

ABSTRACT

Author: Kihara Francis

Title: The Burden of History: The Abe Government's Impact on Japan-South Korea Relations

Thesis Advisor: Kevin Buterbaugh

Department: Department of Political Science

Year: 2023

This thesis examines how Shinzo Abe—an iconoclastic Japanese politician known for his hawkish approach to international and regional policy—dealt with the colonial legacy of Japan during his tenure. Japan, like its WWII ally Germany, committed a series of atrocities against the various East Asian ethnicities during its imperialist campaign in the first half of the century. Using newspaper articles, and various statements given by Abe and his government, this study will decipher how Abe dealt with compensation for treatment of comfort women and forced laborers; his honoring of war criminals at Yasukuni Shrine; and the textbook controversy that perpetuates a wrong perception of its WWII history. This study will also analyze the reaction of the South Korean government through similar means, to discern the gravity of Abe's actions. The study finds that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not make any positive changes on these issues. More so, the study shows Abe's nationalistic rhetoric and questionable actions in light of the historical issues worsened relations with South Korea. These findings require further research into the complications of the historical issues mentioned, how these issues impact symbolic politics within each country and also, what Japan's attitude towards South Korea tells us about how countries apologize.