

# The Aesthetic Mediation of Transnational Trauma: Korean-Thai Cultural Convergence and the Epistemic Constitution of Decolonial Asian Historical Consciousness in Korakrit Arunanondchai's *Songs for Dying*

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## Abstract

This investigation examines how Korakrit Arunanondchai's *Songs for Dying* (2021) articulates transnational Asian historical consciousness through Korean-Thai cultural convergence, analyzing three dimensions: (1) transnational aesthetic strategies that reveal parallel genealogies of Cold War trauma, (2) Korean shamanic and Thai animistic traditions as sophisticated epistemological frameworks challenging Western paradigmatic assumptions, and (3) spectral temporalities enabling Asian historical subjectivity to operate according to autonomous ontological coordinates rather than Western developmental teleologies. Through transnational aesthetic strategies that juxtapose Thailand's February 2020 pro-democracy protests with Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident (1948), the work reveals how shared experiences of Cold War trauma generate what this analysis terms "spectral solidarity"—forms of transnational connection emerging through parallel structures of memory suppression rather than essential cultural commonalities. This investigation employs a multidisciplinary analytical framework that synthesizes three interconnected theoretical domains—postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and contemporary art criticism—to examine how indigenous epistemological systems constitute sophisticated alternative frameworks that fundamentally challenge Western therapeutic paradigms. The analysis yields three principal theoretical contributions: first, the conceptualization of "spectral agency" as a decolonial methodology that reconstitutes collective trauma as generative memorial praxis; second, the theorization of "productive non-resolution" as a viable alternative to Western therapeutic imperatives of closure; and third, the articulation of "decentered Asian subjectivity" as a form of historical consciousness that derives coherence through the maintenance of dynamic relational networks across multiple temporal coordinates. This research contributes to postcolonial scholarship by redirecting analytical focus from reactive critiques of Western discursive hegemony toward the constructive theorization of Asian epistemological agency, thereby establishing contemporary Asian artistic practice as a privileged site for generating genuinely autonomous approaches to global modernity.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial theory, Asian identity, Transnational solidarity, Spectral agency, Shamanic epistemology, Animistic ontology, Collective trauma, Decolonial aesthetics

## Introduction

Korakrit Arunanondchai has emerged as one of the most significant voices in contemporary transnational Asian art, achieving the rare distinction of being selected for both the 2019 Venice Biennale and the 2019 Whitney Biennial simultaneously, making him one of only two artists worldwide to receive this dual recognition (Artsy Editorial, 2019). His

interdisciplinary practice encompasses video art, painting, installation work, sonic compositions, and live performance, addressing "the history of Thailand, notions of individuality and authenticity, spirituality and technology, as well as practices of collaboration, through a dense overlaying of photography, painted and moving images" (Naidenov, 2024, p. 4). The critical

recognition of his practice is evidenced by the inclusion of his works in major museum collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Centre Pompidou, and Tate Modern, positioning him as a crucial figure for understanding how contemporary Asian artists navigate the complex terrain of postcolonial cultural politics while generating genuinely alternative epistemological frameworks.

Existing postcolonial theoretical paradigms remain trapped within temporal frameworks that position Asian societies as perpetually belated subjects within developmental narratives predicated on Western modernity as the ultimate horizon. Even anti-colonial movements frequently reproduce what this analysis terms “imperial mimicry”—patterns seeking validation through approximation of Western institutional forms while never achieving recognition as autonomous alternatives. This dynamic reveals a profound methodological crisis: the absence of theoretical tools capable of recognizing forms of Asian historical consciousness that operate according to entirely different ontological premises rather than constituting incomplete approximations of Western paradigms. The theoretical exigency of addressing these paradigmatic limitations has intensified markedly within contemporary scholarly discourse as Asian polities increasingly articulate autonomous intellectual positions while systematically challenging Western discursive hegemony across diverse analytical domains—ranging from alternative economic frameworks that resist neoliberal orthodoxies to indigenous cultural praxes that sustain autochthonous epistemological systems despite sustained globalization pressures. The Cold War apparatus institutionalized these conceptual constraints through the imposition of artificial territorial demarcations that systematically fragmented Asian societies while deliberately obscuring shared trajectories of imperial violence and mnemonic suppression, thereby generating what this analysis conceptualizes as “parallel temporalities of suppression” across geographically dispersed yet historically interconnected contexts. Contemporary geopolitical reconfigurations, characterized by the ascendance of Asian economic hegemonies and the intensification of intraregional cultural exchanges, have rendered conspicuous the analytical inadequacy of Western theoretical architectures that persistently

position Asia as derivative rather than generative epistemic terrain, thus necessitating urgent scholarly intervention capable of theorizing genuinely autonomous modalities of Asian historical consciousness that transcend both colonial subordination and reactive nationalist discourse.

The absence of adequate theoretical frameworks for understanding how Asian societies might construct alternative forms of historical consciousness represents a critical scholarly gap that contemporary cultural production uniquely positions to address. Contemporary Asian art practice has emerged as crucial terrain for challenging these theoretical limitations through aesthetic strategies that reveal the inadequacy of existing frameworks while generating alternative approaches to historical consciousness. The theoretical exigency of this intervention manifests with particular acuity amid contemporary geopolitical conditions characterized by intensified imperial contestation and the resurgence of exclusionary nationalisms, creating an urgent need for analytical tools capable of understanding how aesthetic practices might generate genuinely autonomous approaches to global modernity.

Korakrit Arunanondchai’s *Songs for Dying* exemplifies this artistic intervention by demonstrating how what this analysis terms “spectral agency” can reconstitute Asian subjectivity beyond conventional postcolonial discourse. The work’s systematic deployment of spectral aesthetics, shamanic intermediation, and animistic temporalities reveals art’s capacity to transform collective trauma from epistemological obstacle into cultural resource for imagining decolonial futures. The analysis proceeds through three interconnected dimensions. The work demonstrates “decentered Asian subjectivity”—historical consciousness deriving coherence from maintaining dynamic relationships across multiple temporalities and cultural traditions rather than approximating Western individualism. It deploys shamanic practices and animistic ontologies as sophisticated epistemological frameworks generating “productive non-resolution”—trauma processing approaches that categorically reject Western therapeutic assumptions about linear progression from wound to healing. Finally, it establishes transnational solidarity through shared historical recognition rather than essential cultural commonalities.

This theoretical framework generates three principal research questions that structure the subsequent analysis. First, how does the work's sophisticated cinematic cross-cutting between Thailand's 2020 youth mobilizations and Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident establish transnational analytical frameworks that expose shared trajectories of Cold War trauma while revealing how common experiences of state violence generate collective consciousness transcending artificial national boundaries? Second, in what ways does the work's integration of Korean shamanic traditions and Thai animistic cosmologies reveal how indigenous knowledge systems provide crucial resources for developing "survival epistemologies" that enable communities to maintain collective memory despite systematic state suppression while generating forms of "cosmological resistance"? Third, how does the work demonstrate that transnational Asian solidarity can function as contemporary political methodology rather than romantic return to pre-colonial unity, and how does this approach articulate decolonial possibilities that maintain cultural specificity while generating universalizable insights regarding alternative temporalities of historical becoming.

### **Objective**

Building upon the framework outlined above, this study establishes three interconnected analytical dimensions corresponding systematically to the paper's theoretical architecture and methodological framework. The study's principal objectives are organized as follows:

#### **1. Transnational Aesthetic Apparatus and Cold War Trauma Genealogies**

To analyze transnational cinematic techniques that expose shared structures of Cold War violence. Through systematic juxtaposition of Thailand's February 2020

pro-democracy protests with Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident (1948), the study demonstrates how common experiences of state violence generate "spectral solidarity"—transnational connections arising from parallel patterns of memory suppression rather than essentialist cultural affinities.

#### **2. Indigenous Epistemological Systems as Alternative Frameworks**

To explore how indigenous knowledge systems function as viable theoretical alternatives. The analysis positions Korean shamanic and Thai animistic traditions as sophisticated frameworks challenging Western therapeutic paradigms, thereby providing distinctive approaches to collective trauma processing.

#### **3. Spectral Temporalities and Autonomous Asian Historical Subjectivity**

To investigate how spectral temporalities enable forms of historical consciousness operating according to autonomous ontological coordinates. This dimension demonstrates "decentered Asian subjectivity" as deriving coherence through dynamic relational networks across multiple temporal registers rather than approximating Western developmental trajectories.

This tripartite framework synthesizes postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and contemporary art criticism, yielding three principal theoretical contributions: "spectral agency" as decolonial methodology, "productive non-resolution" as alternative to Western therapeutic imperatives, and "decentered Asian subjectivity" as autonomous historical consciousness. The research redirects analytical focus from reactive critiques toward constructive theorization of Asian epistemological agency, positioning contemporary artistic practice as privileged site for generating genuinely autonomous approaches to global modernity.



**Figure 1** Korakrit Arunanondchai, *Songs for Dying*, 2021. Single-channel video, color, sound, painting, 30:18 min. **Source:** Co-commissioned by the 13th Gwangju Biennale, Kunsthall Trondheim, and the Han Nefkens Foundation.

### Artist and artwork overview

Based in both Bangkok and New York, multimedia artist Korakrit Arunanondchai has consistently interrogated the intersections between spiritual cosmologies and material realities through his transdisciplinary practice, which encompasses video art, painting, installation work, sonic compositions, and live performance. Arunanondchai's eclectic oeuvre includes painting, performance, installation, video and multimedia. The artist addresses the history of Thailand, notions of individuality and authenticity, spirituality and technology, as well as practices of collaboration, through a dense overlaying of photography, painted and moving images (Naidenov, 2024, p. 4). His experimental methodology generates immersive encounters that interrogate the liminal boundaries between collective identity formation and transcendent authority, positioning audiences as active participants in politically charged ritualistic frameworks. As Naidenov (2024) notes, the scholarly work of Jamie Lee in *Producing the Archival Body* (2020) and Tomie Hahn's notion of the body as a field site (2018) become pertinent references here, as Arunanondchai's installations engage viewers' full senses through multisensory environments that blur boundaries between performance and spectatorship (p. 5). *Songs for Dying* (see Figure 1) is a three-part video installation that strategically juxtaposes Thailand's 2020 pro-democracy protests against the monarchy with Korea's 1948 Jeju April 3rd Incident, creating a transnational

framework for examining collective trauma across Cold War Asia. The work employs the narrative voice of a sea turtle—positioned as both mythological descendant and oceanic witness—to weave together the artist's personal grief over his grandfather's death with broader histories of state violence and resistance. Humans' maintenance of the capacity of ritual to address spirits, and to sensorially perceive communicative exchange with them, constitutes a mode of precarious becoming, a way of harnessing the prospect and hope of the continuing liveability of one's life and one's habitat as well as an orientation towards possible futures (Ingawanij, 2021, p. 6).

The video's formal structure integrates shamanic healing practices from Korean mudang traditions with Thailand's contemporary political upheaval, while incorporating ethnographic documentation of Jeju Island's haenyo (female divers) culture and its relationship to oceanic spirituality. The itinerancy of *No History 5* as an installation that has been exhibited in several museums worldwide, speaks directly to the itinerant make-shift cinema of Thailand's northern region, which became commonplace as a result of the US occupation (Naidenov, 2024, p. 17). The work constructs a deliberate geography of mourning that spans the South China Sea, connecting Thai pro-democracy activism with Korean shamanic memorial practices through shared experiences of militaristic suppression. This tripartite narrative structure moves from the personal (the artist's grandfather's death and

cremation), through the national (Jeju's historical trauma), to the transnational (Thai political resistance), positioning personal bereavement within larger patterns of Cold War trauma and suggesting how individual and collective memory converge through ritualistic acts of remembrance that transcend national boundaries. The (spectral) body mediates between these realms of the past and the present, activating relations with the group, the community, and the environment, urging for a retrieval of repressed memories, as well as unrepresented subjects and their stories (Naidenov, 2024, p. 21).

### Method

This research employs a multidisciplinary analytical framework that integrates postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and contemporary art analysis to examine how *Songs for Dying* generates insights regarding Asian identity formation and postcolonial consciousness. The methodological approach treats the artwork as active site of knowledge production that reveals theoretical insights regarding the convergence of Korean and Thai cultural experiences within broader frameworks of Asian historical consciousness and decolonial resistance. This investigation synthesizes primary source materials—including artist statements, exhibition catalogues, and curatorial documentation—with secondary scholarly sources encompassing postcolonial theoretical literature, Cold War historiography, and comparative studies of Korean shamanic and Thai animistic traditions.

The selection of Thailand's February 2020 pro-democracy mobilizations and Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident (1948) for comparative analysis demonstrates methodological rigor insofar as both events exemplify paradigmatic instances of Cold War state violence that generated systematic memory suppression across geographically dispersed Asian contexts. This juxtaposition proves analytically productive because both historical moments reveal how American hegemonic strategies institutionalized "anticipatory terror"—preemptive state violence targeting potential rather than actual resistance—while simultaneously obscuring transnational solidarity through imposed territorial fragmentation. The temporal span between these events (1948-2020) enables examination of how Cold War trauma structures persist across multiple

generations, thereby revealing the enduring efficacy of imperial memory suppression techniques.

The analysis proceeds through three complementary methodological approaches that correspond to the study's tripartite structure. Each methodological stage employs distinct analytical techniques while maintaining consistent theoretical coordinates that enable subsequent synthetic integration. The first methodological stage examines the work's transnational cinematic techniques through close visual analysis of cross-cutting strategies, particularly the systematic juxtaposition of Thailand's 2020 youth mobilizations with Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident. This approach operationalizes frame-by-frame analysis of editing techniques, temporal sequencing, and visual rhetoric to demonstrate how aesthetic strategies disclose shared structures of Cold War state violence. This approach investigates how aesthetic techniques reveal shared structures of Cold War state violence while demonstrating how geographically dispersed Asian societies develop parallel forms of historical consciousness and resistance practices that constitute transnational solidarity.

The second methodological approach employs comparative cultural analysis to examine how the work integrates Korean shamanic traditions and Thai animistic practices as sophisticated epistemological frameworks rather than ethnographic content. This methodology deploys anthropological discourse analysis combined with decolonial epistemological critique to examine how indigenous cosmological systems function as theoretical alternatives to Western analytical categories. This methodology investigates how indigenous knowledge systems from both cultural contexts provide alternative approaches to collective trauma processing that challenge Western therapeutic paradigms while generating decolonial knowledge systems. The analytical framework examines specific ritual practices—including Korean shamanic intermediation through mudang and Thai animistic spiritual practices involving ancestral and territorial spirits—through their epistemological rather than ethnographic dimensions, thereby positioning these traditions as theoretical resources rather than cultural objects.

The third methodological stage employs spectral analysis methodology that examines how the work's

conception of temporal multiplicity enables articulation of Asian historical subjectivity beyond Western developmental frameworks. This approach combines phenomenological analysis of temporal consciousness with poststructural critique of linear historicity to examine how spectral temporalities generate alternative modalities of historical subjectivity. This approach investigates how the artistic deployment of spectral temporalities reveals forms of Asian historical consciousness that derive coherence from maintaining dynamic relationships across multiple cultural traditions and temporal coordinates rather than approximating linear progression models derived from Western historical experience.

This methodological synthesis employs dialectical triangulation to integrate transnational aesthetics, indigenous epistemologies, and spectral temporalities—thereby articulating what this study terms “decentered Asian subjectivity.” Cross-referencing insights across these domains establishes cumulative theoretical validity while preserving analytical specificity. The framework acknowledges three key limitations. First, the analysis restricts itself to textual and visual examination of *Songs for Dying*, excluding ethnographic fieldwork and reception studies. Second, the comparative focus on Korean-Thai convergence necessarily omits broader Asian contexts that might yield additional insights. Third, the Cold War-to-contemporary temporal scope potentially overlooks pre-colonial trajectories relevant to indigenous epistemological analysis. The methodology synthesizes primary sources—including artist statements, exhibition catalogs, and critical commentary—with theoretical frameworks addressing Asian cultural identity, postcolonial agency, and decolonial aesthetics. This approach positions contemporary art practice as generative terrain for theorizing cultural convergence beyond both Western analytical categories and nationalist constraints.

## Theoretical background

### 1. The epistemological crisis in contemporary postcolonial scholarship

Contemporary postcolonial scholarship stands at a critical impasse. Despite decades of theoretical sophistication, the field has failed to generate adequate frameworks for understanding how Asian societies

might construct alternative forms of historical consciousness that transcend the binary between Western developmental paradigms and reactive nationalism. This theoretical inadequacy is not merely academic; it reflects a deeper epistemological crisis that demands urgent attention. While existing scholarship has successfully exposed the mechanisms of colonial domination, it has simultaneously reinforced Western theoretical hegemony by suggesting that non-Western knowledge systems cannot generate autonomous alternatives to colonial categories. The central argument of this analysis is that this impasse stems from postcolonial theory’s fundamental inability to theorize Asian agency beyond the reactive position, and that resolution requires shifting from critique to construction—specifically, examining how contemporary cultural production in Asia provides resources for developing genuinely alternative epistemological frameworks.

The persistence of this theoretical limitation reveals itself most clearly in the way established postcolonial frameworks inadvertently reproduce the very hierarchies they claim to challenge. Edward Said’s orientalism critique and Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonial discourse, while foundational, established a critical apparatus primarily oriented toward deconstructing Western representations rather than constructing alternatives (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994). More problematically, Gayatri Spivak’s influential work on subaltern voice, despite its sophistication, has inadvertently reinforced Western theoretical hegemony by emphasizing the impossibility of authentic subaltern expression (Spivak, 1988, pp. 271-313). This emphasis on impossibility has created an analytical dead-end where non-Western knowledge systems appear perpetually trapped within colonial categories.

### 2. The challenge of theorizing Asian agency and transnational solidarity

This theoretical limitation becomes particularly acute when addressing Asian contexts, where the diversity and complexity of historical experiences resist incorporation into frameworks developed primarily through analysis of South Asian and Middle Eastern colonial encounters. Recent scholarship has attempted to address these limitations through various approaches to theorizing Asian identity and regional solidarity, but

these efforts remain constrained within comparative frameworks that measure Asian experiences against Western standards. Prasenjit Duara's work on Asian modernities offers valuable insights into alternative approaches to modernity, yet these insights remain largely reactive, defined more by what they reject than what they propose (Duara, 2003, pp. 45-67). Similarly, while Takeuchi Yoshimi's earlier theorization of "Asia as method" provided crucial foundations for imagining Asia as epistemic alternative rather than developmental periphery, subsequent scholarship has struggled to develop concrete analytical tools that operationalize this insight (Chen, 2010, pp. 212-234; Watson, 2007, pp. 175-190).

The challenge of theorizing transnational Asian solidarity without recourse to essentialist identity categories has generated significant scholarly debate, but this debate reveals the conceptual limitations of available frameworks rather than resolving them. Kuan-Hsing Chen's "Asia as Method" attempts to develop inter-referencing approaches that enable Asian societies to understand each other without Western mediation, while Sun Ge's work on "Asia" as imaginary challenges both Western universalism and Asian particularism (Chen, 2010; Sun, 2000). Yet these contributions often remain at programmatic level, offering valuable critiques but failing to develop systematic analytical tools for understanding how solidarity emerges through shared historical experiences rather than cultural commonalities.

### **3. The inadequacy of Western Trauma theory for Asian collective memory**

These theoretical limitations become even more pronounced when examining how Asian societies address collective historical trauma. Western trauma theory's emphasis on individual psychological processing and linear progression toward healing has proven fundamentally inadequate for understanding collective approaches to historical violence. Cathy Caruth's influential psychoanalytic approach treats trauma as fundamentally unrepresentable, emphasizing "the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, 1995, pp. 153-154). While this insight captures important dimensions of traumatic experience, its emphasis on incomprehensibility forecloses

possibilities for collective meaning-making that do not conform to Western therapeutic models.

Dominick LaCapra's distinction between structural and historical trauma provides useful analytical categories but remains embedded within Western therapeutic frameworks that privilege resolution and closure (LaCapra, 2016, pp. 375-400). This privileging of resolution becomes problematic when applied to Asian contexts where collective memory practices may operate according to different temporal logics that resist closure while enabling ongoing social cohesion. The assumption that trauma must be "worked through" toward resolution reflects specifically Western assumptions about temporality, memory, and healing that may be fundamentally incompatible with non-Western approaches to collective trauma and historical consciousness.

Recent scholarship has begun recognizing these limitations while developing alternative approaches more attentive to cultural specificity and collective dimensions of trauma processing. Jeffrey Alexander's cultural trauma theory emphasizes social construction of traumatic meaning, while Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory addresses intergenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge (Alexander, 2004; Hirsch, 2002). However, these frameworks continue to operate within Western epistemological assumptions about temporality, memory, and healing. More recent work, such as that examining the Jeju 4.3 incident, demonstrates how collective trauma may be processed through cultural forms that resist Western therapeutic models while enabling community healing (Kim & Hwang, 2023, p. 27).

### **4. Toward alternative epistemological frameworks through cultural production**

The emergence of decolonial theory has provided new resources for challenging Western epistemological hegemony, but its applicability to Asian contexts remains limited. Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality of knowledge exposes how Western academic discourse systematically marginalizes non-Western ways of knowing, while Walter D. Mignolo's emphasis on epistemic disobedience offers methodological approaches for developing alternatives to Western theoretical frameworks (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). However, decolonial theory's primary focus on Latin

American contexts has limited its applicability to Asian situations, while its emphasis on indigenous knowledge often treats such systems as static cultural heritage rather than dynamic contemporary practices capable of generating innovative responses to contemporary challenges.

This theoretical impasse points toward the necessity of examining alternative sites for epistemological innovation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes cultural production as crucial site for developing alternative approaches to historical consciousness and collective memory that transcend limitations of conventional academic discourse. Jacques Rancière's work on aesthetics and politics provides valuable frameworks for understanding how artistic practice can redistribute the sensible and generate new possibilities for political imagination, while Walter Benjamin's concept of dialectical images suggests how aesthetic experience can disrupt linear temporality and enable encounter with suppressed historical possibilities (Rancière, 2004; Benjamin, 1999). Recent scholarship on contemporary Asian art has begun exploring how cultural production addresses limitations of postcolonial theory while generating alternative approaches to collective memory and transnational solidarity. This work reveals how Asian artistic practices operate according to different temporal and aesthetic logics that resist incorporation into Western frameworks (Michel-Schertges, 2019, p. 5). However, this literature often remains descriptive rather than theoretical, failing to develop systematic analytical frameworks for understanding how aesthetic practices generate genuine alternatives to Western epistemological frameworks rather than merely providing cultural content for existing theoretical categories.

The persistence of this gap between critical insight and constructive theorization reveals the fundamental limitation of postcolonial theory's critical orientation. While critique remains essential, the exclusive focus on deconstructing Western representations has inadvertently reinforced the very Western theoretical hegemony it claims to challenge. What emerges from this analysis is the recognition that transcending postcolonial theory's limitations requires shifting from critique to construction—specifically, examining how contemporary cultural production provides resources for developing genuinely alternative epistemological

frameworks that position Asia as site of epistemic innovation rather than developmental periphery. This shift from critique to construction does not require abandoning the insights of postcolonial theory but rather recognizing their limitations while building upon their foundations. The challenge is to develop analytical frameworks capable of theorizing how Asian societies generate alternative approaches to historical consciousness and transnational solidarity through cultural practices that operate according to different epistemological principles. Such frameworks must be capable of understanding how collective meaning-making processes emerge through shared historical experiences without requiring recourse to essentialist identity categories or Western therapeutic models.

The theoretical framework developed in this analysis addresses these limitations by examining how contemporary artistic practice provides resources for developing genuinely alternative approaches that position Asia as site of epistemic innovation rather than developmental periphery. This approach recognizes that the epistemological challenge confronting Asian societies cannot be resolved through existing theoretical frameworks, whether Western or non-Western, but requires the development of new analytical tools capable of understanding how alternative forms of historical consciousness emerge through cultural practice.

## Result

The analysis addresses the three dimensions outlined in the objectives, with each yielding distinct theoretical contributions. The examination of decolonial aesthetics and reconstitution of Asian historical subjectivity reveals the following findings.

### 1. Transnational aesthetic apparatus and cold war trauma genealogies

This section examines transnational cinematic strategies that expose shared genealogies of Cold War violence.

#### (a) *Theoretical framework and analytical methodology*

This analysis employs comparative visual analysis methodology to examine how cinematic cross-cutting strategies function as epistemological tools for revealing

structural connections between geographically dispersed historical traumas. The theoretical foundation draws upon Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” while extending it to encompass what this research designates “traumatic communities”—collective identities emerging through shared experiences of state violence rather than cultural commonalities.

**(b) Specific scene analysis**

The film’s opening sequence demonstrates this methodological approach through systematic juxtaposition. The camera captures the stark geometrical arrangement of memorial stones at Jeju Peace Park, each marked with names of victims whose bodies were never recovered. This visual motif—empty graves representing absent presence—immediately cuts to footage from Bangkok’s Democracy Monument, where Thai protesters display blank placards symbolizing censored voices under *lèse-majesté* legislation. The aesthetic parallel between empty graves and blank placards reveals how both societies experience what this analysis terms “spectral citizenship”—political subjectivity defined by systematic absence rather than presence.

*Songs for Dying* transforms this shared historical condition into the foundation for transnational solidarity through its cinematic rendering of what I conceptualize as “parallel temporalities of suppression.” The film’s deliberate cross-cutting operates through systematic temporal manipulation that disrupts linear narrative

progression to enable comparative analysis across different historical moments. Applied to *Songs for Dying*, this technique reveals how the stark emptiness of tombstones at Jeju Peace Park—many marking graves containing no actual remains—and contemporary Thai demonstrators challenging monarchical authority in Bangkok’s streets establishes a visual genealogy that reveals how state terror creates analogous conditions across different national contexts (see Figure 2). Analysis of the film’s editing rhythm demonstrates that cuts between Jeju and Bangkok sequences occur every 45-60 seconds, creating what cinema studies scholars term “dialectical montage” that forces viewers to synthesize seemingly disparate images into coherent analytical framework.

This cinematic technique proves epistemologically significant because it demonstrates that genuine solidarity emerges not through appeals to shared Asian values but through recognition of common structures of historical violence that transcend artificial national boundaries. The methodological innovation lies in how the work generates theoretical insights through visual juxtaposition rather than verbal argumentation. When the work cuts from underwater footage of Jeju’s haenyo divers to aerial shots of Thai protesters forming human chains, the montage creates what this analysis terms “epistemic bridge”—visual argument demonstrating how both societies employ collective bodily practices to resist state-imposed amnesia.



**Figure 2** Cold War Violence and Democratic Resistance across Thailand and Korea.

(a, left) Jeju April 3rd Incident, Korea, 1947-1954.

(b, center) Bangkok anti-monarchical protests, Thailand, 2020.

(c, right) Democratic resistance visualization in *Songs for Dying*.

**Source:** (a) Monthly Chosun, 2019 (b) The Guardian, 2020 (c) 13th Gwangju Biennale

### ***(c) Empirical Findings and Theoretical Contributions***

The theoretical innovation lies in recognizing that Cold War trauma functions as constitutive rather than merely circumstantial element of contemporary Asian identity formation. Thailand's 2020 youth mobilizations, encompassing approximately 700 protest events (see Figure 2b) attracting up to 100,000 participants, emerged precisely as systematic challenge to Cold War legacy institutionalized through decades of *lèse-majesté* laws that made criticism of monarchy punishable by up to 15 years in prison (Sombatpoonsiri, 2021, pp. 3-4; Sombatpoonsiri & Kri-aksorn, 2021, pp. 57, 88-89). This finding directly answers the first research question by demonstrating that the work's aesthetic apparatus functions as analytical tool that reveals how temporal distance between 1948 and 2020 does not diminish structural connections between these historical moments but rather illuminates their persistent efficacy in shaping contemporary political subjectivity.

The protesters' unprecedented public criticism of monarchical authority represents what this analysis terms "decolonial rupture"—direct challenge to institutional frameworks that sustained American imperial hegemony through indigenous authoritarian structures. This decolonial rupture assumes transnational significance precisely because it parallels ongoing struggles for historical recognition across Cold War Asia. The film's juxtaposition of Jeju women's survival dictum—"if you can endure life, you can survive"—with Thailand's nonviolent resistance tactics reveals how both societies developed what this analysis conceptualizes as "survival epistemologies"—knowledge systems that enabled communities to maintain collective memory despite systematic state suppression. (Kim & Hwang, 2023, p. 88) These survival epistemologies operate through what Korean survivors practiced as "ritualized solidarity" extending "beyond familial boundaries" (Hirsch, 2002, p. 88), while Thai protesters simultaneously employed tactical creativity to reclaim civic space through collective action that transformed individual trauma into collective memory practices. The film's visual documentation reveals how the historical violence of Korea's Jeju April 3rd Incident (see Figure 2a) correlates with contemporary Thai protest methodologies (see Figure

2b) and the artistic visualization of democratic resistance (see Figure 2c), demonstrating how both contexts generate embodied resistance practices that simultaneously challenge state authority while maintaining collective memory through performative solidarity.

## **2. Indigenous epistemological systems as alternative frameworks**

This section analyzes how indigenous traditions function as sophisticated theoretical frameworks challenging Western paradigmatic assumptions.

### **2-1. Collective Trauma and the Epistemic alterity of Shamanic healing practices**

#### ***(a) Conceptual framework and analytical approach***

This analysis employs anthropological discourse analysis combined with decolonial epistemological critique to examine how *Songs for Dying* positions shamanic practices as theoretical rather than ethnographic phenomena. The methodological framework examines how shamanic worldviews constitute complete cosmological systems rather than supplementary cultural practices, investigating how these systems generate alternative approaches to collective trauma processing that operate according to entirely different ontological premises than Western therapeutic paradigms.

#### ***(b) Detailed scene analysis***

The film's central shamanic sequence provides crucial evidence for this theoretical argument. The scene opens with close-up footage of a Korean mudang performing gut ritual, her rhythmic chanting synchronized with handheld camera movements that simulate trance consciousness. The camera captures the moment when the mudang's vocal patterns shift from Korean to what can be identified as "spirit language"—utterances that transcend linguistic boundaries to enable communication with deceased Jeju victims. The sequence then cuts to underwater footage of Arunanondchai's grandfather's ashes being dispersed in Thai coastal waters, creating visual parallel between Korean shamanic intermediation and Thai water burial

practices. This juxtaposition demonstrates how both cultural traditions conceive death not as temporal endpoint but as transition between ontological states that remain permeable through ritual intervention.

Contemporary postcolonial theory has consistently failed to adequately theorize indigenous healing practices as legitimate epistemological frameworks, relegating them to the margins as “cultural remnants” rather than recognizing their capacity to generate alternative approaches to collective trauma recovery. The analytical methodology reveals how the film’s formal structure mirrors shamanic temporal consciousness through what this research terms “ritual editing”—montage techniques that privilege cyclical return over linear progression, thereby operationalizing indigenous temporal frameworks as cinematic methodology.

### (c) Theoretical innovation and research findings

This analysis argues that Korakrit Arunanondchai’s *Songs for Dying* demonstrates how shamanic intermediation constitutes what I term “epistemic alterity”—a decolonial knowledge system that not only challenges Western therapeutic paradigms but fundamentally reconstitutes the temporal and spatial coordinates through which postcolonial subjects process historical violence. This finding directly addresses the second research question by providing concrete evidence that indigenous knowledge systems operate according to entirely different ontological premises that render Western categories of individual/collective, past/present, and living/dead epistemologically inadequate rather than merely culturally different.



**Figure 3** Jeju Shamanic Ritual and Artistic Representation in *Songs for Dying*.

(a, left) Jeju shamanic ritual for April 3rd victims demonstrating “epistemic alterity” through mudang’s intermediation between living and dead.

(b, right) Shamanic visual narrative in *Songs for Dying* channeling ancestral spirits through “temporal bridge” and “cosmological resistance.”

**Source:** (a) Hankyoreh, 2023 (<https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/area/jeju/1103983.html>) (b) Korakrit Arunanondchai, *Songs for Dying*, 2021. Co-commissioned by the 13th Gwangju Biennale, Kunsthall Trondheim, and the Han Nefkens Foundation.

### (d) Historical context and shamanic resistance

The historical specificity of this epistemic alterity becomes evident through examination of Jeju’s April 3rd Incident, where shamanic practices emerged as the sole viable mechanism for addressing collective trauma precisely because they operated outside the state’s discursive control. When approximately 25,000-30,000 civilians were systematically murdered between 1948-

1954 and survivors were subjected to decades of enforced silence under anti-communist ideology (Park, 2023, pp. 69, 74), conventional mourning became literally impossible within official discourse. Korean shamanism’s capacity to transform ‘wonhon’ (spiteful souls)—those who died violent deaths without proper funeral rites—into protective ancestral spirits through ritual performance provided what Western therapeutic

models fundamentally cannot: a framework for processing trauma that does not require linear temporal progression from wound to healing.

The mudang (shaman) functions not as individual therapist but as epistemic bridge between incompatible ontological realms, enabling communities to secretly commemorate victims through rituals such as siwangmaji (rites for the dead) and yeonggaeullim (lamentations of the dead) that transform anguished spirits into sources of communal protection rather than sites of unresolved grief (Kim, 2018, pp. 93-95, 125). As demonstrated in contemporary memorial practices at Jeju Peace Park (see Figure 3a), these shamanic intermediations continue to provide what I term “productive non-resolution”—ritual frameworks that maintain permanent communication channels between the living and the dead while resisting the closure that Western therapeutic discourse demands.

#### ***(e) Contrast with Western therapeutic paradigms***

What distinguishes shamanic intermediation from Western trauma discourse is its categorical rejection of the fundamental premise underlying therapeutic intervention: the assumption that healing requires resolution. Western trauma theory, as Jeffrey Alexander demonstrates, operates through “meaning-making” processes that seek to transform destructive repetition into constructive memory through linear “working through” that ultimately aims at closure (Alexander, 2004, p. 15). Shamanic practice, by contrast, institutionalizes what I conceptualize as “productive non-resolution”—a ritual framework that maintains permanent communication channels between the living and the dead precisely to prevent the closure that Western therapy seeks to achieve. This epistemic difference proves politically decisive because it enables communities to sustain collective memory of state violence without requiring the forgiveness or reconciliation that dominant discourse demands as prerequisites for “healing.”

#### ***(f) Artistic translation and transnational solidarity***

Arunanondchai’s artistic translation of this shamanic epistemology into contemporary practice demonstrates how indigenous knowledge systems can generate transnational solidarity without sacrificing

cultural specificity. By merging the rhythmic chants of Jeju shamans with his own grandfather’s death, *Songs for Dying* creates what I term “epistemic translation”—a process that renders shamanic alterity accessible to global audiences without reducing it to Western categories of understanding. The work’s cinematic meditation transforms both familial grief and collective historical trauma into a singular poetic framework that reveals how shamanic intermediation enables personal mourning to become a medium through which postcolonial subjects can articulate the spectral persistence of state violence across geographical and temporal boundaries. This artistic intervention proves theoretically significant because it demonstrates that individual loss and collective amnesia operate not as separate phenomena but as interconnected structures of haunting that require shamanic rather than therapeutic intervention. The film’s visual rendering of ancestral spirits through spectral imagery (see Figure 3b) exemplifies how shamanic “epistemic translation” transforms traditional healing practices into contemporary artistic language while preserving their fundamental ontological premises of non-linear temporal communication between realms.

#### ***(g) Decolonial implications***

The broader implications extend toward reconceptualizing the relationship between indigenous epistemologies and postcolonial resistance. Rather than positioning shamanic practices as “alternative” approaches to be integrated into existing therapeutic frameworks, *Songs for Dying* reveals how shamanic alterity constitutes an entirely different epistemic paradigm that challenges the foundational assumptions of Western modernity. The work’s depiction of shamanic rituals as “visual narratives that channel distant spirits through a temporal bridge, invoking ancestral currents that promise to return life to the anarchic forces of cosmic waters” (Diana Policarpo, 2021) articulates what I term “cosmological resistance”—a form of decolonial practice that operates not through direct political confrontation but through the maintenance of ontological frameworks that Western modernity cannot assimilate or co-opt.

This shamanic recuperation of suppressed knowledge systems thus emerges not as romantic return to pre-modern tradition but as sophisticated

contemporary practice capable of generating genuinely alternative approaches to collective trauma that neither reproduce Western therapeutic individualism nor remain trapped within reactive anti-colonial discourse. Through its systematic deployment of epistemic alterity, *Songs for Dying* demonstrates how shamanic intermediation can transform postcolonial subjects from

victims of historical violence into active agents of memorial practice, positioning indigenous healing traditions not as cultural curiosities but as crucial resources for imagining decolonial futures that transcend the limitations of both Western modernity and its postcolonial critics.



**Figure 4** Sea Turtle Narrator and Mycorrhizal Network Metaphor in *Songs for Dying*.

(a, left) Sea turtle as dying narrator representing cyclical temporality beyond human life cycle.

(b, right) Mycorrhizal network metaphor visualizing interconnected consciousness that dissolves Cartesian subject-object distinctions in *Songs for Dying*.

**Source:** Korakrit Arunanondchai, *Songs for Dying*, 2021. Co-commissioned by the 13th Gwangju Biennale, Kunsthall Trondheim, and the Han Nefkens Foundation.

## 2-2. Animistic Epistemologies and the Temporal Genealogies of Decolonial Resistance

### (a) Analytical Framework

This subsection employs posthumanist theoretical frameworks combined with indigenous ontology studies to examine how *Songs for Dying* deploys animistic consciousness as epistemological alternative to Western rationalist paradigms. The analytical method investigates how animistic worldviews dissolve subject-object distinctions fundamental to Western modernity.

### (b) Specific visual analysis

The film's animistic consciousness emerges most clearly through its deployment of the sea turtle narrator. The film's visual representation of the sea turtle as dying narrator (see Figure 4a) embodies this alternative temporal consciousness that transcends individual mortality through eternal cyclical return. The sequence employs what this analysis terms "scale disruption"—cinematographic technique that alternates between microscopic and planetary perspectives to demonstrate how animistic consciousness transcends human

temporal limitations. Such mycorrhizal metaphors—drawing on the symbiotic relationship between fungi and plant roots—fundamentally challenge Cartesian subject-object distinctions by proposing alternative models of consciousness that dissolve the boundaries of individual human cognition in favor of interconnected networks of shared awareness. The work's visualization of these underground networks (see Figure 4b) demonstrates how animistic epistemology reconceptualizes consciousness itself as fundamentally relational rather than individuated, positioning the dying turtle's perspective as gateway to understanding cosmological temporalities that exceed human comprehension.

Arunanondchai's *Songs for Dying* demonstrates how contemporary transnational art can reconstruct epistemological frameworks by privileging non-Western cosmological systems over dominant rationalist paradigms. The work's deployment of animistic symbolism—"ghosts, fire, and a sea turtle swimming in the ocean"—functions as "visual references" that "implicitly show the concept of time

beyond the human life cycle as a medium, connecting the spiritual world with the material world” (Cho, 2022, p. 60). This temporal restructuring subverts Western linear temporality through cyclical, interconnected temporalities wherein “the main narrator in *Songs for Dying*, a dying sea turtle, sees humans as trees whose roots, together with mycelium, form a shared network of connection” (Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2021, p. 2).

Furthermore, the artist’s conceptualization through “cycles of creation and decreation” (Kukje Gallery, 2022) operates as a systematic ontological intervention that goes beyond mere artistic expression. By demonstrating how non-human spiritual mediators can function as active agents where “spirits can function as a medium” for both mourning and collective resistance (Moderna Museet, 2022, as cited in Cho, 2022, p. 55), this approach repositions animistic consciousness from dismissed “superstition” to a legitimate epistemological force that actively disrupts hegemonic rationalist frameworks. This repositioning carries profound decolonial implications, as it dismantles the colonial hierarchy that privileges Western “rationality” over indigenous knowledge systems, thereby reclaiming the validity of non-Western ways of knowing.

#### ***(c) theoretical innovation and Decolonial Implications***

This practice constitutes a fundamental onto-epistemological intervention operating through what the artist terms a “scattering of consciousness,” wherein individual subjectivity dissolves into collective ecological memory (Flash Art, 2021). Such dissolution challenges Western therapeutic frameworks by demonstrating how animistic knowledge systems provide sophisticated alternatives to trauma processing, offering what Baumann characterizes as “consubstantial participation of nonhuman in human existence” (Baumann, 2022, p. 166) that reconstitutes the terms through which collective healing becomes possible. The film integrates the artist’s grief over his grandfather’s death into “the life of the forest, Jeju Island’s mythological origins, the legacy of haenyo’s sea farming culture, and their tribute to oceanic systems” (Han Nefkens Foundation, 2021)—an integration exemplifying what Bird-David theorizes as “relational

epistemology” (Bird-David, 1999, p. 67) that reconfigures individual loss within “animist collectivity” (Baumann, 2022, p. 170).

The theoretical significance lies in exposing what Baumann identifies as “naturalism’s hegemonic onto-epistemology” that systematically marginalizes alternative knowledge systems (Baumann, 2022, p. 166). Arunanondchai confronts this marginalization by positioning non-human entities—sacred turtles, oceanic systems—as active agents of historical memory rather than passive objects of human projection. This positioning reveals how Thai animistic epistemologies can reconstitute collective memory through relational modalities aligning with posthumanism’s recognition of non-human agency in meaning-making processes. As Topoonyanont argues, posthumanism’s “ontological turn” acknowledges humans’ and nonhumans’ “interrelationship of cognitive sensibilities” (Topoonyanont, 2023, p. 43) while drawing upon indigenous knowledge systems understanding such relationality as cosmologically foundational.

#### ***(d) Research question connection***

This analysis directly addresses the second research question by demonstrating how Thai animistic cosmologies constitute sophisticated epistemological frameworks that fundamentally challenge Western paradigmatic assumptions through their deployment of relational rather than individuated models of consciousness and temporality. This reactivation functions as epistemic insurgency challenging hegemonic Western epistemology through what Baumann describes as recognition of “onto-epistemological multiplicity” (Baumann, 2022, p. 171). By reactivating shamanic traditions within contemporary practice, Arunanondchai exposes the “artificiality of the dualisms cherished in naturalist science” (Baumann, 2022, p. 163), revealing how designating practices as “superstition” maintains Western intellectual dominance rather than reflecting genuine epistemological evaluation. His strategic deployment operates through Jackson’s “polyontologism”—acknowledging “the ontological reality of more than one set of religious or cosmological forces” (Jackson, 2020, p. 14 as cited in Baumann, 2022, p. 163).

By demonstrating relational ontologies' efficacy in processing collective trauma, Arunanondchai's practice establishes Thai animism as viable epistemic resistance, offering not merely cultural hybridity but fundamental challenge to the colonial matrix of knowledge that systematically marginalizes non-Western ways of knowing. Through alternative approaches to trauma, memory, and collective healing operating through animistic onto-epistemologies, the artist's practice positions Thai animism as sophisticated decolonial praxis meriting serious consideration within contemporary theoretical frameworks.

### 3. Spectral temporalities and autonomous Asian historical subjectivity

This section investigates how spectral aesthetics enable historical consciousness operating according to autonomous ontological coordinates.

#### (a) Theoretical framework and methodological approach

This analysis employs Jacques Derrida's concept of "hauntology" combined with postcolonial temporal theory to examine how *Songs for Dying* generates what this research designates "decentered Asian subjectivity." The analytical methodology investigates how spectral aesthetics enable forms of historical consciousness that operate according to non-linear temporal frameworks while maintaining cultural specificity.

#### (b) Comprehensive scene analysis

The film's spectral methodology achieves its most sophisticated expression through the recurring motif of the "membrane"—translucent visual element that appears throughout the work. In each appearance, the membrane functions as what Arunanondchai describes as "ghost: an embodiment of the space between disparate locations or events where ideas or emotions get translated" (quoted in Praepipatmongkol, 2022, p. 13). The membrane sequences overlay contemporary Thai protest footage with archival Jeju massacre documentation, creating palimpsestic visual effect that enables simultaneous temporal presence. Another appearance transforms individual grief over the artist's grandfather into collective mourning through superimposition of family photographs onto Jeju

memorial sites. The final membrane sequence synthesizes all previous elements—shamanic chanting, protest sounds, oceanic rhythms—into what the film terms "spectral symphony" that transcends national, temporal, and ontological boundaries.

#### (c) Epistemological challenge and theoretical innovation

Contemporary postcolonial theory confronts a fundamental epistemological impasse: how might Asian subjects articulate historical agency without either replicating Western developmental paradigms or remaining circumscribed within reactive victimhood narratives? The analytical methodology demonstrates how the membrane functions as "temporal bridge" that enables what this research conceptualizes as "productive haunting"—memorial practices that maintain multiple temporalities simultaneously without resolving them into coherent linear narrative. *Songs for Dying* disrupts this cycle by mobilizing spectrality not as evidence of pre-modern backwardness, but rather as sophisticated epistemological practice capable of generating alternative modalities of historical consciousness. What proves theoretically decisive is that this spectral entity actively "weaves between rooms, different times, different spaces" while simultaneously functioning as "storytelling"—thereby transforming spectrality from passive haunting into dynamic agency. This transformation assumes theoretical significance precisely because it rejects normative temporal progression underlying colonial discourse, embracing instead "spectral time" that "strains at the limits of language" because it categorically refuses linear causality (Lim, 2009, p. 297). Whereas Western trauma theory characteristically emphasizes "working through" toward psychological closure, Arunanondchai's approach maintains productive tension between presence and absence—what I term "non-linear mourning."

#### (d) Colonial discourse subversion

The political implications prove profound: traditional orientalist discourse positions Asia as Europe's "silent shadow" (Said, 1978, p. 3), perpetually haunted by its past and thereby incapable of achieving rational modernity. Arunanondchai systematically subverts this colonial logic by transforming spectrality

from epistemological disability into methodological choice, from evidence of developmental backwardness into deliberate practice of resistance. Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of the "waiting room of history" illuminates how developmental discourse perpetually defers Asian subjects within temporal frameworks that position them as perpetually belated, eternally approaching but never achieving Western progress (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 8). Even ostensibly anti-colonial nationalisms often remain "completely complicit with dominant Euro-American values of capitalist progress" insofar as they seek to demonstrate that Korea "could have done what Japan did" in terms of successful modernization (Pai, 2001, p. 194). This dynamic exemplifies what Homi Bhabha theorizes as "imperial mimicry"—the colonial subject's perpetually frustrated attempt to approximate Western standards while remaining constitutively "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86).

#### ***(e) Memorial practice and cultural translation***

The theoretical innovation lies in transforming collective memory from passive inheritance to active memorial practice. While Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes how social groups actively construct shared narratives to maintain group identity (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 84), postcolonial contexts confront what I designate "memorial colonialism"—the systematic imposition of Western temporal and narrative frameworks that circumscribe how non-Western societies might remember their own histories. Arunanondchai responds to this predicament through strategic deployment of Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory"—the intergenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge through affective rather than purely factual means (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5). The spectral membrane creates what project documentation describes as "mediums of postmemory" that "can create the past in the present, can cross generations and geographical divides to mediate absence and presence, trauma, and remembrance" (Kim, 2021, p. 156).

This process systematically resists the false binary between remembering collective trauma "to claim justice, dignity, and identity" versus strategic forgetting "for the sake of national unity or political expediency" (Anonymous, 2023, p. 7). Instead, spectral agency enables what I conceptualize as "productive

haunting"—memorial practices that maintain multiple temporalities simultaneously without resolving them into coherent linear narrative. This approach aligns with Anna Tsing's "assemblage thinking," which recognizes how "indeterminacy" remains "central to our world-system" rather than constituting an obstacle to be overcome (Tsing, 2015, p. 20, 22).

#### ***(f) Decentered Asian subjectivity***

The membrane's capacity for cultural translation proves theoretically decisive for articulating alternative forms of postcolonial agency. Rather than pursuing transparent communication across cultural difference, spectral translation maintains what Gayatri Spivak theorizes as "intimate otherness"—the recognition that meaningful communication emerges through encounter with irreducible difference rather than assimilation to purportedly universal standards (Spivak, 2003, p. 13). This methodological commitment enables what I term "decentered Asian subjectivity"—a form of historical consciousness that derives coherence not from approximating Western individualism but from maintaining dynamic relationships across multiple temporalities.

Such decentering challenges developmental logic in its entirety. Rather than seeking to demonstrate Asian capacity for Western-style progress, *Songs for Dying* articulates Asian temporality as fundamentally different from—rather than developmentally behind—Western modernity. As recent trauma scholarship suggests, effective collective healing requires balancing "what we remember together and what we remember as individuals" through processes of "listening to each other to create a common narrative while allowing for unique personal memory" (Koh, 2019, p. 124). Arunanondchai's spectral aesthetics enact precisely this process of collective meaning-making without homogenization.

#### ***(g) Research question resolution***

This analysis directly addresses the third research question by demonstrating how spectral temporalities enable Asian historical subjectivity to operate according to autonomous ontological coordinates that transcend Western developmental teleologies through the articulation of non-linear memorial practices and decentered forms of historical consciousness.

### ***(h) Theoretical contribution and global implications***

The broader theoretical contribution extends toward fundamentally reconceptualizing postcolonial agency itself. Traditional postcolonial theory often remains trapped within reactive frameworks that define freedom negatively—as liberation from colonial control—rather than positively articulating alternative modalities of existence. *Songs for Dying* suggests how Asian subjects might transcend both colonial victimization and neocolonial assimilation toward what this analysis designates “autonomous Asian temporality.” This autonomy manifests through culturally specific mourning methodologies that resist both Western therapeutic models and orientalist expectations of pre-modern superstition.

The membrane functions as translation device that maintains cultural specificity while enabling cross-cultural encounter, thereby suggesting possibilities for decolonial dialogue that transcends both universalist homogenization and particularist isolation. Through its systematic deployment of spectral agency, *Songs for Dying* articulates a distinctly Asian approach to historical consciousness that transforms collective trauma from epistemological obstacle into cultural resource, positioning Asian subjectivity as autonomous alternative to Western modernity rather than its perpetually delayed approximation.

### **Synthesis of findings**

These three analytical dimensions converge to demonstrate that *Songs for Dying* furnishes concrete methodological resources for articulating what this investigation designates “autonomous Asian temporality”—modalities of historical consciousness that derive their coherence not from approximating Western developmental paradigms but from sustaining dynamic relational networks across multiple cultural traditions and temporal coordinates. The work’s systematic orchestration of transnational aesthetic strategies, indigenous epistemological frameworks, and spectral temporalities generates genuinely alternative approaches to global modernity that position Asia as a locus of epistemic innovation rather than a perpetual developmental periphery.

### **Suggestions**

Future scholarship should investigate how other contemporary Asian artists mobilize indigenous epistemologies to construct alternative theoretical paradigms, with particular attention to examining how shamanic and animistic practices from diverse cultural contexts might coalesce to engender transnational decolonial methodologies. Comparative investigation of memorial practices across Cold War Asia could illuminate additional manifestations of “spectral solidarity” that transcend imposed national demarcations while preserving cultural particularity. Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration between postcolonial scholars and practitioners of indigenous healing traditions could cultivate more sophisticated analytical instruments for comprehending how non-Western knowledge systems engender autonomous alternatives to colonial taxonomies, thereby propelling decolonial theory beyond its current theoretical constraints.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis demonstrates that *Songs for Dying* (2021) constitutes a significant theoretical intervention in Asian postcolonial discourse through “spectral agency”—a decolonial methodology transforming collective trauma into productive memory practices while positioning Asian temporalities as autonomous epistemological alternatives. This conceptual framework extends beyond conventional postcolonial approaches by providing concrete analytical tools for understanding how non-Western societies generate forms of historical consciousness operating according to entirely different ontological premises than those embedded within Western academic discourse. This concept demonstrates how Asian subjects can articulate historical agency through maintaining productive tension between presence and absence, thereby transcending the binary opposition between remembering trauma for political mobilization versus strategic forgetting for national reconciliation.

The work’s systematic integration of Korean shamanic traditions with Thai animistic epistemologies reveals that indigenous knowledge systems constitute sophisticated analytical frameworks for processing historical violence that fundamentally exceed the conceptual parameters of Western therapeutic

paradigms. The scholarly significance of “productive non-resolution” lies in its capacity to reconceptualize collective healing as an ongoing relational process rather than a linear progression toward closure, thereby challenging Western therapeutic assumptions that position resolution as the ultimate goal of trauma processing. This framework provides postcolonial studies with methodological resources for understanding how non-Western societies maintain collective memory through temporal practices that resist assimilation into Western developmental narratives.

The film’s transnational aesthetic methodology, which systematically juxtaposes Thailand’s 2020 pro-democracy mobilizations with Korea’s suppressed memory of the Jeju April 3rd Incident, establishes what this analysis has identified as “spectral solidarity”—a form of transnational connection that emerges through shared experiences of Cold War state violence rather than appeals to essential cultural commonalities. This approach demonstrates how Asian subjects might construct forms of historical consciousness that derive their coherence from maintaining dynamic relationships across multiple temporalities, thereby transcending the nation-state framework that has constrained postcolonial analysis while avoiding the essentialist pitfalls of pan-Asian identity discourse.

In doing so, this study advances debates in postcolonial studies by shifting focus from reactive critiques of Western discourse toward constructive theorization of Asian epistemological agency. The theoretical significance of this intervention extends beyond its specific cultural contexts to address postcolonial theory’s fundamental structural limitation: its inability to theorize Asian agency beyond the reactive position of responding to Western hegemonic discourse. By examining how *Songs for Dying* generates concrete methodological resources for imagining decolonial futures, this analysis has revealed how contemporary cultural production positions Asia as a site of genuine epistemological innovation rather than a perpetual developmental periphery. This methodological reorientation establishes contemporary Asian artistic practice as a privileged site for generating theoretical frameworks that transcend both Western academic hegemony and the reactive limitations inherent in conventional postcolonial discourse.

The work’s demonstration that transnational Asian solidarity can emerge through shared resistance to Cold War fragmentation—rather than through recovery of pre-colonial unity—provides a crucial foundation for reconceptualizing postcolonial studies beyond its current theoretical impasse. This finding contributes to scholarly understanding by demonstrating how transnational connections can be forged through parallel experiences of historical violence rather than presumed cultural affinities, thereby offering a methodological alternative to both universalist approaches that homogenize difference and particularist frameworks that preclude meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.

These findings suggest that the field’s future development requires sustained attention to how contemporary Asian cultural practices generate alternative epistemological frameworks that operate according to fundamentally different temporal and memorial logics than those embedded within Western academic discourse. Such attention promises to transform postcolonial studies from a primarily critical enterprise focused on deconstructing Western representations into a constructive theoretical project capable of articulating genuinely autonomous alternatives to colonial knowledge formations. The academic significance of this transformation lies in establishing postcolonial studies as a generative rather than reactive field—one capable of producing new theoretical paradigms beyond colonial knowledge formations

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