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## **Heritage Soft Power in East Asia's Memory Contests: Promoting and Objecting to Dissonant Heritage in UNESCO**

Ryoko Nakano<sup>1</sup>

*Heritage has entered the center stage of public diplomacy in East Asia. Competition to claim and interpret memories of World War II in East Asia has driven campaigns to list heritage items with UNESCO. State and non-state actors aim to use heritage listings to present a particular view of the war and related history to domestic and international audiences. This paper highlights the role of heritage soft power in East Asia's "memory contests" by examining the promotion of dissonant modern heritage in UNESCO's heritage programs. It conceptualizes heritage designation as a soft power resource in East Asia and presents a conceptual framework for understanding the hegemonic competition over the "memory regime" that emerged from the structural change in East Asia's regional order. It then uses this framework to analyze the processes by which state and non-state actors promote and/or object to UNESCO recognition of their sites and documents as heritage of outstanding universal value or world significance. The elements of this process are illustrated with case studies of two very different pieces of heritage, Japan's "Sites of the Meiji Industrial Revolution" and China's "Documents of Nanjing Massacre," which were enshrined as significant world heritage in 2015. While state and non-state actors in East Asia are increasingly recognizing the utility of heritage as a soft power resource for advancing specific historical narratives to an international audience, a backlash movement from civil society groups and governments in other countries prevents a purely unilateral interpretation. As a result, the utility of heritage soft power in this context must be significantly qualified.*

*Keywords: heritage, soft power, memory of war, East Asia, UNESCO*

### **Introduction**

International heritage institutions have recently become crucial arenas of contestation for the public and cultural diplomacy of East Asia. The governments of China, South Korea, and Japan, in addition to civil society groups, each promote what they think of as significant world heritage to not only national communities but also a foreign audience. The motives behind such promotion may vary, but competition to claim and interpret the memory of World War II in East Asia drove

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campaigns to list heritage items with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). When heritage in dispute is inscribed, opponents do not hesitate to criticize not only the nominators but also UNESCO.

Drawing on the literature of International Relations and Heritage Studies, this article aims to study the use of heritage in East Asia's international politics over the memory of World War II. Its primary questions are how heritage is used as a soft power resource in East Asia's "memory contests" and why, and how successful such efforts are. To this end, this research develops a theoretical framework to analyze the use of heritage and UNESCO heritage designation in East Asia's memory contests. Two specific cases are used to analyze the processes in which state and non-state actors promote and/or object to UNESCO recognition of their sites and documents as heritage of "outstanding universal value" or "global importance." The methodology of conducting these case studies is qualitative by nature through observation, reconstruction and analysis of the discourse and acts of heritage nominators and opponents. They help explain both the process and outcome of East Asia's promotion of heritage in UNESCO.

The cases are chosen from UNESCO's heritage listings in 2015: the introduction of the "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution" to the World Heritage List and the inscription of the "Documents of Nanjing Massacre" into the Memory of the World (MOW) Register. The first was nominated by Japan, but the inclusion of Gunhamdo (Battleship Island) or Hashima (in Japanese), which was known as a place where Koreans and Chinese prisoners of war were forced to work during World War II, was contested by the government of South Korea and civil society groups. The second case was promoted by the Chinese government with the initiative of Chinese archivists and librarians. Despite Japan's repeated attempts to prevent the inscription, China's nomination was successful, which caused fierce criticism and counter-actions by the Japanese government and civil society groups.

Other relevant cases, such as the "Voices of the 'Comfort Women,'" nominated jointly by a Korea-based civilian network of fourteen organizations and the Imperial War Museum London, and the "Japanese Occupation of Singapore Oral History Collection," nominated by the National Archives of Singapore, are also important and indicative in the study of East Asia's memory contests and the use of heritage. However, it is difficult to make a thorough investigation into the development of controversies at this stage, primarily because the nominations were unsuccessful, and/or the examination process is still ongoing. Furthermore, the study of the two cases in different programs, one inscribed in the World Heritage List and the other in the MOW Register, is useful in understanding a process from a nomination to its outcome. Those cases studies demonstrate that heritage soft power in East Asia's memory contests is significantly qualified.

The remainder of this article is divided into five parts. The first section conceptualizes UNESCO's heritage designation as a soft power resource in East Asia. The second briefly explains the normative and institutional characteristics of UNESCO's two heritage programmes. The third presents a conceptual framework for understanding the hegemonic competition over the "memory regime" that emerged from the structural change of East Asia's regional order. The fourth conducts two case studies: Japan's "Sites of the Meiji Industrial Revolution" and China's "Documents of

Nanjing Massacre.” In the final and concluding section, this article argues that heritage soft power is a double-edged sword in East Asia’s memory contests.

### **Conceptualizing heritage and UNESCO’s heritage designation as a soft power resource**

While the notion of a legacy from one’s own history is a component of heritage, states and communities with a keen interest in increasing their influence abroad recognize the importance of heritage in foreign relations. With the expansion of the global capitalist system, the economic functions of heritage increase, ranging from the enhancement of tourism to the acquisition of development aid. Heritage also plays a role in constructing a national significance that a society can be proud of and which appeals to a foreign audience. Because heritage can be used by the present generation to attract a foreign audience and improve the image of themselves, it fits within the category of “soft power” or the “power of attraction,” as described by Nye (2004).

However, because heritage is grounded in knowledge of history, memory, and identity (McDowell, 2008), it is also a “productive form of power.” Barnett and Duvall (2005, p. 21) define productive power as power that produces the meaning of subjects through diffuse social relations. It is “the discursive production of the subjects, the fixing of meanings, and the terms of action, of world politics.” Regarding diffuse socialization processes as the core of soft power efficacy, Lee (2011, p. 40) argues that soft power works as a productive power by which “a sender’s values and practices have any effect on a receiver’s change in policy with or without persuasion.” While the extent of the effects largely depends on the interest of the receiver, a sender’s engagement in discursive processes and practices has the potential to reshape social relations and policy directions. The construction and promotion of heritage for a foreign audience does not necessarily mean persuasion, but it can shape the meaning of historical events and produce knowledge of the past. The presentation of heritage has the power to construct “truth” with evidence from the past. Moreover, Smith (2006, pp. 2-5) argues that heritage is a social and cultural process in which a sense of place, belonging, and understanding of the past is constructed and negotiated for present human activity and creativity. Because visitors, viewers and observers can be part of the process of heritage-making, the nature of heritage is both constitutive and relational.

Nevertheless, if a state wants to make heritage its soft power resource, diplomatic and political efforts are required, because “for soft power to be activated it needs to be cast as a message” (Chitty, 2017, p. 24). The fastest route to disseminating the notion of heritage to the world is a UNESCO heritage listing. UNESCO was established in the aftermath of World War II as a branch of the United Nations. As its main slogan, “building peace in the minds of men and women,” succinctly suggests, UNESCO has a noble mission for the achievement of peace and the construction of human solidarity through culture and education. A wide range of UNESCO programs and activities can be described as “soft power initiatives” whose impacts are difficult to measure but nevertheless can be discerned from place to place (Duedahl, 2016). Due to the soft power element of UNESCO itself, a UNESCO listing authorizes the significance of heritage and legitimizes the historical narrative attached to it. As Mattern (2005) suggests, legitimacy is the key

attraction. UNESCO's legitimizing effects are especially attractive to those who have a weak voice and little authority in the international setting. Moreover, UNESCO's heritage designation provides a sense of confidence in the value of heritage, which can affect the domestic audience. Thus, UNESCO's recognition is a useful tool for governments and local communities to use in the construction of heritage of world significance.

The tendency to look at UNESCO's heritage designation as a tool of public and cultural diplomacy is strong outside Europe. At least two factors are in play. First, non-European states started participating in UNESCO's programs as a consumer of UNESCO's norms and resources, by which they could gain social, cultural, and technical support, in addition to international recognition and connectivity. In East Asia, after the defeat of World War II, Japan craved UNESCO membership as a step toward reentering the international arena. The image of UNESCO in Japan has been as an international symbol of democracy and peace (Saikawa, 2016). UNESCO has also played a role in education for countries in need. After the end of the Korean War, children in South Korea used textbooks produced by UNESCO, and a new education system was constructed with UNESCO's support (Min, 2015, pp. 11-19; Jung, 2015). China, which rejoined UNESCO in 1971, also benefitted from UNESCO's "Education for All" campaign to tackle the illiteracy that was prevalent in the 1980s (Lu, 2015). These historical experiences gave credit to UNESCO at both the state and civil society levels.

Second, the dominant concept of heritage originates in Western Europe. It is embedded within a specific discourse that defines the ethics for the proper care of material objects, sites, places, and/or landscapes authorized by expert analysis and study (Smith, 2006, pp. 29-34). UNESCO and the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an international expert organization of architects, historians, archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists, and so forth, have popularized the notion of heritage worldwide by enacting conventions and charters. However, among non-Western states a perception that there is a Western imperial legacy of heritage conservation and practices makes UNESCO's idea of a "shared heritage of humankind" less credible for those who have a memory of colonial subjugation (Kersel and Luke, 2015). Even for states without an experience of Western colonialism, the lack of non-Western participation in the process of heritage legislation and institutionalization inevitably makes the World Heritage program look a "Western" program. However, World Heritage can be an international stage for non-Western countries to showcase their civilizations and cultural significance to a Western audience. The same applies to MOW, commonly known as UNESCO's "documentary heritage" program. In cooperation with nongovernmental expert institutions such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Council on Archives (ICA), which originate in Europe, UNESCO launched this program in 1992 and developed an MOW framework. Because East Asian nations are latecomers to these heritage programs, they are not the heritage norm makers and cannot easily influence the direction of discussion on what constitutes heritage and how it should be managed.

Nevertheless, once the economic power of non-Western countries grows and their political and diplomatic leverage in world politics expands, they can move toward actively contributing to the

improvement of UNESCO's programs, most prominently in heritage conservation (Winter, 2014b). In 1993, Japan financially and normatively contributed to the establishment of "intangible cultural heritage," which included oral traditions, performing arts, social rituals, and so forth as the subject of protection, and exercised its cultural and economic power to assist other countries' heritage conservation in a way to direct their national policies (Akagawa, 2014). South Korea has also consolidated its efforts in conservation and research in archaeology, intangible cultural heritage, and the Memory of the World (MOW) in the Asia-Pacific region. Winter (2014a, p. 132) asserts that "being a leader in heritage conservation policy" is an "important vehicle for advancing cultural diplomacy in the region." Compared with Japan and South Korea, China came late to active participation in UNESCO heritage programs. However, so-called "heritage fever" since 2004 has driven China to engage in heritage-related initiatives at both the local and national levels, partly to restore national pride in an international setting, and partly to assure constant income from tourism (Lai, pp. 317-319). Chinese President Xi Jinping is keen to collaborate with UNESCO and incorporate its heritage activities into the "China dream," that is, a revival of the Chinese nation, culture, and civilization (China, 2014).

In sum, heritage is an important tool for governments and civil society groups to unify a community and create a social and cultural cohesiveness. A UNESCO's heritage designation is even more useful in disseminating their historical narrative abroad and confirming the validity of their narrative both domestically and internationally. The acquisition of a UNESCO heritage designation is most appealing to those who feel that their heritage is neglected or unfairly treated despite its significance. Thus, dissonance over the values of heritage attracts competitions for a UNESCO's heritage designation.

### **UNESCO World Heritage and the Memory of the World**

This section briefly explains the institutional and procedural characteristics of UNESCO's two heritage programs: World Heritage (1972-) and the Memory of the World (1992-). They share a normative goal of protecting heritage of "outstanding universal value" or of "global importance," which is an attractive credential for those who want to obtain a UNESCO heritage designation. These programs are different from a newer one such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003-), which cherishes the specific value of culture or community along the line of cultural diversity. However, World Heritage and MOW have different institutional structures and listing procedures.

World Heritage is based on the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972. The centrality of state parties is embedded in this program despite the missionary statement to construct the "common heritage for humanity" (Meskell, 2013). The World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger are used for ensuring that state parties follow the UNESCO rules for heritage conservation. However, the program also gives state parties a primary role in nominating sites. Only from those inventories can expert organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and ICOMOS assess and

recommend sites for World Heritage listing. Moreover, the recommended sites require a final endorsement from the World Heritage Committee, which consists of 21 state representatives. Career diplomats who are delegates in the Committee engage in multilateral negotiations and consensus building to defend and pursue their national interests, which may sometimes block or retain the inscription of sites against experts' recommendations (Bertacchini et al., 2016). Therefore, World Heritage does not sacrifice the traditional norm of state sovereignty.

Compared to the UNESCO World Heritage, MOW, known as UNESCO's "documentary heritage" program, is more expert-oriented and less state-centric (Nakano, in press). It provides state parties with little opportunity to prevent non-state actors from making an unwanted nomination and to interfere in the expert-oriented decision-making process over the heritage listing. The nomination process of the MOW Register is open to "any person or organization, including governments and NGOs" (UNESCO, 2002, p. 23). Only when more than two nominations are made from the same country, the national MOW committee or a relevant regional committee will be asked to adjudicate on its priority. Moreover, state parties cannot get involved in the selection process for the MOW Register, as the expert committee, the International Advisory Committee (IAC), directly recommends the selected nominations for the approval of the UNESCO Director-General. Because IAC meetings are closed to the public, state parties cannot easily exercise their influence over the direction of the IAC's discussion.

While state parties are the ultimate actors in the decision-making process of World Heritage listing, the MOW allows non-state actors to nominate what they think as heritage of global importance without much interference from the governments. In consequence, competition for a UNESCO's heritage designation takes place in different ways: in the making of World Heritage, state parties are the main actors whereas in MOW, non-state actors outside UNESCO can directly participate as a nominator.

### **Heritage competition in East Asia's memory regime**

Competition to promote or object to the value of historical materials or properties as world significant heritage derives from the diverse collective memories of the past. Controversies over collective memories are not new in East Asia. World War II and colonial occupations have been remembered differently across Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, East Asia has followed the trend in Europe of revisiting and rethinking historical injustice and wartime responsibilities. While globalization and the democratization of East Asian countries encouraged debates on historical memory and responsibility at civil society levels, the structural change of East Asia's regional order also brought those critical questions to the center of diplomatic relations.

This trend derives from uncertainty within what Evelyn Goh (2013) calls East Asia's "memory regime." After 1945, a collective memory regime has developed in Asia as an "interlocking normative framework" that shaped institutionalized practices over time (Goh, 2013, pp. 164-172). It was sustained by the dominant memory of World War II that was constructed around Japan's

defeat in the Pacific War. In this memory regime, the defeat is regarded as the result of a Japanese military clique who waged an aggressive war. Japan's security policy of "de-militarization" under a new constitution was therefore justified as a way of correcting historical injustice. Although the war was remembered differently in mainland China and other places, a thaw of the Cold War in East Asia in the 1980s led to space for a significant number of groups to dissent from this regime, publicly contesting the Japanese war memory. The governments of China and South Korea, in addition to civil society groups and individual activists, each aimed to reshape the memory of World War II in Asia, first at a national level and then by disputing Japan's official historical narratives at the regional level. The changing balance of power in East Asia accelerated and expanded the scale of contestation. The decline of U.S. economic power and military engagement in the region triggered Japanese conservative ambitions to reinforce Japan's military capabilities and expand its partnerships across Asia. While the trilateral alliance of the United States, South Korea, and Japan is still intact, China's economic ascendance has led to less incentive for South Korea to cooperate with Japan. As a result, regional competition over a hegemonic position in East Asia's memory regime is a main feature of East Asia's international relations. Precisely because there is no fixed common memory in East Asia, each actor aims to use all available methods and instruments to promote different historical narratives.

A conventional method of promoting historical narratives abroad is public diplomacy. Indeed, East Asian political actors have accelerated their efforts in reaching out to an international audience, not just to obtain a hegemonic position in East Asia's memory regime, but also for political and diplomatic leverage, most notably in Washington (Calder, 2014). Among the three nations in East Asia, China places considerable emphasis on public and cultural diplomacy. Although China's public diplomacy previously focused on assuring the world of its peaceful rise, it started competing for "discursive power" on the global stage around the Beijing Olympics in 2008 (Zhang, 2010). Under President Xi Jinping, this power was designated as not only soft power but also a substantial indicator for realizing the Chinese dream (Zhao, 2016). The "One Belt One Road" initiative, China's grand project for the creation of infrastructure partnerships, is also a soft power strategy for consolidating its cultural standing by linking more than 500 sites across the Silk Road corridors and bringing itself to the center stage of the Asian civilization (Winter, 2016).

To a lesser extent, Japan and South Korea have also made efforts to strengthen their public relations efforts. The Japanese government made an institutional reform to reinforce its public diplomacy sector and increased its budget for strategic communications. To adjust to the age of globalization and digital revolution, Japan launched a new program for network-based public diplomacy (Stanislaus, 2017). South Korea has also accelerated its public and cultural diplomacy to boost its economy and popularity worldwide. As the idea of "middle power" diplomacy has been popularized, soft power and public diplomacy have been designated as key components of South Korea's diplomacy to seek a greater global role (Lee, 2016, p. 5). The trend of integrating government and private sector resources and initiatives to reinforce Korea's soft power is growing rapidly and being institutionalized (Ayhan, 2017; Kang, 2015). Such new political initiatives expand the scope of public communication strategy and integrates diplomatic functions and public-private partnerships for better public communications.

The competition in East Asia's public diplomacy becomes even fiercer when it is associated with the memory of war, as it is driven more by the "logic of consequences" than by the "logic of appropriateness." According to Hall and Smith (2013), the logic of consequences associates public diplomacy with a strategic value that political leaders recognize in promoting and using soft power. States engage in public diplomacy because of a belief that by doing so they can increase their soft power and mitigate rival nations' influence. The logic of appropriateness is related to the status of public diplomacy as a common practice for emerging powers. Public diplomacy must be practiced because other countries do so. Certainly, the logic of appropriateness plays a part in East Asia's public diplomacy over the memory of war, but the logic of consequences is a more substantial driving force because, as Gustafsson (2014) explains, the memory of World War II in Asia is deeply connected to the "security of identity." China, Japan, and civil society groups concerned with the memory of World War II in Asia are not shy about defending their historical narratives and objecting to others because this is a defense of their identity and current existence. An attempt to change a storyline of East Asia's memory regime is taken as an effort to subvert the regional order attached to the memory regime. A verbal fight between Chinese and Japanese diplomats over the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute escalated precisely because of a fear of the opponent's historical narrative dominating on the island (Nakano, 2016).

Based on the same logic, civil society groups are even more active in reshaping the public perception of war because their identity is set to correct historical injustice. For instance, Korea-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have organized war-related museum exhibitions, built monuments and statues to commemorate victims of war and oppression, and run campaigns to protest against the Japanese government for not fully recognizing its responsibility for the women recruited as sexual slaves for the Japanese military. They have secured internal support and widened their transnational networks to push their agenda internationally (Kim, 2014). Although less successful, Japanese conservative politicians have also conducted public diplomacy by taking out full-page advertisements in international newspapers and sending historical revisionist books to professors overseas to "correct" the historical misunderstanding abroad (Yamaguchi et al., 2016). These civil society groups take action because they believe it is the right thing to do and is part of their *raison d'être*.

If these actors are serious about improving the quality of public diplomacy and making it more engaging than propaganda, heritage is a reasonable resource. As discussed earlier, heritage does not directly send a message to viewers but is involved in the construction of values and meanings with the help of the historical information and interpretation attached to it. In competition over a hegemonic position in East Asia's memory regime, both state and non-state actors recognize the utility of heritage as a soft power resource in putting forward a specific historical narrative to the international audience. By using this resource, they aim to create a favorable environment in which they can manage the problematic relationship between their nation-state and others in East Asia. Thus, heritage is no longer just an issue of culture; it is also a concern of politicians and diplomats.

### **East Asia's promotion of dissonant modern heritage**

To gain a UNESCO heritage designation, nominators craft words and sentences to convey an interpretation of what they believe to be heritage of outstanding universal value or global significance. Their campaigns intentionally promote their heritage to win international public support for their own historical understanding. This section examines two examples of the acquisition of UNESCO's heritage designation: Japan's "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution" and China's "Documents of Nanjing Massacre."

### *Case 1: The Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution*

As a state party adhering to the World Heritage Convention, Japan submitted a nomination file of the "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution" to the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO in 2013. Its official preparation for the nomination started in 2008 (World Heritage Council of the Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution, 2015). Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (JCA) decided to include the "Heritage of Modernization and Industrialization in Kyushu and Yamaguchi" on Japan's World Heritage Tentative List. Because the properties were in different parts of southwest Japan, mainly in the Kyushu-Yamaguchi region, they require "serial nominations" by which all properties are connected by a single storyline. Eventually, the nominated sites were reorganized to include 23 components of industrial complexes in 11 sites within 8 areas, which were renamed "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining." Japan also provides a storyline of "the first successful transfer of industrialization from the West to a non-Western nation" between the 1850s and 1910 (UNESCO, 2015a).

There is some evidence to suspect that a specific group of people in the government's circle promoted this nomination. The coordinator of this nomination was Kato Koko, a Harvard graduate in town planning, with a close connection to Abe Shinzo and internationally well-connected. Under her leadership, the World Heritage Promotion Council of Japan constructed a strategy for UNESCO's inscription, one aspect of which was to make a success story of Japan in the turbulent period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This story fits in the Japanese grand narrative that most conservative and nationalist politicians, such as Abe Shinzo, like: the legacy of Meiji Japan characterized by a remarkable modernization and industrialization (Abe, 2006). In September 2013, against the recommendation of the Heritage Committee in the Cultural Council in JCA, the Abe administration put forward the nomination of the Site of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution instead of the "Churches and Christian Sites in Nagasaki." Upon the visit of an ICOMOS expert to the nominated sites in 2014, a Japanese reception party marked the enthusiasm of the Japanese government for the UNESCO listing, including over 1,700 participants such as Prime Minister Abe, members of parliament, senior officials, and local and business representatives (Yanagisawa, 2015).

Japan's nomination and promotion of the Sites was likely to invite criticism from South Korea. The sites include the island of Gunhamdo (Battleship Island) and the Mitsubishi Shipyard in Nagasaki. In South Korea, Gunhamdo had been publicly known as a place where Koreans and Chinese prisoners of war were forcibly taken to work during World War II. Because Korean former

laborers and their families sued the related Japanese companies including the Mitsubishi Industrial Group, Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal, and the Nachi-Fujikoshi Corporation for individual compensation since 1997, Japanese storyline that ignores this part of history in Gunhamdo looked like a case of historical injustice.

When Japan nominated the sites in September 2013, there was no official discussion between the governments of Japan and South Korea on this matter: the issue of “comfort women” was more pressing for the two governments to settle. Only after ICOMOS endorsed the “outstanding universal value” of the Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution in accordance with the World Heritage criteria such as integrity and authenticity did South Korea express its strong opposition: President Park Geun-hye directly presented her concern to the UNESCO Director-General. According to Kimura (2015), South Korea suddenly started a campaign to prevent the inscription for two reasons: first, the ICOMOS decision looked like South Korea’s loss in a competition with Japan over historical perceptions, and second, South Korea saw this occasion as a great opportunity to bring out Japan’s acknowledgment of “forced labor,” which was prohibited under the 1930 Forced Labor Convention of the International Labor Organization.

The Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution were successfully introduced to the World Heritage List in July 2015. During the World Heritage Committee meeting, the governments of Japan and South Korea had a closed session, which led to an agreement that both parties would support South Korea’s nomination of Baekje Historic Areas in addition to the Japanese nomination. As a condition, the Japanese ambassador Kuni Sato, the Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO, acknowledged at the table of the World Heritage Committee meeting that the civilians from the Korean peninsula were brought to the island and “forced to work,” and promised to establish an information center to explain the history of Korean victims on the site (UNESCO, 2015b). For the domestic audience, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs translated “forced to work” into the Japanese phrase “hatarakasareta,” by which it denied “forced labor” and Japan’s breach of the 1930 Forced Labor Convention of the International Labor Organization (Japan, 2015b). For the Korean side, this remark was equivalent to Japan’s acknowledgment of “forced labor,” as in English such a differentiation does not make sense.

Although this diplomatic settlement publicly saved face for both parties, it did not satisfy Korean activists and labor unions concerned with the Japanese wrongdoings against the forced laborers. In September 2015, “Infinite Challenge” (Mudo), a popular entertainment show in South Korea, featured the site of Gunhamdo, criticizing that Japan had not yet put any explanation of Korean forced laborers at the site. The show became a major engine of a new entertainment and social movement related to the Korean forced laborers. South Korea’s two umbrella labor groups, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, erected statues of Korean forced laborers, first in Bupyeong Park, the former factory site of Mitsubishi Heavy Industry in Incheon, and then in front of Yongsan Station in central Seoul with a donation of 100 million won (US\$89,000) in 2017 (Yonhap, 2017b). Film director Ryoo Seung-wan produced the film *Gunhamdo* (2017) with a “sense of duty to raise awareness of a deeply atrocious, but less publicized, historical subject” (Rumy, 2017). Although the film was relatively unsuccessful in

Korea mainly due to its negative characterization of a Korean collaborator with the Japanese, it played a role in reconstructing the value of the Japanese island of Hashima as a place for Koreans to commemorate the forced labor victims and shame the Japanese for their “wrongdoings.” Korea’s major entertainment company, CJ Entertainment, promoted the film in the U.S. and other countries, and organized a special prescreening of “The Battleship Island” in Paris for UNESCO headquarters officials and Korean diplomats stationed there (Yonhap, 2017a).

In presenting the cultural products and statues related to Korean forced laborers in Gunhamdo, non-state actors challenged the UNESCO-certified storylines of the legacy of Japanese industrial revolution. In this sense, the inscription was not the end of controversy but the beginning of heritage politics from below. The Japanese government regarded the erection of forced laborer statues as a problem for the South Korea-Japan relationship, even suggesting that it breached the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (Suga, 2017). Nevertheless, under Moon Jae-in’s leadership, South Korea government was unwilling to suppress the activities of civil society groups, as was the case for the comfort women statues. Ironically, while Japan aimed to promote a successful image of Japanese modern history through UNESCO’s World Heritage Program, it caused a backlash that the governments could not easily contain. In other words, this case demonstrates that a state-level agreement is insufficient to manage heritage dissonance.

### *Case 2: The Documents of Nanjing Massacre*

In October 2015, China’s nomination for the “Documents of Nanjing Massacre” was inscribed into the MOW Register. The nomination was initiated by Zhu Chengshan, the curator of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall and former deputy director of the Communist Party of China Jiangsu Provincial Publicity Office. At the Nanjing People’s Congress in 2009, he and nine other party members proposed a plan to nominate the documents related to the Nanjing Massacre for the MOW Register. After this plan was chosen as one of ten important agendas for Nanjing, the original documents were selected from the holdings of the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, the Second Historical Archives of China, and the Nanjing Municipal Archives. Then the Documents of Nanjing Massacre were nominated for the Register in 2010 (Jiang and Cai, 2015). After an unsuccessful result, the collection was expanded to include other sources from four more archives in China, which led to a successful nomination in 2015.

The nominated collection has three parts. The first part concerns the period of the massacre (1937–1938). The second part is related to the post-war investigation and the trials of war criminals as documented by the Chinese National Government’s Military Tribunal (1945–1947). The third part concerns files assembled by the judiciary authorities of the People’s Republic of China (1952–1956). These documents comprise 11 sets of archives that include films, photographs, and texts. According to Chinese nomination form, they provide “solid evidence” that “had a profound appeal to the global community and helped people around the world better understand the cruelty of war” (UNESCO, 2014).

In China, the Nanjing Massacre has an iconic meaning in the public memory of Chinese wartime suffering under Japanese military aggression. This massacre was seen not just one of many tragic events, but rather equivalent to the Jewish Holocaust or the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While Iris Chang's famous book, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997) contributed to international recognition of the event, the UNESCO inscription provides further assurance that the Nanjing Massacre was an enormous human tragedy for the world to remember. After the inscription, Zhu Chengshan explained that the UNESCO listing represented the "global recognition" of "one of the greatest crimes ever perpetrated against humanity" and "will help us honor history, refute wrong claims and disseminate the truth" (Xinhua Net, 2015). Zhu was one of the vocal opponents of Japan's Prime Minister's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine and the revisionist history textbook that did not mention the Nanjing massacre. For him, UNESCO's heritage designation proved his point that any attempt to deny the massacre would be deemed illegitimate and unjust. For those who committed to the remembrance of Chinese people's suffering, the real value of the inscription was the notion of acquiring international recognition that China's records and accounts of the Nanjing Massacre were authentic.

The inscription of the Documents of Nanjing Massacre provoked unprecedented Japanese reactions against UNESCO. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide (2015a) argued that the UNESCO decision was regrettable despite the conflicting views of Japan and China. He demanded that UNESCO should carry out its work properly, arguing that China had been allowed to use MOW for its own political purposes. Later, he added that Japan would consider suspending its financial contribution to UNESCO unless the organization improved MOW's institutional mechanism and increased its "transparency and fairness" to prevent any future abuse of UNESCO's authority (Suga, 2015b). A spokesperson for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also called the inscription into question, claiming that the documents themselves lacked "integrity and authenticity" (Japan, 2015a).

At the public civil society level, two popular magazines in Japan featured discussions of the inscription and the "Nanjing Massacre." The right-wing magazine *Seiron* (Sound Arguments) gave sensational media coverage in December 2015 on the "defeat" of Japanese diplomacy, featuring articles by revisionist Japanese historians and journalists. The critics accused not just China and UNESCO, but also Japanese ministry officials and the Japanese nation of neglecting the heritage competition in East Asia (e.g. Takahashi, 2015). The center-left magazine *Sekai* (The World) organized a tripartite discussion in its February 2016 issue between Matsuura Koichiro, the former UNESCO Director-General, Igarashi Takayoshi, a former special advisor to Japan's Prime Minister Kan Naoto, and Togo Kazuhiko, former ambassador to the Netherlands and the Director-General and Chief of the Treaties Bureau for Japan's Foreign Ministry. Although the discussion did not have a nationalistic tone, the three expressed concerns over the inscription of the Documents of Nanjing Massacre as the politicization of MOW. They agreed that although the Documents of Nanjing Massacre were probably authentic, it was necessary for UNESCO to be more neutral (Matsuura et al., 2016).

In response to the public debates on UNESCO and Japan's loss in the memory contests, the Japanese government took measures both domestically and internationally. First, in June 2016, Japan's National Commission for UNESCO, part of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, changed its translation of the term *kioku isan* (memory heritage) to *sekai no kioku* (the memory of the world). Originally, the Ministry had used the term *kioku isan* to describe the program, but after the inscription of the Documents of Nanjing Massacre, Japan emphasized that MOW differed from the more established heritage programs such as World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage, which were founded by treaties and had a transparent selection process. Presumably, the intention behind the change in wording was to soften the impression that a weakness in Japanese diplomacy was to blame for the inscription of the Nanjing Massacre documents.

Second, Japan urged UNESCO to make the selection process more transparent and accountable to state parties (Hase, 2015). By suspending the payment of its assessed contribution to UNESCO, Japan pressured UNESCO to accept its proposal for the creation of an inter-state committee, a requirement for expert examination of submitted documents, and a revised process for selecting the MOW committee members. UNESCO had an internal discussion on MOW, which resulted in a report to its Executive Board (UNESCO, 2017). The report partially reflects Japan's suggestions: a "mechanism which would protect the MOW program from political abuse" is required: if there is any "questioned nomination," mediated dialogue between the concerned parties should be a requirement at the earliest stage.

Although a formal decision on MOW reforms has not yet been made, the UNESCO report affected the selection process of MOW in 2017. While a Korea-based civilian network nominated "Voices of the 'Comfort Women'," a Japanese rightwing nationalist group also gathered similar documents and nominated them as "Documentation on 'Comfort Women' and Japanese Army discipline." Because these two civil society groups nominated overlapping documents from different angles, UNESCO decided to postpone a decision on the inscription of both documents until the nominator and concerned parties had been invited for a dialogue.

## **Concluding thoughts**

A race to anchor historic sites and objects to UNESCO's heritage designation has started in East Asia. While heritage is often cherished for a society's collective memory and identity, it is also a powerful resource capable of attracting foreign tourists and the international media. Because heritage has a productive power to develop historical narratives, states domestically support heritage conservation and preservation and internationally promote heritage to educate a foreign public about what should be remembered and what kind of story should be told. In East Asia, both governments and civil society groups regard a UNESCO heritage designation as useful for advancing their historical narratives to the world. Due to the uncertainty within the "memory regime" that has emerged from the structural change of East Asia's regional order, competition to obtain heritage designations is a significant feature of regional politics.

The two case studies demonstrate how difficult memories of the war and related history can be mobilized by state and non-state heritage organizations and how this contributes to the escalation of memory contests. When the historical narrative of items listed by UNESCO does not correspond to their own, state and non-state actors are not hesitant to contest UNESCO's decision. If heritage is positioned as a static product against the interests of others, the utility of heritage soft power is significantly qualified. In this sense, heritage soft power is a double-edged sword: heritage can make the past experience of a particular group accessible to a foreign public and provide anchorage points for people to reflect on the past beyond national boundaries, but it can also weaken a potential of reconciliation if it only serves the interests of a particular community of shared memory. Further research is necessary to fully uncover the role of civil society in international heritage politics, but the findings of this article suggest that the inclusion of civil society is a key to a successful public diplomacy. This is related to the nature of heritage by which both state and non-state actors are invited to take part in a process of constructing a dominant historical narrative. Without an understanding and a shared notion of heritage at a transnational civil society level, it is almost impossible to manage heritage dissonance and prevent negative pushbacks to an attempt to make a "common heritage for humanity."

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