

1. The objective of the project

The research problem presented in this project concerns the Japan – South Korea reconciliation process. The aim is to establish whether the new paths to the reconciliation, encompassing on one hand the activities of Japanese and South Korean non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the involvement of the United States (US) on the other, can provide greater success in advancing relations between the two states in comparison with both governments' approach. As the states' administrations remain dominant with regards to designing and executing policies concerning reconciliation matters, focusing on the alternative objects of analysis ensures the innovative character of the project. With regards to the NGOs, the decisive factors for their selection are: financial and organisational independence from the governments, international scope of activity and undertaking projects aimed at strengthening civil societies in both countries. The part relating to the United States' role has been selected on account of their status of being the biggest ally and security guarantor for both Japan and South Korea in Northeast Asia region. Despite the fact that the Japanese-South Korean reconciliation remains within the American strategic interest, so far the government's representatives have demonstrated restraint in performing activities with regards to this matter.

2. The research to be carried out

The research has been arranged in four phases and each of them contains a set of specific research tasks. The first stage concerns deepening the theoretical knowledge within the matters of the reconciliation process between Japan and South Korea, as well as creating a theoretical model for analysis. The second and most extensive phase is related to the first component of the project, namely the non-governmental organisations in Japan and South Korea. It involves above all conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the selected NGOs. What is more, this part will concentrate on the legal analysis allowing to define the framework of activity for the organisations, as well as the analysis of the documents and reports published by those entities. The third stage concerns the study visit and conducting semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the governmental and non-governmental units in the United States, respectively: The Department of State (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs in particular) and The Asia Foundation. In addition, the analysis of the official documents and the discourse analysis will be applied at this stage in order to determine and evaluate the US commitment in advancing the reconciliation process in Northeast Asia. The fourth and last phase will concentrate on consolidation of gathered research materials and formulating the results.

3. Justification for choosing the research topic

The research problem introduced in this project is significant within studies concerning Northeast Asia region. So far, the reconciliation process between the states has been perceived as the governments' domain. The main assumptions of this project are focusing, however, on the non-state aspect, transferring the focus to the NGOs, that have been omitted in the discussions concerning the peacebuilding mechanism between Japan and South Korea. This element of the research is also relevant with regards to the civil-society building process in both countries, and in the situation of the rising position of non-governmental sector, both regionally and globally. In relation to the US role in the reconciliation, the interesting phenomena of constraint is observable, despite the dominant American presence in the region, including its non-governmental organisations, initiating activities aimed at enhancing cooperation between the Northeast Asian states. Undertaking the analysis concerning this aspect will allow to establish the reasons of such restrained approach and determine whether it is being gradually transformed.