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Master's Thesis of Seoul National University

**An Analysis of the Films on
Independence Activities During the
Colonial Period: Assassination, the
Age of Shadows, and the Battleship
Island**

**일제강점기 독립운동을 다룬 한국영화의 특징분석:
<암살>, <밀정>, <군함도>를 중심으로**

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**Graduate School of International studies
Seoul National University
International Area Studies Major**

Jae Hyouk Lee

Abstract

This thesis was written to discover how Koreans accept the Japanese colonial era, which is considered one of the greatest traumas for Koreans, as well as how they inherit their anti-Japanese sentiments and memories from the colonial era. Among numerous theories and methods, visual media such as movies, dramas, and documentaries have been noted for their ability to create frames and visceral reenactments of the past. For this reason three movies that cover the Japanese colonial period were chosen in order of Korean box office ranking: *Assassination* (2015), *The Age of Shadows* (2016), and *The Battleship Island* (2017). Narrative theories such as Propp's folktale character theory were used as a research method to analyze the narrative structure and discourse surrounding the aforementioned films. The following outcomes were observed as a result of this study: first, those films structure homogenous popular memories regarding rectification of Pro-Japanese issues. Second, the aforementioned films reenact historically forgotten figures or places. Third, the characteristic similarities observed from these films are most likely to be an outcome of the political and economical context of the time in which these films were produced.

Keywords: Japanese colonial period, Reenactment, Colonial movies, Narrative Theory, collective memory

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I. Introduction

1. Purpose of this thesis

The Japanese Colonial Period is arguably the most influential and traumatic historical event in modern Korean history. As a result, the memories from the colonial period directly and indirectly affect the formation of the identities of Korean individuals. Then how do members of Korean society inherit memories and experiences from the colonial period? There are several studies addressing this question in academia: Wagner (2014) argues that the inheritance of traumatic historical memories, such as colonial memories, is centered around families. Palais (1995) suggests that modern Koreans inherit memories structured by Korean historians through education. Additionally, some scholars like Alexander (2004) have argued that the media has the ability to adapt and dramatize a nation's trauma and thus easily create and enhance collective identity.¹ However, those studies reveal limitations when it comes to

¹ Alexander, and Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* [electronic Resource] / Jeffrey C. Alexander ... [et Al.], 2004.

addressing the question of why a variation of colonial memories occurs, because they do not consider the mechanisms of memory.

The way that the Japanese colonial period is memorized varies depending on the political and social contexts. In other words, the Japanese colonial period could be viewed as a good from historical memories that can be produced and consumed in a variety of ways depending on the discourse and how it is embodied. The memories of Japanese colonial rule, which are embodied through cultural reenactments, are variously celebrated through national holidays (eg. March 1st)² and memorials (eg. Statue of Peace, also known as comfort woman statue) as well as in visual media, such as documentaries, dramas, and movies. These media sources not only enable the collective experience of Korea under Japanese rule, but also carry out political and ideological practices accordingly. Among those formats, film is a medium that provides a spectacle of intense collective experience and is an important public instrument that produces popular memories of the Japanese colonial era.

² In Korean 삼일절. A national holiday which was established to honor the ancestors who have participated in the national independence movement to restore sovereignty of the nation during Japanese colonial era.

Additionally, from an industrial perspective of producing and consuming goods, movies reconstruct the memory of Japanese colonialism in the form of commercial memory.

Most modern Korean films' way of remembering this colonial era is related to the public's taste and expectations formed in the various contexts of popular culture, and at the same time, the movie industry's unique production system combined with the customs and reenactment strategies.³ Through this paper I will examine the relationship between the Japanese colonial era and film using examples from three popular movies released since 2004,⁴ *The Age of Shadows* (2016),⁵ *The Battleship Island* (2017),⁶ and *Assassination* (2015).⁷ This paper intends to discuss how film deals with varying themes about

³ Fritzsche, Maria. *The American Marshall Plan Film Campaign and the Europeans*. Bloomsbury. 2018. p. 160-161

⁴ Korean box office data provided by KOBIS (Korea Box office Information System) only keeps track of the movies that are released after 2004. The study selected three films (films that have Japanese colonial period as background) in order of the number of audience data provided by KOBIS.
<http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business/stat/boxs/findFormerBoxOfficeList.do>

⁵ In Korean, 밀정

⁶ In Korean, 군함도

⁷ In Korean, 암살

Japanese colonial period from the perspective of the creation and maintenance of memory. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine how Japanese colonialism is reenacted in modern Korean society, and at the same time, how it relates to the formation of popular memories of the Japanese colonial period. In addition, this paper discusses the perception of movies related to the Japanese colonial period, which can be classified as historical films, and how they can be tied into the problems associated with the Japanese colonial period that are now emerging in Korean society.

2. Literature Review

Some researchers, such as Chung (2015), describe Koreans' strong ethnic identity, anti-Japanese tendency, and cultural nationalism as the result of Korea's history as a unified nation during the Goryeo dynasty, or of Joseon's perception of Japan before the 20th century.⁸ Koreans' cultural esteem was greatly damaged at this time, and stigma from invasion became the basis of anti-Japanese nationalism among Koreans. This was because Korea

⁸ 정연태. 일제의 한국 지배에 대한 인식의 갈등과 그 지양. 역사문화연구(53), 3-34. 2015

was under Japanese colonial rule, as Koreans historically considered themselves superior to what they considered the barbaric Japanese. A study by Lee (2007), argues that anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans existed even before the colonial era; Koreans never viewed or considered Japan as an enemy (“원수”) before the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 (Imjin war, in Korean 임진왜란). Instead, they considered the Japanese to be raiders (“왜구”) or barbarians (“오랑캐”). However, the Japanese invasion in 1592 changed the Joseon peoples’ cognition, and this change became the basis of today’s anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans.⁹ From this viewpoint, anti-Japanese tendencies are the results of the memories constructed through historical events. However, this perspective reveals weakness when explaining how those constructed memories are shared and spread in Korean society.

Wagner (2014) argues that the inheritance of memory is centered around families. Traumatic memories, such as those from war and colonialism, remain relatively strong and are most likely to pass on to future generations. What is important here is how strongly the descendants who inherited the memory can relate themselves to it, and depending on the degree of

⁹ 이규배. 반일감정의 에 관한 고찰. 일본문화연구, 24, 121-145. 2007

association, memory amplifies or disappears.¹⁰ From this point of view, it is possible to understand why anti-Japanese sentiments among Koreans are amplified throughout generations, but this perspective also reveals limitations in explaining why Koreans share similar memories, if the memories are passed down from different ancestors. Then what about Korean educational systems? James Palais claimed that Korean history academia has developed as a way to escape the humiliation and sense of inferiority caused by colonial Japan. Additionally, Palais also acerbically criticized Korean historians for their excessive desire to break away from Korea's humiliating pasts, which results in modern Koreans not being able to view history objectively.¹¹ From this point of view, the frame of Korea's colonial rule and anti-Japanese memory is woven and structured by Korean historians and scholars. Thus, anti-Japanese sentiments in Korea are inherited by accepting frames woven by Korean historians, via education. Education is doubtlessly a strong medium, but it is questionable as to whether people can truly feel a historical event that they never have experienced.

¹⁰ Wagener, Renee. "Familial Discussions in the Context of Memory Research on the Second World War -Expectations and Disappointments-. *Peripheral Memories*. 2014. p. 70-91

¹¹ Palais, James B. "A Search for Korean Uniqueness." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55, no. 2 (1995): 409-25.

Unlike education, movies and dramas allow viewers to visually feel something they have not physically experienced. There is a noticeable difference between reading historical text about events and witnessing them through a movie or drama. The media has the ability to adapt and dramatize a nation's cultural trauma and easily create and enhance collective identity.¹² Not only that, the media is well-known to have an enormous frame effect. George Lakoff, in his famous work "*The all new Don't think of an elephant: Know your values and frame the debate* (2004)" explained how frame works by using elephants as an example. Once we first see an elephant, we always think of their characteristics whenever the animal is brought up; enormous, grey colored, big ears, strong, smart, et cetera. Once a word gets framed in our cognitive system with a clear image it is extremely difficult to remove the image derived from the word.¹³ In this way a frame becomes a guide when we try to understand or judge reality.¹⁴ People reconstruct reality by combining

¹² Alexander, and Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity [electronic Resource]* / Jeffrey C. Alexander ... [et Al.], 2004.

¹³ Lakoff, George. *The All New Don't Think of an Elephant*. Chelsea Green Publishing. 2014

¹⁴ Thomas Nelson, Rosalee Clawson, Zoe Oxley. *Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance*. The American Political Science Review Vol 91. 1997

information accepted through frames, and by this logic the reality we perceive is actually just various recombinant pieces of information woven by frames.¹⁵ This implies that the reality we perceive could be different from our actual reality. For these reasons, conducting a study on visual media and its ability to reenact past memories is exceedingly necessary.

According to Kang (2017), historically, memory has only been regarded as a vague trace of the past. However, since the 1980s, interest in memory has expanded to academic fields such as oral history and microhistory, and as the importance of research involving memory has been highlighted in recent years, discussions that have adopted memory theory as part of their research methodologies have been developed in various ways.¹⁶ Park (2014) argues that visual medias' ability to implant actual or fabricated historical memory in individuals is enabled in two ways: the first is the narrative of an event or a memory being structured by a visual reenactment, and the second is experiencing history in a communicative way through visual

¹⁵ 이동훈. 프레임은 어떻게 사회를 움직이는가, 삼성경제연구소, 2012

¹⁶ 강승목. 장률 감독 영화의 영화적 공간에 구성된 기억 재현과 문화적 기억. 씨네포럼(30), 9-37. 2018

media.¹⁷ In addition, there are several more studies discussing the theoretical background of memory reenactment, such as Park's (2017) work on the audience's degree of attention and memory,¹⁸ Lee's (2017) research on the relation between cinema and historical memory,¹⁹ and Grainge's (2003) study on how cultural memory is obtained through films.²⁰ However, the amount of research that relates the theoretical backgrounds of memory reenactment to actual cases is minuscule. Although there are some historical case studies, such as analyzing events like the Holocaust,²¹ Soviet revolution,²² sinking of Sewol ferry,²³ and Vietnam War,²⁴ there are, surprisingly, no case studies on films that use the Japanese Colonial Period as a setting.

¹⁷ 박진우. 역사적 사실과 영상 재현의 관계 집합적 기억의 사회적 구성 과정에 대한 재검토, 애니메이션연구 10(4) 113-132, 2014

¹⁸ 박덕춘. 영화 관객의 주목도가 프레즌스, 감동, 기억에 미치는 영향. 디지털융복합연구 15:4, 413- 419. 2017

¹⁹ 이지영. 영화의 경계: 영화와 역사적 기억. 비교문학, 72, 789-218. 2017

²⁰ Grainge, Paul. Memory and popular film. Manchester University Press. 2003

²¹ 이승진. 기억과 재현 : 홀로코스트 영화. 열린정신 인문학연구, 14(2), 211-238. 2013

²² 하승우. 혁명과 영화적 기억. 문화과학, 90, 109-133. 2017

²³ Choi, Eun. A certain way of contemporary Korean cinema remembering the tragedy of sewol ferry: focused on *Tunnel* (2016). Film studies (72). 293-326. 2017

²⁴ Nguyen, Thu N. Memories of Vietnam War through post-war movies. Seoul National University. 2016

Therefore, conducting research on how the Japanese Colonial Period is portrayed in Korean films would be meaningful, as the period is often regarded as the most important even in Korea's modern history. However, there are criticisms on the study of 'cultural contents', such as films and dramas, due to its methodological issue of not being able to maintain objectivity.²⁵ The analysis of 'cultural contents' relies heavily on the subjective viewpoint of the researcher due to its nature.²⁶ However, the researchers can still make their research seem as objective as possible by applying some of the narrative analysis methodologies, such as Saussure's syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis, Propp's folktale narrative structure analysis method, and Chatman's discourse analysis.

²⁵ 박상천, 문화콘텐츠 개념 정립을 위한 시론, 한국언어문화학회, 한국언어문화 제33집, 2007.

²⁶ 이기상, 문화콘텐츠학의 이념과 방향, 인문콘텐츠학회, 인문콘텐츠 23, 2011.

3. Research Question

In recent years, the number of Korean films covering the Japanese colonial period has dramatically increased. What characteristics regarding the Japanese Colonial Period do visual media portray? What are the contents of colonial memories presented by those films? How does our society's public memory of colonial times construct by those films?

II. Theoretical Framework And Research

Methodology

1. Theoretical discussion on memory and reenactment

Memory is necessary in defining the relationship between the past and the present. Modern states tend to use memories for strengthening national ideologies. Eric Hobsbawm argues, in his prominent work “*the invention of tradition* (1983)”, that the invention of tradition is a product of memory, and it is used as a medium to achieve national goals.²⁷ Therefore, the discussion of memory provides the basis for understanding the nature and meaning of collective identity such as nationalism, racism, and regionalism. It is important to recognize that memory is constructed rather than self-existing. This means that individual memories are reconstructed according to the interests of society, and may be presented in a different way from their original meanings.

²⁷ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Invention of Tradition* chapter 1 inventing traditions. Cambridge University Press; reissue edition. 2012

²⁸ Therefore, there is no memory that is purely structured in the consciousness of the individual, and personal memories could be reinterpreted based on one's social relationships. In this regard, it is necessary to pay attention to the social memory, which is the norm and the framework, rather than to the individual's memory. This is because social memory can be used as a medium, which explains the social and cultural identity as well as the social relationships of its members, apart from their personal experiences.

The sociality of memory can be embodied through its expressed form, because memory is reenacted through certain means and shared by members of society. Stuart Hall writes about reenactment in perspective of discourse: according to him, reality gains specific influence through reenactment.²⁹ In the reenactment that this paper references, consideration of its social perspective is important; by looking at the cultural and political background of visual media we will be able to find a relationship between visual reenactment and social tendency. The essentialist view of the object itself on image reenactment

²⁸ Nora et al. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Volume 1: Conflicts and Divisions*. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996

²⁹ Hall, Stuart and Bram Gieben. *Formations of Modernity*. The Polity Press. 1992

implies limitations, and the discussion of memory through image reenactment means addressing their physical and technical characteristics as well as how they are constructed in connection with the social context surrounding it.

History as discourse requires narratives as a method, and can be constructed and understood accordingly.³⁰ A dictionary defines memory as the act of keeping or recalling previous impressions or experiences in consciousness.³¹ From this perspective, history is the only memory of the past that is considered history by the present point of view, and what is not remembered is not recognized as history. Therefore, history consists in the intersection of memory and oblivion, and these attempts to restore the past are usually optional.³² In other words, history targets the past through a specific purpose, with a developmental perspective. However, history and memory are not separate but relative concepts, given that memory gives us a more comprehensive understanding of the present through the past. More

³⁰ Kramer, Lloyd. *The New Cultural History: Chapter Title: Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick Lacapra*. University of California Press. 1989

³¹ ‘기억’: 네이버 국어사전.

<https://ko.dict.naver.com/#/entry/koko/6388566874b247daa77f4c2e7490de47>

³² Hobsbawm, Eric. *On History*. New York: New Press. 1997.

specifically, history is a closed text but memory is an open act and a decentralized concept. History is also intelligent, public and scientific, while memory is emotional, private and intuitive. In this respect, memory makes history unstable or solid, while competing and compromising with history.³³ In the end, memory provides critical points for historical truths and scientific objectivity, and can be used as a way to give various interpretations and meanings to the past.

Nevertheless, attention to actual memory was minuscule, because memory, coupled with empirical research trends, has been perceived only as part of the empirical or psychological process based on personal experience.³⁴ In general, memory focuses on the private aspects of the past, as opposed to history, which focuses on the past on a public and official level. Therefore, memory has varying characteristics and is not obliged to conform to the order of internal association of the past, present and future. In other words, history has been recognized as a scientific method in terms of seeking truth, the

³³ 한정선. 상품화된 기억--전후 일본의 전쟁 기억과 영화 <로렐라이>. 역사비평 no.82. Pp. 374-395. 2007

³⁴ Wertsch and Boyer. *Memory in Mind and Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2009

verification of fact, and objectivity; more so than memory.³⁵ In this respect, history has been discussed as a branch of study, and so the corresponding research procedures and methods have been used, whereas memory has been perceived as a matter of relative importance as a romantic act of thinking about the past. However, through this paper I will argue that memory can function as a supplement for the limitations that history holds.

Since memories of colonization, which can be perceived as a collective experience, play an important role in the formation of identities of a nation and members of society, many states put extraordinary significance to the official history of colonization.³⁶ Thus, the memory of colonization co-exists through various forms in society, and it is perceived as an event that has the potential for collective action against the present and future. From this point of view, remembering the colonial era in the present is a historical practice performed in a particular social context. In response to this, Halbwachs earlier argued through the concept of collective memory that memory is a product of social values and consensus in the social context. According to Halbwachs, memory

³⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric. *On History*. New York: New Press. 1997.

³⁶ 전진성. 기억의 정치학을 넘어 기억의 문화사로. *역사비평*, 451-483. 2006

is a kind of socialization process, and even the original memory (even if the process of memorization is done individually) is socially formed.³⁷ Therefore, past events acquire meaning through social memory and become one fact shared by members of society, and these memories can be understood from the perspective of collective memory. In this context, collective memory requires a social framework, such as a common time and space, or a shared perspective and a shared position, and each memory is reconstructed and combined by such specificity of social and cultural relationships (Halbwachs, 1992).

On the other hand, the Japanese colonial period is embodied by various memories. The reenactment of memory by various media sources is not simply a reenactment of the colonial period, but a composition of its current meaning, which is being shared in the same form as collective memory, in a practical and concrete form. In this regard, Assmann introduces the concept of cultural memory and discusses the reenactment of memory and its cultural implications. According to Assmann's work "cultural memory" is a socially transmitted memory and institutionalized memory based on a variety of family

³⁷ Halbwachs, M. *La topographie le'gendaire des e'vangiles en terre sainte: Etude de me'moire collective: Les cadres sociaux de la me'moire*. Coser, L (Trans). On collective memory. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992

registry bodies or symbolic devices.³⁸ These cultural memories are maintained or altered by various desires, depending on the current social conditions, to be reborn or reconstructed as new memories. Meanwhile, colonial memories are also a kind of knowledge of the past shared by members in diverse societies. Therefore, what is important is that the meaning of the colonial era may vary depending on the way and purpose of remembering the era. What should not be overlooked is that certain contributions to colonization of Korea as a past event affect the relevant reality perception and practice of current members of society. Since colonial memories clearly have opposing structures, such as enemies and allies, or perpetrators and victims, the society that remembers them clearly sets the boundaries of identity through the norms of prohibition. Therefore, identifying those restrictive factors can help with understanding the tendency of discourse on colonial memory.

The memory of colonization, which emphasizes the nobleness of colonial victims, involves current moral responsibility, which in turn results in a demand to remember the colonial in forms such as a memorial, which

³⁸ Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. Assmann, A and Wilson, D (trans). UK: Cambridge University Press. 2011

becomes the duty of current members of society. In this sense, the cultural reenactment of colonial memory becomes a specific cultural restraint to members of society. In other words, no matter which format the reenactment takes, colonial memories involve compliance on a social level, such as ideological, political and economical situations, so the individual's problems are relegated to posterity. Personal memories, such as the trauma of individuals due to colonization, may be buried in the process of symbolic displacements by these cultural representations or be materialized in official procedures and methods.³⁹

The reenactment of colonial memories through movies means that one can experience them visually through cinematic customs that are distinct from other genres. According to Rosenstone, who discussed the process of history being reenacted in film, film consists of emotional, personal and dramatic aspects.⁴⁰ This is a narrative strategy that integrates past events into specific issues in order to provide a special visual experience in the form of a product

³⁹ LaCapra, Dominick. *Representing the holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1994

⁴⁰ Rosenstone, Robert. *Visions of the Past: the challenge of film to our idea of history*. Harvard University Press. 1995

under a set condition; for a movie, that would be its screen time. Therefore, movie narratives do not cover all the memories of the Japanese colonial era as a whole. Meanwhile, since films provide a visual experience of intense realism in a collective and simultaneous state, colonial memory evokes a rather strong sense of emotional unity through the fragmentary images of the colonial era presented by film. Unlike text based media, the memory of the past dealt with in movies becomes a popular myth and narrative with a single, deeply imprinted and extensive influence, with one of its main features being the focus of a limited actor or character with apparent characteristics.⁴¹ Stacey discussed this feature of film through the concept of an iconic memory imprinted by an actor's role in relation to the acceptance of a movie by the public, and a narrative memory in which events carried out by the actors are recognized.⁴² This view is also a reflection of the complex social context and the trauma of various agents that exist in colonial memory. It can be recognized as public entertainment offered by reenactment.

⁴¹ Suzuki, Tessa. *The past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*. Verso. 2005

⁴² Stacey, Jackie. *Hollywood memories*. Screen, volume 35 issue 4, p. 317-335. 1994

Film's reenactment of colonial memory can be seen as materializing colonial era in the form of a commercial public memory (Pearson, 1999).⁴³ After all, the movie's handling of colonial memories informs the public regarding what the contents and images of the Japanese colonial era were. Foucault argues that mass media, such as television and movies, are a means of creating popular memory. This means that the public does not experience their past through reenactment mediums such as the media, but instead see what they should remember through the media (Foucault, 1975).⁴⁴ In other words, the public sees images that are reprogrammed by certain knowledge gained through watching movies; through specific ways of remembering the colonial period instead of the reality of the era or their own pasts.

⁴³ Pearson, Roberta. Custer loses again: the contestation over commodified public memory. Dan, B and Weissberg, L (edited). *Cultural memory and the construction of identity*. pp. 176-201. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1999

⁴⁴ Foucault, Michel. *Film, History, and Popular Memory*. Foucault, M et al (edited). *Foucault at The Movies*. Columbia University Press. 2018

2. Methodology

Based on the theoretical background discussed earlier, this paper aims to examine how memories of the Japanese colonial period are reenacted and organized through the following three movies released since 2004: *The Age of Shadows* (Ji Woon Kim, 2016), *The Battleship Island* (Seung Hwan Ryoo, 2017), and *Assassination* (Dong Hoon Choi, 2015). As was briefly discussed in the previous section, these movies were picked in order of the number of audience data provided by KOBIS.⁴⁵ They are all blockbusters that have the Japanese colonial period as a historical background, and were produced with the aim of securing a large number of audiences and earning huge profits in a short period of time by mobilizing large scale production costs and marketing. In fact, these films were produced by casting famous actors, and used an abundant amount of computer graphics and large scale filming sites to provide spectacular sights different from previous films regarding Japanese colonialism. Therefore, research on these films will serve as a clue on how memories of the Japanese colonial period can be accepted by the public in recent years and what the cultural meaning of it is.

⁴⁵ KOBIS (Korea Box office information system).
<http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business/stat/boxs/findFormerBoxOfficeList.do>

This paper seeks to utilize narrative theory as a research methodology from the perspective that the film is a narrative involving a specific meaning, and is an important social device that constitutes a specific discourse on past events such as colonization. Specifically, analysis and discussion will take place at four major levels. First of all, through Propp's narrative and character theory⁴⁶, one should observe the overall narrative structure of the film. Next one should go through an integrated syntagmatic analysis of the combination and arrangement of events from the beginning to the end of the narrative at the surface level, in order to find out what the ideological meaning of these colonial memories are. Thirdly, one will find out what its confrontational values are through a paradigmatic analysis to observe which values and norms the films use as a framework for understanding the colonial period.⁴⁷ Then, we will identify a variety of visual effects and music at the level of discourse. Lastly, we will regroup the main characteristics that the films contain in

⁴⁶ The theory created by Vladimir Propp, which is derived from folktales' structure, that all the characters could be organized into seven categories (the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the false hero, the dispatcher).

⁴⁷ Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in general linguistics*. Trans. Roy Harris. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 2013.

common to analyze ideas, and find out what kind of ideological implications those findings have in current Korean society.

III. Analysis of The Films

1. Basic Backgrounds

A common feature of the stories in these films is the description of Japan and the colonial period. In these films, Japan is set as the main villain that Korea must overcome to achieve independence, just as the other traditional Koreans films that use the Japanese colonial period as backgrounds. Before jumping into the main analysis, we should first take a look at the basic characteristics of the films this paper covers. First, these films are all reenactments of Korea under Japanese rule. In other words, because it directly depicts the Japanese colonial period, the movie's background is set in colonized Korea. Due to this shared setting, all the films portray Koreans as being oppressed by the Japanese. *Assassination* claims to be based on a true story, and *The Age of Shadows* is based on the novel from 1923, *경성을 뒤흔든 사람들*,⁴⁸ which is based on the Hwang Ok bombing incident,⁴⁹ and

⁴⁸ Direct translation would be *1923 People Who Rocked Kyung Sung* (Kyung Sung is the old name for Korea's capital)

⁴⁹ In summary, in 1923, Hwang Ok, a police officer of the Gyeonggi Provincial Police Department, was found to have brought a bomb from China to Korea to destroy major

the background of *The Battleship Island* is set on Hashima Island,⁵⁰ which is one of the areas symbolizing Japanese colonial period. The box office and production cost for the films are as follows:

(currency in US dollar)	<i>Assassination</i> (2015)	<i>The Age of Shadows</i> (2016)	<i>The Battleship Island</i> (2017)
Box Office	\$90.9m	\$55.3m	\$47.3m
Budget	\$16m	\$8.62m	\$21m
Number of Audience	12,706,829	7,500,457	6,592,151
Box Office Ranking	8th	29th	47th

Table 3.1 Box Office, Budget, Box Office Ranking, and Number of Audience of Three Films⁵¹

Japanese institutions in collaboration with a member of activists for independence (의열단). ‘황옥 경부 폭탄 사건’ 네이버 지식백과
<https://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=3536441&cid=43667&categoryId=43667>

⁵⁰ In Japanese, 端島 (Hashima), now it is well-known as one of the UNESCO's world heritage site

⁵¹ Box Office and budget
Assassination (2015 film). (2020, May 25). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_(2015_film))
The Battleship Island. (2020, May 25). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battleship_Island
The Age of Shadows. (2020, May 25). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Age_of_Shadows

Despite the controversies surrounding these films,⁵² as table 3.1 shows, all of the films were commercially successful (although *The Battleship Island* was less successful than the other two films) and all are ranked in the top 50 of Korean film box office ranking. Furthermore, in the top 70 box office ranking, six of these movies set Japan as the enemy (five movies have the Japanese colonial period as their backgrounds)⁵³ which is about 8.5% of 70 movies. This fact implies that regardless of the elaborateness of films, the films that set Japan as the main villain generally tend to get positive responses from Korean audiences. Another significant setting as popular as the Japanese colonial period would be the Korean War. Movies regarding the Korean War deserve in depth comparison, since it shares various common denominators with the

Number of Audience and Box Office Rankings

KOBIS (Korea Box office information system).

<http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business/stat/boxs/findFormerBoxOfficeList.do>

⁵² 군함도, '일본의 고의적 역사 왜곡 도발까지 이어져' -경기일보

<http://www.kyeonggi.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=2147217>

⁵³ Rankings also from KOBIS and the list of six movies are *Roaring Currents* (명량 Han Min Kim, 2014), *Assassnation* (암살 Dong Hoon Choi, 2015), *The Age of Shadows* (밀정, Ji Woon Kim, 2016), *The Battleship Island* (군함도 Seung Wan Ryoo, 2017), *The Last Princess* (덕혜옹주 Jin Ho Huh, 2016), *The Battle: Roar to Victory* (봉오동 전투 Shin Yun Won, 2019)

<http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business/stat/boxs/findFormerBoxOfficeList.do>

Japanese colonial period. The Korean War is another traumatic event for Koreans, however, since the fundamental ideology of the Korean War is different from that during the Japanese colonial period, I will not discuss it further in this paper.

2. Analysis on *Assassination* (2015)

3.2.1 Visual Analysis of Poster

All the films being compared in this paper use Japanese colonialism as their main settings, but the way the colonial period is remembered is different in each film. In particular, the characteristics of keywords and the visual expressions that appear on the movies' posters allow one to perceive what part of the colonial period it wants to remember. Therefore, observing these films' advertising posters will allow us to further understand their narratives.



Picture 3.2.1 The official main poster of *Assassination*, 2015

Six people in shabby clothing are gathered around a small table under Tae Guk Gi⁵⁴ looking straight ahead with very grave faces. Their clothes represent the situation the country is in, and the Korean flag hung above their heads implies they are gathered for the good of the nation. Their grave faces and the pistols

⁵⁴ 태극기. Korean national flag

on the table (and in one actor's hand) foreshadow the fact that they are planning a revolt that will involve violence. The title of this film is *Assassination*, so it is apparent that they are planning to assassinate someone for their nation. This poster's tagline is "1933, motherland disappears and operation begins." This tagline implies that *Assassination* is set in 1933, and the point of the operation seems to be either to regain the sovereignty of the nation, or to get revenge.

3.2.2 Narrative Structure of *Assassination*

	<i>Assassination</i>
Set Up	The journey of the group of independence activists gathered by Kim Gu
Confrontation	Yum Suk Jin impedes the assassination plan by selling the activists' information and hiring assassins
Climax	The Battle between Yum Suk Jin/Japanese soldiers and Hawaii Pistol/independence activists
Ending	Korea's independence and the death of Yum Suk Jin
The hero (protagonist)	Ahn Ok Yoon ⁵⁵

⁵⁵ 안옥윤 (전지현 분)

The villain (antagonist)	Imperial Japan and Pro-Japanese Koreans
The donor	Kim Gu, ⁵⁶ Kim Won Bong, ⁵⁷ and Yum Suk Jin ⁵⁸
The helper	Choo Sang Ok, ⁵⁹ Hwang Duk Sam, ⁶⁰ Myung Woo, ⁶¹ Mitsuko, ⁶² etc
The false hero	Yum Suk Jin
The dispatcher	Kim Gu and Kim Won Bong

Table 3.2.2 An Overview of the Narrative Structure, and Characters of *Assassination* Utilizing Propp's Folktale Character Analysis

The narrative begins with introducing the background story of Yum Suk Jin and his gathering, a group of independence activists, to assassinate Kang In Gook,⁶³ a Pro-Japanese individual and Kawaguchi Mamoru,⁶⁴ the general of the Japanese military. However, contrary to how Yum was described as a heroic independence activist through background stories, he turns out to be a traitor, and becomes an obstacle for the assassination plan.

⁵⁶ 김구 (김홍파 분)

⁵⁷ 김원봉 (조승우 분)

⁵⁸ 염석진 (이정재 분)

⁵⁹ 추상옥 (조진웅 분)

⁶⁰ 황덕삼 (최덕문 분)

⁶¹ 명우 (허지원 분)

⁶² 미츠코 (전지현 분)

⁶³ 강인국 (이경영 분)

⁶⁴ 카와구치 마모루 (심철중 분)

Despite Yum's interference, through the sacrifice of the activists, the activists successfully complete the plan. Yum survives until the very end of the narrative, but ends up getting executed at the hands of his comrades.

3.2.3 Represented Confrontational Value

Korea	Japan
Independence	Colonization
Independence activists	Japanese soldiers/police and Pro-Japanese Individuals
Sacrifice	Evasion
Loyal/patriotism	Betrayal/Pro-Japanese actions
Rectification of Pro-Japanese issue	Fail to rectify

Table 3.2.3 Major Confrontational Value Revealed in *Assassination*

By setting Kawaguchi and Kang (villains) as the main targets that the independence activists (heroes) must execute, the film constructs a clear boundary between the imperial Japan/Pro-Japanese people and independence activists. The sacrifice of the independence activists is described as an obligational duty that everyone must follow, and evading this duty is criticized

and punished by the other social members. Therefore, the practice of such a duty (sacrifice) is described as an act to prove one's patriotism and loyalty, whereas betrayal and being Pro-Japanese colonialism is portrayed as an unforgivable sin.

3.2.4 Characteristics of Memories

	<i>Assassination (2015)</i>
Main Plot	The plan to assassinate a Korean who supports Japan as well as a Japanese general
Main Message	Sacrifice of independence activists and rectification of Pro-Japanese issue
Main Conflict	A group of independence activists summoned by Kim Gu V. Imperialist Japan and Pro-Japanese Koreans
Suggested Memory of the Colonial Period	Brutality of Imperial Japan and betrayal of Pro-Japanese Koreans
Reenacted Time of the Colonial Period	1930s
Main People Being Remembered	Independence activists

Table 3.2.4 Characteristics of Emphasized Memories and Reenacted Colonial Period Revealed in *Assassination (2015)*

The dictionary definition of assassination is the act of killing a famous person or someone important.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is clearly an act that requires violence. However, this film justifies such violence by emphasizing the public memory of the despondent colonial period; innocent Koreans brutally getting killed by Japanese soldiers and Pro-Japanese Koreans. The violence that the independence activists use is portrayed as a righteous act because their violence is emphasized as a tool to avenge and resist the violence of Japanese.

The film is centered on the assassination of Mamoru Kawaguchi⁶⁶, the main character of the Gando disaster⁶⁷ and commander of the Japanese military force stationed in Joseon⁶⁸ in the 1930s. *Assassination* uses a different strategy than previous colonial films. Some of the characters in this movie lost their family to Japanese, some killed their own family members who supported the Japanese, and some suffered from the fear that they could get killed by the

⁶⁵ Cambridge Dictionary: Assassination
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/ko/%EC%82%AC%EC%A0%84/%EC%98%81%EC%96%B4/assassination>

⁶⁶ Motif of the character was Ugaki Kazushige.

⁶⁷ In Korean, 간도 참변. An incident in which Koreans were indiscriminately slaughtered by the Japanese army.

⁶⁸ 조선주둔군

Japanese at any time. Although all the characters equally suffered under Japanese colonialism, they all chose different paths; a soldier for national independence, an assassin, a traitor, et cetera. The film reminds that the problems of the colonial period cannot be explained simply through the dichotomy of Japanese and Korean. The movie asks the question of how to view the Japanese colonial era from this point in time through its setting and characters.

It has been 75 years since the end of Japanese colonialism, but the memory still remains as strongly as if it had occurred yesterday. In *assassination*, the group of assassins organized by Kim Gu and Kim Won Bong, Yum Suk Jin, and Hawaii Pistol, Kawaguchi Mamoru, appears as main agents leading the narrative. Links are formed through the intersection of known and unknown characters, fictional characters, known events, and hypothetical events. For example, Kim Gu is well-known as the father of the Korean independence movement, however the rest of the characters are not from actual history.⁶⁹ *Assassination* associate those fictional characters with

⁶⁹ Kim Won Bong is also a real figure in Korean history, but not as well-known as Kim Gu due to ideological issues surrounding the figure.

Kim Gu, who is a real individual from history. Therefore, the person who watches the movie subconsciously forms a bond to the fictional characters, and feels as if he or she is a part of colonized Korea. As was discussed in the theoretical frame section, Halbwachs argues that one group is given a specific identity that distinguishes it from other groups, and that this group memory displays a pattern of combining concepts and images that becomes real through a specific “space.”⁷⁰

Another interesting aspect of the film that I noticed was the existence of the character Kimura. In the film, Kimura appears as a Japanese man who is against colonialism and imperialism. He reduces his Japanese identity by calling himself “Jap Kimura”⁷¹ in Korean, and he even participates in anti-Japanese movement by helping Korean activists for independence. Considering the coercive and arrogant nature of the average Japanese individual portrayed in Korean movies, Japanese characters like Kimura are extremely rare in films that use the Japanese colonial period as a setting.

⁷⁰ Halbwachs, M. *La topographie le'gendaire des e'vangiles en terre sainte: Etude de me'moire collective: Les cadres soiaux de la me'moire*. Coser, L (Trans). On collective memory. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1992

⁷¹ “일본놈 키무라”

However, Kimura ends up losing his life in the middle of an operation. In this context, Kimura seems to represent the ‘conscience’ of the Japanese, which makes his death the death of the Japanese’s conscious as well. The character Kimura is used as a meticulous fictional device that gives an image and norms (or guidelines) of how “moral” Japanese individuals behave and react. Therefore, his existence creates certain norms and boundaries in cognition of Korean audiences.

Yum Suk Jin is a traitor and the opportunistic main villain in *Assassination*. Yum is a high officer of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, but ends up betraying his comrades for his own selfish desires. He was portrayed as a righteous leader who would do whatever it takes to achieve the independence of Korea at the beginning of the film, however, his last line (“I didn’t know... I didn’t know Korea would achieve independence. I wouldn’t have done it only if I knew”⁷²) explicitly demonstrates extreme selfishness and ignorance, which makes him symbolize stereotypical pro-Japanese individuals. At the moment of his death, Yum’s

⁷² “몰랐으니까... 해방될지 몰랐으니까. 알면 그랬겠나?”

eyes were shaking with fear, whereas the death of his comrades were used as a cinematic backdrop to illustrate the dignity and unyielding will of independence activists. The character Yum Suk Jin clearly represents pro-Japanese Koreans. Therefore, his death after Korean independence represents the fancied rectification of Pro-Japanese issues.

3.2.5 Social Context Behind *Assassination*

Assassination was filmed in 2014 through 2015. Since 2013, Korea-Japan relations were worsening rapidly due to President Park's China friendly diplomacy.⁷³ Japan's rising Anti-Korean sentiment was also expressed in various forms politics such as deleting comfort women issues from history textbooks⁷⁴ and ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan marking Takeshima⁷⁵ as a Japanese territory.⁷⁶ Obviously, Korea's social anti-Japanese sentiment also rose accordingly. However, around august 2014, the Park regime considered

⁷³ 손열. 위안부 합의의 국제정치. 국제정치논총, 58(2), 145-177. 2018

⁷⁴ “일, 위안부 지우기 역사왜곡 ‘착착’... 정부 ‘강력 문제제기’” - 문화일보
<https://n.news.naver.com/mnews/article/021/0002224352?sid=100>

⁷⁵ In Korean, 독도 (Dokdo)

⁷⁶ “Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan - Japanese Territory”
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/territory/index.html>

for a secret high-level consultation with Japan due to America's deepening concern about the deteriorating Korea-Japan relations and various economic problems.⁷⁷ From then, the Park regime started to demonstrate a relatively flexible stance towards historical issues, and this change in tendency became the basis for the comfort women consultation in 2015.⁷⁸ Pro-Japanese issues were discussed seriously during this time, researches on nationalizing assets of collaborationists⁷⁹ and settlement of the Pro-Japanese collaboration⁸⁰ would be decent examples demonstrating such an atmosphere of time. Not only that, the public support and sentiment towards Park's regime was rapidly aggravating due to Sinking of Sewol Ferry in April, 2014. The tragedy of Sewol ferry exploded deep-looted corruption⁸¹ controversies among Korean society, and caused people to question the qualification of Park's regime.⁸² As the narrative of *Assassination* puts a heavy emphasis on rectification of the unresolved

⁷⁷ 신옥희. 일본군 위안부 피해자 문제 합의와 한일 관계의 양면 안보 딜레마. 아시아리뷰, 9(1), 151-177. 2019

⁷⁸ 손열. 위안부 합의의 국제정치. 국제정치논총, 58(2), 145-177. 2018

⁷⁹ 김기창. 친일재산 환수의 쟁점과 의의. 법과사회, 49(8), 69-102. 2015

⁸⁰ 이준식. 뒤늦은 국가차원의 친일청산. 법과사회, 49(8), 33-67. 2015

⁸¹ In Korean, 적폐

⁸² 김병욱. 세월호 문제와 국가 정체성에 관한 한국정치사상적 검토. 한국철학논집, (62). 2019

problems of the past, such as Pro-Japanese issues, it won't be irrational to argue that the film was heavily influenced by the social context of the time it was produced.

3. Analysis on *The Age of Shadows* (2016)

3.3.1 Visual Analysis of Poster



Picture 3.3 Poster of *The Age of Shadows*

The poster is very shadowy and dark which captures the overall atmosphere of the movie. Two men are displayed in two separate windows to convey that those characters are pursuing different paths. The character in the left window is dressed in shabby clothing and seems like he strives to hide his identity, since it is hard to identify who he is due to the glasses and hat he is wearing. The person on the right window is contrasted against the character on the left; he is dressed in a fancy looking coat and his face is completely revealed. However, his facial expression exhibits confusion, which forms connection to the catchphrase of the poster: “enemy or ally”⁸³.

3.3.2 Narrative Structure of *the Age of Shadows*

	<i>The Age of Shadows</i>
Set Up	Inner conflict of Lee Jung Chul
Confrontation	Lee Jung Chul V. Japanese police and Independence activists V. Pro-Japanese traitors
Climax	The bombing of the banquet hall
Ending	Jung Chae San’s monologue

⁸³ 적인가 동지인가

The hero (protagonist)	Lee Jung Chul ⁸⁴ and Kim Wu Jin ⁸⁵
The villain (antagonist)	Imperial Japan and Pro-Japanese Koreans
The donor	Jung Chae San ⁸⁶
The helper	Yun Gye Soon, ⁸⁷ Lubich, ⁸⁸ Huh Chul Ju, ⁸⁹ Shim Sang Do, ⁹⁰ etc
The false hero	Cho Hee Ryung ⁹¹
The dispatcher	Jung Chae San

Table 3.3 An Overview of the Narrative Structure, and Characters of *The Age of Shadows* Utilizing Propp's Folktale Character Analysis

Unlike how *Assassination* distributes an equal amount of time to go over the narratives of its leading characters, *The Age of Shadow* focuses heavily on the internal change of the main character Lee Jung Chul. The narrative begins with Lee having intense guilt and an inner conflict for being a Pro-Japanese individual. However, the spirits of the independence activists and Jung Chae San's persuasion caused a great ripple in Lee's mind. Similar to

⁸⁴ 이정출 (송강호 분)

⁸⁵ 김우진 (공유 분)

⁸⁶ 정채산 (이병헌 분)

⁸⁷ 연계순 (한지민 분)

⁸⁸ 루비크 (Foster B. Burden 분)

⁸⁹ 허철주 (김동영 분)

⁹⁰ 심상도 (고준 분)

⁹¹ 조희령 (신성록 분)

Assassination, the traitors become a serious obstacle for the independence activists, but Lee ends up successfully accomplish the bombing of the banquet hall. Although the plan was successful, Jung Chae San's monologue at the end creates a popular memory that suggests the fight is not yet over.

3.3.3 Represented Confrontational Value

Korea	Japan
Independence	Colonization
Independence activists	Japanese soldiers/police and Pro-Japanese individuals
Sacrifice	Evasion
Loyal/patriotism	Betrayal/Pro-Japanese actions
Struggle and moving forward	Succumbing to failures

Table 3.3 Major Confrontational Value Revealed in *The Age of Shadows*

The Age of Shadows demonstrates similar confrontational values to those of *Assassination*. Identically, Japanese police and Pro-Japanese traitors appear as threats the independence activists must overcome to successfully carry out their plan. The violence of the independence activists are also

justified in a similar way, whereas the violence committed by Japanese police and Pro-Japanese traitors is portrayed as evil. The difference is that *The Age of Shadows* constructs a popular memory in which the rectification of Pro-Japanese issues has not yet been resolved. Therefore, even if the country struggles from failures of Pro-Japanese rectification, instead of succumbing to failures, one must endlessly strive to achieve the nation's goal.

3.3.4 Characteristics of Memories

	<i>The Age of Shadows</i>
Main Plot	Preparation of a bombing plan
Main Message	The sacrifices of independence activists were not meaningless
Main Conflict	Inner conflict of Lee Jung Chul and division of independence activists
Suggested Memory of the Colonial Period	Patriotism, loyalty, and the betrayal of independence activists
Reenacted Time of the Colonial Period	1920s
Main People Being Remembered	Forgotten independence activists

Table 3.3 Characteristics of Emphasized Memories and Reenacted Colonial Period Revealed in *The Age of Shadows* (2016)

As briefly discussed before, *The Age of Shadows* is inspired by a novel based on a true story. This fact signifies that the movie went through a double dramatization process, which means the narrative of the movie will be very different from actual history. Regardless of the authenticity of its main storyline, since some parts of the movie are based on history, Korean audiences can easily form empathy with the movie. *The Age of Shadows* centers around the main character Lee Jung Chul⁹², a double agent, who bears the dishonor of being called pro-Japanese. The movie emphasizes the fact that Lee's sacrifice for the nation is a heroic choice; in the film, pro-Japanese Koreans are criticized by members of society, stressing that treachery is revolting and that death for the nation is a duty, not something to fear. This kind of emphasis on public memory is conspicuous in the introduction scene where Kim Jang Ok, a member of the independence fighters,⁹³ gets chased by numerous Japanese policemen. After an intense gunfight between Kim Jang Ok and hundreds of Japanese police forces, Kim ends up being cornered with severe injuries. Lee Jung Chul attempts to save Kim by suggesting he

⁹² 이정출 (송광호 분)

⁹³ 의열단 김장옥 (박희순 분)

surrender, but instead of surrendering Kim demonstrated a strong anti-Japanese bias:

Lee: “Do you think this country can achieve independence? This country is an overturned ship.”

Kim: “That’s right, rats run away first when a ship overturns.”

Lee: “Let’s go out, you can maintain your life if you surrender. Life comes first.”

Kim: “A man cannot join the group of rats. Hail to Korean independence.”⁹⁴

Right after their conversation, Kim commits suicide. This scene functions as a memory of independence activists and traitors. In scenes like this, independence activists are described as possessing an unyielding will, and as fearless heroic figures who are not scared of death. On the other hand, pro-Japanese individuals and traitors are nothing more than rats.

The reenactment of the Japanese colonial period in *The Age of Shadows* appears quite archetypal at first; the film also reenacts a few unconventional memories that are not easily found in other Korean films. The film questions

⁹⁴ 이정출: “넌 이 나라가 독립이 될 것 같냐? 어차피 기울어진 배야.”

김장옥: “그렇지 기울어진 배에 쥐새끼들이 먼저 빠져나가지.”

이정출: “나가자 나가면 살수있어 목숨은 건져야지.”

김장옥: “사람이 쥐새끼와 함께할수는 없지. 대한독립만세.”

the purpose and goals of independence activists by using irony. In the beginning of the movie, a group of independence activists visit Kim Hwang Sup, a rich Korean art collector⁹⁵, to get the money they need by offering him a Korean national treasure.⁹⁶ Kim was pro-Japanese and cooperated with Japanese police by secretly selling the independence activists' information. The national treasure represents the excellency of Korean history and its citizens, which means that this treasure also represents the spirit of the nation. Thus, trading national treasures is strictly prohibited and is considered an unforgivable sin; selling a national treasure is almost equivalent to selling a nation. Although the group of Korean independence activists did not know Kim was pro-Japanese, they handed him this treasure regardless. Consequently, the independence activists sold the nation's spirit to a pro-Japanese individual to save the country from Japan.

In addition, *The Age of Shadows* uses the virtuous nature of Kim Wu Jin⁹⁷ as a device to demonstrate the imperfections of independence activists

⁹⁵ 김항섭 (남문철 분). His true identity was that of a pro-Japanese traitor. Later gets punished by Lee Jung Chul

⁹⁶ Korean national treasure no. 78 반가사유상 (Bodhisattva in pensive position)

⁹⁷ 김우진 (공유 분)

through irony. Kim Wu Jin is described as a charismatic leader. However, his imperfection, which is one of his personal characteristics, exposes the activists to great danger. The existence of Yun Gye Soon⁹⁸, also a member of the independence fighter, was exposed by the picture that Kim took. He took the picture to satisfy her desire, but because of the picture, Yun was captured by the Japanese police and tortured to death, which is ironic. Furthermore, he could not identify the real traitor in his group. Kim releases Ju Dong Sung⁹⁹, who was on the verge of getting shot by Cho Hwe Ryung.¹⁰⁰ Because of this incident, Ju, who once was a loyal member of the independence fighters, betrays the group, and becomes a serious obstacle to their end goal. Logically, if Kim was a leader who only cared about achieving his goals, he would not have released Ju. No matter how small the possibility, if there is a possibility Kim must execute him to remove any possible obstacle to his goal. Why does *The Age of Shadows* emphasize the imperfections and failures of these heroic figures? Independence activists such as Lee Jung Chul, Kim Wu Jin, and Kim

⁹⁸ 연계순 (한지민 분)

⁹⁹ 주동성 (서영주 분), a loyal member of the independence fighter, however later betrays them due to the harsh accusation he experienced.

¹⁰⁰ 조회령 (신성록 분), the right hand person of Kim Woo Jin, however he turns out to be the real traitor in Kim's group.

Jang Ok are portrayed as admirable but at the same time fragile and imperfect figures. Although the audiences' admiration towards characters doubtlessly plays a huge role in forming sympathy¹⁰¹, creating a "perfect character" is not recommended for a few significant reasons. One such reason is because a character's vulnerability makes the narrative more fluid and nonlinear¹⁰²; another is because the audiences' sympathy increases when the character makes occasional mistakes or has some minor defects in their personality, as the pratfall effect demonstrates.¹⁰³

In *The Age of Shadows*, the soundtrack also plays a big role as a part of the narrative. Two well-known classical masterpieces were used: *Bolero* by Maurice Ravel and *Slavonic Dances in E minor, Op. 72 No. 2* by Antonín Dvořák. To completely understand the narrative that these classical pieces formulate in the film, one must understand the pieces' stories and backgrounds

¹⁰¹ Huston, Ted. *Foundations of Interpersonal Attraction*. New York: Academic Press. 2013.

¹⁰² 변민주 (2011) argues that applying nonlinear narrative structure to the storyline can make a movie commercially more successful.

¹⁰³ Aronson, E., Willerman, B. & Floyd, J. *The effect of a pratfall on increasing interpersonal attractiveness*. Psychon Sci 4, 227–228. 1966.

first. Ravel's *Bolero* is regarded as an ideal piece of music that can fully utilize the three elements of choreography: time, space, and energy.¹⁰⁴ As this piece was inserted in the climax scene, where Lee Jung Chul bombs the Japanese banquet hall, through repeated rhythms, the tension heightens exponentially. *Bolero* is one of Ravel's later works and it portrays a completely different style, breaking away from his ordinary composition pattern.¹⁰⁵ This background is quite symbolic because when this song starts Lee Jung Chul finally breaks away from his pro-Japanese identity and becomes an independence activist. It is unclear whether the sound supervisor for the movie fully intended this overlap, but even without knowing the music's background the audience experiences an intense catharsis through the explosive orchestral sounds towards the end.

The second classical piece used in this film is *Slavonic Dances in E minor, Op. 72 No. 2* by Antonín Dvořák. Slavonic Dances was inspired by European gypsy culture. Gypsies are the group of people who were forced to

¹⁰⁴ 김은수. 라벨 《볼레로》의 무용음악적 특성 연구. 한국무용교육학회지 제25집 제1호. 2014

¹⁰⁵ Grout, Donald and Palisca, Claude. *A history of western music 4th edition*. New York: Norton. 1988.

leave their country due to foreign invasions. According to a study on gypsies by Fraser (1992), the first group of gypsies were northern indians who left their country due to a numerous amount of Muslim invasions between 6~11th centuries. Gypsy culture as a whole has not been independently produced, and has instead followed the laws and customs of their places of residence. The gypsies' languages have been influenced by the religions and regions they have passed through, which means that they had no such thing as unique gypsy culture. Gypsies, for a long time, constantly migrated from different regions and formed exclusive tendencies. Many believe that exclusiveness and wandering are important points regarding the nature of gypsies, but the constant persecution they faced have been the main cause of this prejudice that they cannot settle in one place. It was natural not to engage in any kind of exchanges because of this constant persecution, and because the society back then did not accept gypsies, it was inevitable for them to continue their nomadic lifestyles. For these reasons, gypsies had been hiding in the mountains until the 18th century.¹⁰⁶ It is apparent that the sound supervisor or the director of the film wanted to reenact the feeling of desperation and sorrow

¹⁰⁶ Angus, Fraser. *The Gypsies*. Blackwell. 1992.

of losing one's motherland by a foreign force through this classical piece. Although the runtime of the music varies depending on the performers, *Slavonic Dances in E minor, Op. 72 No. 2* is usually around 5 minutes. It can be divided into two different parts: its first two minutes involves melancholy and lyrical temperament and a minute and a half of expressing joyfulness, until it repeats once again. It seemed like Dvořák wished to express the ups and downs of Slavonic life through his music, but the film purposely removed the piece's joyful part to maximize the expression of the pain of losing one's country.

Jung Chae San's last monologue at the end of the movie also requires attention as it is the message that permeates the whole movie:

“We have to move forward even if we fail.”

“Even if failure blocks our way, we must overcome the pile of failures and move forward and rise up.”¹⁰⁷

As history shows, Koreans could not achieve independence by their own hands. Korean independence was achieved through foreign force during the

¹⁰⁷ “우린 실패해도 앞으로 나아가야 합니다. 실패가 쌓여 그 실패를 딛고서 앞으로 전진하고 더 높은곳으로 올라서야 합니다.” - 정채산 (이병헌 분)

second world war, which may make the tremendous effort of the independence activists look empty. However, Jung's monologue suggests that the act of moving forward itself has meaning no matter if, in the end, it was successful or not. This scene and the film *The Age of Shadows* therefore creates a popular memory by putting heavy emphasis on forgotten independence activists and their achievements.

3.3.5 Social Context Behind *The Age of Shadows*

As it was discussed in section 3.2.5, the Korea-Japan relations was deteriorating due to President Park's China friendly diplomacy. However, due to America's concern Park had to find a way to ameliorate the situation. Although due to aforementioned security dilemma the stance of Park's regime towards Japan was clearly more flexible after mid 2014, the Korea-Japan dissension reached zenith in 2015 with her attendance to China's Victory over Japan Day¹⁰⁸ and Hashima Unesco Heritage controversy.^{109 110} Discussed

¹⁰⁸ 전승절 (戰勝節)

¹⁰⁹ 신옥희. 일본군 위안부 피해자 문제 합의와 한일 관계의 양면 안보 딜레마. 아시아리뷰, 9(1), p.163. 2019

¹¹⁰ "Japan's 'Island of hell' whitewash Mars Unesco Heritage Site" - 중앙일보
<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2020/06/21/national/politics/Hashima-Island-Unesco-Japan/20200621180800345.html>

security dilemma clearly become the basis of the controversial 2015 Comfort Women Agreement, but Park's eagerness to reach an agreement to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty on Basic Relations of 1965, which was signed during her father Park Chung-hee's regime, also played a role making such problematic and impetuous decision.¹¹¹ Also the MERS breakout in 2015 became an enormous burden for Park's regime. Park experienced a decline in the public support rate May through August 2015, and a research by Cho (2019) suggests that this decline is caused by inappropriate and inefficient actions of the regime.¹¹² Not only the Comfort Women agreement and MERS were the problems for the Park regime, but also the nationalization of history textbook brought a huge controversy among Korean society. The (textbook) autonomy group criticized the nationalization group's perspective as a reproduction of the colonial modernization theory, and argued that the nationalized history textbook demonstrates denial of the independence movement and endorses dictatorship and Pro-Japanese ideologies. Later this argument of autonomy group's became a discourse to frame and criticize

¹¹¹ 신옥희. 일본군 위안부 피해자 문제 합의와 한일 관계의 양면 안보 딜레마. 아시아리뷰, 9(1), p.166. 2019

¹¹² 조영호. 박근혜 정부 시절 메르스(MERS) 사태와 정부신뢰 하락. 한국정치연구 28(2), 167-193. 2019

nationalized textbook as glamorization of dictatorship and Pro-Japanese issues.

¹¹³ As *the Age of Shadows*, reenacts characters who are erased from history for having the characteristics that are regarded as flaws in official history or modern political context (will be discussed further later). Therefore, the reenactment of figures who are not recognized by the official history can be regarded as a cultural revolt that represents the social context.

¹¹³ 신은희, 장수명. 역사 교과서 국정화 과정에 대한 신제도주의 분석. *교육정치학연구* (23)4, p. 135-164. 2016

4. Analysis on *The Battleship Island* (2017)

3.4.1 Visual Analysis of Poster



Picture 3.4 poster of *The Battleship Island*

The main poster of *The Battleship Island* portrays numerous Korean mine workers on Hashima island (also known as battleship island). Five

characters stand out in the center, implying that they will be the main characters leading the storyline. Those workers are wearing extremely worn out clothes and their faces are covered with dirt, as if they are barbarians from an uncivilized society. The catchphrase of the movie is “In 1945, on hell-like battleship island, there were Joseon people.”¹¹⁴ From this phrase the audience can assume that this movie is set in 1945 on the Battleship Island, and its main focus is the Joseon people. The phrase and the image on this poster delivers an intense impression to viewers: that the Joseon people on Hashima island were treated inhumanely.

3.4.2 Narrative Structure of *The Battleship Island*

	<i>The Battleship Island</i>
Set Up	Koreans being sold to Hashima Island
Confrontation	Korean workers V. Pro-Japanese Koreans
Climax	The battle of Korean workers and Japanese soldiers/Pro-Japanese Koreans
Ending	Escape from Hashima and the nuclear explosion at Nagasaki

¹¹⁴ “1945년, 지옥섬 군함도 그곳에 조선인들이 있었다.”

The hero (protagonist)	Park Mu Young ¹¹⁵
The villain (antagonist)	Imperial Japan and Pro-Japanese Koreans
The donor	America ¹¹⁶
The helper	Lee Kang Ok, ¹¹⁷ Choi Chil Sung, ¹¹⁸ Oh Mal Nyun, ¹¹⁹ etc
The false hero	Yoon Hak Chul ¹²⁰
The dispatcher	OSS ¹²¹

Table 3.4.2 An Overview of the Narrative Structure, and Characters of *The Battleship Island* Utilizing Propp's Folktale Character Analysis

In *The Battleship Island*, unlike in the other two films, it is hard to efficiently apply Propp's theory due to the ambiguousness of the narrative structure. The other two films clearly declared that the main villain of the film is Japan and Pro-Japanese individuals. However, in *The Battleship Island*, all the main characters besides Park Mu Young, are portrayed as Pro-Japanese individuals who do not mind coexisting with Japanese people. Additionally,

¹¹⁵ 박무영 (송중기 분)

¹¹⁶ America created chaos by bombing Hashima.

¹¹⁷ 이강옥 (황정민 분)

¹¹⁸ 최칠성 (소지섭 분)

¹¹⁹ 오말년 (이정현 분)

¹²⁰ 윤학철 (이경영 분)

¹²¹ A secret group of independence activists that sent Park to rescue Yoon.

many violent crimes, such as child rape, torture, and murder, are committed by Korean characters. This is quite problematic because that kind of narrative can make the characters harder to understand for the audience, which will further make it difficult to empathize with them. This issue will further be examined in later sections. Despite the problems regarding its narrative structure, *The Battleship Island* has an identical ending theme to the other films: the rectification of Pro-Japanese issues.

3.4.3 Represented Confrontational Value

Korean workers	Pro-Japanese Koreans
Love	Violence
Hero	Traitors and Japanese soldiers
Violence by main characters	Violence by Pro-Japanese and Japanese

Table 3.4.3 Major Confrontational Value Revealed in *The Battleship Island*

As is briefly mentioned in the previous section, unlike the other two films, *The Battleship Island* does not clearly set Japan as the main villain of the narrative. Therefore, the represented confrontational value is

distinguishable from the other two films. For example, the love between father and daughter, and the romantic relationship of Choi and Oh are portrayed in the film. Although the violence utilized by the heroic figure is justified in similar ways, in *The Battleship Island* violence is also demonstrated as a tool to protect those the leading characters love.

3.4.4 Characteristics of Memories

	<i>The Battleship Island</i> (2017)
Main Plot	Revolt of the exploited Korean workers in Hashima
Main Message	Japan managed to divide Koreans by making Pro-Japanese Koreans exploit other Koreans
Main Conflict	Korean workers V. Pro-Japanese Koreans and imperial Japan
Suggested Memory of the Colonial Period	Exploitation of imperial Japan and brutality of Pro-Japanese Koreans
Reenacted Time of the Colonial Period	1945
Memorized Targets	Workers of Hashima Island

Table 3.4.4 Characteristics of Emphasized Memories and Reenacted Colonial Period Revealed in *The Battleship Island* (2017)

The film “Battleship Island” has been a hot topic even before its release.¹²² The island is located near Nagasaki, and was originally called Hashima Island, but was also called the Battleship Island because it resembled the shape of a battleship. Battleship Island is the size of only two football fields, and the entire island is made up of coal mines. Since the discovery of coal around 1810, the Japanese mining project began on a small scale. In 1890, Mitsubishi managed the site, and then mining began in earnest. Since the outbreak of the Pacific War, many Korean laborers have been forced to serve on the island. Many Koreans suffered from more than 12 hours of forced labor a day amid a coal mine that could explode. After the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the number of Koreans forced to serve on the island increased from 500 to 800, and 122 Koreans died on the island between 1925 and 1945.¹²³ The Battleship Island was produced in this historical context, but in its own way reenacts historical events of the past.

¹²² 파이낸셜 뉴스.

<https://www.fnnews.com/news/201612220817480524>

¹²³ 대일항쟁기강제동원피해조사및국외강제동원희생자등지원위원회 (2012). 사망 기사망 기록을 통해 본 하시마(端島)탄광 강제동원 조선인 사망자 피해 실태 기초조사. 서울: 도서출판 선인.

The movie starts out by showing Korean workers mining in Hashima island in monochrome. The black and white screen gives the audience a solemn feeling, as if he or she is watching an old historical documentary about a tragic event. The audience will quickly realize that there are no Japanese individuals in this scene. The head of the labor force¹²⁴ is Korean, but he exploits other Koreans, including adolescents, and hits them with the whip in his hand. Although he is Korean himself, he clearly does not care about other Koreans, and this kind of exploitation of others like him appears throughout the film. The introduction ends with the Japanese Warship March¹²⁵ as background music, showing the full scale image of the stormy battleship island to emphasize the despair and hardship Koreans faced under Japanese rule. The main characters of the movie were swindled by Sugiyama, a Japanese detective, and sold to the battleship island. The passage of the Koreans who were sold to the island is similar to that of African Americans in the notorious atlantic slave trade; to send as many Koreans as possible to the island, people were loaded onto the bottom of the ship as if they were items.

¹²⁴ 송중구 (김민재 분)

¹²⁵ 軍艦行進曲 군함행진곡

As briefly mentioned above, the role of pro-Japanese Koreans were predominant compared to the role of Japanese characters. In the film, the historical context of the Japanese colonial era was often described as a cinematic background or as an atmosphere. Gyeong Sung was reenacted in bright and colorful colors, while heavy and dark gray tones were used in the coal mines and the Koreans' residential areas. Reenactment of the dark and humid undersea mine constructs the main image of the battleship island. On the other hand, the proportion of pro-Japanese Koreans such as Song Jong Gu, the leader of the Korean workers who used harsh violence against them in every scene that he appeared in, and Yoon Hak Chul¹²⁶, a respected leader who used to participate in Korean independence movement but became a pro-Japanese, was relatively too large. As a result, the incident in which a Korean character turned out to be pro-Japanese had more influence than the shadows of colonialism, which was only presented as a cinematic background or as a material.

As is revealed through table 3.1, out of the three films, *The Battleship Island* spent the most capital on production, but their return was the lowest.

¹²⁶ 윤학철 (이경영 분)

The reason for its relatively scanty success can be addressed through analyzing the narrative of the film. The film's narrative contains problems with both the plot and characters. The first problem that requires addressing is that this film does not clearly set the main enemy. The main characters of the film, besides Park Mu Young¹²⁷, are described as opportunists who would not hesitate to be pro-Japanese if being so benefitted them. In addition, there are several pro-Japanese characters, such as Song Jong Gu, who exploit Korean workers harsher than the Japanese characters exploit them. Their tendency can be easily observed through few of their lines:

Lee Kang Ok¹²⁸: “Why are they fighting already? Joseon scum don’t know how to wait”¹²⁹

Oh Mal Nyun¹³⁰: “Not only was I taken away by a Joseon bastard, but also captured by a Joseon bastard.”¹³¹

¹²⁷ 박무영 (송중기 분)

¹²⁸ 이강옥 (황정민 분)

¹²⁹ “누가 조선 종자 아닐까봐 그새를 못참고 싸우고 자빠졌냐?”- 이강옥

¹³⁰ 오말년 (이정현 분)

¹³¹ “내가 끌려간 것도 조선놈 때문이요, 잡혀온 것도 조선놈 때문인데.”- 오말년

These lines are spoken by the main Korean characters. This kind of violence and Korean belittlement by the main characters not only makes it difficult for Korean audiences to form empathy with the main characters, but also makes the main enemy of the film hard to distinguish.

3.4.5 Social Context Behind *The Battleship Island*

When *The Battleship Island* was being filmed Korea was experiencing a large social and political convulsion due to the South Korean Political Scandal of 2016.¹³² As a result of the scandal, president Park Geun-hye became the first impeached president in the constitutional government of Korea. Unlike how the other two films clandestinely resisted by reenacting forgotten figures and putting emphasis on the message of the rectification of Pro-Japanese, *The Battleship Island* explicitly reflects the social context.

¹³² In Korean, 박근혜-최순실 게이트



Picture 3.4.5 Left: Park Mu Young Surrounded by Candlelights
Right: 2016 South Korean Candlelight Protest¹³³

During the impeachment process, many Koreans went on the streets and held candlelight to protest against president Park Geun-hye. This nonviolent protest impressed many democratic countries in the world¹³⁴ and became the basis for the Moon's regime.¹³⁵ In the film, Park Mu Young brutally murders Yoon Hak Chul for betraying Koreans, surrounded by candlelight held by Korean workers. Yoon was a well-respected leader of Korean workers on Hashima Island, but his true identity was a Pro-Japanese

¹³³ Picture from 한겨레 <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/PRINT/816458.html>

¹³⁴ "South Korea Just Showed the World How to Do Democracy"- Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/05/10/south-korea-just-show-ed-the-world-how-to-do-democracy/>

¹³⁵ 강명세. "촛불혁명"의 희망은 무엇이었으며 그것은 어떻게 실현할 수 있는가?. 의정연구 (51)0, 6-36. 2017

traitor. His wrongdoings were punished by the candlelight and by Park Mu Young, a righteous heroic figure who is on a mission to save everyone on the island. The character Park Mu Young resembles Moon Jae-in and Yoon Hak Chul resembles Park Geun-hye; the candlelight represents the public's desire to reveal deep-rooted corruption and punish misdeeds.

IV: Characteristics of Analyzed Colonial Films

1. Rectification of Pro-Japanese Issue

2020 marks the 75th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, however, Korea is still surrounded by numerous unresolved colonial issues. Out of those colonial issues, the films mentioned in this paper mostly deal with pro-Japanese issues and reenact homogenous memories regarding pro-Japanese groups. The general tendency towards pro-Japanese groups that these films reenact is filled with violence and resentment. In *Assassination*, although imperial Japan is set as the main enemy, the last villain that was punished was Yum Suk Jin, a pro-Japanese traitor who once was a respected independence activist. Yum is described as an enemy that destroys the independence group internally and hinders the independence movement. In the film, Yum's actions are often more threatening than those of the Japanese, which simply makes him look like a larger enemy than imperial Japan.

A similar kind of dualism also can be observed in *The Age of Shadows*. Lee Jung Chul is described as a figure conflicted between pro-Japanese and Korean independence movements. However, in contrast to Yeom Seok-jin, Lee Jung-chul becomes an independence activist after being pro-Japanese. Unlike how Yum was punished by death by his comrades for his pro-Japanese actions, Lee successfully liquidated his pro-Japanese past and was reborn as an independence activist who successfully carries out a large scale rebellion by himself. Although this kind of multidimensional narrative about pro-Japanese characters cannot be found in *The Battleship Island*, it portrays a similar ending for pro-Japanese groups; the main characters who displayed pro-Japanese tendencies were killed in the final battle scene. Only Park Mu Young and Lee So Hee¹³⁶, the daughter of Lee Kang Ok, survived in the end. The movie ends with Koreans seeing the Nagasaki nuclear explosion from a boat. The director's act of reenacting the collapse of imperial Japan and the destruction of pro-Japanese collaborators at the same time makes it seem like he wanted to proclaim that those who deserve to live on the Korean peninsula where the shadow of imperial Japan have disappeared are the only ones free from pro-Japanese controversy.

¹³⁶ 이소희 (김수안 분)

The films recognize that modern pro-Japanese issues cannot be completely resolved on the Korean peninsula. However, these films attempt to rectify pro-Japanese issues by recreating imaginary spaces. In *Assassination*, Yum's death took place in a space reminiscent of Manchuria, a vast deserted land, and for *The Age of Shadows*, the banquet hall is reenacted as an imaginary space that allows for the destruction of pro-Japanese individuals and imperial Japan. For *The Battleship Island*, Hashima Island is the imaginary space used for rectification. As has been discussed, these imaginary spaces have been reorganized into spaces where ethnic aspirations can be realized, which promotes the desire for a complete rectification of pro-Japanese issues within the Korean Peninsula.

In all of the three films, *Assassination*, *The Age of Shadows*, and *The Battleship Island*, violence against the Japanese and pro-Japanese Koreans is reenacted and retained as something reasonable and just. This violent narrative is further maximized through realistic graphic effects. Such a narrative can be interpreted as visualizing the experience of the Japanese Colonial Period and the torment of its victims by reenacting violence. The object being

remembered may have a huge impact on the reenacting of media sources dealing with actual memory.¹³⁷ The violence and the harshness of the colonial period, coupled with films, a medium for reenactment, may reveal such images more vividly. The aforementioned films ask questions involving what to remember from the colonial period through the reenactment of violence. The Japanese colonial period is doubtlessly one of the most important shared memories in modern Korean history, and is yet to be settled. Therefore, the reenactment of the violence during this colonialism only forces the answer to such questions from the perspective of a specific value, and does not present the issue of colonialism at an essential level; in other words, these films reenact violence only to push a specific memory of the colonial period.

In the same context, the main characters described by each film can be discussed as the subject of such violence. In *Assassination*, independence activists use violence on pro-Japanese and Japanese individuals to regain the sovereignty of their nation and to avenge their comrades. In *The Age of Shadows*, Lee Jung Chul uses violence to inherit the will of the independence

¹³⁷ Olick, Jeffrey. *The Politics of Regret : On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge. 2007.

activists, and in *The Battleship Island*, violence is used to punish Japanese and Pro-Japanese individuals' wrongdoings. The main characters (the main agents of violence) portrayed by the films are all described as attractive characters with respectable qualities. Thus, such violence is dismissed as the optional act of a righteous person, and is glamorized as being justified and rational.

In *Assassination*, Kim Gu, the godfather of the Korean independence movement, orders Ahn Yoon Ok to kill Yum Suk Jin if Yum is a traitor, which Ahn reveals right before she kills him. In this scene, Ahn Yoon Ok's murder was recognized for its legitimacy because she commits violence ordered by a great man of modern Korean history, Kim Gu, whom Koreans respect. The audience observes that the violence committed against the pro-Japanese group is justified. Similarly in *The Age of Shadows*, even though there might be innocent Japanese people participating in the party, Lee Jung Chul's bombing the Japanese banquet hall is justified as something righteous, as his terrorism was performed to avenge the sacrifices of the Korean independence activists. In *The Battleship Island*, Park Mu Young¹³⁸, a heroic secret agent of OSS, brutally murders Yoon Hak Chul and Japanese soldiers using the justification

¹³⁸ 박무영 (송중기 분)

that he is saving Koreans on Hashima island. Park's violence on pro-Japanese and Japanese soldiers is justified through his heroic splendor, which is expressed through his unmatched combat ability.

2. Use of Forgotten Figures and Places

The films this paper covers have shown desires to recreate historical memories. Numerous historical events contain dramatic attributes in themselves, and at the same time there is a reality in which the premise of fact works. For a movie that is bent on finding stories that people will like, an event that actually happened is a useful and attractive subject to dramatize. Therefore, films have been continuously carrying out the work of portraying real people in history as main characters or recreating events that actually occurred, and bringing the memories of the past into a present time and space. In the process, movies are used to make historical events that must be remembered public again, or to re-discover characters or events that were not shown in history. Amid the overwhelming sense of reality provided by films, audiences who have appreciated the reenacted history are given the viewpoint

of first hand witnesses, as if they themselves had actually observed it. Thus, the film becomes a moving recorded space and a mnemonic space that reconstructs historical facts vividly.

The film *The Age of Shadow* is about the activities of independence activists in the 1920s, which have been excluded from or neglected in official history. The film is based on the historical events of the Hwang Ok Bombing Incident, but the real figures involved in it have something in common in the fact that none of them are favored by official history. The main character, Lee Jung Chul, is, in history, known as the figure who led the Hwang Ok incident and was involved with the Japanese police, but his true intention is yet to be confirmed. Kim Woo Jin was also a real independence activist, but he was left out from history due to his failure to assassinate President Rhee Syngman after Korea's liberation, for hiring a large number of pro-Japanese people. Jeong Chae San, the leader of the independence activists, was derived from the real historical figure Kim Won Bong, but he is also regarded as a problematic person and has been excluded from official history because he moved to North Korea after Korea's liberation.

Although most of the characters in *Assassination* are fictional, it is the first film to feature the independence activist Kim Won Bong, who was removed from history for being a defector. In *The Battleship Island*, all the characters are completely fabricated. However, it is the first film to visually reenact Hashima island. Jung and Jung (2017) argue that the reason these films appoint roles to forgotten figures is closely related to the political situation of the time. According to them, when *Assassination* and *The Age of Shadow* were released, Korea was facing political and historical problems, such as president Park Geun Hye compromising with Japan regarding the comfort women issue and in government published textbooks, and in this political context, the reenactment of those forgotten figures can be regarded as a kind of cultural protest.¹³⁹ In the same context, *The Battleship Island* can be regarded as stemming from the controversy over the registration of Hashima Island as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

¹³⁹ 정창훈, 정수완 (2017). 식민지시기 배경 영화들의 상품미학 이데올로기 비판 <암살>, <밀정>, <아가씨>를 중심으로. 인문콘텐츠 (45), 33-58 (26 pages).

Identical social resistance also can be addressed from the return of the forgotten word Tochak-waegu.¹⁴⁰ “Towae” is a long forgotten word which seems to be used during the Japanese Colonial period. Although the original meaning of Towae is not totally confirmed, it is commonly construed as a synonym of Pro-Japanese collaborator by the experts.¹⁴¹ However, this forgotten word was resurrected when historian Jeon Woo-yong used it to criticize Na Kyung-won, a prominent conservative political figure.¹⁴² In March 2019, Na Kyung-won argued that after Korea’s liberation, the Special Investigation Committee for Pro-Japanese traitors¹⁴³ caused division among Koreans. Na’s utterance brought enormous controversy because her opinion can be viewed as a denial of Anti Pro-Japanese activities. After that incident, Na and her political party, the Liberal Korea Party (which is now the United Future Party), were immediately framed as Pro-Japanese collaborators. Although Na’s statement in 2019 was the direct cause of the Towae frame, the

¹⁴⁰ 토착왜구. Tochak means aboriginal and waegu means Japanese raiders.

¹⁴¹ “[팩트체크] 토착왜구 뜻하는 ‘토왜(土倭)’ 1908년에 처음 사용 - NEWSTOF <http://www.newstof.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1401>

¹⁴² “‘토착왜구’ 어원은? 나경원 ‘반민특위 발언’ 파장” - KBS NEWS <http://mn.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=4160478>

¹⁴³ 반민특위 (반민족행위특별조사위원회)

public's sentiment towards her already was deteriorating due to her previous actions, which made her appear to be a Pro-Japanese individual.¹⁴⁴

In the midst of this Pro-Japanese controversy, Jeon's word of criticism "Tochak-waegu" well represented the enraged public's sentiment and quickly became a new ideology that represents Pro-Japanese collaborators. The Tochak-waegu ideology not only demonstrates hatred towards Pro-Japanese individuals, but also reveals the public's growing anti-Japanese sentiment towards Japan itself. "Waegu" is a Korean word that demonstrates extreme contempt towards Japanese people, and it is equally vulgar as other words that express despise for other races. Although the Towae ideology was developed after the analyzed films were released, their conceptions share an identical social consensus: the settlement of Pro-Japanese issues.

¹⁴⁴ She's known to have participated in the Akihito, the King of Japan's birthday party and 50th anniversary ceremony of the foundation of Japanese Self-Defense Force.

http://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20190324500005&wlog_tag3=naver

<https://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20190725500049>

V. Conclusion

1. Summary

The various memories of the Japanese colonial period are related to the roles of the characters set by each film as the main body of the narrative and the way the memory is presented. Through narrative analysis, two characteristics that comprise the films were found: emphasis on the rectification of Pro-Japanese issue and the reenactment of forgotten figures or spaces. Although ideological issues are not completely excluded from the film's narrative structure, in the end, the aforementioned films do not fully reveal issues related to the Japanese colonial period. As discussed before, the ideologies surrounding the colonial period are mostly presented as cinematic settings or materials in the film. Therefore, the narratives suggested in the films cannot be seen as ideologies that can represent the enormous discourse of Japanese colonial period. However, popular culture mediums, such as movies, can contribute to the structuring of discourse on the Japanese Colonial Period.

The films covered in this paper remember the Japanese colonial era in the film industry custom of colonial films. This means that the narrative features of these films gain meanings in the genre of colonial films and in the industrial custom of film and in the political and economic context surrounding them. This indicates that colonial movies cannot heal the trauma of the colonial era, and instead, colonial memories that have been reconstructed into films have limitations that will inevitably remain as consumer goods in the film industry. Meanwhile, in the case of the Japanese Colonial Period, the perception changes depending on the current domestic and international political context, as Korea and Japan still cannot reach an appropriate agreement on colonial issues.

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As discussed earlier, the Japanese colonial period is remembered through a way of reenactment in each film. Through this, the films guide the public regarding what the Japanese colonial period was like and what to remember more importantly. In other words, the object and emphasis of the memories set by each film and the resulting structured semantic system are knowledge and discourse on how to view the colonial period. Therefore, the

memory produced by the films is also a collective memory and mass memory with implicit present social consensus and evaluative meaning for colonial times. The films realize rectification of pro-Japanese issues through the reenactment of certain symbolic space. In that the memory of the colonial period is not fixed but becomes a cultural symbol in the form of various cinematic spectacles, it is reconstructed according to the interface of social consensus enabling production and consumption to become possible. Therefore, collective memory of the colonial period, which is a particular social memory, does not have a fixed meaning, but rather has the potential to change.

In this regard, colonial times also lie in the process of being consumed as a product of blockbusters in the context of the film industry, and the resulting memory of colonial times only sublimates into a spectacular visual experience through the collective experience that film provides. As these films were originally made for commercial success, it is unclear whether the essential discourse surrounding the colonial period was considered seriously by the film makers. Nevertheless, the analyzed films can be regarded as a

reflection of social context and also as a cultural protest of popular history against official history.

2. Limitation of the research

This paper does not represent all the colonial films that exist in Korea. The films that this paper regards were all filmed during president Park Geun Hye's regime. By understanding the reenactment of certain historical events or figures through a film could be viewed as a form cultural protest¹⁴⁵, the films this paper analyzed can only represent the memories produced under the political and social context during president Park's regime. Additionally, since this paper only deals with the theoretical background of memory reenactment, it can not address the psychological and physiological memories and influence that the films contain. Furthermore, this paper does not consider the reaction of the actual audience of the films, so their actual response might differ from the theoretical expectations this paper reveals.

¹⁴⁵ 정창훈, 정수완 (2017). 식민지시기 배경 영화들의 상품미학 이데올로기 비판 <암살>, <밀정>, <아가씨>를 중심으로. 인문콘텐츠 (45), 33-58 (26 pages).

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국문초록

이재혁

국제대학원 국제지역학 전공

서울대학교

본 논문은 한민족의 가장 큰 역사적 트라우마 중 하나로 꼽히는 일제강점기의 기억이 어떠한 방식으로 구성되고 현대 한국인에게 전승되는지 알아보기 위해서 작성되었다. 반일감정과 기억에 관한 수많은 이론들 중에서 영화, 드라마, 다큐멘터리와 같은 미디어의 프레임 생성능력과 재현능력을 주목하여 가장 많은 관객들이 본 순서대로 일제강점기를 배경으로 하는 한국 영화 세 편을 선정하고 연구하였다. <암살>, <밀정>, 그리고 <군함도>가 어떠한 일제강점기의 기억을 재현하고 그 재현된 기억의 특징은 어떠한지에 대해 논의하였고, 연구방법론으로는 영화를 둘러싼 서사구조 및 담론 분석에 유용한 블라디미르 프롭의 민담형태론과 같은 서사이론을 활용하였다. 이러한 분석을 통해 논의된 연구 결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 이들 영화는 모두 친일청산이라는 아직까지도 큰 사회적 이슈가 되고있는 문제의 중요성을 강조하는 대중기억을 주로 생산한다. 둘째, 연구 대상 영화들은 모두 역사적으로 잊혀진 인물이나 장소를 재현한다. 셋째, 이들 영화에서 관찰된 특징적 유사점들은 이 영화들이 제작된 당시의 정치-경제적 맥락의 결과물일 가능성이 높다.

주제어: 일제강점기, 재현, 식민영화, 서사이론, 집단기억

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