



Sediment of Soft Influence: The Study of Soft Power, Soft War, and Smart Power in the Serene Turmoil of Yoko Ogawa's The Memory Police

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Abstract. The shifting landscape of international relations has spurred a transformation in the approach towards soft power, soft war, and smart power strategies. This evolution is driven by the recognition of the limitations of traditional hard power methods in achieving sustainable influence and control in an interconnected world. As countries adapt to global dynamics, the fusion of hard power and soft power tactics emerges as a strategic imperative to navigate complex geopolitical challenges effectively. In this regard, writers in different fields reflect it in their writings, especially in literature. On the top of the list is Yoko Ogawa who, paid much attention to the power dynamics. Thus, the study investigates these powers in Yoko Ogawa's novel *The Memory Police*. The research examines the government's systematic erasure of memories as a manifestation of subtle control. It highlights the contradictions inherent in the regime's exercises of soft power, which ultimately lead to its failure to achieve its desired goals. It explores the psychological struggles faced by individuals subjected to oppression, and how they can draw on their cultural

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heritage as a source of soft power to confront authoritarian regimes.

Keywords: Soft Power; Soft War; Smart power; Cultural Heritage; *The Memory Police*.

المخلص: أدى المشهد المتغير للعلاقات الدولية إلى تحول في النهج المتبع تجاه القوة الناعمة والحرب الناعمة والقوة الذكية. ويعود هذا التحول إلى إدراك محدودة وسائل القوة الصلبة التقليدية في تحقيق النفوذ والسيطرة المستدامة في عالم مترابط. ومع تكيف الدول مع هذه الديناميات العالمية، يظهر الدمج بين القوة الصلبة والقوة الناعمة كضرورة استراتيجية للتعامل بفاعلية مع التحديات الجيوسياسية المعقدة. وفي هذا الصدد، يعكس الكتاب في مجالات مختلفة هذا التحول في كتاباتهم، لا سيما في الأدب. وتأتي يوكو أوغوا في مقدمة الأدباء الذين أولوا اهتماماً بارزاً بديناميات القوة. لذلك، تتناول الدراسة هذه القوى في رواية أوغوا "شرطة الذاكرة". وتبحث الدراسة في عملية المحو المنهجي للذكريات التي تمارسها السلطة بوصفها شكلاً من أشكال السيطرة الخفية، كما تكشف التناقضات الكامنة في ممارسة النظام للقوة الناعمة، والتي تنتهي في نهاية المطاف إلى عجزه عن بلوغ غاياته المرجوة. وتعرض الدراسة كذلك الصراعات النفسية التي يعانيها الأفراد تحت وطأة القمع وكيف يمكن لهم استدعاء تراثهم الثقافي بوصفه مصدرًا للقوة الناعمة لمواجهة الأنظمة السلطوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القوة الناعمة؛ الحرب الناعمة؛ القوة الذكية؛ التراث الثقافي؛ شرطة الذاكرة .

Introduction

Yōko Ogawa is a well-known Japanese author who has great impact on modern literature by exploring profound themes related to Japan after World War II. Born in Okayama and educated at Waseda University, Ogawa's works often show her life experiences and the changes in society after the war, particularly evident in her famous novel *The Memory Police*. Drawing influences from influential texts like *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Ogawa engages with themes of imprisonment and resilience, emphasizing the human spirit's strength during adversities. Ogawa's novel is often compared to George Orwell's *1984*, though it evokes a more melancholic tone. In *The Memory Police*, Ogawa shows a society where people's memories and identities are erased, representing a mental struggle happening in their minds instead of on actual battlefields. The people living on the unnamed island quietly face a tough fight as their memories of everyday things and ideas slowly disappear, leading to the breakdown of who they are as individuals and as a group. In the



story, the government's control over memories is a way to dominate the people, highlighting the harmful effects of hidden power and conflicts.

0.1 Research Problem

The research problem lies in the absence of studies that approach *The Memory Police* through the framework of soft power, soft war, and smart power, as most prior analyses have largely focused on themes of memory and identity. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring how these forms of power manifest in the novel and reveal themselves within the neocolonial world.

0.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by a fundamental question: In what ways does *The Memory Police* portray the dynamics of soft power, soft war, and smart power within the neocolonial setting? To address this overarching inquiry, several subsidiary questions are posed:

1. How does the regime use the systematic erasure of memories to exercise subtle control and transform it into a soft war waged against memory and identity?
2. How do contradictions and inconsistencies in the regime's application of soft power expose its weaknesses and lead to eventual failure?
3. How are hard and soft powers intertwined within the narrative to form what Joseph Nye describes as "smart power"?
4. How can individuals within the story draw on their cultural heritage as a source of soft power to resist authoritarian oppression?

0.3 Research Objectives

The study examines how *The Memory Police* depicts the mechanisms of soft control within the neocolonialism context, focusing on their impact on individuals and the ways in which cultural heritage becomes a means of resistance against authoritarian control.

0.4 Research Methodology

This study adopts a thematic analysis approach to explore how *The Memory Police* shows the dynamics of power. The analysis follows three main steps: first, identifying recurring ideas such as memory, forgetting, surveillance, and heritage; second, grouping these ideas under the themes of soft power, soft war, and smart power; and third, using inductive reasoning to show how these forms of power interact and shape the novel's portrayal of control and resistance. The analysis is supported by relevant literary and theoretical sources to explore how political authority operates through subtle means and how individuals respond to these forms of power.



0.5 Organization of the Study

The present study is organized into three chapters. The first chapter reviews existing literary studies that have examined *The Memory Police* from different perspectives. The second chapter establishes the historical and theoretical base for analysis, encompassing soft power, soft war, and smart power. The third chapter analyzes the manifestations of these powers in *The Memory Police*. The study relies on both library and online sources to collect relevant data that align with the research focus.

Chapter One: The Relevant Studies

Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* has been thoroughly studied by scholars globally, who have focused on themes like authoritarian control, memory loss, and identity. Researchers have explored how the novel reflects political oppression, the struggle to preserve personal and collective memories, and its connections to historical and cultural contexts. Additionally, some studies compare *The Memory Police* to other works of dystopian fiction to explore the universal theme of memory suppression. Other interpretations include the novel's portrayal of memory loss as a metaphor for cognitive decline, such as Alzheimer's disease, and its engagement with the evolving nature of totalitarianism. These different perspectives highlight the complexity and significance of the novel.

In his paper titled "Suppression of Memory as Totalitarian Strategy: A Critique of Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*," Kumar (2024) examines how the novel shows the ways in which authoritarian governments control individuals by erasing their memories. The narrative unfolds on an island where both objects and memories vanish, serving as a metaphor for governments' ability to strip both personal and collective identity. Kumar's analysis positions the novel as a critique of how totalitarian regimes influence memory and identity.

In another study named "Re-Imagining 'Dystopian Space': Memory and Trauma in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*," Foong and Chandran (2020, pp. 100-119) explain that *The Memory Police* illustrates the power of memory as a tool for resisting authoritarian rule in a bleak future. The study concludes that even though the government is harsh, the narrator, R, and an elderly man manage to keep their awareness of what is happening and hold on to their sense of self. The story powerfully shows that even tiny efforts to preserve memories can bring a sense of freedom and strength.

Memory and identity are major themes in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, as Akhtar (2023, pp. 1- 6) discusses in her study "Memory and Identity



in Dystopian Fiction: A Comparative Study of *The Memory Police* and *The Maze Runner*.” Akhtar says that strict governments control people by changing their memories and sense of who they are. In *The Memory Police*, people begin to lose their identities and connections with others because the government forces them to forget certain things, like birds and roses. For example, the main character’s mother is taken away for having banned items, showing how the government destroys personal connections and history. The main character helps her editor, who still remembers things, showing how hard it is to keep your identity in a society that wants you to forget. Ogawa’s story shows that when memories are erased, people are more controlled by the government, highlighting how important memory is for resisting and surviving.

Within the same scope of comparative studies, a study by Kaiissar titled “The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*,” highlights the same idea. In *The Memory Police*, the enforcers of forgetting force their will on the people, who mostly accept this loss of memory. However, some characters, like R, fight back and keep their memories, representing both individual and collective memory. In the end, the act of remembering wins against the oppressive government’s efforts (Kaiissar, 2021).

Furthermore, in their research entitled “The Shaping of Japan’s Collective Memory in Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*,” Akmalie and Aminah (2023) state how the Japanese government shaped Japan’s collective memory by controlling what people remembered through censorship from the Meiji to the early Showa periods. For instance, in 1882, the government banned many books to control what was considered morally dangerous. Police were placed in libraries to watch over and limit access to certain information. The Public Security Preservation Law of 1925 also gave the government the power to silence opposing views. These actions allowed those in power to control what people could know and remember. *The Memory Police* reflects this idea by showing a society where objects and their memories vanish, and The Memory Police make sure this forgetting happens. This is similar to how the Japanese government used censorship to remove certain parts of history from people’s memories.

The novel deals with a society where The Memory Police carefully remove memories and physical objects. This creates a conflict between those who want to enforce this erasure and those who want to preserve their memories. In the study “A War of Memory and Identity in Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*”,





the idea of retrieval failure is used to study how the loss of memories affects the characters' identities. This suggests that if there are not enough reminders or signals, memories can disappear, making it difficult for people to remember them (Srinidhi Sudha, 2023, pp. 1631-1634).

Shiota (2021) provides a review of the work in question for the Michigan Quarterly Review. While placing it in the broader cultural context, Ogawa's *The Memory Police* tells the story of an island where memories and objects disappear for no reason. The island's people appear completely indifferent to these losses and just throw away what is gone. If anyone remembers or tries to keep these things, The Memory Police will punish them. The narrator's mother hides some of the lost items until she is taken away. The narrator then tries to protect her editor, who also has memories. Shiota contends that the novel's portrayal of The Memory Police as villains takes attention away from its message about changing history and how society allows forgetting. The story shows how people quickly accept small losses, which can lead to serious gaps in history and memory. It criticizes not only the direct control of The Memory Police but also the slow social changes that make this control possible. The novel warns against the risks of just going along with things and emphasizes the need to remember and question history (Shiota, 2021).

Turning to another aspect, Henning (2023) argues that rather than attempting to displace these widely accepted interpretations, the article "Somewhere out there in a place no one knows: *The Memory Police* and the literature of forgetting" offers a new perspective. According to him, the novel might be interpreted as a reflection of how memory loss develops in people, especially in cases of Alzheimer's disease. Henning suggests that reading the novel in this way can increase its significance. One could interpret the island, for instance, as a brain damaged by Alzheimer's. Henning draws comparisons between Ogawa's story and other works on memory loss, such as Thomas DeBaggio's *Losing My Mind*, David Shenk's *The Forgetting*, and Nicci Gerrard's *What Dementia Teaches Us about Love* (Henning, 2023, pp. 117-122).

In a different context, Ana Došen is an academic member of the Faculty of Media and Communications at Singidunum University in Belgrade, Serbia. In her article titled "*The Memory Police: Rehashing the Image of Totalitarianism or Intentionally Anachronistic Writing?*", she argues that literary and visual images of totalitarianism that emerged before and after World War II remain present in the collective memory of the world. Even after half a century, writers rarely seek to invent new models for this phenomenon. Contemporary authors



face challenges in presenting these themes in innovative ways. Relying so strongly on these existing settings only serves to preserve an image of what was, and to ignore the alarmingly evolving potential of totalitarian thought. Clearly, the writer's position in the present is demanding a lot. Yoko Ogawa's depiction of *The Memory Police* is deliberately ambiguous in order to evoke a familiar image of authoritarian control as a universal symbol of oppression. This approach carries the risk that her work will be read as a cliché. Ironically, Ogawa's novel can be interpreted as thematically and stylistically out of sync, yet striking in its depiction of the struggle against forgetting. Moreover, in *The Memory Police*, Ogawa explores writing as a meditative and creative process, but also the potential futility of such activity within a world of oppressive control and prevailing indifference (Došen, 2024, pp. 49-57).

Previous studies of *The Memory Police* have looked at its dystopian world, but they have not really explored how The Memory Police use their subtle methods to control, or how their actions show elements of soft warfare, and how the islanders rely on their cultural heritage as a soft power resource to resist against The Memory Police's actions. Furthermore, the combination of soft power and hard power, known as smart power—particularly in the context of a neocolonial world, has not been thoroughly examined. Thus, this study examines how The Memory Police's strategies of control echo the methods of neocolonial powers, which refer to exerting influence through economic, cultural, and psychological means rather than through violence. Additionally, Ogawa's novel looks at how The Memory Police use soft power and soft warfare in a made-up world that feels strangely familiar. The idea of smart power is also discussed, focusing on how the island's government cleverly controls its people but ultimately fails to achieve its long-term goals due to its underlying flaws.

Chapter Two: Historical and Theoretical Base for Analysis

According to the standard literature on colonialism, there are three conditions for a state's actions to be considered colonial. First, the colonizing state must have political control over the colonized state, whether full or partial. Second, there must be settlers from the colonizing state living in the colonized state. Third, the colonized state must export its economic resources to the colonizing state. However, Kelly (2017) states that in the twentieth century, a new theory of colonialism became necessary. Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister and then the first president of Ghana, developed the concept of neo-colonialism. Nkrumah explained this concept in a 1965 book entitled *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Nkrumah (1965, p.



4) points out that “the essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside”.

In the twenty-first century, the methods of colonialism have changed. States can no longer divide up continents as Europe did with Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 or as Spain and Portugal did with the Americas. Now, the tools of neocolonialism are based on attraction rather than coercion. This new tool of international affairs is called soft power (Kelly, 2017).

2.1 Soft Power: Origin and Growth

In the complex world of international relations, military power and economic strength are becoming less important. Instead, soft power, which focuses on persuasion and working together, is becoming more important for addressing complicated issues like climate change and terrorism (Nye, 2004, p. 10). Soft power has been coined by Joseph S. Nye, a political scientist and professor at Harvard University. He introduced this concept in his important 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, and further developed it in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.

Soft power means getting others to want the same things as you, not by using force or money, but by showing them the country’s values, culture, and success. This way of influencing people, called “the second face of power,” highlights how important it is to shape ideas and gain supporters in international relations without using threats (Bachrach Baratz, 1963, pp. 632-642). Some critics have claimed that the concept of soft power isn’t new (Zahran Ramos, 2010, p. 495), but is deeply intertwined with Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Zahran Ramos, 2010, p. 497). According to Antonio Gramsci’s view, hegemony is a form of indirect domination, where the dominant power exerts control not always through force or coercion, but by influencing culture, ideology, and values (Cox, 1992, p. 179- 194). Only by using such a method can the oppressive regimes secure the consent of the people by making them believe that the existing system is in their best interest. Soft power is often used to achieve hegemony. A state that can attract and persuade rather than coerce can maintain its dominance while avoiding the cost of military invasion. In this regard, both hegemony and soft power are deeply interconnected because both describe mechanisms of influence that go beyond the use of military force (Zahran Ramos, 2010, p. 497).



A country's soft power comes from three main resources: culture, political beliefs, and foreign policies (Nye, 2004, p. 16). According to Joseph Nye, culture includes art, music, and lifestyle, serves as soft power by resonating with people worldwide, influencing their views and alignment with a country's values. This influence transcends borders organically, appealing to audiences through traditional and pop culture (Nye, 2004, p. 16), thereby shaping perceptions and foreign policy. For soft power to be effective, a country's cultural values must align authentically with its foreign policies. Meanwhile, culture plays a central role in attracting and persuading others, showcasing a country's influence without coercion or financial incentives (Nye, 2004, p. 17).

A country's global influence is shaped by its internal environment, including democratic values and governance quality, inspiring admiration and alliances based on shared principles. Consistency between a country's domestic practices and external rhetoric enhances soft power credibility, while incongruence can erode it. Soft power extends beyond cultural exports and foreign aid to include internal characteristics like standard of living and human rights, subtly influencing global perceptions through example rather than coercion. Nye underscores that a country's soft power hinges on the alignment of its values, governance, and policies, serving as a model that attracts others and furthers its international objectives (Nye, 2004, p. 18).

Joseph Nye's insights on "Foreign Policy Substance and Style" underline how a country's soft power hinges on both the substance and style of its foreign policy. Substance involves policies and decisions that align with global values, while style relates to diplomatic approach and communication methods. Nye stresses the importance of balancing substance and style to enhance a country's soft power, emphasizing the need for policies and actions to resonate with global values. A harmonious blend of substance and style in foreign policy is key to projecting authenticity and influence in the international arena (Nye, 2004, p. 18).

Soft power is often misunderstood, being perceived as a standalone strategy sufficient for shaping effective foreign policy. However, to address the misconception that solely relying on soft power can yield effective foreign policies, the concept of "Smart Power" was formulated. It marks a strategic approach that synergizes hard and soft power elements to craft more impactful foreign policy strategies. This notion diverges from soft power by incorporating an evaluative dimension to assess the efficacy of these combined strategies in achieving desired outcomes on the global stage (Nye, 2012, p. 38).



Building on this complexity, the understanding of soft power deepens; it becomes clear that its application is not without complications. As a result, the concept of soft power has expanded to include what is known as “Soft War”, while soft power aims to foster positive influence, soft war employs similar techniques in more manipulative and harmful ways. Even though there is no strong theory to support it, soft war uses soft power techniques in a more evil way to shape people’s opinions and the policies of other countries. It involves strategies like cyber-attacks, economic sanctions, manipulating the media, spreading lies. These approaches are different from regular warfare and are not completely covered by current laws or theories about just wars (Gross Meisels, 2017, p.1). This means that soft wars include psychological warfare, economic warfare, and information warfare or diplomatic warfare. These dimensions are seldom employed in isolation; rather, they function synergistically. A campaign of psychological warfare is often amplified by economic pressure, while information control prevents the organization of resistance. This multi-domain approach makes soft war a particularly insidious and effective form of modern coercion, operating below the threshold of conventional military conflict but achieving similarly profound results.

Nye (2004, p. 33) emphasizes that the United States has historically dominated discussions on soft power due to its global impact and democratic values; he also underlines the significance of soft power held by other nations. Nye (2004, pp. 80-89) elaborates on how countries like France draw soft power from their language, culinary heritage, and artistic contributions, while nations like Japan leverage technological advancements, unique pop culture, and a dedication to international harmony to enhance their global appeal.

2.2 Soft Power in Asian History and Japan

According to the Asian Development Bank (1997), Asian countries possess valuable soft power resources in their art, fashion, and cuisine, which have influenced other parts of the world. In the 1950s, the mention of Asia brought to mind images of poverty and starvation (as cited in Pocha, 2003, p. 9). However, Japan’s economic success in the 1950s marked the beginning of Asia’s revival. Following Japan’s development strategy, other Asian countries also experienced economic growth. Japan’s achievements have not only enriched its citizens but also enhanced its soft power. With its distinctive culture, Japan possesses greater soft power potential than any other nation. Currently, Japan stands as a global leader in various fields, holding the top position worldwide for the number of patents and development aid. Additionally, it ranks highly in research and development spending,



international air travel, sales of books and music, internet hosting, high-tech exports, and life expectancy (as cited in Sanger, 1991, p. D1). In “A Contest of Cultural, East Embraces West”, Mydans (2003) points out that Japan was the first non-western nation to achieve economic and technological equality with the West while preserving its distinct cultural identity.

Drawing its strength from its cultural heritage of traditional arts and pop culture, Japan began working hard to increase its soft power in the late 1900s. Not only that, but it also began to compete with the great powers because it possessed abundant sources of soft power. The Japanese cultural heritage is rich and diverse. It is represented in various main aspects, including traditional crafts, performing arts, architectural patterns, culinary heritage, as well as Japanese language and world literature. Firstly, traditional arts and crafts stand as a poignant example of Japan’s cultural heritage. For instance, the art of origami is the traditional art of paper folding that transforms paper into sculptures through specific folding techniques. Secondly, the performing arts are considered one of the most important aspects of cultural heritage. For example, Kabuki is a theatrical form that includes exaggerated movements and elaborate costumes, often telling stories about historical events and acting as a preserver and transmitter of cultural heritage. Thirdly, cultural heritage is also manifested in Japanese architectural and engineering styles, whether they are religious, such as Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, or other buildings associated with historical and traditional events, such as tea houses designed for tea ceremonies that reflect simplicity. Fourthly, culinary heritage represents an important aspect of Japanese cultural heritage; with Japanese cuisine recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. Fifthly, the Japanese language itself reflects a unique aspect of cultural heritage, as embodied in its distinctive style and rich literary traditions. Lastly, literature plays an important role in depicting people’s lives and traditions; it also serves as a means of exporting the cultural heritage and preserving it from extinction through international Japanese literature that crosses borders and has been translated into different languages. This has significantly contributed to exporting Japanese culture and introducing people of various nationalities to it.

Therefore, *The Memory Police* serves as a reflection of a dark political scene, in which political power exercises control over individuals using many different means. In Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, the regime’s soft tactics of control ultimately fall apart as they employ increasingly forceful methods to erase memories. The Memory Police use different ways to control





people by erasing memories. They start by making people forget simple things like flowers and birds and then get more forceful. They use tactics like making books vanish to show a kind of cultural battle and spreading fake news to scare people mentally. This represents a form of psychological war for the mind. Simultaneously, the fear of losing basic needs, such as food, manifests as an economic battle. The main characters, the protagonist, her editor, R, and an old man, try to hold onto memories, drawing on their soft power resources to maintain a sense of self. They show a silent resistance by keeping memories alive in a world that tries to make them forget.

Chapter Three: The Manifestations of Soft Conflict in *The Memory Police*

In *The Memory Police*, Ogawa shows a society where people's memories and identities are erased, representing a mental struggle happening in their minds instead of on actual battlefields. The people living on the unnamed island quietly face a tough fight as their memories of everyday things and ideas slowly disappear, leading to the breakdown of who they are as individuals and as a group. In the story, the government's control over memories is a way to dominate the people, highlighting the harmful effects of hidden power and conflicts.

3.1 Cultural Heritage as a Soft Power Resource for Island Inhabitants

The islanders' cultural heritage plays a crucial role in fostering resistance against *The Memory Police*. Traditional practices, storytelling, and communal activities serve as bowls for collective memory, reinforcing identity among characters.

In *The Memory Police*, the narrator's mother keeps a cabinet filled with items that have long since disappeared from the island, like ribbon, bell, emerald, stamp, and perfume. This cabinet symbolizes a repository of lost cultural artifacts. The mother's stories about these items provide a glimpse into a shared cultural history that the narrator can no longer fully access (Tilden, 2022, p. 20). Although the mother tries to tell her daughter about such items, which symbolize cultural artifacts, could be seen as an attempt to convey and hold their heritage by passing it down to the next generation; however, she also expresses her disappointment since her daughter is unable to make a connection or feel such items. Each item represents a piece of the island's cultural remains that has been systematically erased. The cabinet becomes a small world of lost heritage, housing threads of a past that the society has collectively chosen to forget (Tilden, 2022, p. 7).



Long ago, before you were born, there were many more things here, my mother used to tell me when I was still a child. “Transparent things, fragrant things... fluttery ones, bright ones...wonderful things you can’t possibly imagine. “It’s a shame that the people who live here haven’t been able to hold such marvelous things in their hearts and minds... (Ogawa, 2020, p. 5).

The narrator’s mother’s act of keeping the cabinet signifies a maternal legacy of remembrance, and she actively engages with these objects, sharing stories and memories with her daughter, thus fostering a connection to a cultural history that is increasingly at risk. This act of storytelling is a vital way of transmitting cultural values and experiences. Moreover, Ogawa (2020, p. 6) writes:

The objects in my palm seemed to cower there, absolutely still, like little animals in hibernation, sending me no signal at all. They often left me with an uncertain feeling, as though I were trying to make images of the clouds in the sky out of modeling clay. When I stood before the secret drawers, I felt I had to concentrate on each word my mother said.

For the narrator, the cabinet symbolizes a link to her identity and heritage; although she cannot remember the objects or their meanings, her mother’s reverence for them instills a sense of longing and curiosity. This dynamic emphasizes how cultural heritage shape personal identity, even when direct memories are inaccessible. Consequently, the cabinet prompts the narrator to reflect on what has been lost. It serves as a stimulus for her understanding of the importance of memory and heritage, even as she grapples with her own inability to recall the items. This struggle illustrates the broader theme of the necessity of remembering for the survival of culture.

The existence of the cabinet starkly contrasts the collective amnesia experienced by the island’s inhabitants. “But that’s just the way it is on this Island. Things go on disappearing, one by one. It won’t be long now,” she added. “You’ll see for yourself. Something will disappear from your life” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 5). While the society around her forgets, the cabinet remains a sanctuary for lost memories.

R is a literary editor who lives secretly in the narrator’s home because he can remember things that others forget. He is in danger from The Memory Police, who hunt people like him. R serves as the narrator’s editor, representing



the preservation of literary culture on the island. His role underscores the importance of written works and storytelling in maintaining cultural identity amidst the disappearances. R's ability to remember objects and concepts that others forget positions him as a keeper of cultural heritage. His attempts to recall and share memories reflect the struggle to retain cultural significance in a society plagued by loss. Moreover, R tries to help the narrator and the old man recall lost items like a music box, demonstrating the importance of tangible objects in cultural memory. His efforts highlight the connection between physical artifacts and the emotional resonance they carry.

It feels terribly odd to have something that has disappeared right here before my eyes," I said. "After all, this is something that supposedly no longer exists. Yet here we are looking at this box and listening to the music and pronouncing the name...o...ru... gō...ru. Doesn't that seem strange to you?" "Not strange at all. The box exists without any doubt and it's right in front of us. The music continues to play, before the disappearance and after. It plays on faithfully, as long as the key is wound. That's its role, now and forever. The only thing that's different is the hearts of those who once heard it (Ogawa, 2020, p. 99).

As novels disappear, R's desperation to protect the narrator's books illustrates the broader theme of cultural loss. His concern for literature symbolizes the struggle to maintain cultural practices in the face of erasure.

You should come here with all the books in the house, and of course, you should not exclude your manuscripts". "Losing the novels is very difficult for me. I feel like the strong bond between us is unraveling". " You should not burn your manuscripts; you will continue writing, and that way our bond will not unravel". " But it's impossible, the novels have disappeared as you know (Ogawa, 2020, p. 116).

When the narrator and the old man build a hidden room for R, it symbolizes a sanctuary for cultural memory. This space allows R to continue engaging with the past and protects him from the oppressive forces that threaten cultural expression. R relies on the narrator for sustenance and companionship in the hidden room. This reliance fosters a bond that emphasizes the shared cultural experiences and histories that can endure even in isolation.



“In this way, we managed to live in relative security. Everything went according to plan, and we seemed to have solutions for any problems that did occur. The old man did much to help us, and R did his best to adjust quickly to the secret room” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 67).

Finally, after the narrator’s voice disappears, R emerges from the hidden room without fear of The Memory Police, symbolizing a potential reclamation of cultural identity. “When, at last, he had convinced himself that there was nothing left, he let his arms drop wearily. Then he climbed the ladder one rung at a time, lifted the trapdoor, and went out into the world” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 178). His decision to step out represents a break from oppression and a step toward embracing a new existence outside the confines of enforced forgetfulness. The insistence of the narrator’s mother and R on remembering and their absolute refusal to forget, coupled with their retention of a rich cultural history, constitute a powerful source of soft power, of which culture is a crucial foundation.

3.2 The Regime’s Soft and Pernicious Policies Fall Apart

3.2.1 Ineffectiveness of Soft Power Strategies

According to Nye (2004, p. 120), soft power is only effective if the promoted values are credible and trustworthy. In the novel, the government’s destruction of cultural artifacts contradicts the values of a strong culture. This conflict stops the government from truly influencing others. Ogawa shows how it is crucial to keep cultural elements to keep a gentle influence. Furthermore, how a country treats its people and runs itself affects how much influence it has. When a country is fair, free, and just, other countries are likely to look up to it. This can make other countries want to be similar or collaborate with it, as Joseph Nye points out (2004, pp. 59-60). In Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, the concept of a country’s internal environment shaping its global influence can be compared to the island’s societal structure and the actions of The Memory Police. The Memory Police exert strict control over the island’s population, dictating what can and cannot exist in both memory and reality. This internal authoritarian governance directly affects the external perception of the island and the lives of its people, just as the country’s internal policies and values shape its global influence. “The island is run by men who are determined to see things disappear. From their point of view, anything that fails to vanish when they say it should is inconceivable. So they force it to disappear with their own hands ” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 21). It highlights the island’s repressive internal environment, where dissent or disagreement is met with violence. Such



internal practices would erode any soft power the island's government might have, as brutality and lack of freedom are more likely to inspire fear or contempt than admiration or alliances.

The Memory Police's management style is not at all consistent with any values that might inspire admiration or alliances. Their actions are coercive and destructive, leaving no room for shared principles or mutual respect. The lack of alignment between the island's government's internal values (forced forgetting) and any possible external values (such as freedom of thought) erodes The Memory Police's soft power. Alongside this, how a country acts and how others see it affects how strong it is. In *The Memory Police*, the government is removing important cultural things, which makes people not trust or like it. This also makes life hard for people and stops the country from being a good role model. A country is powerful when it matches what it believes in with what it does. Nye (2004, pp. 64-65) emphasizes that effective soft power requires a balance between substance and style. He says that a country's foreign policy has two important parts: what it does and how it does it. "What it does" means the actions it takes, like helping other countries or making agreements. "How it does it" means the way it works with other countries, like being respectful and working together. When these actions match what the world thinks is good, like being peaceful and positive, the country becomes more influential. When a country is respectful and collaborative, it makes its influence stronger. The substance of The Memory Police (their policies of enforced disappearance) and their method (their brutal tactics and arbitrary searches) are not at all consistent with any form of soft power. Their approach is based on coercion and fear, not diplomacy or example. Furthermore, they impose complete isolation on the population. There has been no mention of any cooperation between the island government and any neighboring countries or islands, nor have the authorities made any attempt at effective communication with the outside world.

3.2.2 The Battle of Soft War Tactics

Yoko Ogawa explores how the novel reflects real-world soft war tactics through psychological manipulation, economic disruption, and constant surveillance; It also celebrates the enduring power of art and memory as acts of resistance against erasure.

In *The Memory Police*, the idea of soft war is mainly depicted through psychological tactics. The Memory Police use methods to eliminate people's memories and relationships on the island. This non-violent approach to control aims to create confusion and disorientation among the community. For the





Journal of American History, Del Pero (2001, pp. 1304-1334) clarifies that the difference between conventional warfare and psychological warfare is based on their objectives. Conventional warfare aims to physically overcome the opponent, whereas psychological warfare strives to influence the thoughts and feelings of individuals. This symbolic battle frequently occurs alongside military confrontations. In this regard, several events in *The Memory Police* exemplify this approach. The process starts quietly in their minds, causing the islanders to slowly lose their sense of self and community. As items and memories disappear, the inhabitants become more submissive and disoriented, enabling The Memory Police to maintain control without using military force. This manipulation of memory and perception is similar to conventional psychological strategies designed to weaken an adversary from the inside.

As a further point, the cultural warfare aspect is clear as The Memory Police target literature and artistic expression, which are vital to the islanders' identity. As books and stories disappear, a crucial means of expression and historical continuity is lost. The narrator's struggle to finish her manuscript, along with R's urgent desire to save literature, emphasizes the significance of cultural artifacts in shaping collective memory. By eliminating these elements, The Memory Police not only stifle dissent but also reshape societal values, fostering forgetfulness and conformity. The protagonist's efforts to preserve her stories symbolize resistance against this cultural erasure, illustrating how art can serve as a form of defiance against oppressive forces.

Economic warfare involves employing economic strategies to weaken an opponent's economy, which in turn reduces its capacity to maintain military efforts, or exert political power. This can manifest in several ways, such as sanctions, trade limitations, asset confiscations, and other financial tactics designed to harm the economic stability of a targeted country or organization. In her novel, Ogawa shows that the disappearances of important things cause problems for the people living there. Losing basic items puts a lot of stress on them and affects their ability to live normally. When some of the island's food supplies disappear, the narrator describes how the island's inhabitants struggle to cope with the loss of these essential resources. Markets become barren, and people are forced to rely on what remains, leading to scarcity and hunger. This effect mirrors the effects of trade embargoes or sanctions, where access to basic necessities is restricted, causing food shortages and economic hardship for the population.

When the roses disappear, not only do the flowers vanish, but their petals are blown away by the wind. This event disrupts the flower industry and any



cultural or economic practices associated with roses, like the perfume industry. Ogawa states that the residents were getting rid of perfumes, even though some of them had a high monetary value, in addition to their personal attachments to them. “We gathered on the banks of the river with our perfume. Then we opened the bottles and poured out their contents, watching the perfume dissolve in the water like some worthless liquid...” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 6). The targeted disappearance of roses symbolizes the destruction of specific industries, similar to how sanctions might target key sectors (such as oil and agriculture) to cripple a country’s economy.

The novels have disappeared, and the narrator, a writer, is forced to burn her books. Her editor, R, pleads with her to save some of them, but she complies with the rules of The Memory Police, destroying her life’s work. “We gather the remnants to burn, bury, or toss into the river” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 5). The disappearance of novels undermines the publishing industry, leaving writers, editors, and booksellers without a livelihood. This reflects how economic warfare can target cultural and intellectual sectors to suppress dissent and creativity. Furthermore, when calendars disappear, time itself becomes distorted. The island is trapped in an endless winter, with constant snowfall. This disrupts agriculture, trade, and daily life, as people lose the ability to track the seasons or plan for the future. The collapse of timekeeping systems paralyzes economic activity, similar to the way sanctions disrupt supply chains and long-term planning, leading to economic stagnation.

Diplomatic warfare is another point to consider. *In Information Warfare: Principles and Operations*, diplomatic Warfare is described as using non-military methods like spying, altering information, and psychological tactics to influence people and governments. This often creates fear and makes people comply with hidden threats (Waltz, 1998, p. 544). The novel looks at how warfare has changed in the digital age, focusing on surveillance and control. The Memory Police constantly monitor the islanders, using tactics similar to today’s cyber warfare, where information is distorted and used against individuals. The islanders live in fear of being watched and possibly disappearing, leading to a feeling of paranoia. The Memory Police are an omnipresent force on the island, constantly monitoring the islanders. The narrator describes how they show up unannounced and conduct searches of houses. This creates an all-encompassing atmosphere of fear and suspicion. “The Memory Police could come at any time, and we had to be ready. They might search the house, or they might take someone. There was no way of knowing...” (Ogawa, 2020, p. 153). The constant surveillance mirrors how



control in today's world often comes from unseen forces that destroy trust and community. By instilling fear and encouraging obedience, The Memory Police manage to silence dissent, showing that non-violent approaches can effectively control people in modern conflicts.

As the story goes on, The Memory Police become more aggressive, showing how soft war tactics are getting worse. The characters, especially the narrator, feel a lot of mental pressure from living in such a harsh environment. The loss of basic things in life, like body parts and eventually the ability to speak, symbolizes how much control is being taken over people's identities. This slow removal of these things shows how damaging soft war tactics can be, aiming to take away people's freedom and turn them into just shadows of who they once were. The characters' challenges illustrate the strength of the human spirit, emphasizing the enduring importance of memory and the arts as tools for resisting authoritarian power.

3.2.3 The Rise of Smart Power Strategies

To further enrich this analysis, the concept of smart power can also be introduced. Smart power, according to Nye (2012, p. 38), is like mixing both soft and hard power to reach goals. In *The Memory Police*, the regime's use of force to enforce memory erasure can be seen as an application of smart power. While the regime primarily relies on soft power's pernicious tactics, or more accurately soft war tactics such as cultural manipulation and propaganda, it does not hesitate to use force when necessary to ensure compliance. For example, the protagonist's mother's eventual capture by The Memory Police and the use of physical coercion to enforce memory erasure underscore the regime's willingness to blend hard and soft power tactics. The Memory Police's ability to seamlessly transition from psychological manipulation to physical enforcement illustrates the regime's strategic use of smart power to maintain control. This combination of hard and soft power tactics underscores the regime's comprehensive strategy for maintaining control, highlighting the multifaceted nature of power in the novel.

3.3 Key Findings

The analysis of Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* results in four central insights:

1. Cultural heritage, including storytelling, artifact preservation, and shared memory functions as a critical, inherent source of soft power for the oppressed. The characters' efforts to maintain memory actively resist the regime's erasure tactics.



2. The regime effectively employs soft war tactics, including psychological manipulation, cultural suppression, and economic constraints, to subtly dismantle individual identity and ensure societal compliance without constant overt force.
3. The novel demonstrates that the regime's strategy, which mixes subtle control with periodic recourse to overt force, constitutes a form of smart power. However, this combination proves inherently unstable, as reliance on coercion signals the failure of the subtler methods.
4. While the deliberate erasure of memory and artifacts serves as the regime's primary mechanism of soft control, the regime's contradictory policies and reliance on underlying coercion ultimately reveal the fragility and limitations of its authority.

Conclusion

History is full of examples that illustrate how power operates, ranging from direct confrontations to more subtle methods of influence and control. Ogawa's *The Memory Police* provides a metaphorical lens to explore these different forms of power, which are often referred to as soft power, smart power, and soft war. These concepts reveal how carefully power and influence can be exercised, especially in conflicts where cultural and psychological strategies replace open violence. This study has examined the main themes of the novel in relation to soft power, soft war, and smart power within the context of the neocolonial world. The investigation has highlighted how the regime cleverly controls its people while also pointing out the weaknesses that undermine its authority and power. Furthermore, the study contributes to wider discussions about conflict and power, focusing on the subtle forms of influence which operate without the usual violence of war.

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