

Technological artifacts and the negotiation of Kamikaze ideology in *Godzilla Minus One*

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Godzilla Minus One* (2023) signals an important turning point in the cinematic representation of Japanese post war trauma, few academic studies have examined how specific visual artifacts function as rhetorical devices to challenge historical narratives. **Purpose:** This paper aims to investigate how visual rhetoric in the film redefines heroism and reconfigures the traditional kamikaze ethos. **Methods:** Adopting a qualitative approach, the study combines Roland Barthes's semiotic framework (denotation, connotation, and myth) with key scenes within depth interviews of five viewers to cross validate the visual text. **Results:** The findings highlight a strong counter discourse narrative where the ejection seat serves not merely as a safety device, but also as a communicative artifact symbolizing reconciliation and the permission to live. The visual transformation of the aircraft from a site of self-sacrifice into a vehicle of life, thus debunking the myth of *gyokusai* (honorable death). Furthermore, audience responses confirm that viewers actively decode this visual metaphor, interpreting survival as a higher form of honor than self-sacrifice. **Conclusion:** Ultimately film successfully redefines heroism by shifting the focus from a death drive to a life drive, proposing that historical atonement is achieved through living rather than dying. **Implications:** These insights demonstrate the capacity of academic film criticism to reveal multidimensional messages within cinematic art, reaffirming the role of visual culture in reshaping collective memory and offering social healing for historical trauma.

Keywords: Film criticism; *Godzilla Minus One*; Kamikaze; semiotics; visual rhetoric

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a film is not only to entertain but also to provide a communication message (Putri et al., 2023). Anwar et al. (2025), note that films effectively serve as a medium for social criticism. *Godzilla Minus One* captures how people renegotiate Kamikaze ideology. *Godzilla Minus One*, reflects Japanese societal anxiety through visual narrative (Palluconi & Schofield, 2021). Originating in 1954, the franchise has evolved into a global pop culture symbol (Gazi, 2024). The monster and its military artifacts act as a site of remembrance, constantly bringing back repressed World War II trauma (Gygi, 2016).

Godzilla Minus One bridges language and cultural gaps using universally understood non-verbal cues. Visual communication builds strong emotional connections, delivering messages that might lose impact if delivered through dialogue alone (Sagheer et al., 2024). Rossi and Milino (2022), studied visual rhetoric and noted a complementary relationship between words and images. In their view, the role of words is to present the intended content accurately and clearly, eliminating ambiguity & imagery, by contrast, leverages its unique persuasive power to instantly deliver the message it seeks to convey into the audience's hearts, far faster than text can. Filmmakers use visual symbols that audiences can recognize at a glance, treating these symbols as tools to convey their creative perspectives and guide the audience's perceptions and understanding

of their work, a perspective put forward by (Valentiyo et al., 2025). Analyzing a film requires carefully breaking down these symbols.

Past studies have explored monster cinema extensively. Scholars often view the Godzilla franchise as a political metaphor. It highlights the fear of nuclear destruction and bureaucratic failure (Palluconi & Schofield, 2021). Takashi Yamazaki's *Godzilla Minus One* (2023) introduces a major shift in this narrative. The movie focuses deeply on individual trauma resolution. It also redefines the true meaning of sacrifice (Griffiths, 2025). The film is described as a culture that reflects physical destruction, as well as projecting a counter-discourse against Japan's militaristic ideology during the imperial era through sophisticated visual rhetorical strategies.

Specifically in the realm of film criticism, other reviews show that there is a significant growth in the scientific literature that places film as an object of academic interest in the form of cultural discourse. In this context, the study of *kaiju* sees Godzilla as a cultural entity that contains questions related to the anxieties of the times, such as the threat of nuclear destruction to the Anthropocene (Rawle, 2024). Previous research has explored the narrative and representational aspects of culture in this franchise. For example, Pelea (2020), said that the cultural specificity and linguistic component that is integrated into Godzilla in Japan, often fail to be translated or reimagined

in the context of American cinema, it confirms that *Godzilla's* incongruity is strongly tied to its socio-historical context. Additionally, Adams (2024), technically analyzes the use of visual darkness and chiaroscuro contrast in the film *Godzilla* (2014) as a visual strategy to mark a political shift from criticism of power to the strengthening of violently imposed hierarchies.

In the narrative transition of *Godzilla Minus One*, it contains the meaning of critical artifacts that can reflect the shift in the meaning of state power, to individual autonomy (Griffiths, 2025). Unfortunately, previous studies of cinema have often failed to see how the technical elements of film can deconstruct doctrine. In fact, the visual representation of war technology in film can be a container in the fight for meaning (Hidayat et al., 2021).

The gap that emerges in the current literature is the lack of attention to how inanimate objects such as technological artifacts in *kaiju* films can have a rhetorical agency capable of changing the flow of ideology. Gazi (2024), argues that the majority of academic analysis still tends to be fixated on *Godzilla* which is a symbol of existential fear and fear of nuclear. However, addressing this gap is urgent, as the film deconstructs that ideology into a historical reality that left a profound collective trauma on Japanese society. Historical records reveal that young kamikaze pilots experienced severe depression, despair, and a loss of life purpose when forced to undertake suicide missions

(Subandi et al., 2022). This systemic sacrifice engendered profound anxiety and trauma with far-reaching impacts on Japanese society, particularly among the families of soldiers who perished in the war (Subandi et al., 2022). In fact, the non-verbal interaction between humans and machines in this film offers a new layer of meaning regarding trauma recovery. This is supported by Shafwan and Hermawan (2025), who say that it can bind rich empirical data to the analysis of accompanying cultural myths. Because of this, the study sees the need to fill this gap by placing visual artifacts as the main axis of analysis.

The novelty of this research offers a visual storytelling approach that is very crucial in analyzing meaning in film. According to Sagheer et al. (2024), the main strength of visual storytelling lies in its ability to reflect complex emotional narratives without having to be limited by verbal language or dialogue. In *Godzilla Minus One*, visual persuasion is used in an attempt to alter the narrative of negotiating the memory of war. Griffiths (2025), adds that this shift in visual focus is effective in redefining the meaning of change, where heroism can no longer be measured from a willingness to die, but to be the courage to live and focus on the future. The urgency in this study, it is said, lies in how the *Godzilla Minus One* film uses visual objects and non-verbal interactions to unravel the meaning of a solid historical narrative. The story centers on a war veteran, he is a marginalized and

depressed as a Kamikaze pilot. The movie portrays his struggles effectively through visual communication (Griffiths, 2025). Visual rhetorical theory emphasizes the true power of images. Visual artifacts can persuade audiences just as strongly as verbal language. They shape viewers emotions and perceptions directly (Kjeldsen, 2021).

Kjeldsen (2021) asserts that the fundamental strength of visual rhetoric lies in its capacity to persuade viewers while simultaneously activating and reinforcing their pre existing cognitive and emotional values. In cinematic texts, technological artifacts bring profound semiotic weight, specifically, the fighter aircraft and its ejection mechanism communicate a monumental ideological paradigm shift. Together these visual artifacts symbolize a deliberate departure from the imperial *Gyokusai* doctrine which demanded an honourable death in service to the Emperor toward *Ikiru*, a contemporary ethos centred on the fundamental right to live. Qualitative reception data validates this visual argument as key informant (such Informant 1 and informant 2) decoded the ejection seat not as an act of military cowardice, but as a symbolic grant of survival and personal agency. Consequently the film visual rhetoric successfully transforms a cold instrument of war into a potent artifact of collective psychological healing.

The visual communication in *Godzilla Minus One* relies on powerful symbols. The filmmakers successfully changed the meaning

of specific military objects. Fighter planes and their ejection seats originally functioned as tools of death. The movie turns them into symbols of individual agency and hope. This analysis will be crucial to understand how contemporary cinema can reconstruct heroic narratives through validation of the will to live and human vulnerability (Griffiths, 2025; Subandietal.,2022). Furthermore, Fong(2024), sees that *Godzilla* is an attempt to reconstruct a historical narrative that responds to national trauma. In addition, Durkin (2021), noted that there was a shift in the representation of fear from the cold war era to *Godzilla* cinema, where *Godzilla* here serves as a metaphor for nuclear trauma that continues to be reconstructed. On the other hand, Lamarre (2022), emphasizes the importance of understanding the situation of the Fukushima tragedy in understanding the modern *Godzilla* narrative, in which *Godzilla* is seen as a reflection of a global crisis and a symbol as a result of human dependence on nuclear energy. Jaworowicz-Zimny and Yamamura (2022), reinforces the argument that the *Godzilla Minus One* movie is a complex social phenomenon.

Gazi (2024), states that current academic studies are still dominated by narrative analysis that places *Godzilla* film communication as a symbol of nuclear threats and natural disasters. Furthermore, there is a significant theoretical gap in the literature regarding how *kaiju* films today use visual rhetoric in making narrative changes to war trauma and memory. Previous

studies conducted by Tsutsui and Jones & Trefalt, began to touch on the nationalist and gender ideological aspects of the film, but did not really delve into the mechanisms of non-verbal communication and semiotics of artifacts as instruments of ideological persuasion (Griffiths, 2025).

Non-verbal communication uses visual elements in cinema to share complex meanings. It conveys emotions easily without language barriers (Subandi et al., 2022). *Godzilla Minus One* visually represents deep trauma and penance. This representation provides rich empirical data for analysis. Shafwan and Hermawan (2025), suggest examining this data through Roland Barthes' social semiotics. Researchers can look at the denotative and connotative meanings of specific objects. By the framework of Barthesian semiotics and visual rhetoric (Agisa et al., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2021; Kjeldsen, 2021), this paper attempt to analyze the *Shinden* ejection seat in *Godzilla Minus One* (Griffiths, 2025). By sematically transforming a death instrument into survival symbol (*Ikiru*) The film also deconstructs imperial *Gyokusai* myths, painting how popular culture negotiates historical (Durkin, 2021).

By unpacking these visual metaphors, the study further explores how such a rhetorical shift reshapes contemporary narratives of heroism and contributes to the healing of post-World War II collective trauma. To systematically analyze these issues, the study

examines the film from a communication perspective, employing visual rhetoric and Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis an approach proven effective in revealing the ideological and psychological meanings embedded in cinematic representations (Agisa et al., 2021).

The main focus of the analysis is directed to the dynamics of interpersonal communication between the protagonist represented by Koichi Shikishima and the mechanic Sosaku Tachibana, as well as the symbolization of the ejection chair which can be interpreted as a communication artifact by re-negotiating the meaning of kamikaze (in the context of World War 2, which required it to sacrifice lives) into an ideology of survival on the basis of the values of humanism and post-war trauma recovery (Arum & Onyekaba, 2025; Subandi et al., 2022).

Griffiths (2025), argues that by combining Kjeldsen's theory of visual rhetoric and Barthes's concept of myth, this study hypothesizes that the film performs a progressive act of communication, in addition to rejecting the narrative as a victim of the kamikaze doctrine, but also actively reclaiming individual agency through visual symbols that openly challenge the doctrine of the state.

The academic contribution of this study is expected to broaden the understanding of how popular media, such as cinema, functions as a space for collective therapy as well as a medium of discursive resistance to historical hegemony (Tsutsui, 2024). So, this films in

modern visual media, can deliver a messages entirely through the rhetorical power of on-screen iamges and symbols (Rossi & Milino, 2022). Interpreting these visual metaphors is therefore a necessary step to understand the film's underlying ideological meaning. By examining the ejection seat as a rhetorical device, this research can explore how a single physical object can shift a historical narrative of sacrifice into a clear statment about human survival and dignity (Griffiths, 2025).

After the second World War, Japanese cinemas have continously grappled with the legacy of imperial suicide tactics, which historical records show inflicted severe psychological trauma on aviators (Subandi et al., 2022). To address potential researcher bias in decoding these historical themes, this paper unites a dual phase qualitative design. First, purposive sampling was deployed to isolate pivotal scenes featuring the *Shinden* aircraft and its non verbal cues (Kartini, 2023). Second semi structured visual elicitation interviews were conducted, to cross validate textual readings against contemporary viewer opinions. Audience data asserts that informants (such informant 1 and informant 2) actively decode the aircraft's safety mechanics not as an act of cowardice but as a symbolic grant of survival. By synthesizing systematic visual sampling with audience reception analysis this methodology effectively bridges filmic rhetoric with authentic sociocultural interpretations, demonstrating how modern audience reframe

historical trauma into messages of human dignity.

RESEARCH METHODS

To unpack the film's deeper meanings, this study operates within an interpretative qualitative paradigm by blending content analysis with multimodal critical discourse analysis. Phsyical components like cinematography and character gestures actively shape visual rhetoric (Griffiths, 2025). Therefore, the observaton targets these non-verbal elements rather than analyzing spoken lines. Sagheer et al. (2024), heavily influence this direction, they point out that cisual storytelling drives emoptional narratvies perfectly well on its own.

Directed by Takashi Yamazaki, the 2023 film *Godzilla Minus One*, provides the context for this study. The researchers concentrate on the exchanges between Koichi Shikishima and Sosaku Tachibana, yaing special attention to physical objects on screen. The airplane's ejection seat is particularly important. It triggers a major change in how the story in understood. To back up the visual readings, the study brings in audience reactions (Subandi et al., 2022).

Isolating key scenes and important cinematic artifacts yields a more precise ideological critique (Sabri & Adiprabowo, 2022). Data collection was occured between December 2025 and January 2026, using high resolution streaming platforms to capture fine visual details (Subandi et al., 2022). The primary analytical instrument was Barthes

semiotic metrix, adapted from drama film research workflows (Kartini, 2023) to make a map of denotative, connotative, and mythical dimensions. The qualitative data collection progressed across two distinct phase. The first is visual observation of the film text which Researchers selected key scenes capturing non verbal interactions and the ideological clash between life and death. High resolution screenshots featuring the *Shinden* ejection seat were logged with exact timestamps and categorized into an observation sheet to systematically decode denotative markers prior to connotative analysis. Meanwhile the second is informant interviews and visual elicitation. The process is done to triangulate textual readings, semi structured interviews were conducted with five purposively sampled key informants (aged 10 – 35) specializing in media, visual design, and post war Japanese history. Showing capture frames directly to participants via visual elicitation enabled researchers to note their cognitive and emotional response to open ended questions.

To firmly unite textual interpretation with actual audience reception, this paper employed an interpretive triangulation strategy (Sagheer et al., 2024). Rather than relying on a single theoretical lens, an inductive analysis synthesized visual rhetoric with Barthesian semiotics. At the micro analytical level, specific visual signs including facial expressions, lighting, and general *mise en scene* were extracted to map the physical and

conceptual markers embedded within the film (Agisa et al., 2021; Kartini, 2023). At the meso analytical level, coded visual sign were cross checked against interview transcripts. External audience feedback actively validated, refined or challenged the initial textual readings, thereby eliminating subjective researcher bias and confirming the visual rhetoric's communicative validate (Sagheer et al., 2024).

The macro analysis phase explores critical discourse. The researchers integrated their findings from both the text and the audience triangulation. This combined data evaluates the visual elements deeply. It reveals exactly how these elements build a persuasive rhetorical argument at the meso level. Finally, the validated visual metaphors are situated within the broader context of post-war Japanese socio-political discourse (Macro level) to critically deconstruct the Kamikaze myth and redefine contemporary heroism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings on how visual rhetoric in *Godzilla Minus One* (2023), reconstructs heroism and deconstructs the *Gyokusai* myth through the ejection seat artifact. The analysis synthesizes film text readings and audience perception validation, extending to how contemporary Japanese cinema renegotiates historical trauma. Table 1 illustrates the informants' profiles.

The audience response in this study is crucial to prove the premise (Subandi et al., 2022), that

Table 1 Key Informant Profiles

Code	Name	Characteristic Representation	Focus Perspective
INF-1	Hendra	Analytical/Rational	Seeing aspects of objectivity, value of life and professionalism
INF-2	Wildan	Emotional/Empathetic	Emphasizing on the aspects of caring for seniority and family
INF-3	Faiz	Pop-Culture Savvy	Using the term tsundere pop culture in character reading
INF-4	Hilmi	Humanis	Focus on the trauma of loss and hope for the future
INF-5	Rafi	Reflective	Seeing movies as a message of penance

Source: Author, 2025

the meaning of a film is not singular, but can be constructed through the interaction between the media text and the cultural background of the audience. The study's main findings show a consistent visual pattern from trauma to recovery. A summary of the semiotic analysis of the four key scenes is presented in the following table 2. Based on the table 2, an in-depth analysis

will be elaborated chronologically to show the evolution of the meaning of heroism.

Before understanding the rhetorical function of the ejection chair as a symbol of recovery, the analysis needs to dissect the visualization of the initial trauma on Odo Island. This scene becomes the zero point of Shikishima's inner conflict.

Table 2 Matrix of Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric Analysis

Scene	Visual Bookmarks	Connotative Sign	Rhetorical Function
Odo Island	Tachibana with his knees bleeding as he looked at his dead comrades, while Shikishima fell down with a slightly cleaner face than Tachibana.	Guilt transference, which is life as a disgrace to the survivors	Antitesis: Establishing the initial premise that life is a sin in the ideology of Kamikaze
Seat Installation in the Hangar	Tachibana's hand gestured, rubbing the edge of the chair with his thumb, then staring at it for a long time.	Hidden affection and unspoken apologies.	Visual Enthymeme: The silent argument that the pilot's safety is more important than a suicide mission.
Flashback Hangar	Tachibana's pat on Shikishima's shoulder and Shikishima's expression with sparkling eyes	Giving blessings and validating one's existence.	Pathos: Changing the audience's perception of Tachibana, who previously wanted Shikishima to die, to wanting him to live.
Final Landing	A white to gray parachute that expands in the sky, while Shikishima hangs a small one below it.	The rebirth of the victory of humanism over militarism.	Synthesizers: The conclusion that the true hero is the one who returns home safely.

Source: Author, 2025



Source: *Godzilla Minus One*, 2023

Figure 1 Odo Island Scene

Figure 1 constructs a harrowing narrative through sharp denotative contrasts in costume and makeup, interpreted via Barthes's connotative analysis. Tachibana is depicted in a wretched physical state, his legs are wounded, and his uniform is tattered and caked with dust and blood. Through the framework of visual rhetoric, the contrasting physical states of the characters function as immediate signifiers of institutional collapse and ideological crisis. The mechanic's bloodied, grime covered appearance graphically embodied the brutal demise of the Imperial Japanese military apparatus, exposing the grim reality of state that systematically sacrificed its citizen. Shikishima's immaculate, pristine uniform creates a sharp visual irony. Rather than denoting safety or moral purity, his physical cleanliness operates as a heavy ideological marker under traditional kamikaze doctrine, which framed non-sacrificial survival as supreme cowardice and dishonour. By juxtaposing these two visual states within the

same cinematic space, the film rhetorically asserts that both the mechanic's physical devastation and the pilot's unblemished body are tragic manifestations of a fractured national ethos. For Shikishima, the absence of physical dirt becomes a psychological stain, visually materialising his intense survivor's guilt.

This psychological burden is further exacerbated by intentional cinematographic choices (Tsutsui, 2024). Contrary to traditional war cinema conventions where heroic figures are captured from low angles to project power, authority, and dominance, the camera consistently looks down on Shikishima from high angles. Enclosed within the claustrophobic confines of the cockpit, his physical stature is visually diminished, symbolizing a broader post-Second World War crisis of masculinity wherein returning soldiers were burdened with societal shame rather than military glory (Shafwan & Hermawan, 2025).

Subsequently, the ejection seat

mechanism emerges as a transformative rhetorical instrument for trauma recovery and reconciliation (Adams, 2024). Subverting his overt verbal hostility, Tachibana's delicate micro-gestures during the hangar repair sequence specifically his gentle touching of the seat function as non-verbal acts of professional empathy. Visual evidence commands greater viewer trust than spoken dialogue, enabling audiences to resolve the apparent contradiction between his aggressive shouting and his tender physical touch. Empirical audience reception data validates this semiotic reading: key informants 1, 2, dan 3 decoded Tachibana's rough exterior as a protective front, describing his behavior as tough love and a pragmatic cover for deep care (Personal communication, Dec 21, 2025). Furthermore, Informant 4 and 5 interpreted the ejection mechanism not as a tool of cowardice, but as explicit permission to go home and a second chance at life (Personal communication, Dec 21, 2025). Ultimately, by

reframing the aircraft from an airborne coffin into a life-saving vessel, the film's visual rhetoric redefines heroism, shifting the core of human dignity from state-mandated self-sacrifice to the individual courage to survive and rebuild.

Through Kjeldsen (2021) visual rhetoric framework, the non-verbal juxtaposition between Tachibana's hostile shouting and his delicate physical contact with the ejection seat holds superior communicative power over spoken dialogue. Contemporary audiences naturally privilege visual cues over verbal declarations, resolving narrative dissonance by prioritizing visible action. Qualitative audience reception data demonstrates that informants 1, 2, and 3 successfully decoded this behavioral gap, interpreting Tachibana's surface-level aggression as expressions of tough love, latent protective care, and a classic *tsundere* demeanor (Personal communication, 21 December 2025). By surreptitiously fitting the *Shinden* aircraft



Source: *Godzilla Minus One*, 2023

Figure 2 Ejection Seat Installation Scene by Tachibana

with a safety ejection mechanism, the mechanic actively transcends restrictive military hierarchical constraints (Agisa et al., 2021). In doing so, he assumes the pivotal role of a moral guardian, conferring ethical purpose onto an otherwise cold military artifact (Subandi et al., 2022) and directly countermanding the pilot's state-mandated suicidal mission (Griffiths, 2025). Audience perceptions regarding this redefined construct of heroism systematically span four interconnected thematic categories: non-verbal communication, ejection seat symbolism, the recontextualisation of honour, and visual trauma recovery. Historically, Imperial Japanese military doctrines branded returning kamikaze aviators with supreme social disgrace, subjecting surviving pilots to severe psychological distress, isolation, and internalized shame (Subandi et al., 2022). In sharp contrast to these imperial norms, contemporary viewers process the visual mechanism as symbolic "permission to go home" (Informant 1 & 2, personal communication, 21 December 2025) and an explicit rejection of *Gyokusai* self-sacrifice (Informant 3, personal communication, 21 December 2025).

Within this visual counter-discourse, Informant 4 said the traditional definition of honour undergoes a radical semantic shift. Rather than measuring heroism through suicidal devotion to the state, true honour is re-anchored in practical human utility, personal responsibility, and the fundamental

courage to survive (Personal communication, 21 December 2025). Rather than viewing non-sacrificial survival as cowardice, audiences decode survival as an act of higher moral responsibility necessary for rebuilding a post-war society. Ultimately, as highlighted by Informant 5 regarding the closing parachute imagery, the film's visual rhetoric successfully establishes a therapeutic cinematic space for collective trauma resolution without relying on explicit dialogue. The image of the pilot floating safely toward land under an inflated parachute symbolizes the final release of historical trauma and the restoration of human dignity. By transforming a weapon of war into a vessel for survival, the narrative effectively dismantles imperial-era myths. In summary, this integrated semiotic and empirical analysis confirms that visual culture possesses the agency to revise shared historical memory, offering contemporary audiences a meaningful framework for reconciling historical trauma through a commitment to life over death.

The audience clearly showed deep emotional reactions, pointing to a shared public need for healing stories (Sagheer et al., 2024). Audiences specifically described a massive sense of relief when the parachute opened. This specific reaction breaks decades of historical tension. Japanese pop culture struggled with kamikaze failures for years. The movie fixes this issue. It frames personal survival as a completely honorable act, providing actual therapeutic value to the audience (Anwar

et al., 2025). Viewers witness the healing of generational wounds. The visuals are essentially a form of cinematic therapy. Audience can finally reframe a tragic past. They watch a genuine survivor story instead (Tsutsui, 2024). The ejection seat completely erases the viewers' anxiety. Surviving the war is the real heroic achievement.

At the macro level, the mechanism of ejection seats functions to deconstruct the *Gyokusai* myth, exposing how Imperial Japan's wartime military doctrine weaponized mass sacrifice for the sake of the country (Subandi et al., 2022). While the microsemiotic signs of the artifact's mechanical features, specifically the ejection lever and its physical propulsion system serve as a direct visual contradiction of state-mandated doctrine. The Kamikaze ideology structurally fused the pilot and the aircraft into a disposable weapon of the state and sacrifice mission. Therefore, the mechanical act of pulling the lever of the self eject seat visually

and literally separates the human body from the state's war machine, thereby reclaiming individual agency. The ideological resistance displayed in the film is highly crucial to this deconstruction. Aligning with the findings of Allen (2022) and Subandi et al. (2022), The film reframes wartime memory by centering the pilots' internal resistance to the doctrine of sacrifice, a perspective that has historically been marginalized. The mechanical escape creates a massive macro-political critique. Hendra backed this exact idea by redefining national loyalty (Informant 1, personal communication, December 21, 2025). True patriotism strictly means preserving human life. Blind obedience to a state's deadly architecture holds no real honor.

Figure 3 shows that the opening key for Shikishima and the audience. If Tachibana was previously thought to be only repairing the plane for his suicide mission, this flashback scene revises his entire motivation. Tachibana's



Source: *Godzilla Minus One*, 2023

Figure 3 Flashback Scene while in the Hangar

words in the flashback became the ethical basis for Shikishima to pull the lever. Based on the survey results, the audience captured this flashback moment as a turning point in the redefinition of the *Gyokusai* Myth. According to Hendra, he thinks that Shikishima's job is not to die, but to continue living for the sake of his loved ones (Informant 1, personal communication, December 21, 2025). In line with that, HiImi added, *the concept of Kamikaze* to die for the country does not make sense. Through this flashback scene, *Godzilla Minus One* emphasizes that heroism does not lie in death, but in the courage to use a safety mechanism (a throwing chair) for the future.

The logical consequence of the flashback is the closing scene. That shows Shikishima floating down with a parachute in a clear sky.

Figure 4 shows that the audience interprets the parachute visual in depth as a symbol of freedom and resolution of trauma. Rafi revealed that the war that Shikishima and the Japanese people went through against Godzilla

provided freedom and security, as seen from how this one little dot had life (Informant 5, personal communication, December 21, 2025). This poetic interpretation is in line with the concept of visual redemption. Glowing skies and inflated parachutes signaled the end of the burden of trauma.

The film's counter-discourse challenges the traditional ideology of the *Gyokusai* myth across three key aspects. First, regarding the purpose of war, the traditional ideology dictates dying for the country or emperor, whereas the counter-discourse emphasizes living for the future and family. This is supported by empirical evidence from HiImi, who stated, "Shikishima fought for the country, others, and himself at the same time".

Second, the meaning of the tools of war shifts significantly; traditionally, the plane was described as the pilot's coffin, but the counter-discourse depicts the aircraft as a protector equipped with an ejection seat. This is empirically evidenced by the visual close-up



Source: *Godzilla Minus One*, 2023

Figure 4 Final Landing Scene

of the lever and Tachibana's gestures. Finally, the definition of a hero is transformed from the traditional view of "those who died in the line of duty" to the counter-discourse of "those who dare to go home and rebuild their lives". This redefinition is empirically supported by Hendra's statement, "Your job is not to die... but to live for the sake of loved ones" (Informant 1, personal communication, December 21, 2025).

The analysis of these aspects confirms that *Godzilla Minus One* engages in a radical counter-discourse. While traditional ideology positioned the plane as the pilot's coffin, this film significantly revises that definition. Heroes are those who dare to go home to build the future. The findings of this study offer a new perspective on the study of *Kaiju*. In contrast to Yan (2024), which highlighted the energy crisis or (Durkin, 2021), which focused on Cold War anxiety, this study found that *Godzilla Minus One* used military technology artifacts as a medium of social trauma therapy.

In previous war films, technology was portrayed as a tool of the state to kill. Director Takashi Yamazaki resignifies or redefines (Gazi, 2024). The *Shinden's* plane in this film is changed to be a protective tool, no longer a tool of aggression (Griffiths, 2025). This resignification is characteristic of twenty-first-century *kaiju* cinema. As Rhoads and Okazaki (2024), assert, recent films like *Godzilla Minus One* actively revise fatalistic tropes, utilizing artifacts to emphasize human resilience and moving away from state-mandated sacrifices

toward collective survival.

In military histories, *Shinden* represents a prototype interceptor fighter built by the Imperial Japanese Navy during the final stages of the conflict as a desperate act against American B-29 bombers. The aircraft features a progressive canard configuration; However, it fails to engage in the actual battle scenario. In its original historical environment, *Shinden* similar to other special weaponry developed in the fury of war embodies the deep desperation that characterizes Japan's military strategy, which increasingly uses mass suicide tactics or *Tokko* (Subandi et al., 2022). Scientific references suggest that many aircraft undergo modifications to function as *Kaiten* (manned torpedoes) or Kamikaze ships without landing gears, effectively turning pilots into guided missile navigation system (Subandi et al., 2022).

The film features a completely fictional intervention. Tachibana installs an ejection seat in a plane that historically never had one. Pelea (2020), views this specific choice as a massive political statement. The director transforms this historical weapon into a survival tool. Informant noted this shift perfectly during the interviews. He stated that the movie destroys the glorification of Kamikaze by using technology to protect people (Informant 2, personal communication, December 21, 2025). This creative decision is a direct historical correction (Tsutsui, 2024). The narrative builds an alternative timeline. Japanese technological progress actually safeguards its pilots here. The

military does not throw their lives away for a lost cause. This approach connects directly with ideological localization (Gazi, 2024). *Godzilla Minus One* introduces a brand new concept to the audience: Vital Nationalism.

Contrasting Shin Godzilla's bureaucratic focus (Gazi, 2024), *Godzilla Minus One* champions creates privatised heroism and civilian humanism. Through omitting state military intervention in the climax, individual autonomy is foregrounded (Griffiths, 2025), a change echoed by informant 2, who prioritises family preservation over imperial ideology through Barthesian semiotics (Agisa et al., 2021), the ejection seat counters Western critiques of right wing militarist apologism (Pelea, 2020). Rejecting Kamikaze martyrdom, the film firms that returning to loved ones constitutes true honour (Informant 2, Personal Communication, Dec 21, 2025), framing survival as the ultimate act of courage amid contemporary debates on Japanese remilitarisation.

This phenomenon gave birth to a variant of Defensive Patriotism. The film acknowledges the presence of the armed forces, but changes the orientation of its implementation. Military force is considered justifiable solely if it is in harmony with the humanitarian imperative to minimize loss of life (Tsutsui, 2024). Given the current geopolitical tensions that exist in East Asia, this message has special significance for the Japanese population: having military capabilities (Self-Defense), should not be confused with a retreat to self-destructive

fascism from historical precedent. Thus, the throwing chair emerged as a symbol of ethical demarcation: the use of warfare technology was allowed, depending on the guarantee of safety for its operator. The visual rhetoric embodied by the ejection seat eventually transcends its role as a simple narrative device. It evolves into a cultural artifact that forces the viewer to come to terms with historical reality, embrace vulnerability, and choose a more humane future (Tsutsui, 2024). As a result, *Godzilla Minus One* not only re-evaluates the technical narrative surrounding *Shinden's* aircraft but also reinterprets the emotional narrative of the Japanese (Anwar et al., 2025).

The film's core message easily crosses international borders (Pelea, 2020). Recent movies like *Dunkirk* and *1917* focus heavily on the raw act of surviving. They completely ignore any glorification of traditional battlefield conquests. *Godzilla Minus One* joins this exact global shift. Yet, the Japanese production introduces a very specific technological angle (Jaworowicz-Zimny & Yamamura, 2022). Modern warfare usually treats machines as cold killing tools. The ejection seat flips this dynamic. It breathes actual humanity back into the pilot's life. Western critics often misunderstand Asian war cinema. Japanese directors are clearly helping tear down outdated military ideals. Pulling the safety lever creates a universal language of survival. Faiz highlighted this exact truth during the interviews. He viewed the pulled lever as a brave and conscious

choice to face a difficult reality. The movie aggressively attacks any political ideology that throws young lives away for nothing (Informant 3, personal communication, December 21, 2025). Rafi supported this critique, he argued that sacrificing a young life for a government makes zero objective sense (Informant 5, personal communication, December 21, 2025). Individual human survival must always crush state demands (Griffiths, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that visual artifacts, gesture and non-verbal communication in *Godzilla Minus One* serve two critical functions. Bridging emotional distances where language fails due to deep-seated trauma, the ejection seat serves as an interpersonal, somatic medium of forgiveness. It functions as a visual enthymeme for Tachibana and Shikishima's tough love, radically subverting logocentric demands for verbal reconciliation. Rhetorically, the artifact functions as a radical counter-discourse against the imperial ideology of *Gyokusai* (death as sacrifice). By reframing the Kamikaze plane from a coffin into an instrument of life (*Ikiru*), the film strips the suicide myth of its sacred aura, shifting the narrative focus to the sanctity of individual life and redefining honor as the courage to survive and overcome trauma rather than the willingness to die. Ultimately, this study offers a significant theoretical intervention by shifting the cinematic transition from a militaristic death drive to a humanist life drive. Rather than

offering a localized textual analysis, this article establishes a novel conceptual framework that broadens scholarly understandings of post-war cultural transformation. Through demonstrating how modern visual media operates as an instrument of cultural therapy, this paper illustrates that cinematic artifacts possess the rhetorical agency to reframe collective historical trauma into narratives of social healing and psychological emancipation. This research enriches the field of visual culture by showing how popular cinema functions as a therapeutic sanctuary for renegotiating national memory, facilitating a transition post war guilt toward contemporary self-acceptance.

Nevertheless, several methodological limitations point to fruitful avenues for future inquiry. While these textual and qualitative insights remain compelling, subsequent scholarship should adopt longitudinal reception analyses to investigate how audiences consume and interpret such revisionist narratives over time. Expanding this empirical scope will prove vital for assessing how cinematic rereadings of history interact with Japan's continually evolving geopolitical landscape and changing national identity. By explicitly connecting the deconstruction of the *Gyokusai* myth to modern global contexts, such future studies can emphasize how the universal recognition of technological artifacts as tools of human preservation rather than mere instruments of state sacrifice, is critically needed in today's era of rapid global militarization. Additionally,

comparative studies with post-conflict cinema from nations like Germany or Vietnam are highly recommended to determine whether this cinematic trend of technological humanism is a uniquely Japanese cultural response or a universal phenomenon.

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