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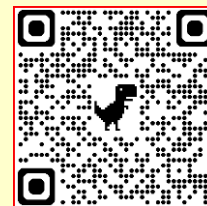
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Historical Memory and Foreign Policy The Role of the Past in Shaping Contemporary Diplomatic Practices among Asian Countries

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the links among historical memory representation, cultural diplomacy strategy, and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness across Asian countries while assessing the moderating role of regional historical tension. Grounded in social constructivist theory and soft power theory, it frames diplomatic effectiveness as the product of processes in which portrayals of the past and carefully coordinated cultural engagement influence trust, communication, cooperation, crisis management, and international legitimacy. Regional historical tension functions as a boundary condition that shapes whether cultural diplomacy translates into successful diplomatic results. A quantitative cross sectional design gathered data via a five point Likert scale questionnaire from 385 Vietnam based participants familiar with diplomacy, foreign policy, Asian studies, historical disputes, international cooperation, or cultural exchange. IBM SPSS version 26 enabled reliability checks, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple linear regression, while Hayes' Process Macro Model 1 tested the moderating effect. The results indicate that historical memory representation ($\beta = 0.632$) and cultural diplomacy strategy ($\beta = 0.688$) markedly enhance contemporary diplomatic effectiveness. Cultural diplomacy strategy yields the larger direct impact, highlighting the value of ongoing cultural exchange, reciprocal involvement, audience adaptation, and trustworthy international engagement. Regional historical tension notably reduces the positive association between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness, shown by the negative interaction coefficient of -0.389 . The findings demonstrate that cultural attraction by itself cannot ensure effective diplomacy when relations carry contested historical narratives, nationalist mobilization, unresolved grievances, and rival claims about victimhood or territorial ownership. Therefore, Asian countries should join inclusive historical representation and genuine cultural engagement with lasting arrangements for handling regional historical tension.

KEY WORDS: contemporary diplomatic effectiveness; historical memory representation; cultural diplomacy strategy; regional historical tension; Asian countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary diplomatic effectiveness forms a vital research concern as Asian states need to protect national interests while sustaining regional cooperation, handling crises, and building international legitimacy amid ties shaped by colonialism, war, territorial disputes, and rival historical narratives. Outcomes in diplomacy thus cannot rest only on material power or economic ties. Collective memories often become politically activated and woven into partisan identities, repeatedly undermining reconciliation even among strategically close partners, as seen in South Korea and Japan relations (Jo, 2022). More critically, clashing views of the past may harden into lasting history wars that override motives for diplomatic, security, and economic collaboration (Deacon, 2024). Cultural diplomacy can foster dialogue and relational goodwill, yet its value grows uncertain when symbolic acts are viewed as historical revisionism, propaganda, or bids to justify territorial claims. China's historical statecraft highlights this strain, since memory diplomacy may strengthen strategic narratives and domestic legitimacy while eroding international goodwill (Chang, 2022). The issue grows more pressing as unresolved territorial disputes and conflict memories keep heightening threat perceptions across Southeast Asia (Zha, 2023). Such matters require inquiry into whether cultural diplomacy strengthens contemporary diplomatic effectiveness and whether regional historical tension dilutes that link.

Prior research shows that portrayals of war, colonialism, and victimhood form national identity and set the bounds of acceptable diplomatic action. Deacon (2025) reveals how popular culture sustains mnemonic divides that sustain official friction between Japan and South Korea. Yet, this body of work mostly draws on qualitative bilateral cases and accounts for hostility instead of assessing diplomatic effectiveness across Asian states. Cultural diplomacy studies likewise claim that exchange can build recognition and relational trust, but the area stays conceptually scattered and often takes for granted that cultural outreach yields influence (Grincheva, 2024). Findings on China's outreach to Indonesia indicate only limited gains, since cultural efforts may be read as extensions of economic or strategic aims (Nur Mutia & de Archellie, 2023). In addition, declared friendship need not produce diplomatic alignment when historical distrust endures (Smith & Fallon, 2024). As a result, earlier work seldom treats historical memory representation and cultural diplomacy strategy as joint predictors of contemporary diplomatic effectiveness and rarely examines historical tension as a boundary condition. This study should remedy these gaps by means of a comparative quantitative survey across Asian countries, measure diplomatic effectiveness through cooperation, trust, crisis management, and legitimacy, and check whether historical tension lessens the positive effect of cultural diplomacy strategy.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following three research questions:

- 1) To what extent does historical memory representation influence contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries?
- 2) How does cultural diplomacy strategy affect contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries?
- 3) How does regional historical tension moderate the relationship between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness?

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how historical memory representation shapes contemporary diplomatic effectiveness across

Asian countries. A further aim is to determine whether cultural diplomacy strategy strengthens cooperation, trust, crisis management, and legitimacy. The final goal is to evaluate whether regional historical tension reduces the favorable effect of cultural diplomacy strategy on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness. Academic merit rests on bringing memory representation, cultural diplomacy, and regional tension into one coherent frame and thereby linking earlier separate lines of inquiry on memory politics and diplomatic practice. On the practical side, the work may assist policymakers in crafting careful diplomatic steps, foreseeing resistance grounded in history, and adjusting engagement approaches to raise cooperation and results in historically contested Asian ties.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contemporary Diplomatic Effectiveness

In this study, contemporary diplomatic effectiveness denotes the degree to which diplomatic practices convert communication, negotiation, representation, and relationship building into foreign policy results such as cooperation, trust, crisis management, and legitimacy. Communication, negotiation, and representation form core diplomatic practices, and diplomatic interaction can foster trust while shaping concrete outcomes (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021). Effective diplomacy must therefore be judged by its ability to secure foreign policy aims and maintain negotiation rather than by activity or visibility alone (Bjola & Manor, 2022). This outcome focused difference matters because regular contact and informal consultation can cultivate trust and support practical cooperation, yet many meetings need not yield substantial gains (Glas & Martel, 2024). Research indicates that combining physical and virtual engagement enables diplomatic institutions to pursue foreign policy goals successfully (Bjola & Manor, 2022). Theoretically, contemporary diplomatic effectiveness holds value because diplomacy allows states to pursue national interests without force, keep channels open in crises, build confidence, and align responses to shared problems. Its relational quality carries special weight in Asia, where consensus, informality, repeated contact, and attention to status shape diplomatic practice. Within ASEAN, relationships and informal consultation create predictability and trust, though slow processes and uneven national capacities may limit joint action (Glas & Martel, 2024). Effectiveness among Asian countries thus stays uneven. China's health diplomacy earned official thanks in Thailand and the Philippines yet did not lift public views, since domestic political rivalry and earlier distrust colored how the aid was received (Li et al., 2025). As a result, contemporary diplomatic effectiveness ought to be measured by cooperation, lasting trust, conflict management, and legitimacy rather than by diplomatic visibility alone.

2.2 Critical Analysis of Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Strategic Narrative Theory

Strategic Narrative theory offers the primary basis for understanding how views of the past mold present diplomacy. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle advanced the approach to show how political actors build shared understandings of world politics and aim to shape the views and actions of home and overseas publics. Strategic narratives arrange events into a time ordered story that links the past, present, and expected future while identifying key actors, problems, identities, and preferred policy options (Miskimmon et al., 2014). The theory separates system narratives about international order, identity narratives about the nature and

role of political actors, and issue narratives about specific policy matters. These layers support one another because portrayals of historical experience shape national identity, locate the state in regional order, and set the interpretive ground for diplomatic moves. Roselle et al. (2014) add that narrative impact covers formation, projection, and reception. Governments first craft an account, spread it via diplomatic and cultural means, and rely on audiences to read that account in line with its intended sense. This sequence ties the theory closely to historical memory representation. Official speeches, museums, commemorations, textbooks, films, heritage schemes, and diplomatic statements choose and link historical events, thereby marking collective achievements, victimhood, responsibility, or reconciliation. Such portrayals do more than recount history. They supply cognitive and moral frames through which officials and publics assess current partners, threats, duties, and diplomatic trade offs. Narratives can thus turn historical memory into tools for national strategy and join present difficulties with inherited readings of regional order (Homolar et al., 2024). In Asian diplomacy, memories of colonialism, war, occupation, national division, and territorial settlement stay fixed in identity narratives. A portrayal that stresses shared struggle, cultural ties, or reconciliation can encourage recognition and cooperative outlooks. By contrast, a portrayal that stresses unresolved victimization or outside aggression can justify caution and pushback. Recent work indicates that narratives supply scripts for political action by showing how actors should handle limits and whether working with others seems fitting (Lerner, 2023). Strategic narrative theory therefore accounts for why historical memory representation should affect contemporary diplomatic effectiveness. When historical accounts supply coherent identities, recognize key experiences, and join past lessons to futures both sides can accept, they can raise communicative credibility, policy consistency, trust, and legitimacy. These traits strengthen the ability to keep dialogue open, handle disputes, and gain cooperation. The framework also explains the place of regional historical tension in the link between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness. Cultural programs send narratives about identity, heritage, friendship, and regional belonging, yet audiences read them through existing memories. When historical tension runs high, rival narratives of blame, humiliation, sovereignty, or injustice reduce the chance that cultural messages will connect. The same effort may then be seen as revisionism, image management, or symbolic taking. When tension is lower, cultural contact can more easily match projected and received meanings. In this way, regional historical tension alters the narrative reception process and lessens the diplomatic gains expected from cultural diplomacy strategy across bilateral and multilateral ties among varied Asian countries today.

The theory assumes that political reality is partly formed through communication, that narratives join events into time sequences, and that state action mirrors readings of identity and order. It further holds that political actors deliberately craft narratives, communication channels spread them, and audiences interpret them. Narrative influence arises when projected meanings gain enough resonance with audience experiences, identities, and earlier beliefs to mold expectations, preferences, legitimacy judgments, and diplomatic behavior.

2.2.2 The Soft Power Theory

Soft Power theory supplies the second basis for showing how cultural diplomacy strategy can raise contemporary diplomatic effectiveness without depending mainly on force or material rewards. Nye framed Soft Power as the ability to shape the

preferences and actions of others through attraction and persuasion. Its main sources stem from culture when foreign audiences find it appealing, political values when they are practiced with credibility, and foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and morally sound. In a later refinement, Nye (2021) stresses that resources alone do not equal power unless suitable strategies turn them into visible influence and desired results. This separation anchors the proposed model. Cultural assets, historical heritage, artistic works, educational exchanges, language schemes, exhibitions, festivals, and cultural bodies gain diplomatic weight when cultural diplomacy strategy arranges them into relationships and experiences that foreign audiences prize. Cultural diplomacy can build familiarity, shrink social distance, convey national values, and open lasting channels of contact among officials, institutions, and publics. These steps produce attraction that may lift national image, boost credibility, encourage dialogue, and foster a more open setting for cooperation. Contemporary diplomatic effectiveness thus marks the result of successful conversion rather than simple possession or overseas display of cultural resources. Empirical work backs this separation. Contact with cultural products can form favorable views of foreign countries, yet the effect hinges on audience knowledge and the setting in which cultural resources appear (Guan et al., 2023). Educational schemes and research ties likewise let states craft positive images, form personal networks, and shape future elites through continued cultural immersion (Rashidov et al., 2024). Viewed through Soft Power theory, cultural diplomacy strategy should lift contemporary diplomatic effectiveness because attraction eases resistance to communication and raises readiness to accept a state's aims, proposals, and leadership. Higher receptivity can ease negotiation, solidify trust, aid crisis communication, and heighten the legitimacy of diplomatic steps. The theory also accounts for why this influence depends on regional historical tension. Soft power is relational since attraction is set by receivers rather than created solely by senders. Guan et al. (2023) demonstrate that turning cultural resources into perceptions rests on context, relationships, strategies, and projection methods. Findings from central Asia also show that reactions to Chinese cultural and public diplomacy mirror geographical closeness, historical ties, earlier grievances, and worries about linked ethnic groups (Vanderhill et al., 2025). Regional historical tension can therefore lower the match between cultural messages and audience readings. Cultural outreach linked to a former colonizer, wartime foe, or territorial rival may trigger doubt rather than attraction. When tension is lower, exchanges can convey respect and shared identity more effectively. When tension is higher, audiences may read the same efforts as propaganda, historical revisionism, or an effort to hide unsettled claims. In this manner, regional historical tension conditions the shift of cultural diplomacy strategy into contemporary diplomatic effectiveness by influencing credibility, emotional openness, and the legitimacy that target audiences grant across varied bilateral and regional diplomatic ties.

The theory presumes that actors can shape others through attraction, that cultural resources hold potential rather than power, and that audiences decide whether those resources seem appealing and trustworthy. It also assumes that strategic communication and relationships can turn attraction into altered preferences and cooperative action. Conversion rests on contextual fit, legitimacy, policy consistency, and receiver interpretation, so historical tension becomes a factor that can heighten or lessen cultural diplomacy results.

2.3 The Impact of Historical Memory Representation

In this study, historical memory representation denotes the degree to

which state actors choose, frame, institutionalize, and convey readings of the past through official narratives, speeches, commemorations, museums, education, and diplomatic symbols so as to shape collective identity and guide foreign relations. Thus, the construct addresses the creation of meaning rather than the fullness or factual precision of historical knowledge. Sierp (2025) notes that political memory travels through symbolic forms and gains political weight when chosen events are arranged into emotionally charged narratives. Klymenko & Siddi (2022) likewise point to narrative building, memory sites, historical analogies, forgetting, and securitization as pathways that join memory to foreign policy. Its importance rests on offering cognitive patterns through which governments read partners, harms, duties, and acceptable policy options. It assigns moral roles such as victim, perpetrator, liberator, or reconciler, and thereby molds domestic approval and the expectations of foreign audiences. From a social constructivist angle, the past limits diplomacy through shared meanings rather than acting as a fixed causal force. Jo (2022) treats collective memory as an intersubjective grasp whose political weight hinges on social interaction, institutional setting, and present mobilization. A critical realist view, however, accepts the real existence of historical events while tracing their current impact to underlying mechanisms that involve narratives, emotions, institutions, and political actors (Liu, 2022).

These mechanisms join portrayals of the past to foreign policy talk and interstate ties (Klymenko & Siddi, 2022). Therefore, historical memory representation can be seen as both an interpretive process and an observable diplomatic resource, gauged through official discourse, commemorative acts, political symbols, and institutionalized narratives (Jo, 2022). A more inclusive, dialogic, credible, and acknowledgment oriented historical memory representation should raise contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries. Open recognition of suffering can mark reliability and respect, while plural narratives can render dialogue politically acceptable, lower identity threat, and supply common language for negotiation. These processes can build trust, crisis communication, cooperation, and international legitimacy. Bachleitner (2019) offers firm backing for the strategic pathway by showing that official diplomatic performances present selected historical images to advance rational international aims. In East Asia, Hagström & Gustafsson (2019) contend that narrative power molds what political actors and audiences view as normal, fitting, and feasible. Historical representation can thus reshape the interpretive setting in which concessions are weighed, so that a compromise may appear as responsible reconciliation rather than national surrender. In practical terms, its worth rests on these relational effects rather than on the mere staging of memorial events. Even so, the favorable influence is not guaranteed. Representation that elevates the state, claims exclusive victimhood, or silences another society's experience can securitize memory and deepen conflict, a risk highlighted by Sierp (2025). Further, Klymenko & Siddi (2022) describe memory and foreign policy as mutually linked, cautioning against treating representation as a one sided cause. The balanced stance is therefore that historical representation by itself may not substantially advance diplomacy. Gustafsson & Hall (2021) demonstrate in Sino Japanese relations that historical disputes assign emotional duties, rights, and deference, and that these rival claims can sustain disagreement even when facts or apologies are stated. This evidence qualifies rather than discards the proposed link. Positive representation must be seen as genuine, allow reciprocal voice, and rest on consistent policy conduct. Philosophically, this joins constructivist meaning making with

pragmatist outcome checking and refrains from treating any official narrative as automatically conciliatory. In operational terms, higher scores should therefore reflect inclusiveness, reflexivity, acknowledgment, consistency, and dialogic openness rather than the strength of state messaging. Under this limited view, stronger historical memory representation produces symbolic and emotional conditions that render effective diplomacy more reachable across historically burdened Asian relationships. Accordingly:

H1: Historical memory representation has a positive impact on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries.

2.4 The Impact of Cultural Diplomacy Strategy

In this study, cultural diplomacy strategy denotes the way a state arranges cultural resources, exchanges, creative works, education, heritage, media, and ties with publics so as to foster mutual understanding, attraction, and diplomatic cooperation. This account sets strategy apart from scattered events because it calls for clear aims, continuity, coordination, and two way engagement. Grincheva (2024) indicates that cultural diplomacy has moved past simple state promotion toward networks that include governments, institutions, and communities. Ang et al. (2015) maintain that cultural diplomacy ought to reach beyond national interest and open space for intercultural dialogue. Its value derives from soft power, through which attraction molds preferences without force (Nye, 2019). Culture offers narratives and experiences that let foreign audiences read a country's identity, credibility, values, and aims. A social constructivist stance views diplomatic relationships as formed through meanings and cultural contact. A pragmatist view judges the strategy by relational results such as trust, cooperation, legitimacy, and crisis communication rather than by the count of events or media items. Cultural diplomacy strategy thus stands as a relational capacity that turns cultural resources into diplomatic contact.

A more robust cultural diplomacy strategy should raise contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries when it remains credible, reciprocal, and attuned to local settings. Cultural exchanges open low risk settings in which officials, artists, students, institutions, and citizens stay in touch even amid political differences. Ongoing contact can lessen stereotypes, humanize former opponents, widen transnational networks, and build goodwill that eases negotiation. Nye (2019) holds that public diplomacy builds attraction when communication is credible and grounded in relationships. Evidence from South Korea supplies a clear path. Lee (2022) observed that international talk about *Parasite* linked the film with South Korea and carried positive tone, thereby reinforcing its nation brand and soft power assets. Zhu (2022) shows that China's international broadcasting uses documentaries to shape national images and push cultural projection. These results suggest that coordinated cultural content can lift visibility and favorable readings, and thereby strengthen legitimacy and diplomatic reach. From a critical realist angle, cultural products do not themselves produce diplomatic success. Their impact runs through mechanisms such as identification, emotional closeness, credibility, network building, and institutional support.

However, the literature backs a neutral or conditional reading. Cultural visibility need not yield trust, policy cooperation, or legitimacy. Grincheva (2024) stresses that cultural diplomacy holds competing channels, actors, interests, and measurement difficulties, so effectiveness hinges on context. Zhu (2022) reveals that Chinese cultural broadcasting stays tied to state branding aims, creating friction between audience contact and official control. Nye (2019) likewise notes that heavy spending on soft power tools can bring

only modest attraction when policies clash with the image being projected. Audiences may therefore read centralized efforts as propaganda, cultural dominance, or image management. Historical grievances and territorial disputes can further outweigh cultural affinity when entertainment appeal sits apart from official conduct.

This discussion qualifies rather than removes the suggested positive link. The construct should gauge strategic quality through reciprocity, authenticity, audience adaptation, continuity, stakeholder involvement, and alignment with foreign policy conduct rather than promotional force alone. Constructivism accounts for how cultural interaction remakes meanings, critical realism isolates mechanisms and contextual factors, and pragmatism weighs effectiveness by diplomatic results. When these traits are present, a stronger cultural diplomacy strategy builds trust, communicative access, and legitimacy that allow Asian states to handle disagreement and secure cooperative diplomatic outcomes. The following hypothesis is advanced:

H2: Cultural diplomacy strategy has a positive impact on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries.

2.5 The Moderating Role of Regional Historical Tension

In this study, regional historical tension denotes the level of lasting interstate strain produced by rival readings of colonialism, war, occupation, territorial ownership, victimhood, responsibility, and remembrance. It appears in repeated official disputes, societal resentment, nationalist mobilization, contested apologies, commemorative controversies, and opposition to rival historical claims. Ranger & Ranger (2023) note that memory politics involves clashes over historical meanings, perceived truths, and public portrayals rather than simple factual disagreement. Sierp (2025) further shows that politicizing and securitizing collective memory can turn past interpretations into sources of identity conflict inside and across states. Regional historical tension therefore stands apart from ordinary historical disagreement because it captures the present emotional and political activation of contested memories.

From a social constructivist view, regional historical tension arises through mutually reinforcing stories of the national self and the foreign other instead of being passed down automatically from earlier events. Jo (2022) treats collective memory as an intersubjective understanding whose political weight rests on institutional setting, public contestation, and strategic mobilization. Bukh (2014) likewise holds that cultural diplomacy mirrors discursively built national identities shaped by international ideational structures. Critical realism still accepts that wars, occupation, and colonial violence took place objectively, yet their present effects run through causal mechanisms that include emotions, institutions, elite framing, and public pressure. Gries & Masui (2022) identify national pride, anger, interstate attitudes, and cooperation preferences as the links that connect historical ownership claims to foreign policy orientations. Regional historical tension thus functions as a contextual condition that can alter how cultural diplomacy is received and turned into diplomatic results.

Regional historical tension is expected to weaken the link between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries. When tension is low, cultural exchanges, heritage programs, educational cooperation, and artistic collaboration can spark curiosity, interpersonal trust, mutual understanding, and communicative access. These gains grow more probable when cultural diplomacy favors reciprocal participation over one sided national promotion (Ang et al., 2015). Cultural engagement can therefore generate relational goodwill that aids

negotiation, crisis management, legitimacy, and wider cooperation.

When tension runs high, however, cultural initiatives meet a hostile interpretive filter. Foreign audiences may read cultural promotion as propaganda, historical revisionism, cultural appropriation, or an effort to normalize unresolved injustice. Deacon (2024) shows that reciprocal memory claims can keep history wars alive and repeatedly block cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Gustafsson & Hall (2021) likewise demonstrate that competing emotional obligations, entitlements, and demands for deference continually renew historical tension in Sino Japanese relations. Officials may also face domestic political costs when cultural engagement seems to undercut national dignity, territorial claims, or victims' calls for recognition. Cultural attraction may still exist, yet its translation into diplomatic trust and policy cooperation grows weaker.

This limiting effect is not absolute. Strategic threats, economic interdependence, alliance duties, and third party pressure can maintain cooperation even when historical grievances remain unsettled (Wiegand & Lee, 2024). A pragmatist reading therefore regards regional historical tension as a variable boundary condition rather than a fixed cultural trait. Operationally, the construct should reflect the salience, recurrence, emotional intensity, and diplomatic politicization of historical disputes. The proposed moderation forecasts that cultural diplomacy can still bring benefits, but its positive diplomatic impact lessens as historical tension rises. Thus, the hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Regional historical tension negatively moderates the relationship between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries.

Drawing on established theoretical foundations, this study advances existing knowledge through the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1:

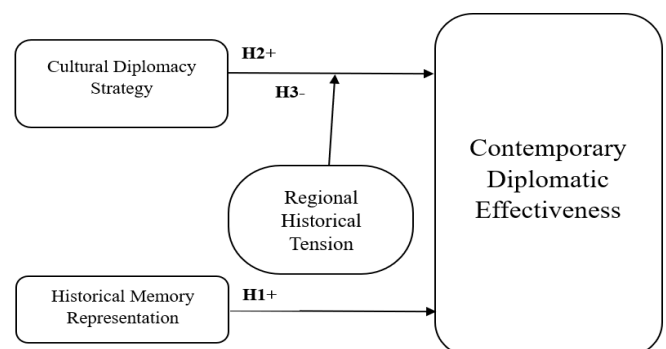


Figure 1: The Paper Conceptual Framework

3. METHODS

3.1 Sampling Strategy

This study used a quantitative cross sectional design to investigate how historical memory representation and cultural diplomacy strategy shape contemporary diplomatic effectiveness while testing the moderating role of regional historical tension. Data were gathered in Vietnam because the country holds a central place in Southeast Asia and sustains wide ranging diplomatic economic cultural and historical links with China, Japan, South Korea, India and other Asian states. Vietnam's background of colonialism war territorial disputes regional integration and expanding cultural exchanges offers a fitting setting for exploring how historical narratives and cultural diplomacy influence views of present

diplomatic relations. The quantitative method allowed hypothesis testing and estimation of direct and interaction effects through standardized survey answers. The cross sectional design recorded respondents' informed perceptions at a single point in time (Bryman, 2016). The individual respondent formed the unit of analysis.

Purposive sampling focused on Vietnam based participants who held adequate academic or professional knowledge of diplomacy foreign policy Asian regional affairs historical disputes or international cultural exchange. Eligible respondents were at least 18 years old currently lived or worked in Vietnam and possessed relevant professional experience academic expertise or formal education in international relations and Asian affairs. Participants comprised government and foreign affairs officers international cooperation personnel university lecturers researchers postgraduate students in international relations diplomats policy analysts journalists covering international affairs cultural institution employees representatives of international organizations and professionals engaged in cross border cooperation. Staff of Vietnamese organizations that maintain regular ties with Asian partners also qualified when their duties involved international communication cultural exchange regional cooperation or external relations. Respondents were drawn from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and other Vietnamese locations that contain universities public institutions international organizations cultural centers research institutes foreign representative offices and internationally active enterprises. Deliberate efforts ensured inclusion of people with varied professional roles educational backgrounds experience levels and areas of Asian regional expertise. Because the constructs concerned national and regional diplomatic practices screening questions required confirmation of familiarity with at least one relevant field such as Asian international relations foreign policy historical memory territorial disputes cultural diplomacy or regional cooperation.

Data collection relied on a structured self administered questionnaire adapted from established research. Historical memory representation assessed how states construct and convey interpretations of the past through official narratives speeches commemorations museums education diplomatic symbols and public discourse with items stressing inclusiveness acknowledgment consistency reflexivity and openness to competing historical experiences (Jo, 2022; Klymenko & Siddi, 2020; Sierp, 2025). Cultural diplomacy strategy examined how states coordinate cultural exchanges educational programs heritage initiatives creative products international media and relationships with foreign publics to foster mutual understanding and diplomatic cooperation with items addressing strategic continuity reciprocity authenticity audience adaptation stakeholder participation and consistency with foreign policy behavior (Ang et al., 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Lee, 2022). Regional historical tension evaluated the salience recurrence emotional intensity and diplomatic politicization of disputes concerning colonialism war occupation territorial ownership contested apologies victimhood responsibility and remembrance while also capturing nationalist mobilization societal resentment competing historical claims and the influence of historical controversies on current interstate relations (Deacon, 2024; Gries & Masui, 2022; Ranger & Ranger, 2023). Contemporary diplomatic effectiveness measured the degree to which diplomatic practices generated cooperation trust constructive communication crisis management relationship stability and international legitimacy focusing on outcomes rather than the frequency of meetings official statements cultural activities or communication campaigns (Bachleitner, 2019; Wiegand & Lee, 2024).

All items used a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The original English questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese and then back translated into English to assess conceptual equivalence with minor wording changes ensuring respondents interpreted each statement in relation to diplomatic practices among Asian countries rather than personal political preferences. A pilot study involved five experts specializing in international relations Asian studies cultural diplomacy historical memory and quantitative research who judged whether the items were clear relevant theoretically consistent culturally appropriate and sufficiently neutral for the Vietnamese context. Their feedback guided revisions of ambiguous expressions reduction of politically sensitive wording clarification of geographical scope and improvement of the questionnaire's logical sequence. Because this expert review centered on content validity and refinement pilot responses were excluded from the main statistical analysis. The finalized questionnaire was distributed through Vietnamese universities research institutes professional networks international cooperation departments cultural organizations policy communities and digital communication channels. Participation was voluntary confidential and anonymous. The questionnaire contained informed consent eligibility questions and attention checks. Incomplete duplicate patterned unusually rapid and disengaged responses were removed. After data screening 385 valid questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis.

3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis relied on IBM SPSS version 26 together with Hayes' Process Macro. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' gender age education professional role work experience geographic location organizational affiliation and familiarity with Asian diplomatic affairs. Cronbach's alpha assessed scale reliability with coefficients of at least 0.70 and corrected item total correlations above 0.30 signaling acceptable internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Exploratory factor analysis employed principal component extraction and Varimax rotation. Items remained when factor loadings surpassed 0.50 and showed no problematic cross loadings (Hair et al., 2009). Multiple linear regression tested the direct effects of historical memory representation and cultural diplomacy strategy on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness using a significance threshold below 0.05. Hayes' Process Model 1 then examined whether regional historical tension attenuated the link between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness (Hayes, 2022).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The sample represented respondents across the principal geographical regions of Vietnam. Specifically, 43.4% of participants were based in Southern Vietnam, 33.2% were located in Northern Vietnam, and 23.4% came from Central Vietnam. Regarding professional roles, university lecturers or researchers constituted the largest group at 25.2%, followed by government, diplomatic, or foreign affairs personnel at 21.8%. International cooperation or cultural institution professionals accounted for 19.5%, while postgraduate students specializing in international relations or Asian studies represented 18.2%. Journalists, policy analysts, and employees of international organizations comprised the remaining 15.3%. In terms of relevant experience, 32.5% had between three and five years of experience, followed by 28.6% with six to ten years. Participants with more than ten years of experience represented 19.7%, whereas those with one to two years accounted

for 19.2%. Furthermore, 38.2% of respondents reported high familiarity with historical memory, cultural diplomacy, regional tension, and Asian diplomatic affairs. Another 20.5% indicated very high familiarity, while 32.2% reported moderate familiarity. Only 9.1% demonstrated limited familiarity. Overall, the sample incorporated diverse geographical, professional, and experiential backgrounds, while most respondents possessed adequate knowledge to evaluate the study constructs.

4.2 Reliability analysis

Table 1 below presents the measurement items used to operationalize the study constructs. Each construct was measured using four items adapted from established academic literature to ensure theoretical alignment and represent its key dimensions. Participants rated all items on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree.

Table 1: Measurement Items

Code	Survey item	Theoretical source
Historical memory representation		
HMR1	Official diplomatic narratives acknowledge historical events relevant to relationships with other Asian countries.	Jo (2022); Klymenko & Siddi (2020)
HMR2	Official representations of the past recognize different national perspectives on shared historical events.	Ranger & Ranger (2023); Sierp (2025)
HMR3	Historical interpretations communicated through official speeches, commemorations, and diplomatic activities are internally consistent.	Jo (2022); Sierp (2025)
HMR4	Official memory practices provide opportunities for dialogue concerning contested historical experiences.	Deacon (2024); Sierp (2025)
Cultural diplomacy strategy		
CDS1	Cultural diplomacy programs are guided by clearly defined diplomatic objectives.	Grincheva (2024); Zhu (2022)
CDS2	Cultural exchanges with other Asian countries are implemented on a continuous basis.	Ang et al. (2015); Grincheva (2024)
CDS3	Cultural diplomacy activities are adapted to the characteristics and expectations of foreign audiences.	Grincheva (2024); Lee (2022)
CDS4	Cultural diplomacy programs encourage reciprocal participation by governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders.	Ang et al. (2015); Grincheva (2024)
Regional historical tension		
RHT1	Historical disputes frequently enter official diplomatic discussions among Asian countries.	Deacon (2024); Jo (2022)
RHT2	Competing historical claims generate substantial resentment among the countries concerned.	Gries & Masui (2022); Gustafsson & Hall (2021)
RHT3	Disagreements concerning apologies and commemorative practices regularly create diplomatic controversy.	Deacon (2024); Gustafsson & Hall (2021)
RHT4	Historical grievances remain politically salient during contemporary diplomatic engagement.	Hwang et al. (2018); Jo (2022)
Contemporary diplomatic effectiveness		
CDE1	Diplomatic communication among the Asian countries concerned remains constructive.	Bachleitner (2019); Wiegand & Lee (2024)
CDE2	Diplomatic engagements generally accomplish their intended cooperation objectives.	Bachleitner (2019); Klymenko & Siddi (2020)

CDE3	Diplomatic mechanisms enable disagreements and crises to be managed without a prolonged breakdown in relations.	Gustafsson & Hall (2021); Wiegand & Lee (2024)
CDE4	Diplomatic practices maintain trust and legitimacy among the countries concerned.	Bachleitner (2019); Jo (2022)

Table 2: Reliability analysis of “Contemporary diplomatic effectiveness”.**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.863	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
CDE1	10.850	4.304	0.726	0.819
CDE2	10.740	3.621	0.783	0.805
CDE3	10.810	4.509	0.715	0.823
CDE4	10.680	5.664	0.772	0.844

Source: (The authors, 2026)

As shown in Table 2, all four items produced corrected item total correlation values between 0.715 and 0.783, well above the advised cutoff of 0.30. The full scale reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.863, exceeding the lowest acceptable mark of 0.70 and affirming solid internal consistency. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha figures calculated after dropping each single item fell between 0.805 and 0.844, every one of them lower than the overall alpha. This pattern

reveals that eliminating any item would lower the scale's reliability. Consequently, CDE1 to CDE4 added meaningful value to the measurement of contemporary diplomatic effectiveness and were kept for later analyses. Similar reliability standards also appeared across the remaining measurement scales used in the study (Hair et al., 2009; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

4.3 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**Table 3:** Factor Loading Matrix.

Rotated Component Matrix ^a							
Component with loading factors							
1		2		3		4	
CDE1	0.746	HMR1	0.783	CDS1	0.759	RHT1	0.752
CDE2	0.792	HMR2	0.826	CDS2	0.811	RHT2	0.796
CDE3	0.821	HMR3	0.768	CDS3	0.785	RHT3	0.834
CDE4	0.774	HMR4	0.719	CDS4	0.736	RHT4	0.773
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.							
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.							
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.							

Source: (The authors, 2026)

Table 3 displays the exploratory factor analysis outcomes that revealed four distinct factors corresponding to contemporary diplomatic effectiveness historical memory representation cultural diplomacy strategy and regional historical tension. All 16 measurement items loaded firmly on their designated factors with coefficients spanning 0.719 to 0.834 and surpassing the advised

cutoff of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2009). The Varimax rotation reached convergence after six iterations pointing to a stable factor solution. As a result, no measurement items were discarded and all 16 indicators were kept for later statistical analyses. Taken together the results offer adequate support for the proposed four factor structure and the construct validity of the measurement model.

4.4 Multiple linear regression model**Table 4:** Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.462	0.128		3.609	0.000

HRM	0.548	0.032	0.632	17.125	0.000
CDS	0.601	0.030	0.688	20.033	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: CDE					

Source: (The authors, 2026)

Where HMR represents the mean of HMR1 to HMR4, CDS represents the mean of CDS1 to CDS4, and CDE represents the mean of CDE1 to CDE4.

As shown in Table 4, the significance values for the relationships between historical memory representation and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness and between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness were both 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. Historical memory representation had a significant positive effect on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness, with $\beta = 0.632$, $t = 17.125$, and $p < 0.001$. Cultural diplomacy strategy also exerted a significant positive effect, with $\beta = 0.688$, $t = 20.033$, and $p < 0.001$. Cultural diplomacy strategy

demonstrated a slightly stronger standardized effect than historical memory representation. These findings provide strong empirical support for accepting H1 and H2.

4.5. Moderator analysis

Table 5: Results analysis of “Regional historical tension”.

Model: 1 Y: CDE X: CDS W: RHT Sample size: 385

OUTCOME VARIABLE: CDE Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dl1	dl2	p
.765	.585	0.246	179.024	3.000	381.000	.000

Model

	Coeff.	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.421	0.117	3.598	0.000	0.191	0.651
CDS	0.477	0.041	11.634	0.000	0.396	0.558
RHT	0.500	0.044	11.364	0.000	0.413	0.587
Int_1	-0.389	0.038	-10.237	0.000	-0.464	-0.314

Source: (The authors, 2026)

Where RHT was calculated as the mean score of items RHT1 to RHT4.

The negative interaction coefficient of $B = -0.389$ in Table 5 shows that elevated regional historical tension diminishes the beneficial influence of cultural diplomacy strategy on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries. While cultural exchanges educational programs heritage initiatives and artistic collaboration can foster mutual understanding and relational goodwill, their diplomatic impact grows weaker as historical tensions rise. Under these conditions, foreign audiences may view cultural initiatives as propaganda historical revisionism cultural appropriation or efforts to justify unresolved territorial and political claims. Ongoing resentment nationalist mobilization and disputes over apologies or commemorative practices can further erode the credibility of cultural messages and limit constructive diplomatic contact. As a result, Asian countries confronting stronger historical tension may find it harder to transform cultural attraction and exchange into trust cooperation effective crisis management and international legitimacy. In addition, the confidence interval for the interaction effect extending from $LLCI = -0.464$ to $ULCI = -0.314$ does not contain zero, thereby affirming the significance and robustness of this negative moderating influence. In short, the results establish regional historical tension as a vital boundary condition that limits the positive contribution of cultural diplomacy strategy to contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries.

Hypothesis H3, therefore, receives empirical support.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Result Summary

Historical memory representation and cultural diplomacy strategy each exert significant positive influences on contemporary diplomatic effectiveness among Asian countries, as reflected in the standardized regression coefficients of 0.632 and 0.688. Inclusive and consistent portrayals of the past, paired with carefully coordinated cultural exchanges, enable diplomatic actors to foster mutual recognition, maintain open communication, build trust, and advance cooperative foreign policy goals. Cultural diplomacy strategy shows a marginally stronger effect, underscoring the particular value of reciprocal cultural engagement, educational collaboration, heritage projects, and communication tailored to specific audiences. At the same time, regional historical tension operates as a significant negative moderator that diminishes the link between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness, confirmed by the interaction coefficient of -0.389 and the confidence interval from -0.464 to -0.314 . Consequently, cultural diplomacy yields more limited diplomatic returns when interstate relations remain strained by contested historical narratives, nationalist mobilization, unresolved grievances, disputed apologies, and competing territorial claims, conditions under which cultural initiatives risk being viewed as propaganda, revisionism,

appropriation, or efforts to evade historical accountability. Overall, the empirical results support all three hypotheses and affirm the theoretical framework that links historical memory representation, cultural diplomacy strategy, regional historical tension, and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness. Addressing the research questions, constructive historical memory representation significantly enhances diplomatic effectiveness, cultural diplomacy strategy produces a significant positive effect of moderately greater strength than historical memory representation, and rising regional historical tension substantially reduces the diplomatic benefits of cultural diplomacy. To sum up, these findings indicate that Asian countries gain most when they present historical narratives inclusively, sustain reciprocal cultural engagement, recognize historical sensitivities, and prevent nationalist contestation from eroding diplomatic efforts. Improving contemporary diplomatic effectiveness therefore calls for governments to integrate credible historical representation with ongoing cultural dialogue, stakeholder involvement, audience awareness, and careful handling of unresolved regional grievances.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings strongly support H1 because historical memory representation significantly improves contemporary diplomatic effectiveness with $\beta = 0.632$. This outcome aligns with claims that historical narratives, analogies, memory sites, and selective remembrance link the past to foreign policy (Klymenko & Siddi, 2020). It further backs the position that mobilized memory gains political force through institutional contestation (Jo, 2022) and that historical imagery can serve as a strategic diplomatic asset (Bachleitner, 2019). At the same time, the study dismisses any deterministic view that expanded memory representation is automatically advantageous. Politicized and securitized memory can heighten interstate conflict (Sierp, 2025), and factual recognition or apology cannot by itself settle rival emotional claims (Gustafsson & Hall, 2021). The positive coefficient therefore favors a bounded reading in which inclusive, reflexive, and dialogic representation carries more weight than sheer narrative intensity. Theoretically, this study broadens constructivist foreign policy analysis by treating historical memory representation as a measurable diplomatic capability that converts contested history into relational knowledge, while showing that effectiveness rests on representational quality rather than mere repetition of the past.

The findings strongly support H2 because cultural diplomacy strategy positively affects contemporary diplomatic effectiveness with $\beta = 0.688$, surpassing the influence of historical memory representation. This result matches the view that credible relationship based public diplomacy builds attraction (Nye, 2019) and the evidence that cultural products can deepen associations with South Korea (Lee, 2022). It also upholds the placement of cultural diplomacy inside lasting networks of governments, institutions, industries, and communities (Grincheva, 2024). Nevertheless, the study rejects the instrumentalist assertion that shipping cultural content automatically turns popularity into diplomatic leverage. Cultural diplomacy needs to move past narrow national promotion (Ang et al., 2015), and Chinese international broadcasting exposes friction between audience engagement and state branding (Zhu, 2022). The relatively strong coefficient should thus be read as proof of strategic quality, reciprocity, authenticity, and audience adaptation rather than promotional scale. Theoretically, this study develops soft power research by reframing cultural diplomacy strategy as a relational conversion capability through which cultural resources produce trust, diplomatic access, cooperation, and

legitimacy.

The findings support H3 because regional historical tension negatively moderates the relationship between cultural diplomacy strategy and contemporary diplomatic effectiveness with $B = -0.389$ and a confidence interval from -0.464 to -0.314 . This outcome agrees with the claim that reciprocal mnemonic encounters keep history wars alive (Deacon, 2024) and with experimental findings that contested historical ownership weakens attitudes toward another country and readiness to cooperate (Gries & Masui, 2022). It further clarifies why cultural messages can meet competing emotional duties and calls for deference (Gustafsson & Hall, 2021). Still, the study only partly accepts portrayals of historical tension as an enduring obstacle. Security costs and alliance pressure can maintain cooperation despite historical disputes (Wiegand & Lee, 2024), and memory salience shifts with political mobilization (Jo, 2022). The negative interaction therefore signals attenuation rather than impossibility. Theoretically, this research inserts a boundary condition into soft power and constructivist diplomacy scholarship by clarifying when cultural attraction fails to translate into diplomatic effectiveness. Cultural resources hold no context free diplomatic worth because their impact hinges on historically structured reception.

5.3 Practical Implications

The positive effect of historical memory representation implies that Asian governments ought to regard the past as a working element of diplomacy instead of ceremonial messaging. Foreign ministries should form memory advisory groups that bring together diplomats, historians, educators, archivists, and affected communities. These groups ought to examine speeches, museum partnerships, commemorations, and educational exchanges for factual reliability, recognition of suffering, and awareness of rival narratives. Because collective memory gains force through institutional and public mobilization, consultation should occur before agreements that involve apologies, reparations, heritage, or territorial symbolism (Jo, 2022). Governments should further promote joint historical research, shared archives, and bilateral commemorative projects. Such efforts can stop official narratives from dominating claims of victimhood while supplying language for addressing disagreements. At the same time, the finding does not warrant unrestricted expansion of memory communication. Since securitized memory can heighten conflict (Sierp, 2025), practitioners should evaluate whether messages promote recognition or stir hostility. Diplomatic effectiveness becomes more probable when historical representation remains inclusive, consistent, evidence based, and tied to consultation rather than nationalist display.

The stronger effect of cultural diplomacy strategy shows that foreign ministries should move beyond isolated festivals toward lasting, audience aware programs linked to diplomatic aims. Resources ought to favor educational mobility, artist and researcher exchanges, heritage cooperation, language programs, joint media production, and professional networks that endure political shifts. Initiatives should feature reciprocal involvement by host communities and independent cultural actors because diplomacy limited to national promotion risks forfeiting authenticity (Ang et al., 2015). South Korea's experience with *Parasite* demonstrates how resonant cultural products can deepen positive national associations when creative industries keep substantial independence (Lee, 2022). Asian governments should, therefore, align public institutions with universities, museums, creative enterprises, diaspora communities, and civil society without imposing excessive control over their messages. Evaluation should track shifts in trust, relationship

continuity, network building, and readiness to cooperate rather than attendance or media coverage alone. Digital engagement should include audience listening and local adaptation. These steps can turn cultural visibility into lasting access, credibility, and cooperation instead of short lived publicity.

The negative moderation result obliges practitioners to gauge regional historical tension before planning cultural diplomacy. A program that works in a low tension setting may trigger resistance where colonial violence, territorial claims, or disputed apologies stay prominent. Foreign ministries should perform historical sensitivity reviews, consult victims' groups and local experts, and steer clear of symbols that suggest appropriation or revisionism. Programs ought to start with listening, acknowledgment, and modest collaborative activities before prominent national branding. Evidence that historical ownership claims can lessen willingness to cooperate shows why cultural disputes call for diplomatic risk evaluation (Gries & Masui, 2022). Under high tension, initiatives should rely on jointly managed platforms, neutral venues, multilingual interpretation, and third party facilitators. Policymakers should not view tension as fixed because security interests and mediation can sustain cooperation amid disputes (Wiegand & Lee, 2024). Cultural diplomacy should function together with historical dialogue, crisis communication, and institutional protections. This combined method can keep memory conflicts from overtaking useful cultural relationships.

5.4 Limitations

Several limitations shape the findings. First, the cross sectional design records perceptions at a single point and cannot confirm temporal causality among the constructs. Second, all 385 respondents were located in Vietnam, so the results reflect Vietnam based views rather than those of every Asian society. Third, purposive sampling may give greater weight to participants already interested in diplomacy or regional matters. Fourth, self reported Likert responses stay open to common method bias, social desirability, and political sensitivity. Fifth, broad regional constructs may mask variation across bilateral ties, political systems, generations, and historical disputes. Finally, four item scales offer analytical convenience but cannot cover every institutional, emotional, and symbolic aspect of memory, culture, tension, or diplomatic effectiveness. The moderation result should therefore be read as a general pattern rather than a universal regional rule.

5.5 Future Research Directions

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to test whether shifts in historical narratives and cultural programs come before gains in diplomatic effectiveness. Comparative surveys across Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia could check measurement invariance and reveal subregional differences. Dyadic studies should focus on particular country pairs because Japan and South Korea may differ from disputes involving China, Vietnam, or India. Researchers could pair surveys with interviews, archival material, media analysis, and diplomatic event data to lessen reliance on common method measures. Experiments could vary apology wording, narrative inclusiveness, cultural messenger, and historical salience to isolate causal pathways. Multilevel models should examine citizens, diplomatic practitioners, institutions, and countries at the same time. Future studies could also examine trust, perceived sincerity, emotional recognition, and national identity threat as mediators while comparing governmental, civil society, and commercially produced cultural diplomacy.

5.6 Conclusion

This study shows that the past continues to act as both a diplomatic resource and a constraint in contemporary Asia. Historical memory representation markedly improves contemporary diplomatic effectiveness when representations offer credible, inclusive, and dialogic readings of contested experiences. Cultural diplomacy strategy produces an even stronger positive effect, affirming the worth of ongoing cultural exchange, reciprocal involvement, and audience sensitive engagement. Yet regional historical tension markedly reduces this relationship, revealing that cultural attraction cannot by itself surmount unresolved grievances, nationalist mobilization, or rival claims to victimhood and ownership. The findings uphold H1, H2, and H3 and confirm an integrated framework that joins memory, cultural strategy, historical context, and diplomatic outcomes. Effective diplomacy therefore calls on Asian governments to align responsible historical representation with genuine cultural engagement while handling the tensions that influence how foreign audiences receive diplomatic initiatives.

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