

SNUAC Asia Square Brown Bag Seminar Series, Spring 2025

The Discourses of the Japanese Imperialist Iron Stake Severing the Geomantic Veins:
Motif of Decolonization and the De-Cold War as Event, Experience, and Myth

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The 2024 Korean film *Exhuma* offers a cinematic rearticulation of the “Japanese imperialist iron stake” narrative, which alleges geomantic sabotage during the colonial era. This study analyzes the film's embedded historical consciousness in light of post-1990s epistemological debates on Japanese colonialism and examines its implications for Korea-Japan relations and the construction of Korean nationalism.

Discourses asserting that Japanese imperialist iron stakes severed Korea's geomantic veins surfaced in 1980s South Korea, responding to the authoritarian suppression of efforts to confront the colonial past. In the 1990s, President Kim Young-sam's historical rectification campaign recast the iron stakes as symbols for purging Japanese imperial legacies. Narrators of the discourse wove experience, memory, and folklore into a historiography that challenged document-centered approaches and sought legitimacy through a quasi-historical movement. By 1995, the state deployed victimhood nationalism to mobilize collective memory and institutionalize the discourse as historical orthodoxy. Yet, once granted official status, the subversive traits of this movement were paradoxically reviewed as hallmarks of pseudo-history.

By examining the transnational dimensions of the Yamashita Treasure narratives across the Korean Peninsula and Southeast Asia, alongside North Korea's novel *The Iron Stake*, this study reveals contested interpretations of Japan's imperial legacy and potential trajectories of decolonization. It argues that narrow positivist historiography has misread the significance of the Iron Stake discourses, which reflect enduring struggles over decolonization and the unfinished project of de-Cold War on the Korean Peninsula.

Yun Lin is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Beijing Tsinghua University, specializing in global history and East Asian regional history. She is currently a visiting researcher at the Northeast Asia Center, Seoul National University Asia Center. Her ongoing research focuses on a comparative study of thought control in twentieth-century the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, with particular attention to issues such as (non)conversion, the Cold War, colonialism, anti-communism, and transitional justice.

Date & Time: April 29th, 2025. 12:00–13:00

Place: SNUAC Room 304 (3rd Floor)