical narratives that can either foster consolidation or exacerbate contradictions. Simultaneously, historical memory functions in two dimensions: as a diachronic link between generations and as synchronous communication, shaping perceptions of a common future. In negotiations, this presents challenges for mediators, as the interaction between parties relies not only on rational historical knowledge but also on myths, symbols, and cultural archetypes. Considering these aspects is critically important for successful mediation in conflicts related to territorial claims and ethnonational identities.

Memory politics is closely related to historical policy, the political use of the past, mythmaking, collective identity, historical narrative, and public commemoration. As noted by K.O. Goldenstein (2023), historical policy reflects a political interpretation of the past, aimed at shaping cultural infrastructure and legislation. The political use of the past is manifested in the recourse to history for achieving political goals. The process of forming collective and political identities through historical resources requires the use of symbols that consolidate memory and ensure social integrity for future generations. States employ memory politics to create a positive or negative image of other countries, which can have long-term consequences for international relations.

The research by O. Horban & R. Martych (2020) demonstrates that contemporary approaches to the study of historical memory have been shaped by methodological changes in historical science, particularly the crisis of traditional historiography and the postmodern critique of metanarratives. Initially, historical memory was viewed as a way of reconstructing the past following current societal needs, but subsequently, it acquired new significance as a tool of collective identity. Its re-actualisation is manifested through commemorative practices, the museification of heritage, and the development of memorial tourism. At the same time, the contemporary stage of its development is accompanied by a crisis of the idea of objectivity and a rethinking of historical perceptions, which transforms the role of memory in political and social processes.

Collective memory plays a key role in the formation of civil society, contributing to the construction of national identity and the strengthening of social norms. As research by O. Batrymenko *et al.* (2024) shows, it increases the level of civic responsibility and national consciousness, which stimulates social activity and the institutionalisation of civil society. The role of historical memory in regional conflicts is particularly noticeable in countries where memory politics influences national identity and public opinion

(China, Japan, South Korea). As O. Marchenko *et al.* (2024) note, individual memory loses its connection with the past under conditions of simulated identity, whereas collective memory is associated with tradition, preserving notions of the past. Today, collective memory is subject to the risk of falsification and negative influence. The main value remains the authenticity of memory in cultural practices, where the individual interacts with the collective.

According to T. Vasylevska & T. Bevz (2024), historical memory is not only a key element of social consolidation but also a powerful tool that helps shape a common understanding of the past among members of society. It serves as a basis for creating collective identity, ensuring the stability and integrity of communities. Thanks to historical memory, societies are able not only to preserve important events and lessons from the past but also to produce shared narratives that strengthen national unity and provide common values.

As noted by I.V. Boginska (2021), conflicts of memory in international relations arise due to differing interpretations of the past, which are utilised to achieve political goals. Under such conditions, historical memory is transformed into an instrument of propaganda. Memory politics can take various forms, ranging from confrontation and compromise to solidarity and reconciliation. The research by M. Murphy (2022) highlights that dominant narratives about the Second World War often ignore or marginalise the experiences of minorities and colonised peoples. This contributes to the formation of one-sided historical perceptions, which can be used to justify contemporary political positions and actions. The author emphasises the need to consider the multiplicity of memories to achieve a more objective understanding of the past and prevent the recurrence of conflicts.

The collective monograph edited by S. Huang *et al.* (2022), examines how the complex legacy of the colonial past and nationalist aspirations influence the formation of memory politics in post-colonial societies in Asia. The research demonstrated that the processes of preserving and interpreting historical events are often used to strengthen national identity but can also exacerbate inter-ethnic and interstate contradictions. Analysing the longevity of historical disputes between China and Japan, K. Gustafsson (2020) notes that discrepancies in collective memory and the interpretation of the past contribute to persistent tension in relations between the two countries. The author stresses that the process of forgetting is an integral part of memory and proposes a conceptual approach that considers both memory and forgetting for improving international relations. As V. Gudzyk & O. Sytnyk (2023) observe, conflicts surrounding historical memory in East Asia significantly influence political and social relations between China, South Korea, and Japan. Analysing commemorations, rhetoric, education, compensation, and punishment, the authors found that China and South Korea maintain stable historical narratives, whereas Japan exhibits a more variable approach.

Analysis of contemporary contradictions in Asian memory politics, specifically cases related to the Partition of British India in 1947, Japanese aggression in Asia in the 20th century, and military conflicts in Cambodia and Vietnam, allows for an understanding of the complexity and

contradictory nature of memory politics in contemporary conditions. These cases demonstrate how different interpretations of historical events can influence contemporary political relations and commemorative practices, forming a basis for either conflicts or cooperation. This study aimed to assess the impact of commemorative practices on contemporary interstate relations and domestic policy.

Materials and Method

The study employed a comprehensive approach aimed at analysing the influence of memory politics on political processes and international relations. The research is grounded in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of historical memory, cross-border nationalism, and constructivist approaches to the formation of national identity. Methods of scientific inquiry included content analysis, comparative analysis, and discourse analysis. Content analysis was applied to the study of official documents and speeches by political leaders. This helped to determine how governments use historical events for the formation of national identity and the legitimisation of their political course. Comparative analysis facilitated the identification of differences and similarities in the state memory politics of various countries. It was established that some countries use the memory of conflicts to mobilise society and increase the level of patriotism, while others employ reconciliation strategies to improve interstate relations. Discourse analysis was used to assess the rhetoric of political figures, reflecting the instrumentalisation of historical memory in the political sphere. Analysis of official speeches, parliamentary debates, and public statements allowed for the identification of which historical events are most frequently used in domestic political struggles and international negotiations. The application of these methods facilitated a comprehensive assessment of memory politics in different countries, enabling the determination of their strengths and weaknesses and the tracing of their influence on political processes and international relations.

The sequence of the study included several stages. The first stage consisted of collecting and systematising data on memory politics in India, Pakistan, Japan, Korea, China, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The second stage involved the analysis of commemorative practices and the legal frameworks regulating memory politics. The third stage entailed a comparative study aimed at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of different countries' approaches to utilising historical memory in domestic and foreign policy.

The source base of the study included official positions of states (Mr. Jinnah's presidential address..., 1947; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1995; Government of Pakistan, 2024), which allowed for tracing the evolution of approaches to forming memory politics at the national level and their influence on international relations. Analytical reports from leading research centres and information agencies (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2019; Talustan, 2023; Kelly, 2024; Asian Military Review, 2024) were also used, containing current assessments of the impact of historical memory on contemporary geopolitical processes, as well as identifying trends and conflict zones related to historical heritage policies.

Results

The historical foundation of contemporary memory politics in Asia and key lines of confrontation. Contemporary memory politics in Asia are marked by contradictoriness, as historical interpretations are frequently employed to legitimise political regimes and construct national narratives. The documentary basis for future historical narratives dates back to the period of colonial rule. For instance, the British Empire controlled India (1858-1947), Burma (1824-1948), and Malaya (1826-1957), leading to fundamental changes in administrative systems, economic structures, and social relations. France exercised colonial rule in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, while the Netherlands dominated Indonesia. The Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945) and parts of China (Manchuria, 1931-1945) caused deep traumas in the national memory of these countries. A consequence of colonial rule was memory conflicts that intensified after independence was gained.

The processes of decolonisation were accompanied by armed conflicts, which became a source of collective trauma and the formation of contradictory national narratives. The most significant included the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949) against the Netherlands, the Indochina Wars (1946-1954, 1955-1975), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the conflict between India and Pakistan following their partition in 1947. The situation in Kashmir was particularly tense, leading to three wars between these countries (1947-1948, 1965, 1999).

These wars had a profound impact on both the domestic political development of postcolonial states and the structure of international relations in the region. The Indonesian War of Independence changed the balance of power in Southeast Asia, laying the foundations for a new state identity. The Indochina Wars had far-reaching consequences not only for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia but also globally. The First War ended French colonial rule, but the Second War, known as the Vietnam War, became an arena for global confrontation between the USA and the USSR in the context of the Cold War. These conflicts left a legacy of political instability, the militarisation of society, and deep social traumas, which continue to affect the national memory of the region's countries.

The Korean War (1950-1953) solidified the division of the Korean Peninsula into two states with opposing political systems. It contributed to the militarisation of both South and North Korea and exacerbated the confrontation between the USA and the PRC. To this day, the conflict remains unresolved, and the memory of it plays a key role in the domestic politics of both Korean states, shaping the image of an external enemy and justifying authoritarian measures. These wars became defining moments for the national identities of the newly formed states, shaped long-lasting memory conflicts, and intensified the divisions between states, complicating regional integration and dialogue.

Memory conflicts are reflected in official versions of history, which shape public perception of the past. In China, memory politics regarding the Japanese occupation included the establishment of the "Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre", which solidified the narrative of the Japanese army's brutality. In Japan, conversely,

history textbooks often minimise or justify war crimes, causing tension in relations with neighbours (Pasquier & Sawada, 2024). In India, government rhetoric emphasises heroism in the struggle against colonial rule, while in Pakistan, the religious aspect of the partition and the role of Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the founder of the independent state are stressed (Sreevatsa, 2022).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), whose members include China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, also plays a role in regional stabilisation. One of its key objectives is to reduce tension among member states, which includes addressing historical disputes. For example, on 13 March 2025, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the Treaty on the State Border between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan (2025), which was the result of negotiations aimed at the peaceful settlement of border issues. The SCO welcomed this signing, stressing the importance of the agreement for peace, security, and stability in the region. Within the SCO, multilateral platforms for diplomatic dialogue function, allowing India and Pakistan to avoid open confrontations and maintain contacts even during periods of heightened bilateral relations. Different interpretations of events frequently become a problem in diplomatic relations between countries, hindering the formation of stable and trusting partnerships. Concurrently, these contradictions can have far-reaching consequences for regional stability, as they create additional obstacles to cooperation in the spheres of security, economy, and culture.

Japanese expansion in the 20th century was driven by several factors, including economic difficulties after the global economic crisis, intense militarisation, and the desire to control strategically important resources, specifically oil, coal, and iron ore. However, in practice, this policy led to brutal occupation, economic exploitation, and numerous armed clashes. Such a strategy caused prolonged conflicts and left a deep mark on interstate relations, shaping historical memory and political tension in the region.

The occupation of Korea (1910-1945) and Japan's aggressive actions towards China, including events in Manchuria and the Nanjing Massacre, resulted in significant civilian casualties, the destruction of infrastructure, and human rights violations. In Korea, the Japanese occupation was accompanied by a policy of cultural assimilation, including the forced imposition of the Japanese language and culture. This policy involved prohibiting the Korean language in schools, teaching exclusively in Japanese, requiring Koreans to change their names to Japanese, and spreading imperial propaganda through educational materials. Specifically, the Korean language was banned in schools, and teaching was conducted solely in Japanese. Koreans were forced to change their names to Japanese ones, and the history of Korea was removed from the curricula, aiming to eradicate national identity. According to official data, between 200,000 and 300,000 Chinese citizens died during the Nanjing Massacre in 1937, making it one of the most brutal war crimes of that period (Kailing, 2024).

Contradictions escalate during periods of political crises or in the context of territorial disputes. The disputed Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands) between China and Japan (Kim, 2021) and Takeshima (Dokdo) between South Korea and Japan (Huth & Kim, 2021) often become an arena

for the intensification of historical claims. China refers to historical maps and documents indicating its rights to the Diaoyu Islands, whereas Japan insists on ownership rights dating back to the late 19th century. Similarly, South Korea emphasises historical control over the Dokdo Islands, including the Joseon Dynasty period, while Japan claims (Q&A About the Takeshima Dispute, n.d.) the annexation of these islands in 1905. Attempts at international settlement include UN calls for peaceful dialogue (Minuck, 2012), however, neither side agrees to international arbitration. China and Korea appeal to the historical past, stressing Japan's aggressive policy in the past as the reason for their inflexibility in contemporary territorial conflicts.

At the same time, Japan, seeking to strengthen its position as a regional leader, attempts to balance between acknowledging past mistakes and protecting its own national interest. In 1995, the Japanese government issued an apology for its aggression in Asia, known as the "Mura-yama Statement" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1995), in which deep remorse was expressed for colonial rule and war crimes. However, this statement was received ambiguously, as some politicians in Japan subsequently questioned its wording, and in neighbouring countries, particularly Korea and China, it was considered that it was not accompanied by concrete steps, such as legally mandated compensation or educational initiatives to inform the public about these events.

The Partition of British India in 1947 became one of the most dramatic geopolitical events of the 20th century, leading to the creation of two independent states – India and Pakistan. The British Empire, which was under significant economic and political pressure after the Second World War, sought to end its colonial rule in the region as quickly as possible. The decision to partition was made in haste, without adequate preparation or consideration of the complex ethno-religious situation, causing mass violent conflicts and a humanitarian disaster. The British administration failed to develop a plan to prevent the violence that accompanied the partition. The ill-conceived nature of British policy created the basis for long-lasting interstate conflicts and instability in South Asia. The hasty decision-making, disregard for the socio-cultural specificities of the region, and lack of effective management of the partition process turned independence into a humanitarian catastrophe, the consequences of which are still felt today.

After Britain announced its intention to leave the colony, internal conflicts between the Muslim and Hindu communities led to mass riots and bloodshed. Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, with the assistance of political leaders Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, oversaw the process of partition, which concluded in August 1947. According to official data, around three million people died during the partition, and over 18 million became refugees (Pawell, 2018), forced to relocate across the new borders that divided Punjab and Bengal between India and Pakistan.

For Pakistan, the partition is a symbol of triumph (Mr. Jinnah's presidential address..., 1947), the embodiment of the idea of creating a separate Muslim state that ensures the preservation of Islamic identity and protection from the dominance of the Hindu majority. This narrative supports the ideological justification for Pakistan's

existence as a state founded on religious differences and contributes to the strengthening of national unity around this historical event. While in India, the partition is primarily regarded as a tragedy (Ahmad, 2019), which caused one of the largest mass displacements of population in history, accompanied by large-scale violence, loss of life, and the disintegration of a multi-confessional community. In this context, the partition is perceived as a symbol of the destruction of harmony and unity that could have existed in independent India. Events such as the forced relocations and conflicts that arose as a result of the partition remain an open wound in India's collective memory, influencing its contemporary politics and relations with Pakistan.

Cambodia, which was under French colonial rule from 1863 to 1953, experienced several stages of armed conflicts, each having a serious impact on its internal stability and foreign policy situation. One of the darkest periods in its history was the Khmer Rouge regime, which lasted from 1975 to 1979. This period, known as the genocide, led to the deaths of around 1.7 million people, representing about a quarter of the country's population (Hunt, 2024). The brutal policies of the regime, which included mass executions, forced labour, and radical socio-economic experiments, caused widespread international outcry.

The policies of the Khmer Rouge led to Cambodia's deep international isolation. Most Western countries severed diplomatic relations with the Pol Pot regime, condemning its crimes against humanity. Concurrently, China remained a key ally of the Khmer Rouge, providing them with financial and military support, further exacerbating tensions in the region. Following Vietnam's invasion in 1979 and the overthrow of the regime, the new government, supported by Hanoi, faced diplomatic complications. The UN and many Western states continued to recognise the Khmer Rouge government as the official representative of Cambodia until 1993, indicating a deep division within the international community.

Cambodia's perception on the international stage was largely shaped through the lens of its bloody past. The prolonged civil war, the presence of numerous refugees, and the humanitarian crisis led to the country being associated with instability, human rights violations, and impunity. Only after the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) peacekeeping mission that Cambodia began to gradually restore its international reputation.

Despite significant reconstruction efforts, the issue of responsibility for the Khmer Rouge crimes long remained a sensitive topic. Only in 2006, under the aegis of the UN, was a Special Tribunal established for the prosecution of the regime's leaders, which became an important step in combating impunity. Concurrently, Cambodia still faces challenges in the field of human rights, affecting its international positioning and relations with key partners, particularly the European Union and the USA.

Vietnam, like Cambodia, also suffered from French colonial oppression. After the First Indochina War (1946-1954), Vietnam gained independence, but the country experienced serious upheavals during the Vietnam War (1955-1975), in which the USA, South Vietnam, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines participated,

supporting anti-communist forces (Black, 2024). Following the unification of North and South Vietnam in 1975, the country faced numerous problems in restoring its economy, rebuilding social stability, and integrating the different political systems that existed as a result of the division into two parts (Nguyen, 2024a).

In addition to internal armed conflicts, Cambodia and Vietnam have tense interstate relations, exacerbated by territorial disputes and historical grievances. The governments of both countries periodically conduct negotiations regarding border demarcation; however, disagreements persist. International mediation efforts, including those by ASEAN and the UN, are aimed at reducing tension, but their effectiveness is limited due to nationalist sentiment and domestic political factors.

A key point of contention is Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978, when Vietnamese troops launched an operation to overthrow the Khmer Rouge regime, which was terrorising the country. This intervention was perceived by some Cambodians as an act of aggression, leading to long-lasting diplomatic disputes between the two states. Vietnam, conversely, considered its intervention necessary for stabilising the region and combating the genocide being carried out by the Khmer Rouge.

Cambodia's official narratives focus on the Pol Pot regime and the role of Vietnamese troops as occupiers, which is emphasised in educational materials, museum exhibits, national days of remembrance, and in the rhetoric of political leaders (Thun, 2021). Such measures are aimed at consolidating these narratives in collective memory, shaping the image of Vietnam as a historical adversary, and leaving a lasting imprint on the country's contemporary political and social life. In Vietnam, the official narrative differs significantly: the focus is on the liberation mission in Cambodia and Vietnam's role in restoring peace and stability after the genocide. The Vietnamese state actively promotes this image, positioning itself as a saviour who intervened to prevent further crimes against humanity. This narrative is used not only to strengthen domestic legitimacy but also to shape Vietnam's positive international image as a peacemaking state. It is reflected in official speeches, school curricula, commemorative events, and state propaganda.

Memory politics as a factor in political confrontations in the 21st century. Discrepancies in approaches to historical memory become the basis for nationalist discourses that influence the formation of identity among younger generations. They consolidate an understanding of history, which fuels a sense of national pride and simultaneously exacerbates interstate contradictions. Discrepancies in the interpretation of the 1947 events have a profound and lasting impact on contemporary bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, which are accompanied by constant political tension and territorial conflicts, particularly over the Kashmir region. This region remains a subject of acute disputes, as both countries shape their historical narratives, which influence public opinion. In India, Kashmir is regarded as an integral part of the state, symbolising national unity, while in Pakistan, it is considered a disputed territory where the will of the local population should be realised. The influence of these differing historical interpretations exacerbates mistrust between the countries

and complicates the search for compromise solutions. These contradictions frequently erupt in the form of border conflicts, diplomatic crises, and political accusations. They hinder the normalisation of relations between the countries and complicate any attempts at regional cooperation. According to the Ministry of Defence, in 2024 India spent around 74 billion USD on defence, making it the third largest military spender in the world after the USA and China (Union Budget, 2024). These expenditures constitute a significant part of the Indian budget and reflect the priority of military needs in the region, which continues to be a flashpoint. Pakistan, in turn, spent around 7.6 billion USD (Government of Pakistan, 2024), which is a significant figure for a country with a less developed economy. These expenditures are directed towards supporting the army and ensuring security on the border with India, especially in Kashmir.

Memory politics related to the partition are actively used in political campaigns in both countries as a means of mobilising public support (Tavares de Oliveira, 2024). In the period from 2020 to 2025, political leaders of India and Pakistan actively referred to historical narratives as a tool for influencing public consciousness. These references are used to strengthen national identity, shape the image of an external enemy, and justify high military expenditures. Particularly noticeable is the inclusion of such narratives in rhetoric related to the conflict over the Jammu and Kashmir region. In the speech by Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2020, the use of historical context to shape the image of India as an aggressor is clearly traceable. Imran Khan consistently appealed to the past, speaking about the events of 1947, when, according to him, the people of Kashmir did not receive the right to self-determination guaranteed by a UN Resolution (Statement by the Prime Minister of Pakistan..., 2020).

From the Indian side, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also actively employs historical rhetoric, particularly in the context of Kashmir. During his visit to Srinagar in March 2024 – the first in five years – Modi stated that Kashmir had been “transformed” from a region of violence into a region of peace and development (Sharafat & Rajesh, 2024). His speech included a reference to the image of a united India, where all regions should be integrated under a single ideology. Furthermore, Modi deliberately stressed that the abrogation of Kashmir’s special status in 2019 was an act of historical justice which restores the integrity of the state.

One of the most striking examples of recourse to history as a tool of political legitimisation in India is the inauguration in 2024 of a Hindu temple in Ayodhya, built on the site of the Babri Mosque, destroyed in 1992. Prime Minister Modi participated in the ceremonies and stated that the temple is a “symbol of national resurgence and historical truth”. Such rhetoric effectively rewrites history from the perspective of Hindu nationalism, marginalising the Muslim community and justifying the government’s actions restricting religious rights (A Hindu temple built atop a razed mosque..., 2024).

Such narratives are used to legitimise aggressive foreign policy and reinforce arguments in favour of militarisation. The impact of memory on defence spending is particularly noticeable in the context of Kashmir, which has remained a point of tension and a subject of territorial dispute between India and Pakistan since their partition. Statistical data show a consistent trend of increasing defence expenditure in both India and Pakistan, with a significant portion of funds allocated to maintaining and strengthening military presence in the Kashmir region. In the 2024–2025 financial year, the Pakistani government allocated 2.12 trillion PKR for defence needs in its national budget, which accounts for approximately 1.7% of the country’s GDP and over 12% of all current expenditures. This represents a 17.6% increase compared to the previous year. Almost half of these funds are designated for the Army, indicating the prioritisation of supporting the land component, particularly in strategically sensitive border areas, including the Line of Control in Kashmir (Government of Pakistan, 2024).

Concurrently, India in its 2024–2025 budget allocated 6.22 trillion INR for the defence sector (Union Budget, 2024), which corresponds to approximately 75 billion USD and constitutes 12.9% of the country’s total budget. Although the budget does not contain a breakdown of expenditures by region, considering the strategic importance of Jammu and Kashmir, a significant portion of funding is traditionally directed towards providing infrastructure, logistics, modernising armaments, and ensuring the presence of the Armed Forces in the region. Thus, the growth of the two countries’ defence budgets not only demonstrates their consistent militarisation but also indirectly confirms the priority of Kashmir in their national security strategy (Union Budget, 2024). Memory politics related to the 1947 partition continue to be an important factor (Table 1), determining not only national policy but also international relations between India and Pakistan.

Table 1. Key differences in the historical narratives of India and Pakistan regarding the events of 1947

Aspect	India	Pakistan
Main emphasis	Tragedy, human losses, destruction of harmony	Triumph, creation of a separate state for Muslims
Historical assessment	Partition is perceived as a forced but tragic step that violated national unity and brought suffering to millions of people	Partition is considered necessary and inevitable for ensuring the rights of Muslims and protecting their identity
Reasons for partition	Inability to resolve conflicts between communities, the role of the British administration in exacerbating differences	Oppression of the Muslim minority in the dominant Hindu culture, and the desire to preserve Islamic identity
Role of Britain	The colonial “divide and rule” policy contributed to the escalation of interconfessional conflicts	Britain is seen as a necessary mediator in ensuring a just partition
Contemporary interpretation	Preservation of the memory of victims and violence, emphasis on unity and territorial integrity	Commemoration of heroes who fought for the creation of Pakistan, emphasis on the necessity of partition

Table 1. Continued

Aspect	India	Pakistan
Geopolitical context	Loss of territories and conflicts over Kashmir are viewed as an injustice and a threat to national security	The struggle for Kashmir is considered a continuation of the historical struggle for the rights of Muslims
Economic aspect	Loss of economic potential due to the division of resources and markets	Initial difficulties in economic development due to the need to integrate new territories and population, but strengthening the national economy in the long term

Source: compiled by the author based on M. Ahmad (2019), I. Talbot (2019)

During the occupation of Korea, Japanese troops forcibly mobilised thousands of women, known as “comfort women” (Myadar & Davidson, 2020), for sexual slavery. The number of such women reached tens of thousands, most of them were from Korea, China, and the Philippines. The Japanese government has repeatedly faced demands to acknowledge these crimes, and in 1993, a statement by the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1993) was issued, expressing sympathy to the victims. However, the issue of compensation still remains a subject of dispute in international relations. According to various estimates, the number of such women ranged from 50 to 200 thousand, most of whom were Koreans. The issue of compensation for these victims remains an important topic in contemporary diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan.

International organisations, particularly the UN, have repeatedly called on Japan to cooperate within the framework of the Human Rights Council and have initiated reports and resolutions regarding the provision of compensation to victims. For instance, in 1996, the UN released a report on the “comfort women” system (United Nations, 1996) and supported educational initiatives to disseminate accurate information about these events, urging Japan to recognise responsibility for these crimes and pay compensation to those affected. In 2015, an agreement was signed between Japan and South Korea, which provided for the establishment of a fund amounting to 1 billion JPY to support former “comfort women” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). However, the agreement caused public dissatisfaction in Korea, as it did not take into account the opinions of the victims themselves.

In addition to official steps, reconciliation efforts are undertaken through cultural exchanges, joint educational projects, and public events. Specifically, universities in both countries hold lectures and exhibitions dedicated to historical events, and initiatives for youth are implemented, aimed at fostering mutual understanding and overcoming historical traumas. Official versions of historical events in Japan, Korea, and China differ significantly, which complicates interstate relations and contributes to long-lasting memory conflicts. These discrepancies are based not only on different interpretations of historical facts but also on cultural specificities of the approach to memory of the past, the political interests of governments, and methods of commemoration. The memory of Japanese aggression in Asia in the 20th century remains a key and simultaneously controversial element of regional politics. Historical events related to the occupation of Korea and aggression against China have left a deep social and cultural imprint, shaping the national identity of both countries. Significant discrepancies in the official versions of the interpretation of these events in Japan, China, and

Korea contribute to the escalation of long-lasting memory conflicts, complicating interstate relations.

One of the most prominent and controversial commemorative practices causing international disputes is the activity of the Japanese Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. This site plays a central role in Japan’s memory politics concerning the events of the Second World War. The shrine commemorates the memory of approximately 2.5 million deceased soldiers, including 14 convicted Class A war criminals who actively participated in the aggressive policy of imperialist Japan. The inclusion of these figures among those honoured has generated deep historical traumas in neighbouring countries, especially in China and South Korea, which experienced occupation and violence at the hands of Japanese troops. In April 2024, former Vice-Admiral of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force, Umio Otsuka, was appointed as the new chief priest of Yasukuni (Mesmer, 2024). This appointment caused serious concern in the region, as it symbolically strengthens the link between Japan’s modern armed forces and its militarist past. Such a renationalisation of the shrine is part of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s broader policy aimed at strengthening national identity by re-examining the memory of the country’s imperial past. China and South Korea traditionally react strongly to official visits by Japanese politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine. For example, in April 2024, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made a ritual offering to the shrine (Kelly, 2024), which prompted “deep disappointment” and calls for repentance for the wartime past from South Korea (Reuters, 2024). China also expressed strong protest against similar actions by Japanese leaders, stressing that the shrine is a symbol of Japanese military aggression (Zhuo, 2024).

Japan’s memory conflicts have acquired a vivid and international dimension through the erection of monuments to victims of sexual slavery during the Second World War, known as “comfort women”. The erection of such monuments is often accompanied by diplomatic disputes and causes tension in interstate relations. One such incident was the appearance in 2017 in San Francisco of the “Column of Strength” memorial, dedicated to “comfort women”, leading to the severing of sister-city relations between San Francisco and Osaka. Osaka Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura openly condemned the erection of the monument, calling it an obstacle to maintaining friendly inter-city ties (Osaka cuts San Francisco..., 2018).

Similar memory conflicts arise in other countries as well. Thus, the erection of the Statue of Peace in Berlin in 2020 provoked a strong reaction from Japan: Japanese diplomats insisted on its dismantling, causing tension in relations between Germany and Japan (Ryall, 2020). Even earlier, in 2013, a memorial to “comfort women” was unveiled in the

American city of Glendale, California (Levine, 2013), which caused protests from Japanese diplomats and a segment of the local Japanese community. Memory of the colonial and

wartime past is increasingly becoming a tool not only of domestic but also of international politics, actively influencing Japan's diplomatic relations with its partners (Table 2).

Table 2. Key differences in the narratives of Japan, China, and South Korea

Aspect	Japan	China	South Korea
Main emphasis	More emphasis is placed on the country's post-war development, attempting to avoid detailed discussion of war crimes. Commemoration of deceased Japanese soldiers	Brutality of Japanese aggression, especially in Manchuria and the Nanjing Massacre. Memory of victims and resistance to occupation	Tragedy of occupation, forced assimilation, sexual slavery ("comfort women"), and the struggle for independence. Emphasis on the heroism of freedom fighters
Historical assessment	Official position acknowledges "mistakes", but often without specific details	Emphasis is placed on the systematic destruction of civilians, devastation, and human rights violations. The Nanjing Massacre is perceived as a symbol of Japanese barbarism	Japanese occupation is considered a period of genocide against Korean culture and identity. The assimilation policy is viewed as an attempt to erase Korean distinctiveness
Contemporary interpretation	There are political forces that insist on re-examining history, particularly in textbooks, often downplaying the scale of war crimes. Official visits to Yasukuni Shrine cause international controversy	Memory of the aggression is actively maintained through memorial events and education. China uses historical claims to strengthen national unity and increase diplomatic pressure on Japan	National identity is formed through the memory of the occupation, especially via school education and cultural heritage. South Korea regularly demands apologies and compensation from Japan
Geopolitical context	Japan attempts to balance the need to acknowledge past mistakes with strengthening its position as a regional leader. It seeks to normalise relations but often faces criticism for insufficient steps in this direction	Uses historical memory to shape anti-Japanese rhetoric in foreign policy. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands issue is used as a continuation of historical disputes	The issue of the occupation remains central in diplomatic relations with Japan. Conflicts over the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands are accompanied by appeals to the historical past
Economic aspect	After the war, Japan focused on economic recovery and became one of the world's leading economies. It often mentions economic assistance to Korea and China after the war to weaken historical claims	Japan's military aggression led to enormous destruction of infrastructure and loss of human resources. After the war, China uses historical rhetoric to substantiate its economic claims against Japan	The Japanese occupation negatively affected Korea's economic development; forced labour and exploitation of natural resources are seen as reasons for economic decline. Contemporary South Korea insists on compensation for victims of forced labour

Source: compiled by the author based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1995) and Kh. Jo (2024)

Cambodian nationalist movements use historical narratives to mobilise public support and pressure the government regarding territorial issues. For example, in 2015, activists and opposition members organised protests against the construction of Vietnamese roads in disputed border areas, which led to clashes between protesters and Vietnamese villagers (Cambodia Protests Against Vietnam's..., 2015). From the Vietnamese side, officials emphasise the importance of a "gratitude policy", stressing Vietnam's role in liberating Cambodia from the Pol Pot regime. This is used to legitimise contemporary diplomatic relations and influence Cambodia, which is perceived as interference in domestic affairs and provokes constant political tensions (Tam Sang & Thao My, 2024).

Although the memory of past conflicts between Vietnam and Cambodia is regularly used in public discourse, neither state has institutionalised, consistent memory politics in the classical sense. Their actions primarily focus on the situational application of historical narratives in the domestic political and regional context, without the formation of specialised state institutions, museums, or long-term international campaigns.

From the Vietnamese side, the memory of the 1979 events, when its army removed the Khmer Rouge regime

in Cambodia, features in official discourse as an act of humanitarian intervention and a "historical mission of liberation". Such a narrative legitimises Vietnam's contemporary diplomatic positions in the region, demonstrating it as a stabilising force and an "older brother" to Cambodia. However, this also creates a condescending attitude towards the neighbouring state, causing asymmetry in bilateral dialogue. In Cambodia, the image of Vietnam as a historical expansionist is cultivated. Nationalist parties and opposition figures often resort to themes of territorial threats and disputed border demarcation, especially during electoral periods or times of social tension (Sokvy & Zeiner-Morrish, 2025).

Thus, in the relations between Vietnam and Cambodia, the memory of the shared past is rather instrumental than structurally formalised. It functions as a means of political influence and legitimisation. The absence of stable mechanisms for commemoration or dialogue about the shared past only reinforces asymmetry in bilateral relations and contributes to periodic escalation of tension. In 2012, official statements by Prime Minister of Cambodia Hun Sen (Main Statement by Samdech Techo Hun Sen..., 2024), in which he accused Vietnam of illegal seizure of Cambodian territories along the common border, caused a wave of

protests in Vietnam. Protesters, including both civic activists and nationalist groups, accused Cambodia of distorting historical facts and demanded official refutation of the statements. Tension in bilateral relations escalated, forcing the governments of both countries to hold additional diplomatic consultations (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2019).

Memory of military conflicts and the colonial past plays a key role in shaping regional relations between Cambodia and Vietnam, significantly influencing the contemporary political climate. One of the central territorial disputes is the demarcation of the land border, especially in the provinces of Takeo, Kampot, Ratanakiri, and Mondulakiri. The Cambodian side has repeatedly accused Vietnam of unilaterally moving border markers and illegally constructing structures (Reaksmey, 2016), such as military posts and roads, which, according to Phnom Penh, constitutes a violation of sovereignty. Another problematic issue is control over islands in the coastal zone, specifically the island of Koh Tral (known in Vietnam as Phu Quoc). Cambodian nationalists demand the return of the island (Chheang, 2015), which was previously part of Cambodia but remained under Vietnam's jurisdiction after the French colonial period.

Bilateral negotiations within the framework of the Joint Committee on Border Demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam are used to resolve these disputes. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has created consultative mechanisms for resolving territorial conflicts between its members. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is limited due to the absence of enforcement mechanisms for decisions. This is related to the "ASEAN Way" principle, which emphasises consensus and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, complicating the adoption of legally binding decisions regarding disputes. For example, in the case of the territorial dispute between Thailand and Cambodia regarding the Preah Vihear Temple, ASEAN attempted to act as a mediator, but its efforts were limited due to the absence of enforcement mechanisms (Setyowati & Nurulita, 2023). Furthermore, in 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in a case between the Philippines and China regarding the South China Sea, a decision which China rejected, highlighting the challenges of enforcing international rulings without the necessary enforcement mechanisms (Batista, 2024).

Historical disputes, particularly regarding territorial claims in the border provinces in eastern Cambodia, remain an open issue that periodically leads to armed

clashes and diplomatic conflicts. These disputes have deep historical roots and manifest in various forms, including infrastructure construction, border demarcation, and environmental projects. For example, in July 2018, Cambodia officially protested against Vietnam's unilateral placement of border markers near Koh Ses island (Chhengpor, 2019). The Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded that Vietnam dismantle these markers, stating that they were installed without agreement and violate Cambodia's sovereignty. This incident underscored the tension in relations between the two countries regarding border issues. Another case is the protracted process of demarcating the 1,270-kilometre border between Cambodia and Vietnam, which has been ongoing since 2006. As of 2024, about 84% of the border had been demarcated (PM reaffirms purpose..., 2024). However, disputed sections remain, especially in the provinces of Mondulakiri, Ratanakiri, Svay Rieng, Takeo, and Tboung Khmum.

These tensions are exacerbated by historical narratives that solidify enemy images in the collective memory of both countries, hindering the development of trusting relations. The military expenditures of Cambodia and Vietnam show a tendency to increase, indicating lingering mistrust between the states. In 2023, Vietnam spent around 7.8 billion USD on defence (Asian Military Review, 2024), while Cambodia, with a much smaller budget, is also increasing its expenditures on military needs, especially in border areas. Military expenditures in Cambodia increased from 618.70 million USD in 2022 to 668 million USD in 2023 (Trading Economics, 2023). This indicates the desire of both countries to ensure military readiness in case of conflict escalation.

Despite historical disputes, both countries cooperate within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), seeking to balance their relations between the need to preserve national interests and regional integration. Joint economic projects, such as infrastructure initiatives, the construction of transport corridors, and trade agreements, serve as a platform for strengthening interconnections and reducing tension. In 2023, agreements in the areas of trade and science aimed at strengthening economic cooperation were signed (Talustan, 2023). Trade figures for 2022 and 2023 indicate the strengthening of economic ties (OEC, 2023), potentially increasing interdependence between the two countries in achieving their development goals. However, the issue of memory continues to play a significant role in determining the foreign policy priorities of both states (Table 3).

Table 3. Key differences in the narratives of Vietnam and Cambodia

Aspect	Cambodia	Vietnam
Main emphasis	The Khmer Rouge regime, genocide, the influence of the colonial legacy, and Vietnam's intervention in 1978	Vietnam's liberation mission in Cambodia, the restoration of peace after the genocide, and disputes with Cambodia regarding historical narratives
Historical assessment	Assessment of Vietnam's intervention as aggression, discussion of Khmer Rouge policies. The importance of the memory of the genocide for national identity	The liberation of Cambodia as an important stage for stability in the region. Recognition of itself as a peacemaker and human rights defender
Contemporary interpretation	Emphasis on internal traumas, the role of the Khmer Rouge in national memory. Vietnam's intervention is considered unfavourably viewed in society	Positioning Vietnam as a saviour that helped stop the genocide and restore peace. The use of this theme for internal legitimisation.

Table 3. Continued

Aspect	Cambodia	Vietnam
Geopolitical context	Disputes with Vietnam regarding territorial claims and historical disagreements. The importance of cooperation within ASEAN for reducing tension	The growth of Vietnam's influence in Southeast Asia. Joint economic initiatives, but strained relations with Cambodia persist
Economic aspect	The growth of military expenditures, the active use of historical narratives to strengthen domestic policy	Joint economic projects with Cambodia, particularly in the energy and agro-industrial sectors, strengthening regional cooperation

Source: compiled by the author based on L. Hunt (2024) and H. Nguyen (2024b)

Political leaders in India and Pakistan frequently employ historical narratives to strengthen national identity, delineate external enemies, and justify significant military expenditures. In Pakistan, national identity has been constructed around the “Two-Nation Theory”, which posits an inherent dichotomy between Hindus and Muslims (Inam, 2023). This concept portrays India as a constant threat to Pakistan's sovereignty, thus justifying heightened defence readiness and military spending. On the other hand, India's national identity has shifted towards Hindu nationalism, particularly under the influence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This ideology emphasises India's Hindu heritage (Xiaolian *et al.*, 2024), often portraying Pakistan as a hostile neighbour and sponsor of cross-border terrorism. Such images serve to unite the population against a common external enemy, thereby fostering public support for increased military budgets and defence initiatives. This necessitates a strategic approach to historical memory management from both countries, aimed at finding compromises and creating new foundations for a shared future.

Memory politics in Asian countries have a direct influence on the formation of regional conflicts and are directly linked to diplomatic tensions, armed clashes, and the blockage of international dialogue. Contradictions are evident both in the content of official historical narratives and in commemorative practices, which contradict each other or deliberately ignore the traumatic events experienced by neighbours. This gives rise to cyclical diplomatic demarches, the blockage of trade agreements, and a negative impact on bilateral relations. The political consequences of these contradictions manifest at several levels. In the domestic political dimension, memory politics are used for social mobilisation, the consolidation of power, and the legitimisation of authoritarian practices through appeal to “national pain” or “national dignity”. At the foreign policy level, historical memory conflicts often serve as a tool for pressure or the justification of rigid diplomatic positions. Speeches by political leaders with an emphasis on historical images become part of a strategic discourse aimed at both domestic and external audiences.

In the 21st century, several stable patterns of instrumentalisation of historical memory can be traced in political and diplomatic discourse, particularly in Asian countries. The first key pattern is the growing politicisation of commemorative practices, manifesting in the active involvement of the state in regulating, initiating, and coordinating official forms of memory. Memorial events, anniversaries, state speeches, and educational programmes are increasingly used as means of forming collective identity and legitimising the current political regime. For example, in China, the official historical policy regarding the

Second Sino-Japanese War is actively conveyed through large state media projects, museum exhibitions, and educational policy, which emphasises the sacrifice of the Chinese people and the need for national unity under the leadership of the Communist Party.

The second pattern lies in the use of historical narratives to legitimise military strategies, defence budgets, and territorial claims. Appeals to the past allow authorities to justify contemporary political steps, presenting them as a means of preventing the recurrence of historical traumas or as “restoration of justice”. This is observed in the case of India and Pakistan, where both sides refer to historical grievances related to the partition of British India and the wars over Kashmir to justify the militarisation of the region and changes in the status of territories.

The third pattern is evident in the transformation of memorial objects into geopolitical symbols which represent claims to historical leadership or moral superiority in the region. An example of this is the Japanese Yasukuni Shrine, which has transformed from an object of mourning for the deceased into a symbol of revisionist historical policy, causing protest reactions in China and South Korea. Another example is Vietnam and Cambodia, where individual monuments and museums dedicated to the Vietnamese occupation of 1979-1989 play the role not only of national memory but also of diplomatic indicators of relations between the countries: the preservation of such objects without joint interpretation strengthens mistrust and makes political reconciliation impossible.

All the aforementioned patterns are formed against the backdrop of a global trend towards strengthening the role of national identity as a basis for political stability in the face of threats from transnational challenges, including migration, economic instability, and the growing influence of non-state actors. This is precisely why national governments seek to centralise the historical discourse and, through it, construct the image of the state as a moral subject with the right to specific political behaviour in response to “historical injustice”. In the 21st century, memory politics is becoming increasingly multidimensional: it encompasses cultural, security, educational, and diplomatic spheres, acquiring a systemic character in the foreign policy positioning of states. Analysis of these patterns allows for the conclusion that effective resolution of memory conflicts will require not only historical dialogue but also the creation of new institutional frameworks for cooperation on issues of collective perception of the past.

Discussion

Analysis of the various aspects of memory politics – historical, cultural, and political – allows for a detailed study

of the influence of these policies on regional stability and relations between states. The results of this study confirm previous conclusions made by other researchers regarding memory politics in the formation of national identity and their influence on cross-border relations. Memory politics is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which requires a comprehensive approach to analysis.

The research by D. Rugo & N. Parish (2021) confirms that the manipulation of historical narratives can complicate processes of national reconciliation and integration. In the context of Asian countries, this aspect acquires particular significance, as historical memory often becomes an instrument of political struggle. Concurrently, the results of this study indicate that in Asia, crises not only arise due to manipulation of the past but also themselves become a catalyst for the escalation of historical contradictions. This is confirmed by the cases of Japan, China, and Korea, where historical conflicts periodically escalate against the backdrop of contemporary political and economic confrontations.

In the research by H. Kaur & P. Jaggi (2023) and S. Kapila (2024), attention is drawn to the significance of historical memory regarding the Partition of British India in 1947 as an important factor in cross-border tension. The authors emphasise that conflicting interpretations of the events related to the partition of India and Pakistan contribute to deepening the divide between the countries. These contradictions not only affect political and economic relations but also shape domestic political rhetoric, intensifying nationalist sentiment. However, the analysis conducted demonstrates a more complex picture. Although the harmonisation of historical narratives can indeed contribute to mitigating tension, there are cases where historical memory is used as a tool of political mobilisation, making compromise solutions impossible. For example, in Pakistani rhetoric, the partition of India is interpreted as a consequence of the injustice of the colonial regime, while in India, the emphasis is placed on external and internal political factors. These discrepancies indicate that the existence of dialogue platforms does not always guarantee reconciliation, as historical narratives can be too deeply ingrained in public consciousness.

Furthermore, the conclusions of H. Kaur & P. Jaggi (2023) regarding the necessity of integrating historical aspects into dialogue platforms are generally well-founded; however, they do not consider cases where excessive focus on historical traumas can, conversely, exacerbate conflict. In this context, a comparison with other regional conflicts is appropriate, for example, with historical memory regarding Japanese aggression in East Asia, where reconciliation attempts often encountered political and ideological obstacles.

In the research by E. Koh & T. Takeshima (2020) and K. Fukuoka & S. Takita-Ishii (2022), disputes regarding the interpretation of Japanese aggression in the 20th century are examined, which maintain tension between Japan, Korea, and China. The authors note that differences in the official narratives and commemorative practices of these countries complicate regional cooperation and provoke new conflicts. In this study, it has been established that the use of historical memory for consolidating national identity and mobilising public opinion leads to concrete

consequences in the sphere of international relations. Specifically, this prevents the signing of bilateral agreements regarding strategic partnership, such as the unsuccessful reconsideration of the military information agreement between South Korea and Japan in 2019.

Historical events related to the military conflicts and colonial past of Cambodia and Vietnam, as noted by H. Tanaka (2020), G. Bagarella (2023), and B. Kiernan (2024), have left a significant imprint on the collective memory of both countries. Cambodia and Vietnam have different approaches to commemorative practices: Cambodia focuses on national tragedy and cultural losses, while Vietnam uses historical memory to reinforce the ideological basis of statehood. In this study, it has been established that such discrepancies in the perception of the past take concrete political and social forms, which directly influence regional stability. For example, in Cambodia, historical memory of the Vietnamese occupation of 1979–1989 is actively used in domestic political struggle. Cambodian opposition parties appeal to historical narratives, accusing the current authorities of collaboration with Vietnam, which fosters mistrust towards the state's official policy. As shown by the research of G. Bagarella (2023), historical contradictions have an economic dimension. Despite active economic cooperation between the countries, anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia periodically escalates, reflected in protests against Vietnamese businesses and citizens. This creates a cyclical model of tension which weakens opportunities for long-term economic integration.

In the studies of G. Zubrzycki & A. Woźny (2020), O. Fridman (2020), and T. Adams *et al.* (2024), the influence of memory narratives on public consciousness is emphasised, which often leads to the escalation of inter-ethnic tension. Historical narratives that are presented through the prism of national interests frequently become the basis for forming stereotypes and negative perceptions of other ethnic or national groups. This study confirms these conclusions, noting that in the context of Asia, the active use of memory often takes the form of official state narratives, which are consolidated in educational programmes, public commemorations, and state political statements. In relations between China, South Korea, and Japan, discrepancies in the assessment of historical events of the Second World War, particularly the Japanese occupation and the issue of war crimes, continue to create tension. Similar mechanisms are observed in South Asia as well, where historical memory of the 1947 Partition of British India is used in India and Pakistan to strengthen national identity and mobilise the population. State commemorations of the tragedy of the Partition in India emphasise the consequences for the local population, while in Pakistan, this event is presented as a moment of national liberation, reinforcing discrepancies in historical interpretations.

One of the key factors is the use of memory for political purposes, which directly causes the escalation of tension. According to the research of S. Gensburger & S. Lefranc (2020), I. Dubey (2021), and M. Siddi & L. Klymenko (2022), memory politics are applied for mobilising the population within a country by constructing historical narratives that form the image of an “enemy” and legitimise the current political course. The conducted research

confirms this thesis, demonstrating that in Asia, historical narratives are a tool for internal legitimization of power (for example, in China through the interpretation of the events of the Second Sino-Japanese War) and a means of foreign policy pressure (as in the case of using historical claims in territorial disputes between South Korea and Japan).

Successful examples of memory management indicate the importance of an inclusive approach, which involves the participation of different societal groups in discussing historical issues. Inclusivity in this context means not only considering different points of view but also the active involvement of representatives of minorities, youth, women, and ethnic and religious groups who often remain on the periphery of public discussions. This allows for the creation of a more balanced perception of the past and contributes to reducing the feeling of alienation among certain groups. The research by D. Clarke (2020) and R. Enaim & Y. Alamy (2023) highlights that such approaches can significantly reduce the level of social tension and contribute to building trust between communities. The conclusions made by these researchers are entirely relevant as they correlate with the results obtained in this study, particularly in the case of Malaysia and Indonesia, where state memory policy in recent years has increasingly included elements of intercultural dialogue and civil society participation.

The study demonstrates that memory politics is significant for the formation of national identity and interstate relations. These policies can have a long-term impact on regional stability and international cooperation, increasing the importance of developing and implementing effective measures for their mitigation. Innovative approaches to memory management, inter-agency cooperation, particularly with cultural organisations and local communities, as well as engaging the public in historical dialogue initiatives, are important aspects in ensuring regional security and stability.

Conclusions

This study was dedicated to the analysis of memory politics in Asia as an element of international relations and a means of political influence. The aim was to identify the link between historical narratives, commemorative practices, and the foreign policy strategic approaches of states. Despite the absence of extensive statistical databases and a limited number of cases, the analysis of theoretical and empirical studies allowed for the achievement of the stated aim.

The study analysed how memory is constructed through state narratives, symbolic politics, museification, memorial architecture, textbooks, and political rhetoric. The influence of historical narratives on diplomatic processes, conflicts, and cross-border interactions was examined. It was revealed that memory politics is not only a means of forming national identity but also a lever of

foreign policy pressure. The shared past becomes a basis for both regional solidarity and the escalation of conflicts, which is particularly evident in disputes regarding historical interpretations, compensation, and the recognition of past crimes. The results indicate a clear tendency towards the politicisation of historical memory in Asia. Historical events, often presented in the form of traumas or heroic narratives, serve as a tool for mobilising public opinion, legitimating power structures, and shaping the international image. Memory politics influences contemporary conflicts not only as an element of symbolic rhetoric but also as a real factor in strategic planning, specifically in negotiations, diplomatic statements, sanctions policy, and initiatives regarding changes in school education. On the other hand, contemporary political crises directly influence the transformation of memory politics, from liberal interpretation to confrontational. A general tendency towards the ideologisation of the past, its consolidation in legal norms, and subordination to foreign policy interests is observed.

The results obtained deepen the understanding of the role of historical memory in regional relations, demonstrating that memory is not just a symbolic resource but an important factor in political decision-making, particularly in the cross-border dimension. This opens new horizons for the analysis of political identity, memory diplomacy, and conflictology in the regional and global context.

The results obtained deepen the theoretical and empirical understanding of the role of collective historical memory in regional relations. It has been revealed that memory is not limited to the function of symbolic capital but acts as an instrument for legitimising foreign policy narratives, a mechanism for influencing political decision-making, and a means of constructing political reality in a cross-border context. Its active involvement in shaping foreign policy strategy indicates the growing significance of memory politics as a form of soft power, combining elements of ideological influence, cultural policy, and the narrative construction of the international order.

Promising directions for further research include the analysis of cultural diplomacy mechanisms capable of transforming memory politics into a means of reconciliation, as well as the study of transnational memory in the era of digital technologies as a new instrument of international influence.

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Conflict of Interest

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