

THROUGH KOREAN EYES: VICTIMS AND OPPRESSORS IN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE JAPANESE COLONIAL RULE

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Abstract: The Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula between 1910 and 1945 represents a difficult period in the recent history of Korea. During this time, the population of the peninsula was forced to accept that the Japanese would run major companies and banks, the ban of the Korean language in public institutions, the displacement of men as forced-labor workers within the peninsula or in Japan, as well as the dehumanizing fate of women who were forced to serve as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers stationed in various bases around the Japanese Empire. The image of the victim and perpetrator was recreated by Korean film directors in recent movies, such as "Snowy Roads" (2015), "The Battleship Island" (2017), and the first season of the television series "Gyeongseong Creature" (2023). This research explores how historical trauma is visualized and narrativized, and how these portrayals contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding colonial memory and national identity.

Keywords: Japanese Empire, Korean Trauma, South Korean Cinema, Comfort Women.

The Korean peninsula was prosperous during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) due to the wisdom of the rulers. Although corruption made the state weak at times, kings such as Sejong the Great proved to the Asian world at large that Koreans were cultured, intelligent people through the invention of the Han'gŭl alphabet, or the kabin metal movable printing method, innovations of observation instruments in astronomy and so on. Unfortunately, the overlord of Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), after bringing the whole Japan under his rule in 1590, took the next step in forging the Japanese Empire from his position as retired regent (taikō) by preparing the invasion of the Korean peninsula, which was meant to be the first step in conquering East Asia¹. Although the Korean state was taken off-guard and lost a lot of land in the first phase of the invasion (1592-1598), due to the ingenuity of Korean general Yi Sun-sin and the help of the army of the Chinese Empire, then under the ruling of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the Korean state was saved, and the Japanese were defeated.

Both the Chosŏn dynasty and the Japanese tried to isolate themselves from foreign influence from the seventeenth century until the late part of the eighteenth century, as they perceived the Christian faiths and the western influence as something that might destroy Asian society. Japan's isolation was broken by the Perry Expeditions in 1853 and 1855, when ships from the United States of America led by commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry forced the Japanese under the Tokugawa shogunate to open their borders to the western powers. Furthermore, this opening led to the collapse of the military shogunate, the restoration of the emperor, and afterwards, to the technological and martial evolution of the Japanese society.

Following Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Japanese Empire compelled the Qing Empire to recognize Korea as an independent nation and to cede Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to Japan. In the aftermath, Japan orchestrated the assassination of

¹ Swope Kenneth, "Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employment During the Sino-Japanese-Korean War, 1592-1598", in *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2005, p. 13.

Queen Min in 1895 and established a government aligned with its interests in Korea. In 1896, King Gojong sought asylum in the Russian legation and attempted to govern from there, but this move was met with disapproval by the Korean public. Consequently, he returned to Deoksu Palace and, in 1897, proclaimed the Korean Empire as a sovereign and independent state².

After Japan won the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, it gained southern Sakhalin and ended the Russian influence in Korea. That same year, the Protectorate Treaty established a Japanese Residency-General in Korea and stripped the Korean government of its diplomatic powers. Emperor Gojong was forced to abdicate after sending a secret mission to The Hague, and his son Sunjong became Korea's last monarch. During his rule, the Korean military was disbanded, control over the police was shifted to Japan, and the Japanese influence expanded across all sectors³.

After the assassination of Resident-General Itō Hirobumi by a Korean nationalist in 1909, Japan signed the annexation treaty on August 22, 1910⁴. Following Japan's annexation of Korea, the colonial administration exploited the predominance of state-owned land, initiating cadastral registration that favored those with proof of formal ownership. This led to the Japanese seizing nearly half the farmland. Additionally, Japan monopolized commerce and industry while developing railroads and hydroelectric infrastructure to consolidate colonial control⁵. Furthermore, the authorities banned Koreans "from possessing firearms and swords; at the same time Japanese school teachers and most government officials [were permitted to wear] [...] swords. Korean newspapers were suspended [immediately] for any infraction of the rule [...]"⁶. Another restriction was that "Koreans were obliged to register with the police in order to travel any significant distance"⁷.

Due to the discrimination faced within their own country, over 2 million Koreans protested after the Korean Declaration of Independence was proposed by 33 Korean representatives on the 8th of February 1919 and read again on 1st March 1919. The Japanese police and troops brutally suppressed the peaceful protest and "more than 7,500 Koreans were killed and 47,000 arrested"⁸. This protest led to the relaxation of the rules, and the military was replaced with civilian police. Moreover, as Japan was rapidly industrialized, it increasingly required labor both in its colonies and in domestic factories, leading textile factory and mine owners to recruit Korean migrants. By 1945, approximately two million Koreans had migrated willingly or under compulsion to Japan, with many still remaining, representing a large minority of Korean descent in present-day Japan. As the Empire started to conquer more and more territories in the late 1930s, it forced the conquered people to become loyal subjects by learning and using the Japanese language and forgetting their own. Korean and other Asian languages in the Empire were banned from public spaces, and those that defied the law could be severely punished. Furthermore, by 1939, loyal Japanese subjects had to take Japanese names if they wanted to be recognised as citizens of the empire⁹.

After the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Imperial army established the first "comfort" station in Shanghai. The rapid expansion of the "comfort" stations only happened after the Nanjing Massacre in 1937, when the Japanese military brutally massacred the local population and raped

² Hyong Sik Shin, *A Brief History of Korea*, Ehwa Womans Universiy Press, Seoul, 2019, p.111,114.

³ Kenneth Henshall, *A History of Japan. From Stone Age to Superpower*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, New York, pp.94-97.

⁴ Ji-hyung Kim, "The Japanese Annexation of Korea as Viewed from the British and American Press: focus on The Times and The New York Times", *International Journal of Korean History*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2011, p. 87.

⁵ Hyong Sik Shin, *op.cit.*, p.120.

⁶ David Brudnoy, "Japan's Experiment in Korea", in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 25, no.1, 1970, p. 168.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.169.

⁸ Hyong Sik Shin, *op.cit.*, p.121.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

around 80,000 women and girls. Officially, the reason for the development of these “comfort” stations was not rape prevention, but sanitary concerns, as soldiers could get infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Another reason was that high-ranking officers of the Japanese army wanted to provide both the soldiers and the officers with enough down time for sexual release and, through this, to calm the nerves of the soldiers who were preparing for suicide missions¹⁰.

The women populating the “comfort” stations were recruited by the Japanese through false promises of obtaining a good job or via abduction. According to the testimonies of survivors, many of the “comfort” women were girls in their teens. There were two ways for school-age girls to reach these stations: either the Japanese enticed impoverished peasant parents to send their girls to work with the promise of money, or Japanese teachers in Korean schools promoted the Women’s Volunteer Labor Corps, which was a screen for the selection in the “comfort” station¹¹.

These historical truths started being presented in literature at the end of the 1990s, with Korean American author Nora Okja Kellers being the first to portray the trauma of Korean women in the novel *Comfort Woman*. Afterwards, more and more Korean American authors started to explore the traumatic experiences of “comfort women” through novels, such as Therese Park in *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), Chang-rae Lee in *A Gesture of Life* (1999), and Mary Lynn Bracht in *White Chrysanthemum* (2018).

After 2000, as the Korean movie industry started to grow, more and more movies on the traumas of Koreans during the Japanese occupation were released. By 2018, there were 36 movies that presented topics such as the Korean comfort women and forced labor during the aforementioned period¹². Among these movies, we can argue that the movies *The Battleship Island* (2017) and *Snowy Road* (2015), as well as the first season of the television series *Gyeongseong Creature* (2023) are the best representations of the problems Koreans faced during the Japanese occupation.

The Battleship Island was released in 2017 and was directed by Ryoo Seung-wan. It presents the harsh life of Korean coal miners who were forced to work in the mine on Hashima island. The movie tries to present an authentic and realistic story by using “monochrome and subdued colouring [that] suggests historical footage, and the massive set recreates the island’s past environment, embellished with WWII propaganda posters and Japanese songs”¹³. Although, in the beginning, there is an emphasis that the movie is based on true events, there was no rebellion and escape from Hashima island. The director wanted to underline that, although there are fictional events presented, the movie still presents the real harsh life of the workers and the inhumane way the Japanese behaved towards Koreans, both the workers and the women.

The focus of *The Battleship Island* is on the survival of Lee Kang-ok, the bandmaster of a renowned musical band in the Korean territory, and his talented daughter. Although Lee Kang-ok and his band managed to survive by giving frequent concerts where they played Japanese music, they were tricked by the police to accept a contract to sing in Japan. In effect, the contract was a fake promise made so that the band could be convinced to travel to Japan, wherefrom they would then be shipped off to Hashima island. The scene where they are in the cargo hold of a ship headed

¹⁰Yonson Ahn, *Whose Comfort? Body, Sexuality and Identity of Korean ‘Comfort Women’ and Japanese Soldiers during WWII*, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 2020, p.9.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp.10-11.

¹² Hyun-seon Park, “‘일본군 ‘위안부’의 영화적 기억과 크로노폴리틱스” [“Chronopolitics in the Cinematic Representations of ‘Comfort Women’”], in *대중서사연구* [Journal of Popular Narrative], vol. 26, no. 1, p. 181.

¹³ Yoojin Choi and Rumi Sakamoto, “Battleship Island and the transnational dynamics of cultural memory between South Korean and Japan”, in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no.3, 2021, p.300.

to Japan, while the Japanese citizens were travelling comfortably in normal cabins, reveals that they were second-hand citizens. This is similar to the way in which German Nazis transported the Jews in cattle wagons during the same time period.

When they arrived close to Hashima island, Japanese soldiers boarded the transport ship to divide men from women and hit all Koreans in order to preserve order. After being forced off the ship, the men were identified, stripped of their valuables, put through a disinfection process, given prison-style clothes, and sent to their rooms. The process is similar to the selection process in the Nazi forced labor camps, the only difference being that the Japanese did not kill the Koreans outright. The women and girls were also stripped of their belongings, forced through a gynecological consultation, given new clothes, and sent to the “comfort” section, where they served as prostitutes for the Japanese soldiers and management staff.

As Hashima island was an important coal mining site, the movie shows how Koreans were forced to work in harsh conditions, as they were given minimal equipment and had to extract coal from underground tunnels that went under water, with the added risks of tunnel collapse due to water pressure or collapse due to gas leaks. Such an incident is depicted in the film, when the failure to properly secure a coal wagon results in it moving uncontrollably, injuring workers and igniting a gas leak. This ignition renders one of the mine shafts inaccessible for further exploitation.

The Korean workers were not perceived as equal citizens of the Japanese Empire, but as second-hand citizens that must dedicate their life to the development of the Japanese cause, if they want to remain alive in this society. Additionally, as they were second-hand citizens, the movie emphasizes that they did not deserve good treatment, and were thus fed simple food that sometimes has worms and were housed in rooms that were flooded with water. What is particularly striking is that the most influential Korean figure on Hashima Island, long believed to be a prominent supporter of the Korean independence movement, was, in fact, a puppet leader. He collaborated with the Japanese authorities by keeping the workers under control and personally receiving the compensation that was meant for them. This collaboration shows how some Koreans, during the Japanese occupation, were blinded by the promise of profit and sold their own kind for a modest sum of money.

In *The Battleship Island*, the Japanese are portrayed as evil colonizers that tricked Koreans to work for them in very harsh conditions. In addition, the movie also emphasizes how women from the annexed territories were brought to Hashima island to serve as sex slaves, and how they were advised to use the Japanese condom and to have very good hygiene by washing frequently. These Asian “comfort” women had to serve tens of Japanese men every day while avoiding becoming pregnant and various sexually transmitted diseases, as illnesses and pregnancy could get them killed.

Later, when the Japanese realized that they were losing the war, they decided to kill all Koreans with the help of the charismatic Korean leader so that no one could talk about the evil acts the Japanese had committed. Fortunately, Moo-young, a Korean independence fighter sent to recover Mr. Yoon, the charismatic leader of the Korean independence movement, finds out that the leader is a Japanese collaborator and that he plans to condemn his compatriots to death. Moo-young and the bandmaster tell the Korean miners the truth and, although people doubt them in the beginning, by the end, the miners are convinced of the betrayal and plan a daring escape.

The historical records of the Hashima island coal mine reveal that it was not controlled by the Japanese army, but by Japanese civilians, and that the majority of the miners were Japanese, not Koreans. However, the movie was intended to portray this island as a prison in order to

emphasize not the historical truth history of this particular location, but the cruel reality of World War II, in which thousands of Korean workers were forcefully taken from the peninsula and sent to mines and factories to work for little pay, while tens of thousands of Korean women and girls were tricked or forcefully taken from their hometowns to various sites in the Japanese Empire to serve “their” nation as “comfort” women, as greedy Koreans collaborated with the Japanese to condemn their brothers and sisters to a harsh life, uncaring and unmoved by their plight.

The movie ends by reminding the audience that while Hashima island was made part of the UNESCO World Heritage, the Japanese did not comply with the UNESCO request to mention the difficulties of the Korean miners that were forced to work in harsh conditions. Therefore, “the film’s depiction of Korean suffering is a remediation of pre-existing images and narratives of Hashima in South Korea”¹⁴, as Korean miners did suffer in the Hashima island mines, although they were not a majority group.

Despite the trend in Korean cinema to try and mesmerize the Western audience through Chosŏn court movies in the last decades, more and more movies about the colonial past were produced. Similar to *The Battleship Island*, after 2000, the Korean movies that present the colonial period also try to depict a realistic image of those years, as the directors and writers were inspired by the increasing number of archival images and other recovered movies that started to circulate on the internet¹⁵. In his movie, Ryoo Seung-wan focused more on the anti-colonial movement, the betrayal of the Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese regime, and the inhumane working conditions suffered by the Korean workers, while the issue of “comfort” women was presented as one more bad fate visited upon Koreans. There are other movies that fully focused on this particular evil done by the Japanese at that time.

Snowy Roads, directed by Lee Na-jeong, is a terrifying movie that presents the life of two Korean girls during the last years of the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula. Young-ae, a girl from a rich family, was able to attend the Japanese school in their area, as her family had the means to provide, while another girl, Jong-boon, is forced, due to her family’s poverty, to be an observer to Young-ae’s academic progress. Unfortunately, both girls are taken by Japanese soldiers and shipped, in a livestock wagon, to a military station somewhere in the Japanese Empire.

The movie “adopted the flashback technique to showcase both present-day hardships as well as the comfort women’s experiences at the military rape camps. The drama portrayed these Korean women as devastated, destitute, and depressed, suffering from trauma and nightmares even after the liberation from Japan”¹⁶. Unfortunately, although many women returned from “comfort” stations after the end of World War II, they were poorly received in a male-oriented society, in which the survivors were perceived as shameful individuals for having lost their chastity. Although the “comfort women” were the victims, they had to hide their past, as not only them, but their whole family could face harsh criticism from the Confucian Korean society. Furthermore, the South Korean government, from the 1960 until the end of the 1980s, was more intent on economic development and accepted “the Japanese monetary donation[s] as part of a national economic strategy, without addressing the victims of the military sexual slavery”¹⁷.

¹⁴ Yoojin Choi and Rumi Sakamoto, *op.cit.*, p. 300.

¹⁵ Jinsoo An, *Parameters of Disavowal. Colonial Representation in South Korean Cinema*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2018, p.127.

¹⁶ Khushboo Verma and Nagendra Kumar, “Was There Any Martyrdom Worse Than This?: Literary and Television Representation of “Comfort Women” of World War II”, in *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2024, p. 134.

¹⁷ Mi Jin Cho, “Victim Silencing, Sexual Violence Culture, Social Healing: Inherited Collective Trauma of World War II South Korean Military “Comfort Women””, in *VCU Scholars Compass*, 2020, p. 3, available online on <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=pkp/>, consulted on May 13, 2025.

When the two girls arrived at the military outpost, they were sent to the “comfort” station where they were housed in prison cells until they were requested to work as prostitutes. Although the director of the movie did not include explicit scenes of the rapes, the way in which it is portrayed is, nonetheless, dramatic. Hundreds of soldiers come each day to the “comfort” station to have a girl in exchange for a ticket they receive for their work, and the viewers can see how soldiers come and leave the tickets on the floor to be stomped on, while they select a wooden board with a Japanese female name and go to the room with the respective name tag. The girls, after being forced to receive the soldiers, had to clean themselves, and wash the bed lines.

As many other women that were forced to work in “comfort” stations, Young-ae tries to commit suicide by walking on the thin ice of a lake, being deeply ashamed of her condition, but Jong-boon saves her. Unfortunately, they are caught by the Japanese soldiers and sent back to the “comfort” station. Afterwards they manage to escape again due to the same merciful soldier, but Young-ae is mortally wounded and dies during the escape.

Although the movie censored the sex scenes, it still has brutal parts such as the scene “where Young-ae’s uterus was removed since she refused to take contraceptives, and one of her friends was shot when her venereal disease worsened”¹⁸. The Japanese soldiers are presented as brutal beings that commit violence upon innocent teenage girls recruited from Japanese schools in Korea or stolen from their home. Although there is one merciful Japanese soldier, this alone does not absolve the rest of the Japanese people. He is used to show that some Koreans survived due to the still-humane hearts of some individuals.

The first season of the television series *Gyeongseong Creature*, directed by Chung Dong-yoon, portrays Jang Tae-sang, the master of a famous pawn shop in Gyeongseong, during the spring of 1945, when the Japanese were controlling the Korean peninsula.

As Jang Tae-sang is developing his business in the city, he maintains a friendship with the wife of the Japanese military commander, which lands him in jail, where the Japanese Chief of Police, Commissioner Ishikawa, confronts him. The main character refuses to admit that he is having an affair with the Commissioner’s wife, so Ishikawa gives him the task of finding a missing girl, Akiko, until the sakura blossoms fall. Tae-sang enlists the help of Yoon Chae-ok, an expert in tracking people that was also looking for her own mother. During their search, the two main characters uncover the horrific experiment conducted by the Japanese army in the city hospital, which resulted in the creation of a powerful monster.

The story is based on the horrible experiments carried out by Dr. Shirō Ishii during World War II in Unit 731¹⁹, a situation that is, unfortunately, very similar to Dr. Josef Mengele, who carried terrifying experiments in the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau during the same time period. Unlike Dr. Mengele, who stated that he was trying to find cures for illnesses or was testing twins or dwarfs to see their reaction to various substances, Dr. Shirō Ishii tested biological weapons on his subjects, which usually brought the victims prolonged and agonizing deaths. Other objectives stated by Dr. Ishii include training new military surgeons and testing the human body’s tolerance to extreme situations, such as low air pressure, starvation, and electric shocks. All these experiments caused the death of 14.000 people of various Asian origins²⁰.

¹⁸ Hwalbin Kim, Claire Shinhea Lee, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military ‘Comfort Women’ and South Korean Media: The Case of Television Dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snowy Road* (2015),” in *Asian Women*, vol.33, no.3, 2017, p.95.

¹⁹ Mohedas, Sonia Dueñas, and Natalia Martínez Pérez. “La representación de la memoria histórica a través de la serie surcoreana *El monstruo de la vieja Seúl* (Netflix: 2023)” [The representation of historical memory through the South Korean series *The Monster of Old Seoul* (Netflix: 2023)], in *Brumal. Revista de investigación sobre lo Fantástico* [Brumal. Journal of Research on the Fantastic], vol. 12 no.2, 2024, pp. 238-239.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

During the action of the television series, the viewer is shown that the first testing base was in China, similar to the Unit 731 in the Harbin district, and that, due to losing control of the experiment in that region, the Japanese military had decided to destroy the base and kill all the prisoners on whom they had experimented, so that nobody could condemn the evil Japanese doctors for their terrible deeds. As the Japanese proceed to destroy the military testing site, they preserve glass tubes containing a strange substance, and they start to experiment again in the hospital of the Korean town of Gyeongseong. It is possible to infer that the creation of a powerful monster that kills the Korean prisoners indiscriminately is, in fact, an allegory for the horrible killings committed by Japanese soldiers in colonial locations. Moreover, as the creature that transforms into a monster was a Korean woman, I believe that it also symbolizes the horrific experience of the Korean “comfort” women, who were not only raped, but also frequently brutally beaten and tortured.

Usually, Japanese soldiers are portrayed in South Korean movies as aggressors. In the television series *Gyeongseong Creature*, the Japanese swords, the use of guns by the Japanese and the colonizers’ military uniforms bearing the Japanese imperial flag are symbols that “represent Japan’s brutal military power, which oppressed and massacred the Korean people”²¹. From the beginning of the series, the director integrated not just the image of the oppressors, but the sound of the guns and explosions as well, in order to make the audience feel the “horror of war and inevitable bloodshed”²² that was created by the Japanese during World War II.

In the first season of the series, the main oppressor is not Commissioner Ishikawa, but the mad military scientist Lieutenant Colonel Kato who, similarly to Dr. Shirō Ishii, wanted to create a great biological weapon for the Japanese Empire. It can be said that he was an evil man because, when the Japanese army had to abandon the Chinese military site, the only thing that mattered to the Lieutenant Colonel was the experiment, and everybody else was expendable. Furthermore, he took Korean people as prisoners and injected them with the experimental drug until he succeeded in creating a monster. Moreover, as in the case of the Nazi experiments, for the Japanese experiments, the Imperial army employed a painter to reproduce the evolution from a Korean person into a Japanese monster.

The Lieutenant Colonel is portrayed as both ruthless and calculating. When his experiment on a Korean woman succeeds, transforming her into a monster that attacks Japanese soldiers, he gives the order not to rescue the wounded men. It is implied that the monster requires human victims to survive, and the injured soldier is seen as an acceptable loss. Later, after relocating the monster to a more secure location, Officer Kato begins feeding it Korean prisoners. This suggests the negligible value placed on Korean lives by Japanese officers.

Historically, during the Japanese occupation, Koreans were treated as second-class citizens, exploited until death in many cases, including being subjected to deadly experiments involving biological weapons. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the television series, Koreans from the colonial period are symbolically portrayed as food for a Japanese-created weapon. Furthermore, the Koreans do not die only through the direct attack of the monster, but as the monster sleeps, it releases anthrax spores which infect people and give them a cruel death, similar to the one suffered by the subjects of the biological experiments conducted by the Japanese in Unit 731.

²¹ Azhari, Cristian Zamir Sierra Echeverria, Muhammad Zikrullah, “How South Korea Represents Japan as Colonization in Film”, in *Journal of Society Innovation and Development*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2025, p. 9.

²² *Ibidem*.

The Lieutenant Colonel was not the only oppressor, as a Japanese noble woman plays an important role in the oppression of the Korean people. The Japanese noble woman was the Commissioner's wife, Yukiko Maeda, a powerful woman who holds the true power in the Japanese hospital and, therefore, gives orders to officer Kato. Furthermore, she is responsible for the disappearance of Akiko, the mistress of the Police Chief, and Yoon Chae-ok's mother, both of whom became experiment subjects for Kato. Moreover, although she likes Jang, she acts cruelly and lets him come in harm's way while trying to find the mistress of her husband, despite being perfectly aware of her whereabouts.

The majority of the Koreans are portrayed as victims, or possible experiment subjects. Although some Koreans, like Kwon Jun-taek and Jang Tae-sang are offered some benefits and are viewed by the Japanese officials and army officers as influential second-hand citizens, they are still discriminated against, as they are not from the pure Japanese race. Korean collaborators had an easier time, but they would risk being punished if they crossed a line. Therefore, it is of no surprise that, despite Kwon Jun-taek's father owning the Bugang company, when his son acts irrationally in order to help his friend and it is discovered he is an anti-Japanese activist, it is very difficult for the father to help his son.

The first season of the series *Gyeongseong Creature* follows multiple storylines, such as the development of the monster, the romantic relationship between Jang and Yoon Chae-ok, and the way in which Koreans survived during the Japanese colonial period, the main theme of the series is the trauma of the Korean people under Japanese rule. The traumatic experience is recreated through scenes that illustrate how easily the disobedient Korean were incarcerated, sent to experiments sites, tortured and killed. Furthermore, the multitude of bodies necessary for the monster to be created suggests the great number of Koreans that were killed due to Japanese actions in the peninsula.

In conclusion, an increasing number of recent cinematic productions portray the tragic trajectory of Korean history from the early twentieth century onward. These narratives are conveyed either through realistic historical films that depict the suffering of Korean men in Japanese mines and the exploitation of Korean women in so-called "comfort stations", or through fictionalized historical television series, such as *Gyeongseong Creature*, which allegorically represent national trauma. The latter often employ the image of a monstrous figure, born from chemical experimentation on Korean victims, as an allusion to the atrocities committed by figures such as Dr. Shirō Ishii during Japan's Imperial rule.

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