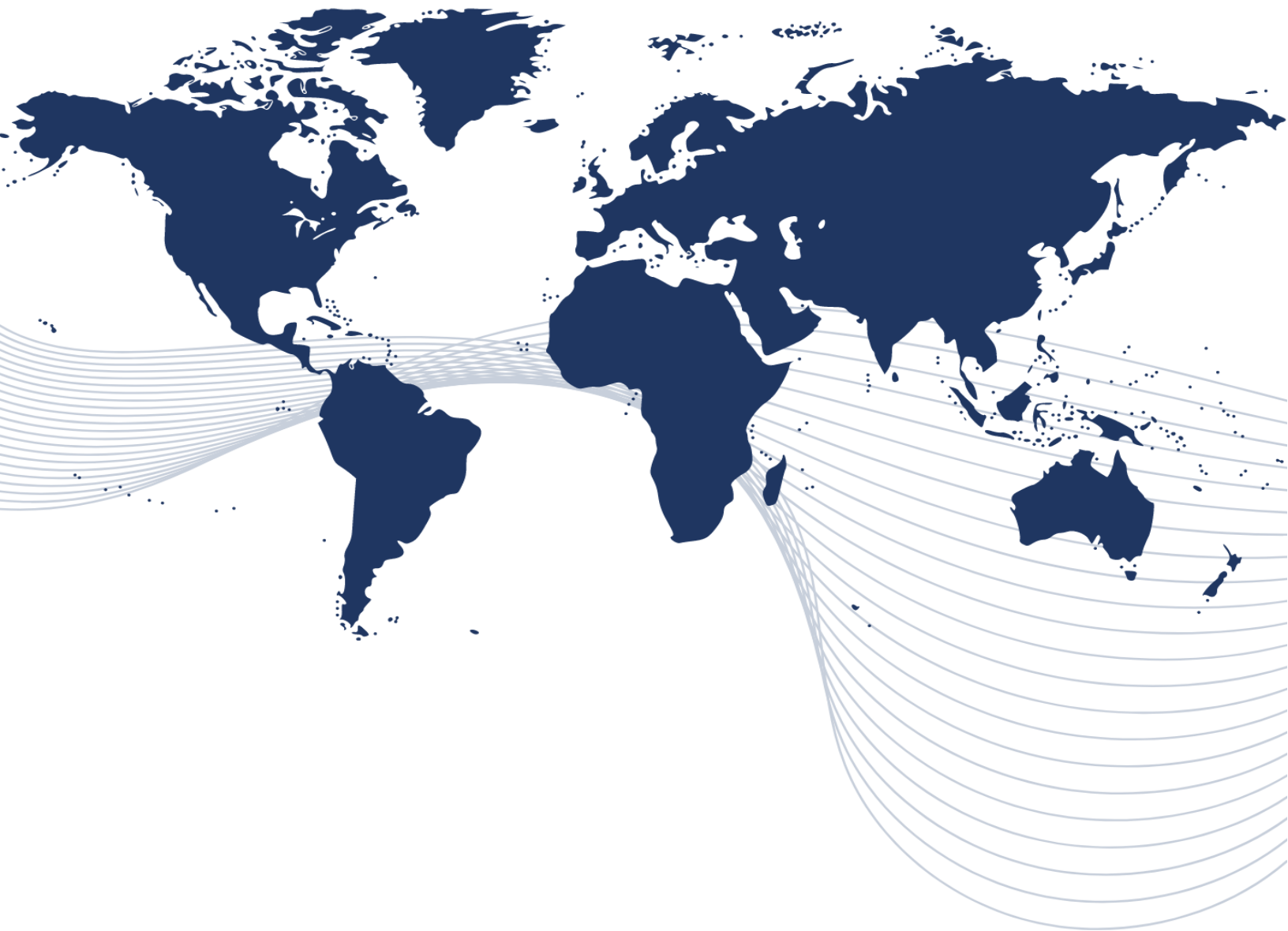


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How South Korea Represents Japan as Colonization in Film

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Abstract

The advancement of the movie industry makes it undeniable that wars between countries have occurred until now. It's just that the way of fighting is different. This study can conceptually illustrate the strategy of a country to attack another country by reconstructing the country's image negatively. The purpose of this study is to understand the representation of Japan as a colonizer in a Korean film entitled "Exhuma." This study employed a qualitative research design. The Exhuma film's symbol analysis research requires a wide range of data sources to support the interpretation of its meaning and messages. The primary source of data is the Exhuma film, where the researcher thoroughly examines the symbol elements to determine which symbols are there. The data is analyzed in seven stages: identification of symbols, analysis of literal meaning, relationship of symbols with context, consideration of interpretation, strengthening interpretation with supporting evidence, relationship of interpretation with themes, and drawing conclusions about the findings. Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that in the film Exhuma, Japan is represented as a colonizer with two categories of historical and mythical symbols. Historical symbols are signs or symbols that depict the atrocities of Japanese colonization, based on adaptations of historical facts. While mystical symbols are signs or symbols that represent the atrocities of Japanese colonization based on supernatural or mystical beliefs and myths in the beliefs and culture of South Korean society.

Keyword: Semiotic; Film; Korea; Colonization; Japan

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INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

It is undeniable that wars between countries have occurred until now. It's just that the way of fighting is different (Henåker, 2020; King, 2022). The dark history of the past, which still leaves a lasting impression on those who suffered during that period, makes this inevitable (Jenks & Bhatia, 2020). In addition, competition between countries in this modern era is also a motive to represent other countries with images that benefit them (Verma & Roy, 2022). One of the media that is often used to retell a country according to its goals and ideology is film (Yudin, 2022). This can be seen in films that tell the story of another country, but the images that appear in the film are favorable to the country producing the film (Barak & Inbar, 2021). An example of such a thing is a movie that tells the story of the Vietnam War with America (Khardel & Vyzdryk, 2020). An American producer helmed the movie. The ideology is automatically in favor of America. So, in this movie, America is presented as the winner and Vietnam as the loser (López Gómez, 2023). This ensures that the perception of America as a hegemonic superpower remains intact. However, this image is inversely proportional to reality and facts. In reality, Vietnam won the war, and America was the loser. Thus, movies are often used as weapons to fight wars in this modern era. Although they do not directly take human lives, movies are able to influence people and form public sentiment. Therefore, it's clear that the war between countries (Jaugaitė, 2021).

Importance of Research for Field

Such a study is very important. In addition to enriching the scientific repertoire, this study can provide a conceptual description or illustration of a country's strategy to attack another country by negatively reconstructing the country's image. The country that is the victim of the negative image can realize and understand the concept used. Victim countries can also determine their attitude of defense or resistance, of course, through films or other literary works that can carry the ideology and positive image of their country. Inevitably, technological and digital advances have made it easier for anyone to produce propaganda that benefits certain parties. And harm the other party. Not infrequently, it also has an impact on public sentiment, which gives birth to discriminatory and racist behavior. Thus, this research is very useful and important to address the negative things above. Therefore, this research holds significant importance as it sheds light on how war transpires in the modern era.

Research or Theoretical Gap

There have been much research related to movies with war thinking in this technological era. Such as research conducted by T. Moffatt who found that *There Will Be No Leave Today* explores the haunting and abject nature of war in the Soviet landscape, comparing it to other post-war European films such as Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying* and Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Moffatt, 2022). P. Zestanakis' research found that 1994's *End of an Era* explored the 1960s youth rebellion against dictatorship through the 1990s consumer-oriented values, highlighting the relaxed ideological climate of the 1990s (Zestanakis, 2022). L. Tisdall's research which found that the 'exceptional' child in early 1960s British science fiction films tapped into nuclear anxieties and fears about a 'permissive society' as well as developmental psychology, challenging adult authority and presenting a counter-narrative to adult conceptions of the 'rising generation' (Cristina, 2024; Ibrahi, 2024; Johan, 2024; Munidar, 2024; Tisdall, 2021).

Anna-Sophie Jürgens' research found that *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* explores modernist visions of technological futures and theatrical urban spaces, contributing to a complex cultural inquiry and transmedial discourse around technology and popular entertainment (Jürgens, 2020). L. Bustamante's research found that film noir, particularly in Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), explores imperfect masculinity around the totemic power of the femme fatale, reflecting the historical and cultural context of the Cold War (Acosta Bustamante, 2019). Daniel Tilsley's research found that *Robot Monster*, despite its strangeness and absurdity, effectively critiques American modernity by examining existential anxiety and examining the interconnectedness of society during the cold war (Tilsley, 2022). Alexander H. Hastie's research found that postcolonial films such as *Days of Glory*, *Outside the Law*, and *Free Men* are read geopolitically as allegories for familiar conflicts such as the war on terror, the Arab Spring, and Israel-Palestine, influenced by popular geopolitical frames of reference (Aida et al., 2020; Andyrestu, 2024; Hastie, 2023; Mulyadi & Harahap, 2024; Mus, 2024). M. Schmitt's research found that Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* and Thomas Clay's *Fanny Lye Deliver'd* explored the English Revolution through an 'archaeology of the future' that unearthed a utopian 'future past' in British cultural and film history (Schmitt, 2023).

Based on the search for previous research above, no research has been found at all that examines the film *Exhuma*. This is reasonable, considering that this film has just been released to the public, so it is still very new to the community. And for that reason, no one has studied this movie. Moreover, this film presents a compelling analysis due to its unique blend of horror elements and the historical context of Japan's colonization of Korea (Cho & Chae, 2021). This film also portrays a lot of Japanese images from the perspective of South Korean ideology as a colonized party (Rhee, 2022). Unlike horror films in general, which tend to scare only, the *Exhuma* film appears with a storyline presentation that makes the audience think about every visual and character scene in the film. This is also the attraction that makes people curious enough to watch repeatedly to satisfy their curiosity about all the symbols in the *Exhuma* movie. The success of the *Exhuma* movie can be seen in the high enthusiasm of the community, whose number of viewers reached 11 million. This film broke the record for the most watched Korean movie in Indonesia. These findings suggest that *Exhuma*'s impact on the public is significant. Therefore, this film is also worth studying and filling the gap in film knowledge research (Diffrient, 2020).

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to understand the representation of Japan as a colonizer in a Korean film entitled "*Exhuma*".

Research Question

How does South Korea represent Japan as a colonizer in the film *Exhuma*?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Examining symbols is one of the primary methods used in literary analysis to uncover the meaning of a work (Coletta, 2021). Objects, characters, events, or even situations that have a deeper meaning than their literal translation can all be symbols in literary works. Semiotics is one such theory. According to this theory, a literary work is a system of signifiers and signs

(Boruszewski, 2021). A signifier is a tangible thing or element that can be felt, heard, or seen; it is the message conveyed. Through symbol analysis, semiotic theory helps us understand how readers create and interpret symbols in literary works. Literary symbol analysis is a creative and complex procedure. You must conduct the analysis carefully, methodically, and using textual evidence (Fernandes & Queiroz, 2022).

In addition, symbols have the capacity to confer power (Arefieva et al., 2021). The idea known as "symbolic power theory" explains how symbols and the meanings they convey can influence people's attitudes, actions, and interpersonal interactions. These symbols can be things that have deeper and more nuanced meanings than their translations, such as words, images, objects, or actions. In "Distinction," Bourdieu explains how the ruling class uses symbols to justify and enforce their power. We refer to these symbols as "good taste" and connect them to distinction and position (Park et al., 2021). Lack of access to these symbols causes the lower classes to feel powerless and inferior. Giddens highlights the importance of symbols in the creation of social reality in his book "The Constitution of Society." According to Giddens, people and societies use these symbols to understand and make meaning of their environment. These symbols have mutable meanings that differ depending on the situation and the passage of time. In "Encoding/Decoding," Hall explains how the circumstances and social status of the person or group receiving the symbol can affect its meaning (Almohimmah & Alresheedi, 2020). Misunderstandings and conflicts can arise from different interpretations of the same symbol by the ruling and lower classes. For example, the national flag is a powerful symbol of patriotism and national identity. It can inspire sentiments of pride and loyalty to the nation. Businesses use trademarks to differentiate themselves from rival goods and create a definite brand identity for their customers. Trademark logos and symbols have the ability to attract customers and influence their decisions on what to buy. Religious symbols such as the crescent moon, David's star, and the cross have deep meant for adherents of certain religions. These icons can provide a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose (Fei & Chen, 2021). Language is a set of symbols used for meaning and communication. Language can be used to oppress and discriminate against other groups, as well as to support certain ideologies and reinforce group identification. As such, symbolic power theory explains how symbols and the meanings they hold can influence a person's thoughts, actions, and interpersonal interactions. These symbols have the ability to construct identity, justify authority, influence social norms and convey meaning. Understanding this idea helps improve our understanding of how symbols affect us and how our environment works. Language is a powerful instrument that we can use for good and bad. It is important to recognize the symbolic power of language in the struggle against oppression and prejudice and in the promotion of justice and equality. We need to question how language can be used to oppress and control people and be critical of our own and others' use of language (Graf et al., 2020).

Computer simulations were used in the science fiction film *The Matrix* to organize reality. The various symbols in the film, including the red and blue pills, symbolize the decision to keep living in delusion or to discover the real truth (Belorusets, 2020). The symbols in the film serve as a critique of the ways in which ideology and media dominate society. The movie shows how symbols have the power to oppress people and alter reality. Disney's animated movie, *The Lion King*, tells the story of Simba, a young lion who, after the death of his father, must accept his new role as king. The symbols in the movie, which include Pride Lands, Circle of Life, and Hakuna Matata, represent various morals and ideologies (Elleström, 2022). Using symbols, the

movie investigates identity, responsibility, and the circle of life. The movie demonstrates the use of symbols to convey moral lessons and important values to the audience (Belorusets, 2020). The South Korean thriller *Parasite* tells the story of two rich and poor households. Stairs and stones are examples of symbols used in the film to symbolize social class differences and the climb to the top. The film criticizes social inequality and the exploitation of the underprivileged through symbolism. The film exemplifies the use of symbols to underline injustice and encourage critical analysis of social structures. These films provide an excellent illustration of the application of symbolic power theory in cinema. Film symbols can effectively convey powerful messages about reality, identity, and power (Elleström, 2022). They can also have a complex range of meanings. Gaining a deeper and more critical understanding of symbolic power in film can help us interpret its meaning (Belorusets, 2020).

Symbols play an important role in human existence. Symbols help us understand and interpret the world in which we live. Symbols can be objects, images, phrases, or behaviors that have deeper and more nuanced meanings than the literal (Belorusets, 2020). The process of symbol creation shapes human perception. People are familiar with the symbols they encounter. There are several ways to recognize them, including touch, hearing, and sight. People associate a symbol with a particular meaning or idea once they recognize it (Elleström, 2022). This association may come from education, cultural awareness, or direct experience. People will then interpret the symbol's meaning in a specific context based on their newfound associations. These perceptions can change depending on the person and the situation (Belorusets, 2020). People's perceptions of their environment will then develop based on how they perceive the symbols. These impressions have the power to influence how people feel, act, and relate to each other. Symbols shape human vision, and the culture in which people live shapes their understanding and interpretation of these symbols (Elleström, 2022). A person's understanding of symbols and their meanings can vary depending on his or her educational background. Individual experiences can shape people's associations with certain symbols. The context in which the symbols are found can influence an individual's interpretation of the symbols. Symbols are powerful tools that have the ability to change the way people see the world. We can better understand how symbols affect us and how we think and act by understanding the process by which images shape perception (Belorusets, 2020; Elleström, 2022).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. Symbol analysis is one of the most widely used qualitative research techniques for deciphering the meanings and messages in films. Numerous qualitative research paradigms guided the research in this study (Xu et al., 2022). Here are a few examples of typical paradigms: The interpretive paradigm focuses on deciphering and interpreting the movie's symbols. To decipher the significance of the film, researchers consider both their own and research participants' opinions. This strategy frequently makes use of techniques like ethnography, hermeneutics, and semiotic analysis. The constructionist paradigm focuses on the social construction of symbolic meanings in motion pictures. Scholars study how symbols can have different meanings depending on the cultural, social, and political environment in which we watch a film. This strategy frequently makes use of techniques like grounded theory and discourse analysis. Researchers utilize critical analysis

to identify how films can support or challenge social values and norms. The Critical Paradigm concentrates on the use of symbols in films to uphold or subvert power structures and prevailing ideologies (Xu et al., 2022).

Data Source, Data Collection and Procedure

To support the interpretation of the meaning and messages presented in the Exhuma film, the symbol analysis research requires a diverse and abundant set of data sources (Xu et al., 2022). The primary source of data is the Exhuma movie, where the researcher thoroughly examines the symbol elements to determine which symbols are there. Reviews and criticism of the Exhuma film from various sources provide diverse viewpoints regarding its interpretation and significance. Analyzing reviews and critiques can help researchers learn more about the symbols addressed by critics and how they understand their significance (Borish et al., 2021).

The supporting data sources are Contextual data, such as details on the social, cultural, and political environment in which Exhuma was produced, can aid scholars in deciphering the significance of the movie's symbols. This information is sourced from books that address these contexts, scholarly journals, and news items (Xu et al., 2022). Scholars can benefit from theories and concepts from a variety of fields, including psychology, sociology, and semiotics, in order to analyze and understand the meaning of the film's symbols. These ideas and theories provide a framework for understanding how symbols work and how the audience interprets them. The analysis of similar films, which includes genre, theme, and style analysis, can assist scholars in comprehending the customs and symbols frequently used within the genre. It is possible to get an understanding of how the symbols in Exhuma differ from or are like those in other movies by making comparisons with other movies (Borish et al., 2021).

This data source narrative provides an overview of potential data sources for symbol analysis research in Exhuma. The research objective, analysis focus, and technique will all influence the selection of relevant data sources (Xu et al., 2022). The most pertinent and helpful data sources for a researcher's work should be carefully considered. Recall that researchers are free to add or remove data sources from the list as needed to best meet their objectives. Scholars must remain receptive to discovering fresh sources of information that may aid in their comprehension of the meanings and takeaways presented in the film Exhuma (Borish et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

To support the interpretation of the meaning and messages presented in the Exhuma film, the symbol analysis research requires a diverse and abundant set of data sources (Xu et al., 2022). The primary source of data is the Exhuma movie, where the researcher thoroughly examines the symbol elements to determine which symbols are there. Reviews and criticism of the Exhuma film from various sources provide diverse viewpoints regarding its interpretation and significance. Analyzing reviews and critiques can help researchers learn more about the symbols addressed by critics and how they understand their significance (Borish et al., 2021).

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a framework for understanding how symbols work and how the audience interprets them. The analysis of similar films, which includes genre, theme, and style analysis, can assist scholars in comprehending the customs and symbols frequently used within the genre. It is possible to get an understanding of how the symbols in *Exhuma* differ from or are like those in other movies by making comparisons with other movies (Borish et al., 2021).

This data source narrative provides an overview of potential data sources for symbol analysis research in *Exhuma*. The research objective, analysis focus, and technique will all influence the selection of relevant data sources (Xu et al., 2022). The most pertinent and helpful data sources for a researcher's work should be carefully considered. Recall that researchers are free to add or remove data sources from the list as needed to best meet their objectives. Scholars must remain receptive to discovering fresh sources of information that may aid in their comprehension of the meanings and takeaways presented in the film *Exhuma* (Borish et al., 2021).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The symbols or signs collected are representations of language, namely dialog in the film and the visuals of the film itself. Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that in *Exhuma*, Japan is represented as a colonizer with two categories of historical and mythical symbols. Historical symbols are signs or symbols that depict the atrocities of Japanese colonization, adapted from historical facts (Han, 2020). While mystical symbols are signs or symbols that represent the atrocities of Japanese colonization based on supernatural or mystical beliefs and myths in the beliefs and culture of South Korean society (Deacon, 2022). The film *Exhuma* employs the following symbols or signs to depict Japan's role as a colonizer:

Table 1. Historical Symbols

Symbols of the film <i>Exhuma</i>	Representation of Meaning
Japanese Soldiers	Repression and massacres
War planes	Repression and massacres
Cannon	Repression and massacres
Sword	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
Spear	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
Sunrise Flag	Greed
Uniting the great East Asia	Greed
Great empire	Greed
Japanese service badge	Repression and massacres
Japanese general's armor hat	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
Japanese war general	Repression, cruelty, and massacres

Beasts	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
Gunshot	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
The sound of swords	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
War	Repression, cruelty, and massacres
Katahito's children	Japanese identity as a colonizer
Makoto's own	Japanese identity as a colonizer
Weapons	Murder, repression, cruelty and massacre
The brave army	Murder, repression, cruelty and massacre
Enemy (Korea)	Greed
Beheading	Murder, repression, cruelty and massacre
Wounds and blood at the end of the movie	Leaving trauma and mental scars

Table 2. Mystical Symbols

Symbols of the film Exhuma	Representation of Meaning
Fox	Manipulative and cunning
Gisune/Murayama/Japanese monks	Manipulative and cunning
Daesalgut (evil aura neutralizing ritual)	Dangerous and cruel
Salt	Dangerous
Human-headed snake	Murder and repression
Glutinous rice	Dangerous
The ghost of a Japanese general	Cruelty, brutality and carnage
A human head held by the ghost of a Japanese general	Murder, cruelty, and massacre
Japanese general's ghost servant	Slavery and oppression
Blood spatter on the ghostly figure of a Japanese general	Cruel, sadistic and brutal
An illusion created by the ghost of a Japanese general	Manipulative and cunning
Iron pegs	Greedy
My lord (the ghost of a Japanese general) is the one who killed ten thousand humans and became a god	Murder, slaughter, cruelty, greed, brutality, and inhumanity
Coordinate point 38.3417,128.3289	Repression
A map of the kora where a knife was stuck in the exact area where the ghost of the Japanese general was buried	Greed and oppression

Horse blood	Dangerous
I'm only afraid of myself (ghost of a Japanese general)	Cruel and brutal
I am the god of war (ghost of a Japanese general)	Greed, cruelty, and carnage
The eternal god (ghost of a Japanese general)	Greedy
Flaming sword (ghost of a Japanese general)	Cruelty and massacre
Vertical coffin	Greed and oppression
Fire (ghost of a Japanese general)	
Human heart	Murder, massacre, brutality, and cruelty
Burning iron (ghost of a Japanese general)	Cruel and brutal
Horns on the head of a ghost Japanese general	Very evil like the devil
Iron stake burial ritual	Greed and repression
Traumatized by the ghost of a Japanese general	Traumatized by Japanese atrocities

Discussion

Historical Symbols

Historical symbols are signs or symbols that represent the atrocities of Japanese colonization based on adaptations of historical facts (Han, 2020). The movie *Exhuma* is like a window that reveals the dark wounds of Japanese colonization in Korea. Behind the tense storyline and brutal warfare, there are meaningful symbols that take the audience on an emotional journey and deep reflection on oppression, resistance, and independence. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of conflict becomes a scalpel for dissecting the hidden meaning behind *Exhuma*'s symbols. The conflict between two elements is the key to understanding the message. Symbols of Oppression and Cruelty: Japanese soldiers, guns, cannons, swords, spears, warplanes, and the Rising Sun flag (Shin, 2022). These symbols represent Japan's brutal military power, which oppressed and massacred the Korean people. The sound of gunfire, the sound of swords, and the roar of war fill the air. These symbols depict the horror of war and the inevitable bloodshed. Beheadings, wounds, and blood Physical and mental wounds bear witness to the unforgiving cruelty of the Japanese colonizers (Han, 2020).

Symbols of Nationalism and Resistance: Bong-gil, Lee Hwa-rim, Kim Sang Deok, Young-geun, and the Brave Army. These symbols transformed into Korean heroes who dared to fight against the invaders and fight for the motherland's independence (Shin, 2022). South and North Korean border, painting of the South Korean Peninsula, notes and map of South Korea, and homeland these symbols show the love and determination of the Korean people to free themselves from the clutches of the colonizers. This is my land (Korea). confirmation of the Korean people's right to their homeland and their determination to defend it. Enemy (Korea). The emblem represents their animosity and resolve to drive out the Japanese invaders from their cherished homeland (Han, 2020).

This contradiction is at the heart of *Exhuma*'s message. Despite facing superior forces, the Korean people never gave up in their fight for independence. Their unyielding spirit and nationalism were the keys to the resistance. Symbols of greed and desire include the flag of the Rising Sun, Greater East Asia, and the Great Empire. These symbols represent Japan's greedy ambition to expand its power and control Korea. Japanese Servant Badge, War Cap. These symbols show the loyalty of Japanese soldiers and their willingness to do anything to achieve the goal of colonization. Makoto's. This symbol shows Japan's desire to make Korea a part of their empire (Han, 2020).

Symbol of Trauma and Inner Wounds, Wounds, and Blood. This symbol not only denotes physical death but also represents the deep trauma and mental wounds caused by colonization. These wounds, both physical and mental, left indelible marks on their souls. This contradiction shows the impact of Japanese colonization, not only on the physical but also on the mental and emotional state of the Korean people (Shin, 2022). The movie is a reminder of the importance of peace and humanity and how oppression can leave deep scars on future generations (Han, 2020).

This analysis is enriched by the dark historical facts of Korea's colonization by Japan (1910–1945). This period was characterized by brutal oppression, economic exploitation, and human rights violations. The regime forced the Korean people to relinquish their identity and culture (Shin, 2022). The movie *Exhuma* is a dark reflection of the past and the Korean people's struggle for independence. The symbols in *Exhuma*, combined with semiotic theories of conflict and historical facts, lead us to a deep understanding of the complexity of colonization and its profound impact on the Korean people. The movie invites the audience to reflect on the importance of peace and humanity (Han, 2020).

Mystical symbols

Mystical symbols are signs or symbols that represent the cruelty of Japanese colonization based on supernatural or mystical beliefs and myths in the beliefs and culture of South Korean society (Deacon, 2022). Oppression and cruelty vs. South Korean cult beliefs and myths Symbols of Oppression and Cruelty: fox, Gisune/Murayama/Japanese monk, Daesalgut, human-headed snake, glutinous rice: These symbols represent the various forms of oppression that the Korean people endured, from manipulation and deception to physical harm and brutal massacres. Japanese ghost general, human head, Japanese ghost general's servant, blood spatter: These symbols show the unimaginable atrocities committed by the Japanese colonizers, leaving deep physical and mental scars. Illusion, Iron Peg, My Lord: These symbols represent the control and oppression that the Japanese colonizers used, both physically and mentally, to subjugate the Korean people. Map of Korea, Blood Horse: These symbols show the Japanese colonization of Korean land and its brutal impact, even on animals. I fear only myself; I am the god of war; the eternal god; the flaming sword; the vertical coffin; the fire; the human heart; the burning iron; the horn (Robillard-Martel & Laurent, 2020). These sayings and symbols represent the arrogance, cruelty, and brutality of the Japanese colonizers, who considered themselves superior and invincible (Deacon, 2022).

Symbols of South Korean supernatural beliefs and myths: fox, Gisune/Murayama/Japanese monk, Daesalgut, human-headed snake, glutinous rice: South Korean culture connects these symbols to supernatural beliefs and myths. The Japanese colonizers use these symbols to evoke fear and horror, reinforcing images of their cruelty

(Robillard-Martel & Laurent, 2020). This contradiction is at the heart of *Exhuma*'s message: Japanese colonization was not only physically oppressive but also mentally and spiritually. The film shows how the Japanese colonizers utilized supernatural beliefs and myths to subjugate the Korean people (Deacon, 2022).

The ghostly symbol of the cruel and brutal Japanese general represents the deep trauma that the Korean people experienced as a result of colonization. This trauma is not only physical but also mental and emotional. The movie shows how this trauma continues to haunt the Korean people, even after independence (Robillard-Martel & Laurent, 2020). *Exhuma* is a powerful and heartfelt work of art that combines history, culture, and symbolism to convey a powerful message of oppression and resistance. The film's analysis of symbols helps us understand the complexity of colonization and its profound impact on the Korean people. The movie also reminds us of the importance of peace, humanity, and the fight against oppression (Deacon, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Exhuma, with its thrilling and action-packed story, presents a dark picture of Japanese colonization in Korea. Behind the riveting action, the movie is full of meaningful symbols that take the audience on an emotional journey and deep reflections on oppression, resistance, and independence. Roland Barthes uses his conflict semiotics theory approach to analyze the symbols in *Exhuma*. The symbols are categorized into two major groups, namely historical symbols and mythical symbols.

The historical symbols represent Japan's brutal oppression and cruelty. They include Japanese soldiers, weapons, and the Rising Sun Flag. On the other hand, symbols of nationalism and resistance are symbols of the Korean people's determination for independence, such as Korean heroes, a map of South Korea, and the motherland. The core message of *Exhuma* is the conflict between historical symbols and symbols of nationalism and resistance: Japanese colonization was not only a matter of physical oppression but also of mental and spiritual oppression. The film is a testament to the Korean people's struggle for independence in the face of overwhelming odds.

Mystical symbol analysis enriches understanding of the complexities of Japanese colonization. In South Korean culture, symbols of supernatural beliefs and myths include foxes, ghosts of Japanese generals, and sticky rice. They evoke a sense of fear and horror, reinforcing images of Japanese colonial cruelty. The ghostly symbol of the cruel and brutal Japanese general represents the deep trauma the Korean people experienced through colonization. This trauma is not only physical but also mental and emotional. The film is a testament to the fact that this trauma still haunts the Korean people even after independence.

Exhuma is a powerful and heartfelt work of art. It combines history, culture, and symbolism to convey a powerful message of oppression and resistance. Analyzing the symbols in the film helps us understand the complexity of colonization and its profound impact on the Korean people. The film is also a reminder of the importance of peace, humanity, and the struggle against oppression. The film *Exhuma* offers much to think about and reflect upon. Here are some suggestions to enrich the experience of watching and analyzing the film. One is to learn more about the history of Japanese colonization in Korea. This will help you understand the

film's context and the meaning of its symbols. Notice how the film uses sound, music, and cinematography to create atmosphere and evoke emotion. Discuss the movie with others. Share your thoughts and interpretations of the movie's symbols and messages. Look for other films that deal with themes such as colonization, war, and trauma. We can learn about the dark history of Japanese colonization of Korea, its profound impact on the Korean people, and the importance of peace, humanity, and the struggle against oppression by understanding and reflecting on the symbols in the film *Exhuma*.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The author(s) declared no conflicts of interest.

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