Since diplomatic relations between China and Japan were normalized in 1972, cooperation in economic and cultural spheres have grown continuously. However, the historical issues between China and Japan are yet to be resolved and still affect bilateral relations today. Trends in Sino-Japanese relations have changed between 1972 and 2017, and historical consciousness and war memories in Japan have transformed accordingly. This thesis traces the relationships between Sino-Japanese relations, Japanese historical consciousness and Japanese war memories.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is constructed based on memory studies. Memory studies theory suggests that collective memories are socially constructed notions, which can be embodied by various cultural entities. The thesis demonstrates what Japanese historical consciousness and war memories have been constructed in what social context, and how Japanese war memories are represented in various cultural forms.

This thesis is based on analysis of 117 Japanese history textbooks published between 1972 and 2017 and 37 of Japan’s war-related museums. Through textual analysis of depictions of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894), the Mukden Incident (1931), the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (1937), Nanjing Massacre (1937), the ‘Comfort Women’, the ‘Three-Alls Operation’, the Battle of Okinawa and the A-Bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945), this thesis clarifies how the wars between China and Japan from 1894 to 1945 are presented in Japanese history textbooks and museums.

By conducting analysis of the historical debates in Sino-Japanese relations
between 1972 to 2017, this thesis argues that although Japan’s domestic environment determines Japanese war narratives and war memories, China’s diplomacy toward Japan also plays an important role in shaping and re-shaping Japanese historical consciousness and war memories. Based on the textual analysis, this thesis argues that although the heterogeneity of war narratives exists throughout the post-war Japan, war narratives are observed to have shifted from ‘conservative perspectives’ in the 1970s to more ‘progressive perspectives’ in the 1980s and 1990s, and then back via ‘progressive--leaning perspectives’ in the 2000s ‘conservative’ or ‘nationalist’ perspectives in the 2010s.

This thesis is expected to indicate ways for improving future Sino-Japanese relations in addition to outlining the transformations in Japanese historical consciousness and war memories.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, which are:
Chapter 1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework;
Chapter 2. Sino-Japanese Relations and Debates over History;
Chapter 3. War Narratives of Japanese History Textbooks (1972-2017);
Chapter 4. War Narratives in Japan’s War-Related Museums;
Chapter 5. Conclusion.