

THE HEALING POWER OF KOREAN CINEMA

In this poster, I will present my findings in terms of how the movies *Epitaph* (2007) and *Ode to My Father* (2014) use the act of "reenactment, acceptance and forgiveness" to retell the South Korea history of Japanese occupation and Korean War. I argue that by "reenacting" scenes from the past and incorporating the ideas of "acceptance and forgiveness" into the plot, filmmakers use the fictional and imaginative cinematic space to reshape Koreans' collective memories of the past, which helps Koreans to heal from the national traumas

A STUDY ON MOVIE THERAPY, NATIONAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

This research is conducted with respect to the relationship between the potential of cinematic space, the shaping of collective memories, and the healing process from trauma, aiming at filling the research gap of how cinema achieves the effect of reshaping memories by altering historical narration

KEY TERMS

TRAUMA AND MEMORIES

National trauma as a part of undesirable yet undeniable collective memories

MEDIA REPRESENTATION

The cinematic potential in altering historical narration and providing a new version of the history to reshape memories

RAF MODEL

Reenactment-Acceptance-Forgiveness as a 3-stage process for the traumatized nation to heal

MOVIE THERAPY

(Felman and Laub 1992, 75-76)

Defined by Dori Laub's three levels of witnesses, audiences can

1. Revisit own memories of the past and activate the process of remembering
2. Participate in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event by watching the characters go through the same trauma
3. Objectively reflect on the authenticity of the history recalled by oneself and the characters to construct own version of the history to make sense of the traumatizing experiences

CHOICE OF MOVIES

Epitaph reenacts the ordinary lives of Koreans with tied interests to Japanese colonizer to alter the collective memories from Koreans are all innocent and blameless victims to that some Koreans willingly become colonized bodies sharing common interests with Japanese colonizer



Ode to My Father reenacts the life of Deok-soo, an insignificant individual to alter the collective memories from Koreans suffered in the postwar era to that Koreans lived purposeful lives as resilient people although they are reduced to money-seeking mindless subjects to provide for their families

NATIONAL TRAUMA

(Shamai 2015, 14; Caruth 1996, 62-64)

Michael Schamai

- Catastrophic event causing physical and psychological damage and pain, experienced by the nation collectively with transgenerational impacts

Cathy Caruth

- Incomprehensibility of the catastrophic event and the experience of surviving the near-death experience paralyzes the traumatized individual;
- The act of survival becomes an "endless testimony" to the trauma that one has experienced and to the impossibility of living

COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

(Bartlett 1995, 200-220; Schacter 2001, 272)

- Memories are constantly being recreated, reconstructed and reinterpreted by our present experience
- Unlike the camera record, the human brain extracts key elements from the experience and stores them, allowing us to add on feelings, beliefs and knowledge obtained after the event to constantly recreate and reconstruct memories



The alterability of memories gives space for present cinema to retell the history and reshape collective memories in a way that helps audiences in accepting and overcoming their traumatized experiences

RAF MODEL (REENACTMENT-ACCEPTANCE-FORGIVENESS)

REENACTMENT from Contemporary Art Studies

Adding in new interpretations from the present during the reenactment of a historical event to transform past narratives, to reproduce the history in a more acceptable and desirable way

ACCEPTANCE from Psychology Studies

Stop avoiding reality consciously and unconsciously and to face and accept facts that are often undesirable, namely people's shameful past or guilt, to guide the subject towards accepting one's responsibility and thereby, allowing one to achieve self-forgiveness

FORGIVENESS from Psychology Studies

Not necessarily the specific action of forgiving or the explicit dialogue of 'I forgive you'; instead, I define 'forgiveness' in these movies as reconciliation or a sense of completion - that both the characters and audience share a sense of relief or moving on

FINDINGS

EPITAPH

Reenactment:

- Horror as the movie genre uses ghostly images and recurring nightmares to vividly illustrate how characters are haunted by their trauma
- Taboo motif hints the oddity of 'naisen ittai' assimilation policy advocated by Japan, implying that interracial union is beyond the natural order and criticizes the Koreans who aligned their interests with Japanese colonizer

Acceptance & Forgiveness:

- Sensory dysfunctionality as the metaphor for the nation's wound under Koreans' wilful ignorance and denial of their responsibility for the colonial past
- Death as the resolution because of the deep-rooted extent and influence of trauma OR achieving A and F is necessary for a traumatized individual to end one's life of self-condemnation and guilt peacefully

ODE TO MY FATHER

Reenactment:

- Patriotism symbolizes the sense of rootlessness of postwar Koreans as they had little autonomy over individual life choices with only monetary incentives
- Hero-making Deok-soo reassures audiences that Koreans lived resiliently and purposefully despite their mindless nature under capital constraints and postwar hardships

Acceptance & Forgiveness:

- Deok-soo's fantasized reunion with his father inside a mirror (symbol of the threshold between conscious and subconscious mind) shows his reconciliation and liberation from his lifelong guilt after recognizing and accepting his guilt
- The ending ends the movie with an optimistic remark by suggesting that spiritual rebirth is attainable despite one's irreversible loss from trauma