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Character In The Wailing (2016)
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UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

The Portrayal Of Historical Trauma From Japanese Colonization To Korea As Analyzed Through Japanese Character In The Wailing (2016)

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2026

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Tanggal Ujian	: 29 Januari 2026
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MOTTO

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَاْىْءٍ إِنِّى فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا ٢٣ إِلَّآ أَن يَشَآءَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ وَٱذْكُر رَّبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَهْدِيَنِ رَبِّى لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَٰذَا رَشَدًا ٢٤

And never say of anything, “I will definitely do this tomorrow,” (23) without adding, “if Allah so wills!” But if you forget, then remember your Lord, and say, “I trust my Lord will guide me to what is more right than this.” (24)

(QS Al-Kahf : 23-24)

Slow down, you're doing fine, you can't be everything you want to be before your time

(Billy Joel, *Vienna*)

Something new, something strange, ten feet taller, I had changed. I believe you, I'm not wrong, oh, it suits me to feel strong

(dodie, *Ready Now*)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Hongjin Na, the director of *The Wailing*, who changed my life with *The Yellow Sea*, a film shown to me in an Asian Film History after 1945 class during my exchange to Japan. Cinema is wonderful when you let it be.
2. My brother, my mother, my mother, and my father. Everything I write, everything I do, is for you.
3. Kayla Diandra, for making life better whenever you're around.
4. Qonita "Shin", who I am always annoying on the phone; who lets me stay over and talk until dawn; who consistently teaches and teaches and teaches.
5. Aileen Fedora Pakasi. I miss you and think of you always.
6. Marsha Phoebe and Salsabila Annisa Putri, who always come to me in a pair, or I to them on my own. It is said that what happened once, will not happen twice, but what happened twice will surely happen a third time—a friendship like ours can only happen once in a lifetime, and I am content with experiencing it once.
7. Annisa Azzahra, who I became closer to in university than in high school. It seems that time has found us at the right time.
8. My friends from university—Syifa, Mazia, Mayda, Satria, Dhafin, Nadhif, Chris, Oki, Gantar, Rei Karis, and others not mentioned. Thank you for coloring this period of my life.
9. My friends from high school—Erza Pentika, Fairuz Ardiaz, Hufa Hamdika—for never changing.
10. Friends I made working multiple jobs—Aldi, Tiffany, Kaci, Chinta, Achell, Ayu, Sinta—for being a good friend and a better coworker.
11. Noah Kahan, a musician I discovered last year, yet, who had just managed to sneak into the crannies of my chest only early February 2024. His words echo what I cannot say—if you were to split me open, you would find a manuscript of the lyrics of his songs within my chest, waiting to be held.
12. Martin Scorsese and Guillermo del Toro, for their works and for their words. You both have altered the way I see cinema, and the way I consume life, for forever.
13. Adam Elliot, Abbas Kiarostami, and my other favorite filmmakers. I look forward to watching endless films for the rest of my life.
14. And for everyone who has passed through my life, who is still here or who has left, for helping me shape the mold of the person I want to become. For every relative, every friendship, every love. Everyone who is living and everyone who has died. Every laugh and every hurt, every path and every turn, led me here. And they will continue leading. You will continue leading.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how *The Wailing* (2016) represents historical trauma from Japanese colonization through the portrayal of the Japanese Man. Using cultural and collective trauma theory alongside close cinematic analysis, it explores how visual and narrative elements construct the character as a symbolic embodiment of colonial violence. The analysis identifies four key traits: animalistic behavior, sexual deviance, manipulation, and cultural subjugation. These traits are linked to historical experiences under Japanese rule, including extreme violence, the comfort women system, collaboration with colonial authorities, and linguistic assimilation policies such as *naisen ittai*. Through techniques such as spatial hierarchy, color contrast, and language use, the film transforms historical memory into affective horror, emphasizing fear, domination, and unresolved trauma. Rather than presenting a direct historical account, *The Wailing* reactivates colonial trauma within a contemporary cultural context. This study argues that the Japanese Man functions not merely as an individual antagonist, but as a cinematic representation of collective memory and the enduring psychological and cultural impact of Japanese colonization on Korean society.

Keywords: cultural trauma, collective memory, Japanese colonization, horror film, cinematic analysis, The Wailing (2016)

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana *film The Wailing* (2016) merepresentasikan trauma historis akibat penjajahan Jepang melalui penggambaran *The Japanese Man*. Dengan menggunakan teori trauma budaya dan kolektif bersamaan dengan analisis sinematik yang mendalam, studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana elemen visual dan naratif membangun karakter tersebut sebagai perwujudan simbolis dari kekerasan kolonial. Analisis ini mengidentifikasi empat ciri utama: perilaku kebinatangan, penyimpangan seksual, manipulasi, dan penindasan budaya. Ciri-ciri ini dikaitkan dengan pengalaman historis di bawah pemerintahan Jepang, termasuk kekerasan ekstrem, sistem wanita penghibur, kolaborasi dengan otoritas kolonial, dan kebijakan asimilasi linguistik seperti *naisen ittai*. Melalui teknik-teknik seperti hierarki spasial, kontras warna, dan penggunaan bahasa, film ini mengubah memori sejarah menjadi horor afektif, menekankan rasa takut, dominasi, dan trauma yang belum terselesaikan. Alih-alih menyajikan catatan sejarah secara langsung, *The Wailing* mengaktifkan kembali trauma kolonial dalam konteks budaya kontemporer. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa Pria Jepang tersebut tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai antagonis individu, tetapi juga sebagai representasi sinematik dari memori kolektif dan dampak psikologis serta budaya yang abadi dari penjajahan Jepang terhadap masyarakat Korea.

Kata kunci: trauma kultural, memori kolektif, penjajahan Jepang, film horror, analisa sinematik, The Wailing (2016)

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Though the term 'folk horror' was recently popularized in a 2010 British documentary by Mark Gatiss titled *A History of Horror*, the concept of folk horror itself is hardly a novel thought in fiction. It is a very particular subgenre of horror, intimate with narrative features such as nature, folklore, and local beliefs, playing around with the concept of paganism and ancestry. In recent years, there has been a spike in interest for horror films with folk settings, such as *Lamb* (2021) and *Exhuma* (2024). Older films like *The Wicker Man* (1973) are also making a resurgence. These films explore the fear of being isolated, surrounded by primordial evil in the rurality of a remote island or hamlet.

And these quirks of folk horror is exactly what *The Wailing* (2016), directed by Hongjin Na, embodies. It tells the story of a policeman, Jonggo, investigating a series of murder accompanied by the spreading of a skin disease endemic in his rural, Korean village. His investigation is littered with supernatural occurrences—including his encounter with a mysterious, unnamed Korean Lady—and the steps that he traces eventually leads him to a Japanese newcomer. This newcomer, too, has no name and is often referred to as the "Japanese Man". People in the village believe that the Japanese Man is an evil shaman that has casted a curse that is the source of the calamity that has befallen them. Matters quickly intensify as Jonggo's daughter, Hyojin, falls victim to these mysterious circumstances.

The demonization of Japan and Japanese people is something that is not rare to encounter in Korean media. The collective trauma shared amongst Koreans as the result of Japanese imperialism is not a topic lost in discussion when speaking of their national identity—in fact, Seo (2021) would argue that the formation of the national identity of both Korea and Japan are so intertwined that it has become impossible and irresponsible to speak of them in separate manners. Even after more than 70 years since Japan's declaration of surrender in World War II and Korea's Day of Liberation, they are still considered as each other's mortal enemies. Different words alike to arch-enemies and eternal "other" (Oh, 2009) have been used to describe their relationship, whether in the context of history, economy, politics, and modern society.

Skabelund (1994) identified three different factors that distinguish Japan's colonialism in Korea when compared to other colonialism. The first of these factors is Korea's status as an established monarchy that has reigned for hundreds of years prior to Japan's invasion, and Japan destroyed its sovereignty. Second, Japan's unique geographical location is close to Korea compared to other colonization situations; this allows for an attempt of a complete domination and integration of Japan into Korea's politics and economics, as well as culture. It should be noted that this is a unique case of colonization as Japan is one of the few examples of non-European, less-developed colonizers, thus, unlike their European counterparts, Japan's colonialist policies in Korea (and another colony, Manchuria) were made with the intention to support the needs of a growing nation. And third, rather than only dominating Korea's politics and economics structure, Japan made conscious efforts to culturally rid of Korea's identity

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through forced assimilation. Some of these efforts include the regulating of the Japanese language as Korea's national language and the spreading of Shinto ideology through school curriculums. Skabelund argues that the combination of these three factors intensified the severity of Japanese colonization and imperialism, thus prolonging the trauma that the citizens of Korea share even to this day.

Their estranged past leads to disagreements that they face even to this day. Korea sees that Japan often makes politically driven moves that aggravate their relationship; Hundt & Bleiker (2007) suggests that the still-existing tension between the two countries comes from their inability to compromise on how to represent the past. An example of disagreement is Japan's prime ministers visiting the Yasukuni shrine in which Japanese war criminals (including Class A war criminals) are enshrined. The same act that is seen as paying tribute and respect to their past in Japan is seen as disrespectful in Korea.

While this research will not focus on postcolonial cinema, it is important to note that *The Wailing* (2016) is a film with strong postcolonial images. Cinema studies have overlapped with postcolonial studies in terms of their focus on representation and identity, along with trauma studies that centerpieces on collective memory. The relevance of aesthetics resources to dissect everyday politics in International Relations have been discussed by Bleiker (2004). And to be more precise, we can say that films reflect the ideologies of the nation it was produced in by bearing in mind how it is not an art of one person, but rather a collective effort with "mixed heterogeneous inclinations" (Kracauer, 1974) that is made for to appeal to and satisfy mass desires. Horror films are, of course, no exception to this idea, with Barak & Inbar (2020) noting that there are a number of horror films that not only portray, but also hint at sources of, violent encounters between suppressed groups and their oppressors.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How is the Korean historical trauma from Japanese colonization articulated in the portrayal of the Japanese character in The Wailing (2016)?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The two frameworks that will be used to answer the research question: Roland Bleiker's aesthetics approach alongside Jeffrey C. Alexander's model of cultural trauma.

Aesthetics and Global Politics (Bleiker, 2009) offers us an extended illustration on an approach to world politics that is considered to be novel, that is, the aesthetics approach. The most important ideas from world politics do not come from the ignorance of the represented and instead from the examination of practices involving representation and how it constructs political events. Thus, Bleiker emphasizes on the gap between what is being represented and its representation in aesthetic sources, such as poetry, architecture, music, cinema, and other forms of artistic renditions. The aesthetics approach has an opposing difference with the mimetic approach that is used more often in IR and international politics, that is the subject of the representation and the representation itself. Where the mimetic approach "seeks to discover a

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truth (...) that somehow escapes the necessity of interpretation", the aesthetics approach instead recognizes that political interpretation is incomplete by nature and is tied with the "values of the perceiver" (Bleiker, 2000).

In 2004, Jeffery C. Alexander formulated the original model of the Cultural Trauma Process (CTP) in his book, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, where trauma is observed to materialize on a collective level when social crises transform into cultural crises. "Traumatic" is a meaning that has to be assigned and established by carrier groups, and this mediated experience always involves nitpicking—selective representation and construction—by what Eyerman (2004) refers to as Intellectuals, those who assign meaning to events. These Intellectuals can be "film directors, singers of song, as well as college professors".

In order to feel traumatized by a certain event, a collective does not have to directly experience it. In fact, collective memory plays a dominant role in assigning an event to be traumatic—Alexander highlights how an event's effect would only be perceived unconsciously, and these "memory residues" would (eventually) appear in public life through creation of literature, here referred to cultural products that are either written or non-written.

Going back to Bleiker's aesthetics approach, the author pulls a thread from the peculiar relationship of film and trauma that enables the understanding of which events and/or actors have traumatized a certain group by analyzing cultural products, in this research's case being films.

It is not in the interest of this research to measure Japan's success in integrating Korea to the Japanese empire, nor to discover the motive of their imperialism. Ultimately, the answers to these questions do not matter as Japan *did* colonize Korea, and Korea as a collective *had* built memories based on the following trauma of imperialism. It had been done. Rather, this research seeks to understand the aftermath of Japan's colonization, and how collective trauma and collective memory play into part with one another; it seeks to understand how these have manifested in representation in Korean cultural products.

Cinema and film is not a traditional form of language and literary culture by any means, and this is why scholars tend to see it as distinct when other forms of art are taken into consideration in trauma studies. It is seen to have not existed as long as other forms of art, allowing it to form a special relationship to modernity by portraying trauma the way it had never been portrayed traditionally (Kaplan & Wang, 2004).

There has been a spike in dissecting IR through popular culture—books, music, films—over the decades through various angles (Barak & Inbar, 2020). Popular culture as an educational tool is one, diverging from more traditional methods of teaching by introducing films or books as a way to learn. Another is the more common approach in IR: the soft power or cultural power approach, viewing it as an "instrument for foreign policy". A third approach considers it an "arena for political change". The final approach is perceiving popular culture as "mirroring cultural values". Neumann and Nexon (2006) proposed that the most direct way in understanding where world politics and popular culture interact is by treating popular culture as the cause and effects of political processes. They also brought forward the idea that popular culture can be used as a medium to explore theoretical concepts. In analyzing popular culture,

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there are three general layers of analysis: (1) story, consisting of plots and characters; (2) allegory, how the story represents specific events, and finally (3) theory, the connection to political phenomenon (Barak & Inbar, 2020).

These approaches demonstrate the way popular culture functions not only as a medium to represent an event, but also as a space where political means are contested. This perspective provides the foundation for analyzing *The Wailing* both as a product and participant in political processes.

ARGUMENTS

From Alexander's model of cultural trauma, the author argues that the Japanese colonization was an event that probes discomfort to Korea's pre-existing identity as a dynasty. This discomfort resulted in a shift in dynamics within Korean society, resulting in trauma lasting even to their contemporary political relations. Trauma can be seen manifested in multiple forms of culture; cinema & film, being one of the most deliberate and unique forms of art, is one of them. *The Wailing* (2016) is a film in which the central villain's identity as a Japanese is constantly brought up and discussed, juxtaposed with the Korean main character. Issues such as language barrier and cultural differences, along with the alienation of the Japanese character, is also a major aspect of the narrative. It embodies colonial domination and subjugation in the form of the Japanese Man, rendering him a symbol of colonialism rather than an individual antagonist. His characterization is animalistic, sexually violent, manipulative, and linguistically external, allowing him to carry the occupation of Japanese colonialism vividly. He embodies the violence that echoes the brutality of the Japanese military rule, especially the comfort women system and the sexual violence abuse during the colonial period. His ability to manipulate Korean characters mirrors the mechanisms of colonial control, in which collaboration fractured Korean society from within. Moreover, his refusal to speak the Korean language functions as an act of cultural imperialism, positioning language as a tool of domination and silencing rather than communication. The author argues that these cinematic decisions were made as the result of generational, cultural trauma.

Through cinematic techniques, these traits transform colonial history into affective horror, invoking fear, moral corruption, and unease rooted in unresolved historical trauma. Rather than offering a direct historical retelling, the film externalizes the lingering psychological and cultural wounds of colonization, illustrating how the legacy of Japanese rule continues to shape Korean collective memory and cultural expression.

METHODOLOGY

The author intends to utilize a form of Close Textual Analysis (hereon: CTA) as a methodology. While CTA has been referred to as Close Reading, Textual Analysis, and other variations, the crux of this methodology remains the same, that it is closely knitted to representations and how meaning is produced and perceived. Hall (1997) described how despite

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all interactions with cultural artifacts producing meanings, it still is generally considered the least apprehended form of culture.

As this research will regard a film, *The Wailing* (2016), as its object of study, a specific variation of CTA is going to be employed in the research, that is the Close Cinematic Analysis (hereon: CCA). CCA depends on the notion that film is a unique form of media as the combination of cinematic features with its narrative may give a film room to conduct meaning that other forms of media may not have. Petric (1976) elaborated on how serious film analyses do not rely on a one-time watch and discussion, and instead are found on careful and repeated viewings of the film and perception of film forms. Analyzing films through CCA means analyzing deliberate choices that the filmmakers choose to make, like shot compositions and acting performances. This ties in with Ponzanesi (2012) when filmmakers' strategy when discussing postcolonial aesthetics and how it intricately interacts with film "language".

CCA also suggests that *just* interpretation is not enough; while drawing out one's own opinion is an integral part of the CCA process, this opinion must then be mingled with factual evidence to be proven right. In his book, *Essential Cinema: An Introduction to Film Analysis*, Lewis (2013) underlined that not only in-film information are necessary for a deep understanding of film, and instead encouraged further reading on the (historical, industrial, etc.) context of the text for a more profound investigation.

There are four stages in a Close Cinematic Analysis, as follows:

1. Treating scenes in the film with great care, watching them closely, and utilizing technical features such as *stop*, *reverse*, *fast-forwarding*, and others, to maximize examination of scenes.
2. Examining cinematic devices of the films closely, from a formal and contextual perspective. This is where background research is conducted.
3. Fusing of cinematic devices and other forms of the films, like narration.
4. Formulating an opinion, thus "reading" the film as a whole.

The CCA, however, has a limitation to its practice as a methodology: its deductive nature. Subjectivity greatly influences it as its practice encourages attentiveness from the scholar to welcome the text (Bardzell, 2009) with warm arms and an open mind. And due to this deductive nature, some scholars hesitate in utilizing the CCA in their research. However, referring back to Bleiker's Aesthetics approach in IR that values meaning being in the eyes of the beholder, the CCA is able to guide the researcher to a more profound reading of the text, as it compels critical media analyes.

The one aspect that will be considered in reading *The Wailing* is Character, to be more specific, the Japanese Man/the Stranger. Characters is often seen as an umbrella term for anything pertaining to a character that may seem interdependent or separate. For example, the angle in which a character is shot is generally considered a cinematography, but we can also infer hints about his character. Is he supposed to be menacing? Is he supposed to be trustworthy? Is he a villain? Is he a good guy? We can get a glimpse of our supposed impression through reading a specific angle. The same thing can be said about lighting, colors, filters, and many others.

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Another example is dialogues. Dialogues—screenplays—is an interesting subject; in fact, the saliency of it is highly contested within film studies. Dialogue is one of the things that Cinema brought into its existence from its predecessor, which is Theater, thus not little film scholars argue for the need to avoid. This topic, however, is one for another day. Whatever its level of saliency is, the one thing that cannot be disputed is that Dialogue *is* there, and if it is there, then it must mean something. The role of dialogues in films range from anchoring a scene, to establishing logic, to of course, character revelation. Speech mannerisms, dialect, and accent help the audience in formulating an impression of a character's personality and background (Skowron et al., 2016).

Understanding the Japanese Man's psychological and symbol roles allows us to see how collective trauma is translated into film—a close cinematic analysis of dialogue, behavior, visual framing, and other aspects of the Character, this study explores how characters in the film embody historical references represented in the story.

THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis will be made up of four main chapters. The first of these chapters will discuss the general overview of the thesis; it will consist of background, research question, conceptual framework, main arguments, research methodology, and the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter is dedicated to discussing Japan and Korea's relationship—how it got to be estranged, and what caused the seemingly irreparable damage to it. It will detail the history between the two countries, the evidence of colonization of Korea by Japan, and their post-colonization relations. Alexander's Cultural Trauma Process (2004) will be utilized in this chapter in order to get a better understanding on how the colonization had disrupted and threatened Korea's previous identity as a nation, resulting in collective trauma amongst Koreans. The second half of this chapter will discuss the social implications of said trauma and how it manifests in Korean society.

The third chapter will begin with the elaboration of the portrayal of Japanese characters in Korean media. It will elaborate on the substantial analysis of *The Wailing* (2016) by Hongjin Na as a subject of interest on the collective trauma stemming from Japanese colonization of Korea. By analyzing the portrayal of the Japanese character and examining how collective trauma is transformed into cultural trauma through the creation of literature—"literature" in the case of this research being the film—and how it participates in the creation and portrayal of the Japanese character in the film, this thesis aims to answer the research question. This chapter will rely on a Close Cinematic Analysis of *The Wailing*, taking into account camera angles, character costume, dialogues or lack thereof, and other cinematic aspects.

The final chapter concludes the thesis by outlining the author's findings.

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CHAPTER 2

JAPAN IN KOREA, 1910 - 1945

With aspirations as big as their reputation, it was only natural that Japan ended up being one of the most influential actors in the second World War. To them, Asia was an unclaimed land rich with undug potentials: China was Japan's fantasy conquest; Korea, a stepping stone. Charles W. LeGendre, an American Civil War General whose advice greatly shaped Japanese colonial policies in Korea, was of the opinion that the annexation of Korea was needed to ensure Japan's national security (Nahm, 1973). Korea is on the way, in any case, between Japan and China, and the assimilation policies that Japan issued in Korea was evidence of how important they were for Japan as its colony, exceptionally in Japan's mission for continental expansion. (Nahm, 1973; Hundt & Bleiker, 2007)

Japan's imperialism of Korea was divided into four phases (Nahm, 1973), separated based on Japan's actions towards the Korean government. These phases started from (1) their attempt at seizing governmental power; (2) the revamping and restructuring of Korea's political structure; (3) the start of political and cultural integration rewarded by economic incentives; and (4) increase of totalitarian control, where "Japanization" of Koreans was the main focus of their expansion. While their attempt at seizing military, administrative, and economic control in Korea was generally viewed as successful, the same cannot be said about their attempt at cultural assimilation (Kim, 1973).

The fourth phase of the Japanese occupation started in 1936 and ended with Japan's loss in World War II in 1945. Rather than a genuine attempt at integration of the two cultures, Japanese culture was dramatically imposed upon the Koreans. Policies like compulsory name-change, forced use of the Japanese language, and the imposition of Shintoism became the indication of the "Japanization" of Koreans. While in the previous phases, the Korean language was still in use in public schools and government offices, starting from 1936, the *naisen ittai* was introduced as an effort to "Japanize" Koreans. This policy created a divide between the Japanese elites as earlier in their occupation, Japan had forbidden Koreans to take up "Japanese-sounding" names in order to easily distinguish between the two groups. However, in the 1940s Koreans were coaxed into believing that they were a province of the greater Empire of Japan, resulting in previously mentioned assimilation policies.

Attempts of liberation through compliance of these policies were seen throughout history. For example, in order to be recognized as more Japanese, Koreans have willingly adopted Japanese names after the 1940s. Technically, by doing so, they were to gain access to bureaucratic privileges that were then only allowed for Japanese, such as marrying (other) Japanese people and thus advancing socially and financially. However, in practice, they were still kept in records as Koreans and having a Japanese name did not in fact make them Japanese.

Korean scholars at the time criticized Japanese arrogance as being the prime reason for their failure in integration—their pride encouraged them to preserve the strong sense of Japanese superiority that led to systematic racial discrimination against the Koreans in multiple sectors of

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the state, be it civil administration, education, or social-culture (Caprio, 2016). Even so, many Japanese were against *naisen ittai* in the first place despite their differing views; within Japanese intellectuals, the two main spectrums were the rejection of ethnocide while the extreme right refused to let the purity of the Yamato majority group be soiled.

Naisen ittai sought to normalize imperial unity through forced assimilation, and these policies operated alongside other forms of overt military coercion (Tanaka, 2003). Among the most severe was the comfort women policy, which subjected Korean women to systematic exploitation and violence. Militarism is of course no stranger to prostitution. Soh discussed in *The Comfort Women* (2020) how in Japanese history, the state-controlled prostitution system institutionalized what can be understood as "the rule of male sex right", granting men regulated access to commercial, public sexual services outside marriage, which was believed to safeguard socially "acceptable" women from rape. There are several different categories of these comfort stations in Japan (also referred to *ianjo*). Yoshiaki (2000) referred to them as: (1) those run by the military; (2) managed by civilians but ultimately supervised and regulated by the military; (3) and facilities (such as restaurants), while Tanaka (2003) categorized them as permanent, semipermanent, and temporary. Soh also divided it by three, though she did it by motives: (1) commercial profit; (2) paternalistic accomodation; and (3) criminal gratification. The Japanese military employed women of all ages and even underage girls as young a fourteen years old.

Beyond this, their stampede was also marked by narratives of extreme aggressions, including documented cases of cannibalism committed by Japanese personnel. In 1945, trials were held for the mistreatment of POWs by Japanese soldiers, including mass murder, beheading, cannibalism of POWs, along with the murders of captured aviators (Frederick, 2005). In March 1945, a military order ("ORDER REGARDING EATING FLESH OF AMERICAN FLYERS") by Major Matoba and Major General Tachibana was issued, detailing that in the wake of the soldier's thinning rations, of their desire to eat the flesh of a captured American aviator, Lieutenant Hall. The following August, Tachibana and 11 of his men were tried for the beheading of two American aviators, subsequently consuming the "flesh and viscera" of one of the beheaded airmen (Case No. 21 Trial of General Tomoyuki Yamashita, 1946). Matoba and Vice Admiral Mori were also tried for the murder of 5 U.S. aviators in February earlier that year. Matoba then confessed to the cannibalism, though international law (then) did not provide a framework for a trial case for cannibalism, he and his men were instead tried for murder and "prevention of honorable burial" (Welch, 2002). Under Japanese imperial rule, a Korean survivor testified that in February 1945, Koreans forced to work at the Marshall Islands were served human meat disguised as whale meat during a food shortage caused by a U.S. blockade. When the Koreans resisted, they were fired upon by Japanese forces, resulting in the death of approximately 100 individuals (Korea Joongang Daily, 2010).

These wartime practices resulted in long-lasting psychological and cultural ruptures within Korean society. Beyond their immediate effect, they generated collective trauma. Japanese war crimes then continue being referenced in Korean understanding of identity and violence history.

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IN KOREAN MEDIA

The Wailing is a horror movie directed by Hongjin Na. It was released in 2016, roughly 71 years after Korea's day of independence. In between those years, and even after, there had been multiple Korean cultural products discussing Japanese colonization. Some of the notable contemporary of these products are *Pachinko* (book by Minjin Lee, published in 2017), *Grass* (graphic novel by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim, published in 2019), the more recently released movie *Exhuma* (dir. Jaehyun Jung, 2024). Even released in the same year as *The Wailing*, there is the film *The Age of Shadows* (dir. Jeewon Kim). The recurring presence of colonial narratives in Korean media demonstrates its continuous back-and-forth with its own past.

When discussing films amongst these cultural products, the audience can most likely point out the villainization of Japanese characters even without prior nor extended knowledge of Japanese imperialism in Korea. While *The Age of Shadows* is somewhat more explicit, having some of its Korean characters, and eventually its main character, be in a resistance group against Japan, *Exhuma* is less direct, more so *The Wailing*. *Exhuma*'s main villain is a Samurai "oni" (Japanese demon) who killed a Korean priest; and similar to *Exhuma*, *The Wailing* has a Japanese character that is singled out, specifically because of his identity as a Japanese person. He is the only Japanese character in the film—the antagonist that is eventually revealed to be the devil. But even before this revelation at the climax of the movie, he is depicted to be alienated from the rest of the Korean population in the village, living in a shed that is only reachable by hiking through the tree-thick mountains. This man does not have a name, often referred to as simply the Japanese Man.

Plot wise, it is easy to say that *Exhuma* and *The Wailing* are similar. In fact, the topic of their similarities and differences was heavily debated following *Exhuma*'s release. Both movies are of the horror genre, have intense themes of shamanism, have Japanese villains, and are internationally acclaimed. The Japanese villains in both movies are also depicted to be evil demons or spirits that are full of malicious intentions, acting out of the urgency of their own impulses, unforgiving, and cannot be reasoned with.

Despite these similarities, the cinematic direction of the films differ, even being a hot topic of debate, with some people liking the more direct storytelling of *Exhuma* and others preferring *The Wailing*'s implicit narratives. *Exhuma* is not subtle with its message. When debating on whether the main characters should attempt to kill their villain, a Japanese demon, or not, one character said that Korea is "the very land our future grandchildren will tread upon and live their lives". The director, Jaehyun Jang, also mentioned "Korea's tragic history involving Japan" in multiple interviews, even highlighting the betrayal that Korea felt when a portion of Koreans aligned themselves with their oppressor (Rosser, 2024; Gogler, 2024).

The Wailing, however, does not possess the same direct language. There are no candid mentions of Japanese imperialism in the movie, nor was it really implied. Hongjin Na, the director, also refrained from hinting at any biases against Japan when writing and filming the movie. From an interview with ScreenAnarchy (Conran, 2016), a question was asked about why

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Jun Kunimura (Japanese Man), was chosen for the role. Na clarified that his decision in making the villain Japanese had nothing to do with Jonggo's (main character) prejudice against Japanese people, eliminating xenophobia as a cause, but rather was focused on his role as a father protecting his daughter and family. A Japanese actor was also chosen, he carried on, because he wanted to portray a villain that has Korean-like appearances, but is actually internally different, even to the point where conducting communication is impossible, perhaps hinting at another main aspect of the movie that is the fear of the unknown. From their conception, the spoken intent of these movies already differ.

And *The Wailing*, again, does not directly address the history between Korea and Japan. Will it be futile, then, to assess it through the lens of trauma?

As Alexander (2004) suggested, the effects of an event is oftentimes perceived subconsciously, and the remnants of these effects (also called "memory residues") will sooner or later materialize in cultural products. When speaking of gaps between what is being represented and its representation, Bleiker (2013) pronounced that negative space or invisibility is not seen as insufficiency, as it allows an audience to digest "complex emotional and political dimensions of reality". In simpler terms, this negative space is where the audience will address and take part in their creation of meaning. As such, this dearth in Na's intent for *The Wailing* is in fact what this research will engage with.

CULTURAL TRAUMA IN FILM

When dissecting trauma in film, Brand (2009) suggested that reading one as performative is vital in shifting critical perspectives, particularly when compared to our (habitually) automatic reading that is viewing films as descriptive. In simple terms, a descriptive reading would be followed by opinions that question the narrative of the reality that the film is showing, while reading it performatively would evoke questions beyond the canon of the film, such as "how does this film make me feel?" and "and what does this tell me about the message the movie is trying to communicate?". Sainati & Gaudiosi (2007, as cited in Pezzotta, 2010) redoubles this notion with the way they set apart a "common spectator" and an "analyst", claiming that the former is passive, absent-minded, and more interested in the story, while the latter is active, technical, interpretative, and tries to understand the relationship between film elements. A performative reading requires mindfulness, as it implicates the audience in the production of meaning (trauma) assigned to an event. Alexander believed that no event in the world is naturally traumatic, and it is the duty of carrier groups in assigning events to be "traumatic" (Alexander, 2004).

In creating a narrative of trauma, the carrier groups—also referred to as Intellectuals by Eyerman (2004)—have to create a compelling tale, that is highly symbolic and also polarizing (Alexander, 2004), that will convince the public that they are, indeed, also traumatized. This is done as cultural trauma spans over generations and will reach a time where certain collectives may not be the immediate recipient of damage, but are still affected by the trauma nevertheless. By doing this, the public is put in a position of being the "audience" that, in Brand's words, act

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as witnesses while reading a film about trauma. The act of witnessing serves as a method to relate to trauma; it is the act of observing from a proximity that escapes representation but still demands reciprocal communication. Even when understanding that a film is fiction, the audience will (sometimes) respond to it as though it is reality, all while knowing that it is not—this is the paradox of fiction (Smith, 1995), and this paradox is what allows the audience to engage with works that may not necessarily relate to them. Witnessing, then, is not simply about watching a film once and constructing an opinion based on it, rather it relies on multiple watches with close examination of the gaps between event and representation, and the impossibility of full understanding of the event.

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CHAPTER 3

According to Aumont and Marie (1996, as cited in Pezzotta, 2010), in order to be dissected, films have to be divided into separate sequences, where each scene is described while observing elements from the film such as editing, character and object movements, the soundtrack, etc. While conducting this, they further emphasize the importance of the utilization of tables, schemes, and graphics to clarify the analytical process.

In this analysis, scenes from *The Wailing* involving the Japanese Man are examined using tables that organize shots, supported by visual graphics in the form of screen captures to aid the descriptive process. Each graphic is labeled using a combination of numbers and letters (e.g. 1A, 2B, 3C, and so forth). The analysis considers four key elements (Petric, 1976): (1) composition; (2) action; (3) sound; and (4) cinematic devices. The dialogues, when available, will be recorded in the same table cell as the screen captures. When a particular element is not specified, consider it to remain consistent with the preceding graphic.

With these guidelines in mind, we begin the analysis.

Figure 1
Scene 1
00:01:32



Figure 1 appears in the opening sequence of *The Wailing*. Following a biblical quotation over a black screen, the film presents a sunrise over the river, before cutting off to this shot. The Japanese Man is positioned on the left side of the frame, fishing in near silence except for the sound of running streams and somber background music. This shot establishes the tone of the rest of the film, that is a cool, blue-green hue. While this palette generally represents nature, the forest, and the sea or water, in horror cinema, it also represents isolation or danger, especially with the dark vignette effect around the frame (Leonardi, 2024). Viewed retrospectively, the

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tonal choice aligns with the film's remote setting in the rural county of Gokseong, reinforcing an atmosphere of unease.

Continuing on, the first scene that will be discussed occurs at approximately the nine-minute mark, just after the title card. It should be noted that this is not the first time we see the Japanese Man, but this is the first time we observe him through the perspective of the Korean characters. In this scene, Jonggo's police partner, Seongbok, recounts a story he heard from the town's gossipmonger, Byeonggyu.

According to the account, a man was hiking through the forest surrounding the town when he encountered a deer. After trying and lifting it upon his shoulders, he lost balance under its weight and fell, tumbling down the hills. As he rolled down the hills, he dropped the deer and his rucksack, striking his head against a large rock. When he regained consciousness, he noticed something in the distance…

Table 1

Scene 2, Part 1

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**
1A 00:10:29		*Composition*: From behind a large rock, we see a figure (the Japanese Man) is bare, hunched over on the floor of the forest. It is daytime, with a stream of light resembling smoke highlighting him. A blue rucksack is positioned not far from him. The tone is cold, blue, evoking the feeling of dampness; the angle is shot parallel to the ground. *Action*: He seems to be feasting on the deer. *Sound*: A distant stream, and the sound of wet chewing.

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1B 00:10:33		*Action*: He pauses, lifting his head up like he just noticed something. His posture and behavior is resembling a predatory animal. *Sound*: The sound of chewing stops. Leaves on the ground rustle as he pushes himself to sit on his heels. *Cinematic Device*: Handheld camera, not still, and shaking as though it is there.
1C 00:10:43		*Action*: He stands, stumbles onto his two feet, taking stuttered steps as he walks towards the hiker's rucksack. We can see more clearly now that he is not fully bare; he is wearing a *fundoshi* (white Japanese underwear bottom for men that is worn by coiling it around the hips and between the buttocks). *Sound*: Rustling of leaves as he walks; the gasp of the hiker.
1D 00:10:49		*Composition*: Now, from over the large rock, we see him in the middle of the shot, hunched over the rucksack. There is a blur effect around the frame. *Action*: He goes over the rucksack, grabbing it, and going through it. He continues to flip the

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		rucksack upside down, letting the contents fall out. Whatever he wanted to find, isn't there. *Sound*: The rustling of the bags and the items inside of it: cans, plastic bags, etc.
1E 00:11:04		*Composition*: A clearer shot of his body; the innards of the deer hang out his mouth. *Action*: Deeming the bag useless, he tosses the bag away, stumbling back to continue devouring the deer. *Sound*: Rucksack hitting the forest floor. *Cinematic Device*: Camera continues to be handheld, unsteady.
1F 00:11:16		*Composition*: A clearer and closer shot of frame 1A - 1C: we look at him from over the large rock. *Action*: He ravages the deer, tearing the flesh with a sharp jolt of his head before diving nose-deep again, swallowing wetly. The *fundoshi* he wears appears to be heavily stained with dirt and blood. Then, he pauses. *Sound*: The sound of a forest, then wet chewing and tearing of flesh, and

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		some snarls from the man.
1G 00:11:21		*Composition*: This time, we see his self more clearly: his body is covered in cuts, his hands and chest and face are covered with blood. His eyes are clearly red, juxtaposed to the blue and cool tone of the forest and the hiker's rucksack, commanding attention. *Action*: Similar to 1B, he lifts his head to the direction of the camera. He seems to notice the hiker. *Sound*: A quiet snarl.
1H 00:11:23		*Action*: He puts one hand on the ground, as though taking a quadrupedal step forward. His face becomes focused, like a predator locating his prey. *Sound*: A louder snarl, now clear through the sound of the forest.
1I 00:11:33		*Composition*: The man disappears. The deer, cut open and covered in blood, similar to him, becomes the main focus of the shot. *Sound*: The snarls are suddenly gone; only the sound of the forest remains.

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1J 00:11:39		*Composition*: Forest heavy with trees, with blue-greenish cold tone. *Cinematic Device*: Camera pans to the left, following the eye movement of the hiker.

The frames presented in Table 1 demonstrate a striking example of characterization achieved without the use of spoken dialogue. Frame 1A - 1B and 1F - 1H share similar visual composition, however, the latter group presents the Japanese man with greater clarity. The shift may indicate the hiker's gained consciousness, and how he is watching the Japanese Man closely.

Through the Japanese Man's movements and postures, he is depicted in a state of animalistic frenzy, frequently positioned on all fours despite being capable of standing upright. In Frames 1B and 1G, he displays heightened perceptual awareness, reacting to his surroundings even while consumed with devouring the deer. This implies an exaggerated sensory capacity, such as heightened hearing, smell, or sight that aligns with the portrayal of him as a predatory figure.

As the scene is presented as a recount rather than a direct depiction, the tendency of sharing stories mouth-to-mouth allows for embellishment and distortion, exaggerating the Japanese Man's self by depicting him as a figure of otherness, an animal who looks human, and a monster who eats venison raw & is capable of disappearing in the blink of an eye (see: 1J).

His appearance further reinforces this construction of differences. Aside from a *fundoshi*, he is portrayed as naked, a stark contrast to the Korean hiker (as seen in 2A, 2B, and 2E) who is fully clothed in modern clothing. The *fundoshi* functions as a culturally specific marker, visually separating the Japanese Man from the Korean hiker, emphasizing his association with the Japanese identity. This distinction is further accentuated through color and contrast. The surrounding area is rendered in cool tones (predominantly blue and green); while the Japanese Man's face introduces a warm hue that becomes increasingly pronounced in Frames 2G - 2J. While the hiker is also shown to be covered with blood on his body as a result of his fall, the Japanese Man's carries a more sinister implication, given the earlier act of devouring the deer—the blood signifies predatory violence rather than injury, making him appear more menacing and malicious.

Table 2 examines the same scene as Table 1 but focuses on a different mode of characterization of the Japanese Man.

Table 2
Scene 2, Part 2

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Frame & Minute	Screen Capture	Description
2A 00:11:46		*Composition*: The hiker, whose face and clothes are covered in his own blood, is slightly to the left of the center of the shot. From previous shots, we know that the large rock is in his right. *Action*: From being in a state of confusion at the disappearance of the Japanese Man, he freezes. He hears a snarling sound. *Sound*: The sound of twigs breaking and leaves rustling—a step taken closer to him. Heavy breathing. *Cinematic Device*: The camera follows him, still handheld yet less shaky than the shots in the first table.
2B 00:11:52		*Composition*: Taken from a higher angle than 2A, the face of the hiker is now in the middle of the shot behind the large rock. *Action*: He slowly peeks up, lips parting. *Sound*: The volume of the heavy breathing picks up, close to a snarl now, as a dramatic music accompanies it.

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2C 00:11:55		*Composition*: From a lower angle, the large rock is shot. The apex of the road centers the shot. The overall tone is still blue-greenish and cool, but we see more bright light from the sky peeking from between the tree leaves. *Sound*: Accompanying background music, full of suspension; slightly quieter than 2B. Rustling leaves, indicating that the Japanese Man is taking closer steps. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera zooms in little by little in the direction of the apex, staying still, in contrast to 2A and 2B.
2D 00:11:58		*Action*: The Japanese man peeks over the apex. *Sound*: Similar background music to 2C, but accompanied with the Japanese Man's low growls.
2E 00:12:00		*Composition*: Shot from a higher angle; frantic, shaky, unstable, not one frame of this cut is clear. *Action*: The hiker yells and falls back against the forest floor. *Sound*: Dramatic music increases in volume. The sound of him gasping and retching wetly.

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		Cinematic Device: The camera cuts to this shot. Juxtaposing the camera from 2C and 2D, the handheld shot follows the hiker's frantic movements.
2F 00:12:01		*Composition*: Same as 2C and 2D, but the Japanese Man's neck and shoulders are now visible. His eyes are strikingly red. *Action*: The Japanese Man rises. *Sound*: Similar to 2E, with added sound of the Japanese man's snarls. The hiker's retching amplifies. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera is still.
2G 00:12:03		*Action*: He reaches down with one hand, grasping the rock for leverage. *Sound*: The hiker becomes choked up, sounds of fears filling the scene along with the Japanese Man's intense growling.
2H 00:12:07		*Composition*: His other hand is now visible. A clearer shot of his eyes where the irises are bloodshot red and the pupils are black. *Action*: His other hand reaches down, as though crawling towards the hiker.

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		Sound: The hiker's stuttered choking turns into an elongated yelling; the Japanese Man's snarls are getting louder.
2I 00:12:11		*Composition*: The Japanese Man looks humongous from this angle, in comparison to the trees, like a giant invading a small city. His hand becomes the vocal point of the scene. *Action*: He reaches for the hiker. *Sound*: The dramatic music swells up; the screaming from the hiker gets louder and so does the growling.
2J 00:12:12		*Action*: The snarl on his face widens. *Sound*: Despite the dramatic music peaking, the Japanese Man's growling almost overpowers it.

Table 2 introduces us to a more suspense-driven sequence of shots. We get a closer look of the hiker as he realizes that the creature is no longer visible. Amidst his confusion, a low snarl—previously heard in the shots presented in Table 1— reappears, this time sounding closer accompanied with the cracks of footsteps on twigs and leaves. From Frame 2B onward, the hiker is filmed from a lower angle, cowered down on the forest floors. We then shift to Frame 2C, to the shot that is directed to the apex of the large rock from which the Japanese Man was previously observed (see: Table 1). While the camera in 2A and 2B appears handheld, producing natural and unstable movements that follow the hiker, keeping him in the center of the frame, the shots directed upward at the rock (starting from 2C) are notably static. Despite the gradual zoom-in, the frames remain steady—a contrast in visual rhythm.

Table 1 has shown us the Japanese Man's non-human, animallike behaviors, his elevated position in comparison to the hiker establishes his role as the "predator" in the scene's dynamic. This form of spatial characterization serves as a recurring motif throughout the film.

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Table 3 discusses Scene 3, which is set in a crime scene where a woman is suspected of setting arson to her own home and stabbing her family members to death. Shortly after being attacked by a body thought to be dead, Jonggo collapses, and as he turns to watch the crowd that has gathered, he sees the Japanese Man.

Table 3
Scene 3

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**
3A 00:20:47		*Composition*: At nighttime, The Japanese Man is placed centered on the frame with spectators of the crime scene surrounding him; a slight beam of light is on him, putting him as the main focus. Red and blue lights from a police car flicker on him. *Action*: He is wearing a bucket hat and a towel slung over his shoulders. He is expressionless as he watches the police at the crime scene. *Sound*: Jonggo's groaning, people wailing, and a somber background music. *Cinematic Device*: The camera is still.
3B 00:21:00		*Composition*: Similar to 3A, but closer. *Action*: He watches the woman, who is being handled by policemen, closely.

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3C 00:21:03		*Composition*: The flickering police lights intensify. *Action*: He suddenly shifts his gaze from the woman to the camera (Jonggo). *Sound*: The background music dramatizes.
3D 00:21:07		*Action*: He tilts his head, ever so slightly, downwards. His gaze hardens.

While the surrounding crowd watches the scene unfold—whispering and attempting to catch a clearer view—the Japanese Man remains focused on the suspect, his face notably impassive. As in Table 1, he appears to sense Jonggo's stare, turning to look at him (3C), remaining expressionless before tilting his head downward (3D). This moment becomes a key site of characterization through the use of a cinematic shorthand commonly known as the "Kubrick stare" (Ferrier, 2023), in which a character looks forward at the camera from beneath lowered eyebrows with their head tilted downward, acknowledging the audience. First appearing in *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), the Kubrick stare has become a visual marker to signify madness and instability. As Todd McGowan (n.d., as cited in Ferrier, 2023) argues, direct address to the audience establishes a psychological connection between the figure on screen and the audience; building upon this notion, Mats Carlsson suggests that the audience's position shifts from a safe, spectatorial position to one of vulnerability. Through the deployment of the Kubrick stare, the Japanese Man asserts a silent dominance over both Jonggo and the audience, increasing the tension of the scene and reinforcing his role as a predatory presence.

Scene 4 is another scene that recounts the words of mouth, similar to the scenes in Table 1 and 2. It begins when Byeonggyu, the gossipmonger, calls Jonggo to his restaurant following the news of the crime in Scene 3.

Table 4

Scene 4, Part 1

Frame &	**Screen Capture**	**Description**

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Minute		
4A 00:25:45	 **BYEONGGYU**: Remember what I told you before? **JONGGO**: What? **BYEONGGYU**: How the Jap raped a woman? **JONGGO**: What about it?	*Composition*: A daytime shot of the lake in Figure 1, but without dark vignette on the border. The tone is blue and bright. A woman is seen to be seated close to the Japanese Man. *Action*: The woman hits the Japanese Man on the arm, teasingly, as they seem to be joking around. The Japanese Man reaches out under her skirt; in response, the woman gasps. *Sound*: The sound of dialogue between Byeonggyu and Jonggo. Incoherent exchange between the woman and the Japanese Man as they laugh, accompanied by the sound of water and birds tweeting. Nearing the end of the shot, the woman gasps. *Cinematic Device*: The camera is still.
4B 00:25:49		*Composition*: The Japanese Man and the woman are centered on the frame. The dark and deep background highlights them as the main focus. Between them is a bucket filled with cooking items and ingredients, next to it a pot filled with cooked food. *Action*: The woman falls back on her behind as the

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		Japanese Man reaches under her skirt; her face is flushed as she looks at him with a horrified look. The man pauses. *Sound*: The sound of streams and the woman's gasp. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
4C 00:25:52		*Composition*: The Japanese Man is placed in the center of the frame. *Action*: He looks surprised at the woman's reactions. *Sound*: Sound of streams. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, following the Japanese Man as he sits up straighter.
4D 00:24:53		*Action*: He looks up, which will be revealed in 4G is the direction of other campers/fishers.
4E 00:24:54		*Composition*: The woman is slightly to the right of the frame. *Action*: She looks at her lap, with a horrified look on her face. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.

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4F 00:25:56		*Action*: The Japanese Man stands up as the woman looks at the direction of the other campers. *Cinematic Device*: The camera is still.
4G 00:25:58		*Composition*: A wide shot of the lake from the opposite side of 4A. *Action*: In the background, slightly to the right, we see the campers busy building fire and setting up camp. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
4H 00:25:59		*Composition*: Similar to 4E and 4F; the Japanese Man stands before the woman, on the left of the frame, who is on the ground. We see the back of his trousered legs. *Action*: The woman looks up at him. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
4I 00:26:00	 **JAPANESE MAN**: (In Japanese) You filthy slut.	*Composition*: The Japanese Man is placed in the center, shot from the bottom. Similar to 2G - 2J (and other following frames), his being fills the frame, making him seem humongous. *Action*: The Japanese Man is looking down at the

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		woman. *Sound*: His dialogue. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
4J 00:26:06		*Action*: The Japanese Man pounds on the woman. *Sound*: The woman's whimper that turns into shouting. *Cinematic Device*: The camera stays still.

Scene 4 opens with the woman and the Japanese Man sharing a laugh, suggesting a momentary rapport. Emboldened, he reaches under her skirt, prompting her to scream and fall backwards on the rocks as she scrambles away (4B). In 4D, he glances at the nearby campers (4G), pausing briefly as though considering whether they had heard her, yet his intent remains unchanged as he towers over her. Frame 4I employs a low-angle shot, as he calls the woman a "filthy slut" in Japanese, before pounding on her (4J). This sequence establishes his role as a predator not only through physical violence but sexual aggression. This echoes the historical patterns associated with the Japanese military's comfort system, in which prostitution was institutionalized and normalized. His disregard for the presence of nearby witnesses mirrors the public nature of comfort stations. Like an animal that cannot control his lust, he rapes her, and this is where sex turns into a public performance and not intimacy. The public setting of the assault further implies a level of shame for the victim, a theme that is also frequently articulated in testimonies by Korean survivors of the comfort women system (Soh, 2020), and malevolence for the perpetuator.

Figure 2
Scene 4, Part 2
00:26:27 - 00:26:46

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Following the sequence in Table 4, Byeonggyu recounts the aftermath of the assault, describing how the woman's skin becomes covered in rashes and boils and how she exhibits signs of madness, incoherently speaking to herself. Her physical deterioration recalls the documented medical consequences experienced by comfort women, many of whom suffered from venereal diseases transmitted by repeated sexual exploitations (Soh, 2020), and the symptoms of her madness can be traced to how victims of the comfort system were deemed crazy when they sought justice (Tanaka, 2003).

The following Figure 3 & 4 and Table 5 & 6 are set in the crime scene from Table 3.

Figure 3
Scene 5, Part 1
00:31:00 - 00:31:03

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Figure 3 marks the second instance that the Japanese Man is referred to as the "Jap", which is a contemptuous term (slur). In Figure 2, Byeonggyu refers to him as "일본놈" (*ilbon nom*), a derogatory term translating to "Japanese bastard". In Figure 3, the woman, Moomyeong, instead uses the term 왜놈" (*wae nom*), a historically charged term that Koreans use to refer Japanese people. In this context, the term "wae" historically denotes "Japan" but is also associated with pirates that used to raid Korean coasts, while "nom", similar to *ilbon nom*, serves as a derogatory suffix meaning "bastard".

Figure 4
Scene 5, Part 2
00:31:33 - 00:31:43

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Figure 4 recalls lingering trauma associated with violence that was perpetuated by Japanese personnel by explicitly drawing on historical anxieties surrounding Japanese aggression. The circulating story that the Japanese Man sucks the blood of a person dry invokes an image of extreme transgressions, one that can be traced back to the act of consuming other human beings previously discussed. While there are no legal records of the crime of cannibalism done by the Japanese in Korea specifically, the witness account of the massacre of the Marshall Islands and records of cannibalism in other Japanese colonies at the time may be enough to build a certain image in the eyes of Koreans (Korea Joongang Daily, 2010).

Transitioning to Scene 6, Jonggo leaves the house for a moment to call Seongbook. When he returns, he intends to find Moomyeong, but instead discovers a backdoor that leads to the rear of the building. Upon opening it, he encounters the Japanese Man yet again.

Table 5
Scene 6, Part 1

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**

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5A 00:32:43		*Composition*: Daytime, behind the burnt down house. The frame is divided vertically down the middle. The right part is the house, dark, thus highlighting the middle to left part of the frame. The Japanese Man is bare, located in the middle, his bottom half obstructed. A light source illuminating his back. In front of him are some bamboo trees arching together into a triangle; it seems to separate him and the camera. The backyard is filled with bamboo trees, thus resulting in a cool, dark greenish hue. *Action*: The Japanese Man is frantically tearing and gnawing at a deer. *Sound*: Wet chewing and the rustles of leaves as he moves. *Cinematic Device*: The camera is still.
5B 00:32:46		*Composition*: The frame is divided vertically down the middle. Jonggo is in the middle of the frame. *Action*: Jonggo peers at the noise, half his body outside the door. He seems to not yet register 5A. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.

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5C 00:32:47		*Action*: The Japanese Man notices Jonggo watching him. He abruptly stops chewing and turns his head to face the camera—where Jonggo is. *Sound*: Wet chewing stops. The Japanese Man's snarl. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
5D 00:32:49		*Action*: Jonggo, finally understanding the scene, is surprised. He loses balance and takes one step outside the door, gasping. *Sound*: The door thumping against Jonggo's body weight; his gasps. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
5E 00:32:51		*Action*: The Japanese Man continues chewing as he pushes himself away from the deer, keeping his eyes on Jonggo. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
5F 00:32:54		*Action*: Both his hands are planted on the ground facing Jonggo.

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5G 00:32:56		*Action*: He gets closer.
5H 00:32:58		*Action*: He grabs one of the bamboo trees.
5I 00:33:00		*Action*: He pulls himself between the bamboo arch (as described in 5A), and walks, one foot in front of the other, towards Jonggo. *Sound*: The Japanese Man's loud breathing now turning into snarling and growling.

The composition of Table 5 is similar to the previous scenes, especially in Scene 1 where we established that the overall cold tone of the film gives off the feeling of isolation—especially by this point, in the burnt house, with Moomyeong's disappearance, Jonggo truly is alone. Until he hears the noises. Until he sees the Japanese Man, covered in warm, red blood that contrasts the bamboo forests surrounding him.

The bamboo arch acts as a barrier between the camera and the Japanese Man, who is positioned further away under bright lighting, as early as Frame 5A. The audience's subconscious is drawn to think this way because the arch is the first dark object that is pulled into our focus—it is in the middle of the frame, obstructing our view of the main subject of the scene. In Frames 5E - 5G, the Japanese Man ravages the deer, again displaying beast-like behaviors until he notices Jonggo (5G).

For the sequence in Frame 5G - 5I, I would like to refer back to the Kubrick Stare as discussed in Table 3. Physically, the Japanese Man is placed in lower ground than Jonggo, who is standing on his two legs, but still, his gaze pierces at the camera, into Jonggo, and consequently, into the audience (5C). Then, he begins moving slowly (5E-5G), keeping his eyes on Jonggo,

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and then, in Frame 5H, he grabs one of the bamboo trees. This enhances the psychological connection between the audience's safe place and the Japanese Man. The subconscious barrier is broken, even more so when he steps under the arch, invading the space.

This table is divided into two as Table 6 is a highly intense chase scene, where the Japanese Man chases Jonggo through the remnants of the house.

Table 6

Scene 6, Part 2

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**
6A 00:33:04		*Composition*: Similar to 5B & 5D. *Action*: Jonggo screams at the sight and rushes back inside the house. *Sound*: The Japanese Man's snarling, then Jonggo's scream that overpowers it.
6B 00:33:07		*Composition*: Shot from inside the house, the frame is mostly dark except for the light coming from the opened backdoor, placed slightly to the left of the middle. *Action*: The Japanese Man chases Jonggo who tries to escape in fear. *Sound*: Jonggo's screaming, the Japanese Man's growls. Clattering and thumping as Jonggo runs through the house. Ambience music begins to emerge. *Cinematic Device*: The

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		camera cuts to this shot. The camera is still.
6C 00:33:09		*Composition*: Outside. The dark, burnt house provides a strong contrast with Jonggo's white police uniform. *Action*: Jonggo continues fleeing. *Sound*: Jonggo's screaming continues; the background music loudens. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera follows Jonggo as he continues fleeing.
6D 00:33:12		*Action*: Jonggo trips over a fallen log and lands on his front.
6E 00:33:14		*Composition*: Very similar to 4H; the Japanese Man's legs are shot from behind on the left side of the frame as Jonggo is on the ground, positioned slightly to the right. *Action*: Jonggo continues yelling in fear as he tries to crawl away (but fails to create actual distance); the Japanese Man approaches him. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.

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6F 00:33:16		*Composition*: Shot from the front, the Japanese Man is positioned in the middle of the frame. His body is a contrast to the burnt house behind him; more so his face that is covered in the deer's blood. The top of Jonggo's head peeks from the bottom of the frame. *Action*: Jonggo continues to try to escape as the Japanese Man takes slow steps towards him. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera follows the movements of the Japanese Man.
6G 00:33:17		*Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
6H 00:33:18		*Action*: The Japanese Man towers over Jonggo, approaching him. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera is still.

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6I 00:33:18		*Action*: The Japanese Man opens his mouth, as though taking a bite from Jonggo. *Sound*: The music peaks; the sound of the Japanese Man's wet growl.
6J 00:33:20		*Composition*: Shot from above, Jonggo is sleeping on his bed, his head in the middle of his pillow. *Action*: Jonggo is screaming as he is asleep; the scene we had just witnessed was obviously a nightmare. *Sound*: The music stops; Jonggo's screams continue. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot. The camera is still.

After Jonggo wakes up, we then realize that this is the third scene where the Japanese Man attacks a Korean that is imagined (previous: Table 1 and 2, and Table 4). So far, this is the clearest we have seen of the Japanese Man: his face, his teeth, his eyes, and his animal-like movement are prominently displayed. Despite the heightened visibility, the dynamic remains unchanged. He pursues his victims, and when they have fallen to the ground, he towers over them menacingly.

Later, close to the one-hour mark, Jonggo decides to visit the Japanese Man's hut after finding out where he lives from the hiker from Scene 1. He brings Seongbok, who in turn brings Yang Isam, his deacon nephew who speaks Japanese to help them communicate with the Japanese Man.

In the Japanese Man's hut, Jonggo goes through the stack of books and finds an illustrated porn book with traditional Japanese art style, subsequently calling him a "pervert".

Figure 5
Scene 7

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00:51:22 - 00:52:26



While Table 4 established the Japanese Man's sexual violence through witness' recounts, the pornographic materials found in his home provides confirmation of the perversion previously described. Figure 5 extends his characterization as a pervert, shifting the immediate threat (the public assault) to a sustained and habitual sexual pathology (private possessions). The specific traditional Japanese art style may also nod to how the perversion is ingrained to his culture than his person.

Figure 6
Scene 8
00:53:44

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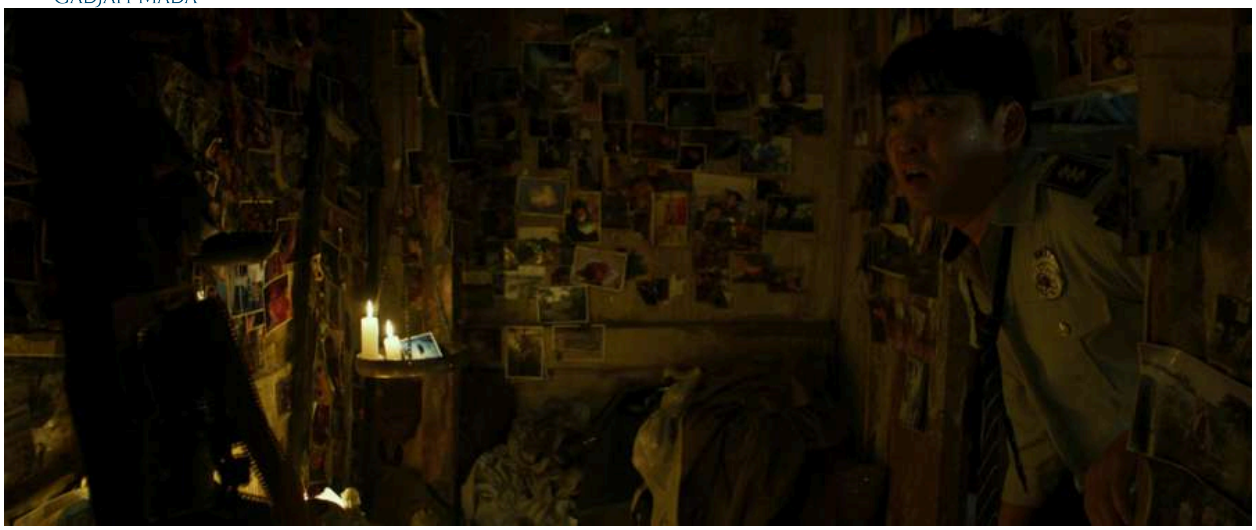

In this scene, Seongbok discovers a hidden room plastered with graphic photographs of the murder victims in Gokseong, with a candle-lit altar positioned at the center of the room. This display recalls the public circulation of Japanese wartime violence in newspapers, most notably the Hundred-man Killing Contest, in which soldiers competed to behead 100 people as though it were a sporting event (Chang, 1997).

Table 7 examines Scene 8, which occurs shortly after Scene 7. In this sequence, Jonggo and Isam are attacked and pursued by the Japanese Man's dog, forcing them to damage the front of the house in order to defend themselves.

Table 7
Scene 8, Part 2

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**
7A 00:55:31		*Composition*: Jonggo, Seongbok, and Isam are located on the left side of the frame, with Jonggo and Isam facing the door on the right where we know the Japanese Man will come through from. *Action*: Jonggo and Isam are hunched on the floor; their faces are filled with guilt.

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		Sound: Tense background music; the Japanese Man's footsteps on wooden floorings approach.
7B 00:55:33		*Composition*: Shot from inside the house, the only light is from the door. The Japanese Man is slightly to the right, standing as the vocal point of the shot. *Action*: He appears in the doorway. *Sound*: Background music continues. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it follows the movements of the Japanese Man.
7C 00:55:36		*Action*: He looks around the room from the outside.
7D 00:55:38		*Composition*: Shot from the outside of the house looking in. *Action*: Jonggo is disheveled and heaving; he looks up at the Japanese Man before guiltily averting his gaze. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.

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7E 00:55:46		*Composition*: The house is dark; the Japanese Man is kept in the center of the frame even as he moves. He is shot from a lower angle. *Action*: He enters the house, his eyes fixed on Seongbok and the room he uncovered before looking down at Jonggo and Isam. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it follows his movements.
7F 00:55:51		*Composition*: Jonggo and Isam are both slightly to the left of the center; they are shot on equal footing. *Action*: They shift uncomfortably; Jonggo does not look at the Japanese Man while Isam takes one look before looking away. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it is still.
7G 00:55:53		*Action*: The Japanese Man looks at Jonggo, Isam, and Seongbok, before heading to the hidden room. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it follows his movements.

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7H 00:56:09		*Composition*: The room is dark except for the altar of candles in the middle of the frame. Gorey printed pictures of victims are glued on the wall. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it slowly pans down from the top of the room to where the altar altar is.
7I 00:56:14		*Composition*: The Japanese Man is positioned in the center of the frame, his face illuminated by the candles from the altar. To his left is Seongbok's arm. *Action*: His hand holds the door open as he examines the room. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, the camera is still.
7J 00:56:16		*Action*: He looks up at Seongbok. *Cinematic Device*: The camera begins following his movements.
7K 00:56:18		*Composition*: Similar to 7G. *Action*: He lifts himself into an upright position, watching Seongbok closely as he closes the door. *Sound*: The music takes a more intense turn with spikes

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		of percussions. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, it follows his movements.
7L 00:56:23	 **ISAM**: (In Japanese) Excuse me.	*Composition*: Similar to 7F. *Action*: Isam looks up at him and begs his pardon while nodding his head. *Sound*: Isam's dialogue. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot, the camera is still.
7M 00:56:24		*Composition*: Similar to 7G. *Action*: Looking surprised, the Japanese Man turns to look at Isam. *Cinematic Device*: The camera cuts to this shot.
7N 00:56:30		*Action*: His gaze shifts to look at Jonggo. *Sound*: The percussion picks up dramatically, and the scene ends with the sounds of a thunderstorm and rain.

Up to this point, every scene depicting the Japanese Man's interaction with the Korean characters—whether imagined or not—has followed a recurring pattern in which the Korean figure falls while the Japanese Man towers over them. However, this encounter marks the first time Jonggo encounters him in reality. The Japanese Man here is not naked. Blood does not cover his being. His canines aren't sharp. His eyes do not burn bright red. He is an old stranger that does not even speak the language they speak. Despite this, the Koreans hold their breath. The Japanese Man commands the attention of the room with every move, every step, every flicker of his eyes. This scene confirms the hypothesis of the first three dream-sequences: the

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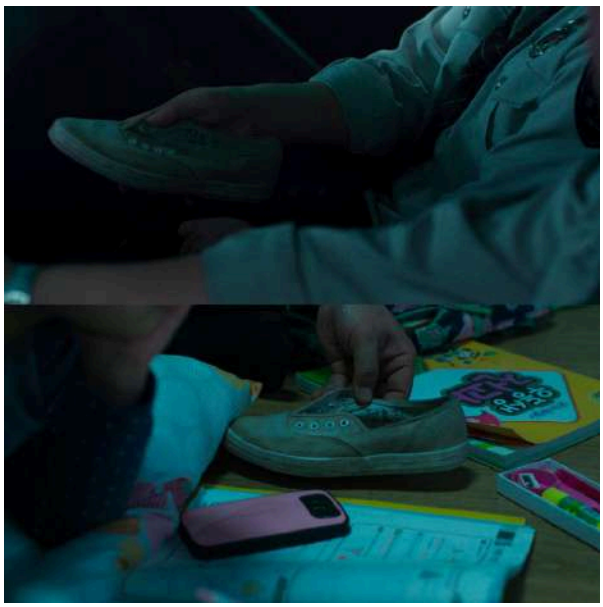
rumors Jonggo had heard turns out to have weight, and the image constructed by his subconscious in his dreams is not without foundation.

In Frames 7B-7C, the Japanese Man enters his home through the broken door, which is shown as the only source of light in 7A. He pauses briefly, surveying the room before looking down at Jonggo. In 7D, his illuminated hand contrasts sharply with Jonggo's face, which is enveloped by darkness. As he moves further inside (7E-7G), the camera does not pan back to the door but instead follow him deeper into the room. His entrance progressively consumes the remaining light, bringing darkness to the screen—a visual metaphor on how the Japanese imperial rule is remembered as backing Korea into a dark corner.

7M shows the surprised face of the Japanese Man when Isam in 7L spoke in Japanese. Out of the three Koreans, the only one able to speak Japanese. Language in this film and in the context of Japanese imperialism is particularly important; as described previously, while deploying the *naisen ittai*, the Japanese imposed their language so much on the Koreans that at one point, Korean students read, spoke, and wrote Japanese better than Korean. In the following scenes, it will be elaborated more, but in the matter of this scene, the Japanese man expresses shock, and perhaps curiosity, at Isam's ability to speak his language.

Figure 7
Scene 9 and Scene 10
00:57:47 & 00:58:38



Jonggo had dealt with murder and rape, and even the Japanese Man's animalistic behaviour. But up to this point, it all had been done to other people. In the first frame of Figure 7, we see Seongbok, still shaken from the encounter, revealing that he had taken a shoe from the Japanese Man's house. Upon further inspection, "전효진" or *Jang Hyo-Jin*, who is Jonggo's

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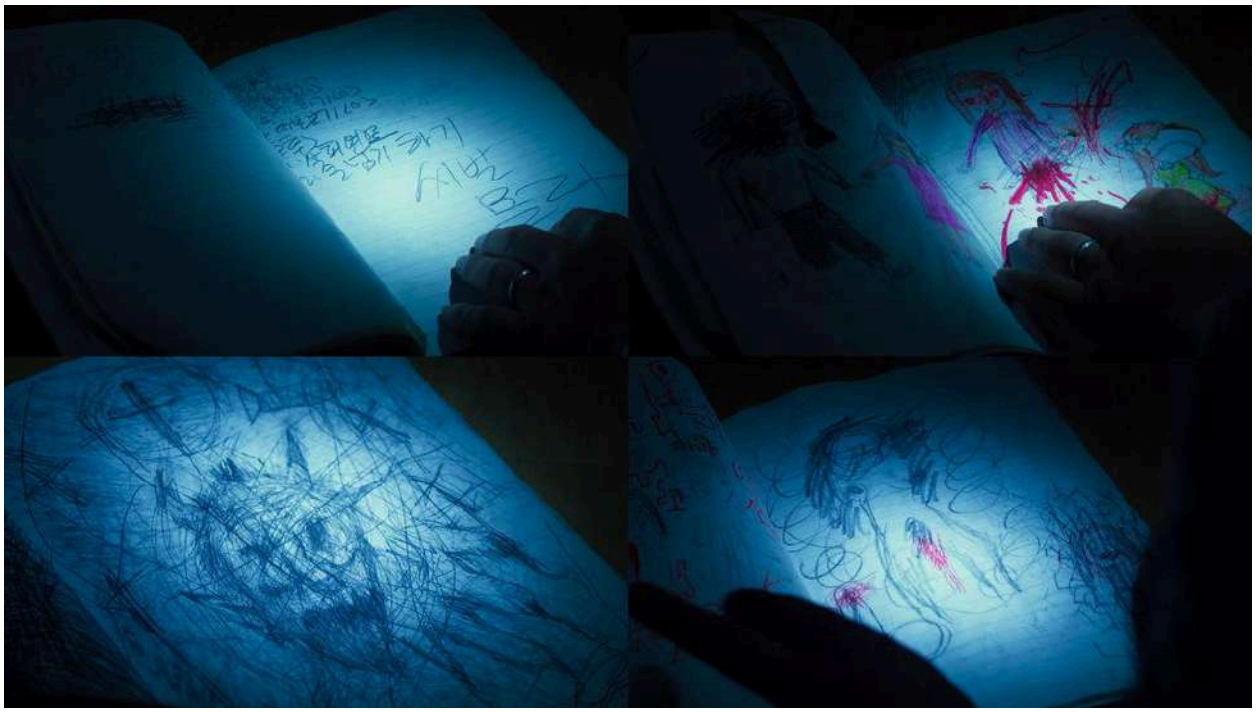
daughter. The threat that was always external had suddenly turned personal. The second frame shows Jonggo showing Hyojin her shoe.

Being confronted by the shoe, she begins screaming at her father, being irrational, contrasting the sweet child we had been shown in the beginning of the film. Her reaction is reminiscent of the story that Byeonggyu told Jonggo in Figure 2, where the Japanese Man's victim began acting mad.

Figure 8 and 9 shows Jonggo sneaking into Hyojin's room in the middle of the night as she is sleeping. He goes through her things and discovers her journal.

Figure 8
Scene 11, Part 1
01:01:13 - 01:01:28



The first frame shows her to-do list, followed by a large "시발" (*sibal*) in Hyojin's writing, meaning "fuck", again emphasizing the stark shift in personality. The second frame shows grotesque drawings of people. The most clear is of a woman (shown by the long hair) with red on her crotch area resembling streams of blood. The third frame is a drawing of a demon or the devil, with the cross over his head. The last frame is the body of a naked woman (shown by her round breast and lack of penis) with even more vicious depiction of her crotch area bleeding.

This journal entries, especially the second and fourth frames, are eerily similar to Figure 5 where Jonggo uncovers the Japanese Man's porn collection. However, Figure 8 is much more malicious for a number of reasons starting from its origin. The pornography in Figure 5 is printed

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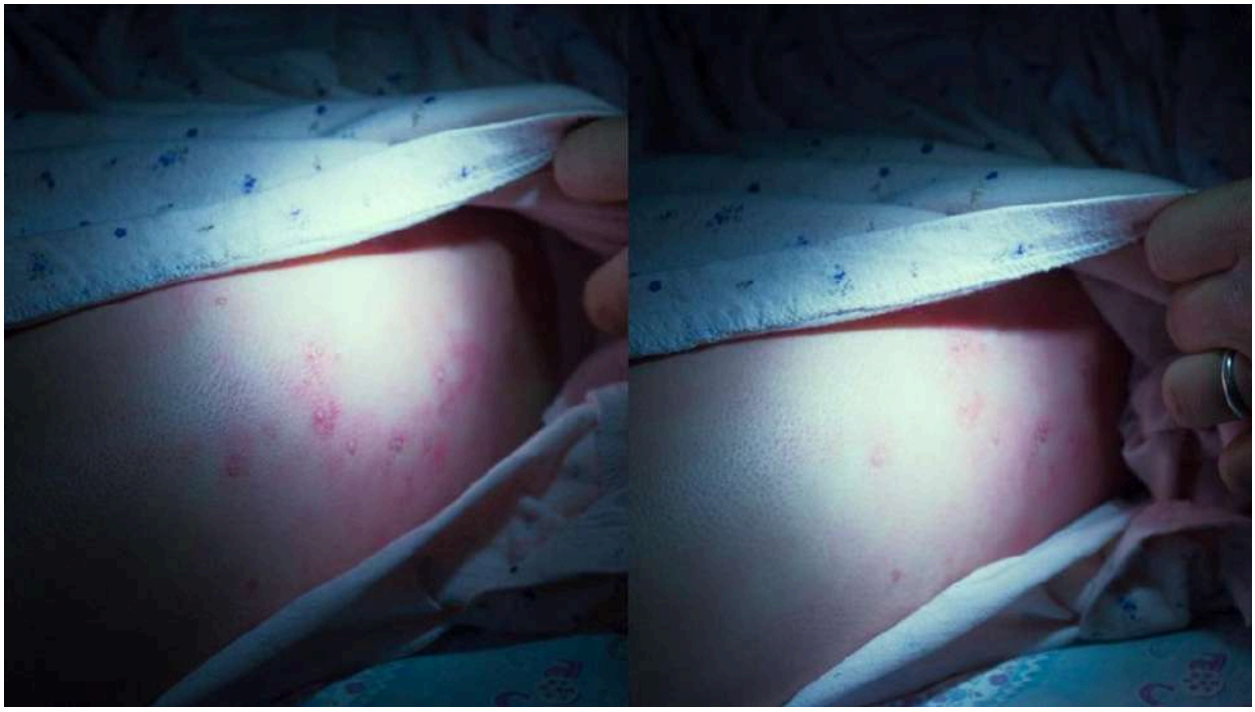
in a traditional Japanese art style into a book, while Figure 8 is hand drawn by Hyojin. Aside from that, Figure 5 shows consensual sex between two adults, resembling the Karma Sutra; some kind of guide to relationships and sexual intimacy. Hyojin's drawing does not involve any sort of sexual act, and instead only shows the women figures. The bleeding implies sexual assault or rape.

After going through her journal, Jonggo investigates by lifting Hyojin's pajama pants and shirt, discovering red rashes on her skin.

Figure 9
Scene 11, Part 2
01:01:51 - 01:1:56



Jonggo discovers at the same time as the audience that Hyojin's drawings may be induced by her own experience. Questions begin to appear: what happened to Hyojin? Has she had her own encounter with the Japanese Man? What has he done to her? All of these questions bring to one conclusion, however, that the Japanese Man is a much worse degenerate than the initial way he was presented by the film. He is a murderer, a rapist, an animal—but what kind of monster would touch a child?

Angered by this discovery, Jonggo takes Isam back to the Japanese Man's house.

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Figure 10

Scene 12, part 1

01:04:13 - 01:04:20



Figure 10 shows the scene where Jonggo demands for the Japanese Man's passport. This scene, innocuous as it may seem, serves the audience a composition that is not yet seen before, that is the Japanese Man and the Korean characters standing on eye-level, with neither towering or cowering before the other. This may be the film's way to declare a turning point in Jonggo's character, from a coward to an angry father that is willing to face the devil for touching his daughter.

This is also marked by the fact that there are no notable scenes in the future where the Japanese Man towers over the Korean characters.

Table 8

Scene 12, Part 2

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**

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8A 01:05:50		*Composition*: Shot from behind the Japanese Man's head, Jonggo is visibly elevated. The mood is dark and shadoy; Jonggo's expression and the muted colors expresses intensity and anger. *Action*: Jonggo takes a step closer to the Japanese Man, looking down upon him. *Sound*: Forest sounds. Jonggo's footsteps on wood. *Cinematic device*: The camera moves with Jonggo.
8B 01:05:57		*Composition*: Bright, in contrast to 8A. Shot in eye-level with the Japanese Man. *Action*: The Japanese Man looks up at Jonggo. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot. It is still.
8C 01:06:27		*Composition*: Outside the Japanese Man's hut, the three characters stand facing each other. The day is visibly bright, but where they are standing is shadowed by surrounding trees. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot.

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8D 01:06:48		*Composition*: Shot from behind Jonggo's arm-level, angled up towards the Japanese Man. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot.

Jonggo appears visibly distressed, and continuing from Figure 10, the physical alignment between him and the Japanese Man marks a turning point in his character's resolve. In two frames (8A & 8B), their positions appear momentarily reversed, with Jonggo towering over the Japanese Man and assuming the role of the predator. In hindsight, however, this reversal functions as a red herring, given Jonggo's tragic fate in the end. By Frame 8D, despite the two characters standing on the same ground level, the Japanese Man once again is shot from a lower angle (see: Table 2, Table 4, Table 6, and Table 7). Cinematically, he is rendered larger than his actual, physical stature, subtly reasserting the established power dynamic.

Figure 11
Scene 12, part 3
01:07:20 - 01:07:32

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In Figure 11, Jonggo asks Isam to translate his words literally. Upon finding his spine, he begins to hurl curses and slurs at the Japanese Man, who remains silent, seemingly accepting the rebuke. Jonggo's actions echoes historical forms of resistance for the *naisen ittai* is speaking in Korean in public (Kim-Gibson, Dai Sil, 1999, as cited in Kitkwoski, 2015), particularly the insistence on speaking Korean in public as a refusal of linguistic assimilation. Although *naisen ittai* resulted in many Korean youths becoming fluent in Japanese, such measures did not eliminate everyday resistance, which persisted even in the smallest practices of daily life.

Figure 12 introduces a new character, Ilgwang, who is a shaman that Hyojin's grandmother hired to exorcise her.

Figure 12
Scene 13, part 1

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01:20:55 & 01:23:41



The first frame in Figure 12 shows Ilgwang wearing a *mubok*, which is a colorful costume traditionally worn by Korean shamans while performing rituals (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, 1982). Korean shamans, known as *mudang*, are typically female, making Ilgwang's presentation as a highly "trustworthy" and reputed shaman somewhat unusual. This incongruity functions as an early indicator of dishonesty in Ilgwang's character, which is later confirmed when it is revealed that he has been working in collusion with the Japanese Man.

The second frame shows Ilgwang wearing *sokgui*, the inner of a male Korean *hanbok*.

Figure 13
Scene 13, part 2
01:25:03

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In Figure 13, Ilgwang is shown to undress. Beneath his *sokgui*, he is revealed to be wearing a *fundoshi*, identical worn by the Japanese Man in Table 1 and Table 6. This visual detail further complicates his characterization. While the presence of a male shaman is already unconventional, a Korean shaman wearing a traditional Japanese garment beneath Korean attire signals a deeper incongruity.

This reading aligns with Na's remarks in an interview with ScreenAnarchy, in which he stated that he sought to evoke a certain feeling through a villain who appears physically similar to Koreans yet is fundamentally different beneath the surface. Although Ilgwang shares ethnic and cultural markers with Jonggo and the other Korean characters, the removal of his outer garment reveals his allegiance to the Japanese Man—positioning him firmly on the side of the villain; the colonizer.

Historically, such figures were not uncommon under Japanese colonial rule. A number of Korean political and social elites openly collaborated with Japanese authorities, as cooperation was often viewed as a pathway to social and economic advancement in colonized Korea (Miyoshi-Jager, 2005; Uchida, 2014).

Figure 14 shows a scene where the Japanese man is trying to buy chickens in the market.

Figure 14
Scene 14
01:27:48 & 01:27:53

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Referring back to Table 7 and Figure 11, even when interacting with Korean characters other than Jonggo and Isam, the Japanese Man makes no attempt to speak Korean. The seller must say "お金" (*okane*), meaning "money", before he responds by handing her the payment. Likewise, when saying "that's okay", he uses Japanese, "大丈夫" (*daijoubu*), rather than Korean, "괜찮아" (*gwenchana*). Throughout the film, Isam remains the only Korean character capable of holding a dialogue with him, as he is the sole figure shown to be fluent in Japanese (see: Table 9).

Table 9 examines the final scene discussed in this study, in which Isam confronts the Japanese Man in a cave and demands that he reveal his true nature as the devil—a demand that the Japanese Man fulfills.

Table 9
Scene 16

Frame & Minute	**Screen Capture**	**Description**

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9A 02:26:03	 **JAPANESE MAN**: (In Japanese) Why is there doubt in your heart?	*Composition*: Shot from Isam's perspective; the camera angles downwards as flickers of fire illuminate the Japanese Man's body with warm light. Aside from that, the screen is dark. *Action*: The Japanese Man prepares the camera as he raises it to face Isam; he questions Isam's faith in his own belief. At this point, the Japanese Man had turned into the devil: his nails are long and claw-like, his body is covered in grime and blood, his ears are pointed. *Sound*: The Japanese Man's dialogue. Isam's heavy breathing. The clicks of the camera. The flickers of firewood. The music that plays is somber, a mixture of strings and piano notes. *Cinematic device*: The camera is still.
9B 02:26:16		*Composition*: A close up of the Japanese Man's fingers and nails. *Action*: He takes another picture. *Sound*: Isam's sobs grow louder as the camera flashes. The music continues. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.

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9C 02:26:16	 **JAPANESE MAN**: (In Japanese) See my hands, and my feet.	*Composition*: Similar to 9A. *Sound*: The Japanese Man's dialogue as the music continues. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.
9D 02:26:30		*Composition*: A close up of his face. *Action*: The Japanese Man lowers the camera, revealing his bright red eyes with sharp pupils; the inflection in his cheeks suggest that he is smiling, amused at Isam's reaction. *Sound*: The music continues. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.
9E 02:26:34	 **JAPANESE MAN**: (In Japanese) You can see it is I.	*Composition*: Shot from eye-level of the Japanese Man from further away. He is placed in the center of the shot, behind the fire. There are candles surrounding his figure. *Action*: He looks up at Isam, smiling, as he admits that he is indeed the devil. *Sound*: His dialogue. The music gradually gets louder. *Cinematic device*: The

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		camera cuts to this shot; it is still.
9F 02:26:42		*Composition*: Shot from behind the Japanese Man. Isam is standing before him. *Action*: The cloak surrounding the Japanese Man slips off his shoulders, revealing the jagged bones underneath the skin of his back. *Sound*: Isam's sobs grow louder. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.
9G 02:26:47	 **JAPANESE MAN**: (In Japanese) It is myself.	*Composition*: Similar to 9A, only closer. The fire *Action*: *Sound*: The Japanese Man's dialogue; his voice changes from one of a normal man's to an echoing, raspy voice as he reveals his true self. *Cinematic device*: The camera cuts to this shot; it is still.

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9H 02:26:59		*Action*: The Japanese Man grins.

The Japanese Man's body is illuminated by the flames of a nearby campfire. Although fire is conventionally associated with warmth, the yellow cast on his body in Frame 9A appears cool-toned, giving the impression of damp, reinforcing the claustrophobic atmosphere of the cave and the dread experienced by Isam as the Japanese Man continues to transform.

As the transformation progresses, features emphasized earlier in the film (see: Table 2, Table 5, and Table 6) are brought sharply into focus: his sharp claws, glowing red eyes, and distorted facial structure. Frames 9F - 9H depict him from a higher angle, looking downward, yet despite this reversal of the established hierarchy, the Japanese Man retains the upper hand. His monstrous form, accompanied by the ominous music, sharp teeth, and deeply wrinkled skin rendered physical dominance unnecessary.

In this final encounter, the film breaks the cinematic rule it had consistently employed, where his predatory nature was conveyed through spatial dominance. The revelation of the Japanese Man's identity confirms what the film had implied and danced around with from the beginning: that he is, unequivocally, the devil. This moment delivers the narrative and symbolic closure toward which the audience has been steadily guided.

FINDINGS

Overall, by conducting a close analysis on the film, the Japanese Man can be defined by four key traits:

The first one, being the most visually obvious, is his animal-like actions. For a large part of the film, the Japanese Man is portrayed as nonhuman and different, seen with elongated nails, sharp canines, and bright blood red eyes (see: Table 1, 2, 5, 6, 9) while displaying erratic behavior. In the sequence in Table 3, we see his heightened senses, noticing Jonggo even with the loud environment noises and bright police cars. In Table 4, while not physically monstrous, we see him considering his actions in raping the woman, and taking the decision to proceed despite the campers not being too far from where they are. This lack of shame and caution for consequences of his transgressions imply that he chooses to follow his instincts instead of adhere to unspoken social rules. Figure 3 shows the derogatory way the Korean characters view him, by referring to him with slurs, while the following Figure 4 explores the rumors of the Japanese Man feasting on the blood of his victims, which is supported by Table 2 and 6. This action may be in recognition of historical facts, where Japanese soldiers take part in the crime of cannibalism

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and other extreme offenses such as public beheading and bayoneting. Spatial placement also supports this idea, as almost always, even when the Korean characters manages to claim level ground or even be placed higher, he is shot from the bottom—this makes the audience appear smaller, and thus creates an illusion of the Japanese Man being bigger than he actually is (see: Table 2, 4, 6, 7, 8). Colors also play a role in the creation of this meaning: the overall tone of the film (as established in Figure 1) is cool-toned with blue and green, however, most times, the Japanese Man is covered with blood that is bright red (see: Table 1, 2, 5, & 6) indicating warm tones—even his eyes are bright red (see: Table 9). Just by the colors chosen to indicate him and apart from him, the Japanese Man is not a natural part of the village.

Secondly, he is also shown to be a sexual deviant. The story told to Jonggo by Byeonggyu in Table 4 and Figure 2 shows that the Japanese Man commits acts of sexual assault, and the results are symptoms of madness and rashes on the skin of his victims. This notion is further supported by the findings of materials of pornography in his house (see: Figure 5) and Hyojin's erratic behavior after being implied that she had met with the Japanese Man (see: Figure 7 & Figure 8). Hyojin's thighs and torso, nearing her crotch area, are covered with red boils. This refers to one of Japan's nefarious wartime crimes, that is the systematic disgrace of women through the military comfort women system. Through it, Japan intended to minimize the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), however, unregulated sexual conducts within the facilities resulted in the girls and women receiving STDs from soldiers and officers. This is what happened with the woman from Table 4 and Hyojin. Soh (2020) argues that this system is understood as "the rule of male sex right" where men have the right to accessible, commercial, and public sexual services. Referring back to the rape scene as discussed in the previous paragraph, the Japanese Man takes what he wanted by raping the woman, understanding that it is apart of his right. Having Hyojin, a child, as one of his victims, also emphasizes the degeneracy as it must take a certain kind of abhorrent to commit sexual assault against a child. However, this also reflects reality where the Japanese military gathered women to employ while being indifferent to their ages.

The third trait is manipulation. The two characters affected by this are Hyojin (as seen in her journal entries in Figure 8 and her erratic behavior throughout the second half of the film) and Ilgwang. With Ilgwang, we did not see the manipulation process, as we were introduced to him already working for the Japanese Man (see: Figure 12 and 13). Ilgwang's character refers to the Korean elites that at the time were majorly pro-Japanese and openly worked with the regime in order to socially and economically advance.

The last major theme is the subjugation of culture. This is mainly shown through the use of language, as one of the most oppressive acts at the attempt of eradicating the Korean culture through *naisen ittai* is the imposition of the Japanese language and the ban of speaking the Korean language in public. He is shown to never speak in Korean, even when being spoken to in Korean; he shows a degree of interest and perhaps conditional respect at Isam who excuses himself in Japanese (see: Table 7), and the only proper dialogue he had in the film was with Isam in full Japanese. Even in mundane interactions such as buying chicken in the market (see Figure

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14), he refuses to speak in Korean, rendering the seller frustrated and resorting to using Japanese in order to complete the transaction. Through these interactions, the film frames language not as a neutral tool of communication, but as a mechanism of cultural domination.

Taken together, these four major themes—animal-like behaviors, sexual deviancies, manipulation, and cultural subjugation—construct the Japanese Man as more than a horror film villain in *The Wailing*. Instead, he acts as an amalgamation figure in which historical trauma from the Japanese colonization is explored and reimagined. His monstrous body, unchecked sexual violence, capacity to fracture Korean social bonds resulting in betrayal, and refusal to engage with the Korean language mirror the lived experiences and inherited memories of colonial oppression. Embedding these traits within recurring cinematic patterns—such as spatial dominance and color schemes—the film reenvisions historical violence into horror. In doing so, *The Wailing* does not merely reference the history, but it also reactivates it, allowing unresolved, and perhaps, unremembered trauma to resurface through visual excess.

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CHAPTER 4

This thesis set out to examine how remnants of Korean cultural trauma appear in pop culture, analyzing how *The Wailing* articulates it through the figure of the Japanese Man, situating the horror within the historical memory of Japanese colonial violence, thus answering the research question, "How is the Korean historical trauma from Japanese colonization articulated in the portrayal of the Japanese character in The Wailing (2016)?' Through Close Cinematic Analysis, it was demonstrated that the Japanese Man is consistently framed as a predatory figure, both physically and symbolically, through recurring motifs of dominance, animalistic behavior, and sexual violence. These representations draw directly from historical anxieties surrounding forced assimilation, tales of cannibalism, and the comfort women system as discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

As explored in Chapter 2, rather than functioning as a literal historical representation, *The Wailing* operates as a cinematic space where unresolved colonial trauma is manifested. The study's core argument stems from Alexander's model of cultural trauma, where the scars from colonial history reflect multiple forms of art and culture. Through the juxtaposition of the Japanese Man's character and the rest of the Korean cast, the repetition of imagined violence, rumors, and exaggerated monstrosity reflects the way cultural trauma persists through collective memory rather than continuity. By treating the film as both a cultural product and a political text, this study reinforces Neumann and Nexon's claim that popular culture participates in political processes rather than merely just reflecting them. It becomes an arena where historical violence is remembered, negotiated, and reimagined.

Overall, this study identifies four major themes in the portrayal of the Japanese Man, each of which reflects aspects of historical trauma from Japanese colonial rule. First, he is depicted as animalistic, engaging in predatory behavior and cannibalism, which not only establishes him as a figure of horror but also echoes the extreme transgressions committed by Japanese soldiers during the colonialism period. Second, he embodies sexual deviance, committing acts of assault and violating boundaries in a way that resonates with the systemic violence inflicted on Korean women and girls, notably from the military's comfort women system. Third, he acts as an agent of betrayal and manipulation, as seen in his influence over characters such as the shaman, Ilgwang, who, despite appearing loyal to the Korean community, ultimately works for him. This reflects the historical reality of Koreans who collaborated with Japanese authorities. Finally, he reinforces cultural subjugation by refusing to speak Korean, thus compelling other characters to communicate in Japanese. This symbolizes linguistic domination and the imposition of Japanese culture during the colonization. These four themes combine to construct the Japanese Man, who is simultaneously monstrous and rooted in historical anxieties of colonial Korea.

This study acknowledges certain limitations in its research. It only examines one film which limits its ability to generalize findings to Korean horror cinema. While this allows for a close analysis, it cannot account for how other films may present historical trauma differently.

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The author also acknowledged that the methodology used relies on narrative and cinematic interpretation, by nature, different viewers or scholars might interpret scenes, symbolisms, or character dynamics differently. Language and Cultural nuances may also be lost in translation as the used translations may not fully capture linguistic subtleties that influence character portrayal.

Future research may extend this analysis by examining how similar representations of colonial trauma appear in other Korean horror films, and even examine other colonial cases from other national cinemas. Following this, they may also investigate how audiences in different national contexts interpret these cinematic constructions. As this study relies on the narrator's interpretation, investigating different audiences' reception of the film may result in understanding whether the horror elements enhance the awareness of the historical events. A study viewed from a gender perspective is also worth considering, as it plays a big role in the two characters portraying each nation (the Japanese Man, as Japan, being a man, & Moomyeong, as Korea, being a woman).

In the end, *The Wailing* demonstrates how horror films can function as a medium to portray historical trauma. By embodying colonial violence in the figure of the Japanese Man, the film reveals how the past continues to haunt the present—not as history, but as inherited memory.

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