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Násilí na jihokorejských středních školách: Reprezentace v televizních
dramatech

Violence in South Korean High Schools: Representations in TV-Dramas

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla veškeré použité prameny a literaturu.

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Anotace: Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením násilí na školách v jihokorejských televizních dramatech. Práce poskytuje historický a systematický přehled o problematice násilí páchaného středoškoláky v Jižní Koreji a zabývá se vlivem společenských podmínek na kulturně specifické aspekty páchaného násilí. S ohledem na nedávno publikovaný akademický výzkum a mediální zprávy o konkrétních případech a problému obecně, tato práce popisuje a analyzuje reprezentaci školního násilí v jihokorejských televizních dramatech poslední dekády, s hlavním zaměřením na seriál *The Glory*.

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Abstract: This bachelor's thesis deals with the representation of school violence in South Korean TV-dramas. The thesis provides a historical and systematic overview over the issue of violence committed by high schoolers in South Korea and delves into the influence of social conditions on the culturally specific aspects of the violence committed. In view of recently published academic research and media reports about specific cases and the problem in general, this thesis describes and analyzes the representation of school violence in South Korean TV-dramas of the last decade, with a main focus on the series *The Glory*.

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Editorial Note

This thesis uses the Revised Romanization system for transcription for Korean words or names, with the exception of established names.

Introduction

School is generally believed to be a place where children can learn in peace and harmony with others of their respective age-group or even make friends. However, differences in personalities and other social aspects can sometimes lead children to quarrels, arguments, hostility towards others or more serious issues, like bullying and violence. The issue of school violence in South Korean high schools is rather specific as it reflects the importance of high social status, the power of money and exceptionally competitive school environment. Although the government has been trying to resolve these issues, in Korean high schools bullying is still rampant to this day which makes it a highly talked-about topic, not only by domestic but also foreign media. With the rise in popularity of South Korean TV-dramas viewers cannot help but notice the severity of bullying portrayed in series such as the worldwide hit *The Glory* (Netflix 2023) or the twelve-episode zombie thriller *All of Us Are Dead* (Netflix 2022).

This thesis aims to provide a detailed look on the issue of violence committed by high schoolers, with a focus on South Korean high schools. It delves into the influence of societal issues on the committed violence itself and the consequences, such as how victims and perpetrators are affected, the way school violence committees work, and legal disputes held over the results of said committee's hearings. The second half of the thesis focuses on examining the representation of school violence in South Korean TV-dramas, especially the *The Glory* series, the motif of the victim's revenge and the inspiration it drew from real-life cases. The sources used for this thesis are mostly recently published academic articles and articles published by trusted South Korean media or international news outlets.

1. School violence in South Korea

School violence, in Korean *hakpok* (abbreviation of the words *hakgyo pongnyeok*, literally *school violence*), has been deemed as one of the most debated nation-widespread social issues in modern Korean history as even today new cases of bullying keep appearing on the news touching the sore spot for most Koreans. One of the reasons for the frequent negative response from the public is said to be the constant reminder of the past when bullying was not as talked about as today and the bullies mostly got away from their actions unpunished (Choi 2023a). It also serves as a reminder of much wider problems, such as the importance of wealth and the power of money in a capitalistic society. For instance, an individual who is wealthier has also consequently more power over others, paying themselves out of trouble or using their contacts to not have to be served justice. In the case of school violence, if the offenders' parents are more financially secure than those of their victims', the bullies tend to be more likely to avoid appropriate punishment.

There are several factors which make this topic culturally specific, such as the importance of wealth and lack of justice or various other factors, e.g. the Confucianist values of Koreans or the extremely competitive school environment. This section serves as an overview of those factors and offers a detailed look at what makes someone a bully or a victim of bullying in South Korea.

1.1 History of *hakpok*

School violence in South Korea is believed by many to be an issue of modern society but historical sources claim otherwise. First instances of local news covering cases of bullying or violence between students can be found all the way in 1950s newspapers. Most articles mentioning school violence in that decade come from the later 1950s as before then the Korean peninsula was amid the Korean War and in the few coming years up until the second half of the decade actively dealt with its aftermaths. The news outlets probably focused more on the war affecting all people of the peninsula rather than other social issues which could have been seen as less important to report on.

Several articles kept in the newspaper archives on Naver¹ such as “Classroom shaken up by violence” (*Dong-a ilbo* 1959) mention violence and collective assault on school grounds, other articles even mention death and stabbings (Bax 2016, 98). The blogger *Godeun* went through various old newspaper archives to find mentions of school violence mostly to combat

¹ South Korean online platform with its own search engine

the often news-repeated belief that bullying in schools is a rampant issue of the new millennium only. He decided to publish his findings in several posts² mentioning archived articles from the 1950s all the way to the first decade of the 21st century. One of his conclusions is that people are not aware of the degree of school violence that occurred in the past: “if such a thing as students being beaten or killed with a weapon were reported on the news these days, it would be considered shocking to everyone.”

In the 1960s South Korea was once again swept by great changes. On 16 May 1961 Park Chunghee carried out a military coup which made the previous elections meaningless as newly elected democratic president Yun Posun effectively lost all his presidential power and Park took over leading the country as the chairman of the so-called Supreme Council for National Reconstruction. The military regime then tried to crackdown on school violence by publicly exercising more power. This meant the police were apprehending more so-called “school gangsters”³, some of whom were even tried in military court. The strategy behind these actions was to completely eradicate school violence from Korean society (Bax 2016, 98).

In the 1970s South Korea was still in a rather chaotic mood as the administration now focused mainly on creating a better image for the country. This meant making the country look happier, cleaner, and better developed. One of the steps the government took to reach these goals was for example the so-called *saemaetul undong* (“New Village Movement”) which was supposed to modernize the countryside. School violence cases were still being covered by the media but not much attention was given to them as most cases were overlooked by the public because of this new “happiness” campaign.

However, this sentiment changed drastically in the 1980s when an epidemic of suicides by victims of *ijime* (bullying) took over Japan. Similarly to what had happened in South Korea, the Japanese media then released several suicide notes of students calling for help (Naito and Gielen 2005). Suddenly, both the South Korean media and the public started paying much closer attention to school violence again. One of the articles from the first half of the decade titled “Scary teenagers are getting more violent” (Lee 1982) describes how children are getting more and more scared to go to school as they fear the violent gangs of delinquents would cause them harm. Another paragraph of the article mentions how school violence is becoming ‘chronic’ as the victims in fear of bullies’ vengeance do not tell their parents or teachers about

² This is the first of five posts uploaded in 2012 on a blog called *Caperture Laboratories* talking about the history of school violence in South Korea: <https://blog.naver.com/jjy0501/100152772193>.

³ Large groups of violent students forming a “gang”, often wielding weapons

the harassment, and the schools are also rather hesitant to report the bullying to police as to avoid reprimands.

In the 1990s this sentiment of school violence getting worse day by day stayed the same as in the 1980s. Newspapers reported frequently about cases such as an elementary student cutting out a junior's tongue with scissors or a student stabbing their bully to death (*Gyeonghyang sinmun* 1996) – cases that cause bigger commotion in the public than ever. Mostly the public's reaction then led to the enactment of the “Juvenile Protection Act” in 1997 (Heo 1997) as one of the first legal steps to fight school violence. The law has been changed many times since then to its current wording:

The purpose of this Act is to regulate the distribution of harmful media materials (...) among juveniles (...) and protect and rescue them from the injurious environment including harmful acts such as the abuse of and violence against them in order to help juveniles grow into persons of sound character. (Juvenile Protection Act 1997)

The blogger Godeun, apart from the old articles, also included his own observations in his posts. In conclusion, he expressed that the law is still insufficient and does not do a good job at protecting children.

In the new millennium, the issue of group bullying persists. In the early 2010s some of the media and even the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology started to shift the blame to webtoons and computer games as the cause of school violence (Yun 2012). After several studies it has been now proven there is no link between playing violent PC games and being violent in real life (Kühn et al. 2019), therefore it can be said that in the 2020s the ‘witch hunt’ against this kind of media is no longer as rampant.

1.2 Becoming an *iljin*

To fully understand who the perpetrator of school violence is, the definition of bullying itself first needs to be established. The most widely accepted explanation for bullying is that it is an intentional aggressive act repeatedly carried out by an offender towards an objectively less powerful victim over a longer period (Olweus 1991; Smith and Brain 2000). Olweus (1991) states bullying happens without the victim's provocation. It is accepted by most experts that bullying consists not only of physical aggression but also of other types of harassment, such as psychological harm-doing, theft and destroying of the victim's possessions.

Thus, a bully is usually someone who aggressively harasses someone who is weaker than them. In South Korea, such a person is called an *iljin*, an expression which was first used in the 1980s with the meaning of a person who is good at fighting, so they stand first (in the

front) during gang fights.⁴ Although there is an established general description for who a bully is, there are many types of bullies with different sets of behavioral and personality patterns.

1.2.1 Characteristics of *iljin*

The following characteristics of South Korean bullies were collected through multiple surveys. In the *Analysis Report of the 1st Survey of School Violence in 2022* done by Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI 2023a) the ratio between the sex of bullies is significantly bigger than in studies which were made in the 1990s (KIC 1999; KNTU 1999), as the female students made up only a fourth of all respondents who admitted to causing harm to their peers in 2022. A study made by the Korean National Teachers' Union in 1999 found that the ratio between the sexes was almost in a perfect balance of half female and half male students, similarly to results of other studies made that year (KIC 1999). Therefore, it can be said that nowadays the perpetrators of school violence usually tend to be male students, compared to the past when the ratio of sexes used to be somewhat balanced. This claim is further supported by the *Analysis Report of the 2nd Survey of School Violence in 2022* (KEDI 2023b) which was held in the second half of 2022 and states that female students represented only a fourth of all bullies who completed the survey.

More personal characteristics of *iljin* cannot be found in newer surveys made by the KEDI which is caused by the institute no longer including questions such as “What are the Main Characteristics of a Bully?” in their questionnaires. However, a few mentions of how bullies have been perceived in the past are mentioned in older sources and studies such as one made by the KNTU (1999) where the bullies are said to be “physically stronger with the inclination to dominate others”. In a study made by the KEDI in 1998 it is said that “bullies are students who often neglect school responsibilities and live life mainly for pleasure”. The same study (KEDI 1998) then claims that more than 40% of respondents consisting of children and youth report the bullies being ill-tempered, having no sympathy towards their victims or remorse for their own actions. The study also states that about a third of all bullies cheat during exams.⁵

⁴ According to the etymology of the word as explained on NamuWiki, s.v. *iljin* (<https://namu.wiki/w/일진>).

⁵ The study (KEDI 1998) uses the word *keonning* (derived from the English adjective *cunning*) which is used as a term for cheating during exams.

1.2.2 Reasons why an individual becomes an *iljin*

The most influential philosophy of South Koreans has been, for centuries, Confucianism which puts the importance of family to the center of Korean culture, filial piety being an essential virtue for Korean children to honor their parents and elders. This necessity of returning the sacrifices parents make for their children lies heavily on the children's shoulders. In the current South Korean society, the way towards success is conditioned by obtaining higher education. Therefore, for the family to retain their reputation it is important that the children work and study very diligently as to fulfill their parents' expectations (Kim and Hoppe-Graff 2001). Because of this, Korean students spend most of their childhood confined to their desk, locked inside a *hagwon*⁶ or self-studying in libraries until late night hours. As a result of such practice, the students end up receiving extreme levels of stress, especially while gearing up towards the most important exam of their life, *suneung*, which determines whether they get accepted into the best universities in the country or not. In such a competitive school environment, not being able to reach the desired goals tends to be the tipping point for lots of students. And so, to get a relief of such stress some end up committing delinquency (Moon, Morash, and McCluskey 2012) or taking it out on their other classmates, as their peers are essentially the competitors they are trying to beat in order to succeed (Seo et al. 2017).

To establish other factors which create a bully, a study was conducted with 20 perpetrators of school violence detained at a youth correctional facility to reveal which societal issues they were impacted by (Bax 2019). This study mostly focused on the situation at home of each student and the way it impacted their school life. As it is a study working with a smaller sample of perpetrators who were already persecuted for their misconduct, the findings cannot be applied to every single bully in South Korean high schools but does offer a unique perspective of bullying being a cyclical issue. Bax then concluded that in most cases the instability at home, lack of affection and supervision led to the youth's decrease in interest in school. Instead, it led them to focus more on other activities which bring them pleasure and most then found themselves within cliques of friends with similar backgrounds. The affection absent from their parents was substituted by these so-called friends thanks to whom they could also let go of their anger and pent-up frustration often by conducting smaller or bigger misdemeanors.

For the purpose of finding out what the perpetrators themselves consider to be the reason for their bullying, KEDI also included a question of what reason the perpetrators had

⁶ Form of a paid private academy attended after school.

for doing so in their survey of school violence in 2022 (KEDI 2023b). More than half of the high schoolers replied they had no reason for doing so or just did it for fun. This was then followed by about 15% of the respondents stating they had either a misunderstanding with the victim or just a plain conflict. The answer “I did not like the victim’s behavior” was picked by 10% of the respondents. A fact worth pointing out is that none of the high school violence perpetrators picked the answers “I wanted to get attention from my guardian or a teacher” and “my friend, junior or senior ordered me to do so”. These options were mostly chosen by elementary and middle schoolers.

To show how the sentiments of the South Korean youth changed throughout the last 25 years, results of a survey conducted in 1999 (KIC 1999) are brought up, the same question being asked to all high school students, regardless of being a bully or not. For male students, the most frequently chosen reason was the same as the one chosen by bullies in 2022, with more than half of the male respondents stating school violence perpetrators bully “for fun”. Female students on the other hand were much more likely to state a more justifiable reason for why bullies harass others, claiming it as a precaution “not to be bullied”, with around 45% of female respondents choosing this option.

1.3 Who is a *wangtta*?

To start off this segment, it needs to be said that anyone can become a victim of bullying, no matter their physical or personality traits. In no way is this segment meant to victim blame those who went through any kind of harassment from others. The following description of a *wangtta* is only a compilation of information provided by academic articles and surveys conducted by the Korean Educational Development Institute.

In South Korea, the word *wangtta* is used to describe a victim of bullying or a person who has been unwillingly ostracized from their peer group. This word is a conjunction of the prefix *wang*, meaning great, and the suffix *tta*, the initial syllable of the word meaning to be excluded (Kim 2000). Although several articles (Chee 2006; Koo, Kwak and Smith 2008) use the word *wangtta* to also describe bullying itself, this thesis will only use it in its connotation to the victim of bullying as to not cause any confusion.

1.3.1 Characteristics of *wangtta*

The following characteristics of South Korean victims of bullying were collected through multiple surveys. In the *1st Analysis Report of School Violence* of 2022 (KEDI 2023a), the ratio between the sex of victims is similar to that in studies of the 1990s (KEDI 1998;

KIC 1997), where the male students made up about 10% more of the victims than female students and in 2022 this ratio had changed to about 35% of the victims being female and 65% being male students. These results show that most students involved in bullying, both perpetrators and victims, tend to be male.

As with the description of an *iljin*'s characteristics in the newer studies the data of personal characteristics of a *wangtta* are missing. In a study conducted by the KNTU in 1999 the students were asked "What kind of personal characteristics make someone more likely to be bullied?" (KNTU 1999). Its results showed students thought classmates who are "bragging" and "arrogant" tend to be bullied the most. These answers were followed by "being less or more liked by the teacher", meaning victims were getting either special positive treatment or a rather negative attention from their teachers. The study also showed one of the reasons for being bullied were victims' physical difficulties, such as stuttering, a limp or other physical handicaps attained because of an illness. A study from the KEDI showed that victims tend to be more timid and socially awkward than their peers, often not fighting back against their bullies resulting in others seeing them as an "easy target" for bullying (KEDI 1998).

1.3.2 Why victims do not speak out

Another specific aspect of school violence victims in South Korea are their reasons for not speaking out about their abuse. In the KEDI study of school violence in 2022, the most chosen answer of why the bullied high school student did not tell anyone about the abuse was "I did not think it was a big deal", followed by "I did not think asking would help" and "I wanted to resolve it on my own" (KEDI 2023a). When the students who did ask for help were questioned whether it actually made a difference in their case and to rate the provided help on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being "not helpful at all", 5 being "very helpful"), the average for high school students of 3.35 (KEDI 2023a) was the lowest out of all school levels.

Some victims do not tell anyone about their experience until many years later when the statute of limitations makes it already impossible for the perpetrator to be held accountable. Many victims then turn to the internet and accuse their bully anonymously, resulting in the perpetrators sometimes losing their jobs. However experts say, it is much better to work with schools to address the bullying as it is happening. In an interview with a school violence victim Pyo, she states the reason why victims do not speak out publicly is the defamation law which makes it possible for the perpetrators to sue the accuser even if they are telling the truth (Lee 2023). Pyo then states "If this law disappears, countless victims will start speaking out."

1.4 Forms of school violence

School violence takes several different forms, both physical and psychological. In the *1st Analysis Report of School Violence* of 2022 (KEDI 2023a) the most prevalent form of bullying is recorded to be ‘verbal abuse’ with more than 70% of bullied high school students having gone through such harassment. This is then followed by ‘group ostracization’, ‘cyber bullying’ and ‘physical violence’, all reaching about 20–30% of bullied victims’ experience. Out of all school levels, high school students went through the most ‘sexual violence’ with about 13% of respondents choosing this option. Lastly, ‘extortion of money and valuables’, ‘coercion’ and ‘stalking’ reached less than 10% of high school students’ experience.

The verbal abuse mostly consists of being called unkind names and teasing about physical appearance. Also, other indirect verbal abuse practice tends to be that of spreading rumors about the victim (Koo, Kwak and Smith 2008). Threats to the victim’s wellbeing are also common, such as threatening to harm the victim or to destroy the victim’s belongings (Seo et al. 2017). There has also been an instance of the perpetrator threatening to harm themselves. In the case of a high school student strangling her friend to death in 2023, it has been revealed that previously the perpetrator has been also threatening the victim with phone calls such as “If you don’t meet me today, I will kill myself” (Chae 2024).

Group ostracization means an individual being socially isolated and singled out by others. “Some victims may be ostracized by an entire class or even by the whole school” (Rashid 2023). In a case of a child prodigy who at 11 years of age joined a class full of 16 year-olds, his parents stated that “he had not been given any role in group projects” which along with other altercations subsequently led to him leaving the prestigious high school (Yoon 2023).

Cyber bullying is a concept of violence which is meant to cause fear or anxiety through online communication (chat rooms) or posts on the internet (bulletin boards, SNS⁷, etc.) (Hong et al. 2023). It became more prevalent in recent years compared to before the outbreak of covid-19. The percentage of this particular form of bullying experienced by high school students has grown from 9% in 2019 (MOE 2019) to around 23% in 2022. The popular South Korean chat platform *KakaoTalk* is a frequent place for cyber bullying to occur. Offenders either make a class group chat without the victim, intentionally leaving them out or add the victim to another group chat created just to verbally abuse them (Jung 2018).

⁷ Abbreviation for Social Networking Service.

The physical violence happening at South Korean high schools manifests itself in several forms. The first form is a basic aggressive type of physical harassment, such as hitting, kicking, or pushing (Seo et al. 2017). Secondly, causing bodily harm which cannot be seen at first glance is also common, such as hiding pins in victim's shoes causing injury to their feet (Lee 2023) or being scratched and pulled by hair (Ko 2023). The last form is violence which does not leave any marks of injury but rather creates psychological trauma for the victim, such as pushing their head down the toilet (Lee 2023) or having dirty water poured on them (Koo, Kwak and Smith 2008).

Sexual violence consists not only of rape and assault but also of illegal filming with hidden camera, in South Korea better known as *molka* (from *mollae kamera*). An instance of a *molka* used by a student inside of a school occurred in October 2023 in a high school on Jeju. The student was arrested after having illegally filmed his female classmates in the women's bathrooms. After confiscating his phone, the police identified at least 50 victims (Hong 2023).

Studies show a decrease of extortion of money and valuables with older students compared to younger ones (Hong et al. 2023) and when comparing the situation before and after the COVID-19 pandemic numbers show very little change with 8.1% of high school offenders having committed extortion in 2019 (Hong et al. 2023) and 7.9% in 2022 (KEDI 2023a).

In South Korea, victims of school violence are turned from humans to objects by a special form of coercion called "being a shuttle". It means carrying out any task the bullies tell victims to do for them. The most common type of this shuttle is called a "bread shuttle" which stands for being forced to buy bread or snacks for the bully. Different kinds of shuttle include a "bag shuttle" and a "homework shuttle" which stand for carrying the bully's bag or other belongings and writing the bully's homework respectively. By making the victims do humiliating acts, the offenders behave like the master of a slave, resulting in the victim losing their sense of freedom (Bax 2016).

Nowadays, stalking is less common than it used to be a few years ago. In 2019, 12% of high school offenders have been recognized as having stalked someone (Hong et al. 2023) and 7.2% in 2022 (KEDI 2023a). Often such cases are those of a student stalking a teacher. In 2023, a male high school student was sentenced to two years in prison after having stalked his female teacher 975 times between 10 April and 8 June (Min 2023).

1.5 The consequences

After the violence takes place, it always has its own consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim. As no case is the same as others, this section serves as an overview of possible and most frequent forms of aftermath of school violence.

1.5.1 Consequences faced by perpetrators

First part of this section will overlook what kind of punishment can a perpetrator of school violence in South Korea expect when the abuse is reported. When the school finds out about such events happening between their students, the first step it takes is having the students' home room teacher assess the severity of the violence (Ko 2023). Depending on their decision, the situation is either resolved internally in the school or following up with the school violence prevention committee's examination. These committees are often made up of around 10 members, consisting of lawyers, teachers, parents, and government officials (Ko 2023). These committee's after the examination can request the school's head to take one of these following measures to punish the offender: 1. An order to give a written apology to the victim; 2. Prohibition against making contact with, threatening, or retaliation against the victim and the student who reported school violence; 3. Service to the school; 4. Service to the society; 5. Completing a special educational course or receiving psychological treatment from an internal or external expert; 6. Suspension of attendance; 7. Change of class; 8. Transfer to another school; 9. Expulsion from the school (Act on the Prevention of and Countermeasures Against Violence in Schools 2012).

This decision can be objected to by the perpetrator's family who can then take the matter to court to re-examine the dispute, as the committee's decision lacks legal authority. The most frequent strategy behind this decision is to prolong the dispute for so long it will not be written on the perpetrator's school records to affect their university acceptance (Ko 2023). An instance of such an abuse of power has hit the news in 2023, when attorney Chung Sunsin took legal action to reverse his son's punishment of having to transfer to a different school (Choi 2023a) for bullying his dorm roommate in 2017 for eight months (Lee and Sohn 2023; Ko and Park 2023). Chung managed to drag out the dispute for a whole year using his status to receive special treatment in court (Ko and Park 2023) but ended up losing (Ko 2023). After the revelation of this year-long dispute, Chung's appointment as National Office of Investigation director was withdrawn (Ko and Park 2023).

However, this practice has been made much more difficult to carry out in 2024, as starting this year, records of serious school violence will be kept in school records of students

even 4 years after graduating from high school. The change affects measures no.6, 7 and 8 as those are considered serious acts of school violence (Choi 2024). Not only that but starting in 2026 universities will also be required by law to include student's school violence records during admissions and according to the record's severity will have the authority to either deduct points or exclude the applicant from admissions at once (Moon 2023).

As mentioned above (1.3.2), another possible outcome for the perpetrator is that of anonymous call-out years later. This practice could be considered a part of the so-called "cancel culture" concerning celebrities, athletes, or government officials. In 2021, there was an especially extensive call-out wave of K-pop idols and other celebrities who allegedly committed school violence during their school years. Such celebrities include Seo Soojin of the K-pop group *(G)I-dle* who had to subsequently leave the group even though the accusation turned out to be false. Since then, she was able to make come-back to the idol-industry scene in 2023 as a soloist (Choi 2023b). Another example was that of the volleyball-player twins, Lee Da-yeong and Lee Jae-yeong who after being anonymously accused of bullying students and verbally abusing teammates in middle school were dropped by their club (Bae and Church 2021; Burt 2023). Lee Da-yeong is now playing for the French volleyball club *Volero Le Cannet* (Paik 2023a) and her sister Lee Jae-yeong has returned to Korea after an injury sustained at her former team *PAOK Thessaloniki of Greece* in November 2021 (Paik 2023b) and has been inactive in the sport since then.

1.5.2 Victim's consequences

The first kind of consequences of school violence for victims is the physical kind which contains any sustained injuries, need for medical care or even death. In 2017, a middle-school student had to be hospitalized after being attacked by four of her bullies to the point of the victim being covered by her own blood of which photo evidence was posted onto social media by a friend of one of the offenders (Lee 2017). A year later in 2018, four teens dragged a 14-year old middle schooler to the roof of an apartment building where they proceeded to brutally beat him; to escape the abuse the boy ended up jumping from the roof resulting in his death (Park 2019).

The second kind of consequence is the psychological kind which is much more discussed and covered by different sources. The most prevalent emotional response school violence victims tend to have regardless of school level is "not wanting to go to school" according to the *2nd Analysis Report of School Violence of 2022* (KEDI 2023b). Other studies state that experiencing and falling victim to school violence at a young age can cause the victim

to develop serious clinical problems, such as anxiety and depression (Seo et al. 2017). In most serious cases, the frustration of not getting any help and failing to see a way out of their despair leads the victim to take or attempt to take their own life (Lee and Bae 2012). In an interview from May 2023, a school violence survivor Pyo stated she has “suffered years from insomnia and depression as a result of (school violence)” (Lee 2023). Unfortunately, the same year in October 2023, Pyo took her own life after uploading a video to YouTube where at the end she is heard saying “I don’t have the confidence to endure and overcome the pain anymore. There is nothing left to continue my life.” (Kim 2023). In the case of lawyer Chung’s son, the victim stated the abuse caused him to “suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and panic disorder.” (Lee and Sohn 2023).

Sometimes, the victim’s feelings of being wronged turn into a need for revenge. In a Korean School Psychiatry Association survey with 65 psychiatrists, they said nearly 90% of school violence victims thought of getting revenge and about half of them had already well thought out plans (Choi 2023a). Often, victims take revenge against their offender years after the abuse, usually by accusing and calling them out online, affecting their work and personal lives. There have also been cases of violent retaliation of the victim still in school. In 2016, a student stabbed his bully in the restroom where he was taken involuntarily (Son 2016). Although the victim alerted his teacher of the abuse, the bully only received brief counseling after which the victim was harassed again resulting in the victim’s retaliation and him attacking the bully with a weapon he brought with him from home (Kim 2024a).

1.6 Countermeasures and prevention

First major effort to combat school violence in South Korea was implementing an *Act on the Prevention of and Countermeasures Against Violence in Schools* on 29 January 2004 (Lee and Bae 2012). This act led to the school violence prevention committees to monitor bullying (Ko 2023) and under this act the offenders can be ordered to fulfill varying kinds of punishment, from writing an apology letter to the victim to expulsion from school (Choi 2023a). The guidelines for handling the committee’s hearings were introduced during a major revision in 2012 (Choi 2023a) and another change for these committees occurred in 2021, when schools’ committees were moved to local branches of education offices, making the number of committees throughout the country stand at 176 offices (Ko 2023).

In February 2023, President Yoon Suk-yeol promised he would put an end to school violence (Rashid 2023) and even before then, during the presidential election period, he vowed to increase the number of police officers assigned to each school (Ko 2023). In response, the

NPA (National Police Agency) reported they would increase the number by adding 1,000 officers assigned to monitor the school areas every year during his presence in office. However, the enforcement pool decreased by 100 officers at the end of 2022, just 7 months after Yoon's inauguration (Ko 2023).

As mentioned above (1.5.1), another countermeasure was introduced in 2024, when the period of committed school violence being recorded in student's school records was prolonged. In 2026, this will be accompanied by an obligation to include these records in student's documents during university admissions.

The KFTU (Korean Federation of Teachers Associations) also emphasized the importance of creating an institution which would be specialized in education for perpetrators and their parents (Rashid 2023). However, in the future, a way to combat school violence should put an emphasis on being of the prevention character, rather than the current corrective actions being taken. First few efforts of putting such prevention to work can be seen at several schools all over the country already. In April 2024, LG Household and Health Care announced the launching and already held few first classes of a school violence prevention program called *Hakgyoya Utja* (literally *School, Let's Laugh*) and plans to give a total of 2,400 lectures at 164 schools across the country (Cha 2024). The program consists of six subjects: empathy, emotion control, positive thinking, difference recognition, digital communication, and defensive behavior (Cha 2024).

2. The representation of school violence in TV-dramas

With the growing popularity of South Korean media such as pop music, fashion and TV-dramas South Korea has managed to make a strong impression abroad by deploying soft power. Especially other Asian countries have contributed to the spread of *hallyu*⁸ as 70% of the revenue generated from the international distribution of Korean TV-dramas comes from Asian countries (Maybin 2018). These Korean TV-dramas (more commonly known as *k-dramas*) are often likened to the Spanish telenovelas in its emotional storyline and dramatic development (Chung 2014). School violence has in the last 10 years become a frequently surfacing topic. Nowadays, even Netflix produces its own Korean shows with the issue of school violence as the centerpiece or as the side story. These shows include the 2022 zombie-thriller *All of Us Are Dead* (*Jigeum Uri Hakgyoneun*), 2020 teen psychological drama *Extracurricular* (*Ingan Sueop*) and most importantly the 2022 revenge psychological thriller *The Glory* (*Deo Geullori*), which became the 5th most watched non-English language Netflix series with 436.90 million hours watched in the first 28 days after release (Stoll 2023).

The Glory is a psychological revenge thriller which tells the story of a woman, Mun Dong-eun (portrayed by Song Hye-gyo), who was brutally bullied by her classmates in high school and seeks revenge as an adult. She has spent twenty years planning the ultimate punishment for her tormentors, trying to make her bullies suffer and lose their successful careers. The show follows her as she carries out her plan, with frequent flashbacks to when she was abused and to the period of life she spent working extremely hard towards her revenge.

Since its release, *The Glory* gained a lot of praise for its depiction of school violence and shedding light on this issue not only domestically, but also overseas. In the 59th South Korean film awards ceremony *Baeksang Art Awards* the drama claimed three out of eight nominations – Best Actress (Song Hye-gyo), Best Drama and Best Supporting Actress (Im Ji-yeon). Although some critics denounced the piece for its extremely graphic and unsettling portrayal of the abuse, it managed to spark discussions about an issue which is still rampant within South Korea (Rashid 2023).

In this chapter, different themes and motifs appearing in *The Glory* will be analyzed and compared to the same themes appearing in other South Korean TV-dramas which have aired over the last ten years.

⁸ Also called the *K-wave*, *hallyu* is the global phenomenon of South Korean popular culture's sudden rise in popularity.

2.1 Revenge

First, one of the most frequently used motifs in South Korean TV-dramas centered around school violence is that of a victim getting revenge on their abusers. Its frequent use could be explained as securing success with the audience early on, as they feel a sort of satisfaction by seeing the perpetrators take the consequences they deserve. This is especially true in South Korea where school violence perpetrators are likely to get away unpunished (Choi 2023a), so seeing such wrongdoings sanctioned at least on screen gives the audience a sense of fairness.

This motif is important for *The Glory* as it builds the entire story around it. The main character Dong-eun starts off the entire show in episode 1 by addressing a letter to her main abuser, Yeon-jin, saying: “Dear Yeon-jin, whom I miss. Do you remember that I used to hate the summer? Thankfully, I moved away before it got even hotter. I’ve been organizing my pictures since yesterday, but it’s taking a while because they’re all such lovely faces. I started picturing in my head that someday you might open that front door and walk in here.” While the audience can hear Dong-eun read out the letter, the camera shows her in her apartment stapling different pictures and news cutouts to the wall; from time to time showing burn scars covering her arms and shoulders. This letter technique is used throughout the show up until the point Dong-eun gives Yeonjin the letter she has been writing. The reading out of the letter serves as a narrative device which gives the audience an insight into Dong-eun’s mental state. Although she reads it in a rather calm voice, the content of the letter sounds more like a scream (Park and Park 2023), a very angry scream full of grief for her lost childhood and innocence. By reading out the letter, she also explains why and how she is going to take revenge on her abusers.

Dong-eun’s private revenge also serves her as a form of self-therapy (Yun 2023); letting out the pent-up rage and feelings of unfairness she kept inside herself for twenty years. She starts off the revenge with the plan of killing both Yeon-jin and herself at the end, not planning to get close to anyone who helps her along the way and not letting herself get too happy over anything as it could “make her forget the rage” she felt by the abuse she went through. However, the process of going through with her plans requires her to take accomplices whose acknowledgement and sympathy for her mental and physical scars then help Dong-eun in the healing process.

Thanks to Yeon-jin not apologizing even when given the chance to, the revenge Dong-eun carries out in the end feels justifiable and right. Thanks to Dong-eun’s involvement, Yeon-jin’s beloved mother turns against her daughter, gets her imprisoned for the crimes she has

committed, and her husband leaves her along with their daughter. In the end, Yeon-jin is left with nothing she cared for and in her last scene of the show is seen being bullied by other cellmates, closing off the circle of torture by achieving the same fate she sealed for Dong-eun in high school.

Another TV-drama using the motif of revenge is the 2021 action series *Taxi Driver (Mobeom Taeksi)* which tells the story of a naval academy graduate Kim Do-gi, now working as a taxi driver for an organization called the ‘Rainbow Taxi Company’ which offers a special “revenge-call” service. When clients ask the organization to take revenge, the workers go and carry it out for them. Each two episodes deal with a different client’s story and their revenge. episodes 3 and 4 are set around a high school to which a victim of school violence, Jeong-min, called the Taxi Company to. Jeong-min has been viciously bullied by three classmates who seem to get away with anything, mostly thanks to the school turning a blind eye to their behavior. The main character Do-gi goes undercover as a new teacher to the same school to get closer to the perpetrators and carry out the revenge. Through various twists and turns Do-gi manages to scare the perpetrators away and make them go to the police with handwritten confessions of everything they have done. Do-gi also manages to convince Jeong-min to come back to school and another of the taxi company workers lets Jeong-min know he was selected for a scholarship which would take care of his upcoming university fees. Just as *The Glory* did, this story again showed that the victim was not alone in the process of getting their revenge and did not have to be outcast for it in the end.

Although seeing on-screen victims get their revenge on the abusers who tormented them feels satisfying to most, this spreading view of revenge being easily done and always successful could be harmful as in reality the experience of someone getting revenge is never that relieving or pleasant (Park 2023). Real victims of school violence who try to get their private revenge outside the legal system are not that likely to end their revenge in success and be able to live on normally or with adequate sense of relief from their suffering.

2.2 Social hierarchy

The theme to which basically everything else ties to in South Korean TV-dramas and filmography in general is the importance of social class and its influence on the life of Koreans. Today, probably the best-known film portrayal of South Korean social classes and their nuance is the 2020 Oscars Best Picture winner *Parasite (Gisaengchung)*. This film in particular managed to create a representing picture of social inequality and wealth disparity in 21st century South Korea and relay it to millions of people around the world (Cho and Park 2020).

This depiction and many others are reacting to and criticizing the state of South Korea's economic inequality with the poverty gap being 32% (OECD 2021), ranking 14th among OECD countries.

In a capitalistic society where most money and power are in the hands of few, trouble is bound to brew. Along with growing assets grows the power one holds over others. This also manifests itself in the school environment as students from wealthier households tend to have much easier time establishing themselves between their classmates, in some cases even holding sort-of influence over them. In *The Glory*, the main abuser (Yeon-jin) comes from a wealthy family with strong connections to the school faculty; whereas Dong-eun's mother is working at a shabby hair-salon and is a less than supportive caricature of a mother to Dong-eun which can be seen in episode 1 when in return for pay-out she signs off Dong-eun's drop-out document stating the reason for her dropping out was maladjustment, not school violence. It is this power imbalance which makes Yeon-jin even more arrogant and cocky towards Dong-eun. Yeon-jin sees being associated with anyone of lower income background as humiliating which can be seen in episode 14 in a flashback when So-hui, another of Yeon-jin's victims, wears the same dress as Yeon-jin who throws a tantrum over this and orders So-hui to take her clothes off.

This social class importance affects most relationships between on-screen bullies and victims. In the 2015 drama series *Who Are You: School 2015* (*Huayu: Hakgyo 2015*) the main character Eun-bi, an orphan living in an orphanage is bullied by a gang of teenage girls led by So-yeong who is a famous prosecutor's daughter. The reason why Eun-bi is targeted is because she stood up for another bullied classmate and So-yeong took it very personally as to "how could an orphan go against what she says?" The abuse is so bad, Eun-bi attempts to take her own life by jumping off a bridge but is saved by a mysterious figure.

The usage of this theme is very frequent in Korean popular media and emphasizes the unfairness of the South Korean capitalistic society and its approach to power imbalance, even between young students (Kasulis 2020).

2.3 "Why?" - "Just because."

Another theme used in Korean drama is the perpetrators not having any real reason for harassing the victim. Bullying others serves them as a sort of amusement for when they feel bored. Any kind of minor altercation they have with the victim leads to them feeling the bullying was called for and the victim deserved it (Fluck 2014).

In episode 9, when met with her husband's interrogation Yeon-jin admits she only bullied Dong-eun because she did not like her. However, in the previous episode 8 the husband had already heard from one of the other abusers that the true reason Yeon-jin started bullying Dong-eun was because she refused to clean the bathrooms instead of Yeon-jin. Dong-eun was the only one who dared to stand up to Yeon-jin as everyone else feared her and what she could do. This small defiance of saying no to an unreasonable order gave Yeon-jin, who saw Dong-eun as someone beneath her level, the reason to start viciously attacking her whenever she could.

In another 2020 Netflix horror fantasy drama, *Sweet Home*, the main character Hyeon-su can be seen through different flashbacks bullied by his new classmate who then turns the whole class against Hyeon-su. It is only in the 7th episode out of 8, when the audience finally finds out when and why the abuse started. In a flashback, Hyeon-su is seen trying to befriend the new student by offering him coins to buy a drink from the vending machine next to the school field. From that day on, the new student bullies Hyeon-su viciously, kicking and beating him in their classroom or in the school bathrooms. It is also revealed the new student is the son of a rich and powerful man which is why everyone just follows his orders and bullies Hyeon-su with him. Only after Hyeon-su asks the new student why he did not like him and harassed him so much, does the new student just say "...because the sky was too clear." The true reason could be similar to that of Yeon-jin in *The Glory* as feeling humiliated by someone who they think of as lower class. For Yeon-jin it was defiance, for the new student in *Sweet Home* it was seeing Hyeon-su's help as a blow to his ego and mockery which set off the bullying.

This theme is used to emphasize that the victim of school violence is and never was an intentional accomplice in their suffering. For someone to truly heal from this kind of abuse it is important to understand they were never at fault. Therefore, the usage of the bully's absurd reason to harass someone as a theme in TV-dramas could be seen as helpful towards the self-healing of a victim (Yun 2023).

2.4 Extreme physical violence

The scenes of South Korean TV-dramas which cause the most shock and make the audience feel uneasiness are those of graphic physical violence portrayal. For this exact reason some critics condemned *The Glory*, viewing it as too violent. However, when asked whether the series seemed realistic most Koreans coincided with the statement (Asian Boss 2023). Some interviewees even added the show "toned it down" or "reality is way worse".

The most shocking scene of *The Glory* took place right in episode 1 when Mun Dong-eun was dragged by the abusers to their school gymnasium where they proceeded to restrain her arms and burn her multiple times with a hair curler on bare skin. The camera then shows Dong-eun's right arm with bright red burn marks caused by the curler. After a couple days pass by, Dong-eun is about to step into her apartment when she hears loud commotion from the inside and as she is about to leave the abusers notice her and drag her inside her own apartment to where they have broken in prior. They then threaten her to dance or in case she did not she would be burned again, this time with her own iron. The abuse is not shown, however in the next scene the camera shows red burn marks in the shape of an iron on Dong-eun's legs, insinuating she was burnt by the abusers in the end.

Other South Korean shows have also portrayed extreme physical violence in the school environment before; for example, the 2022 web series *Weak Hero Class 1 (Yakhan Yeongung Class 1)* which tells the story of Yeon Si-eun, a quiet school prodigy who violently retaliates against his class bullies. Prior to his retaliation, he had been choked and drugged with a fentanyl patch by the bullies resulting in him getting a lower score on a test. This makes Si-eun extremely angry, stabbing a pen into one of the bullies' hand and repeatedly slamming a thick book against the other bullies' head, breaking his nose.

As a result of using this representation of physical violence in Korean high schools in dramas, Korean students could be seen as very violent and coldhearted, in the case of *The Glory* even enjoying inflicting pain on others (Jo 2023).

2.5 Role of a teacher

The role of a teacher in Korean TV-dramas is always at least slightly different. However, when portraying school violence, most times teachers are portrayed as onlookers and not being able to help. It is also difficult for teachers to say something against the school administration when their whole career depends on how they handle these situations (Choi and Kim 2016).

However, in *The Glory* Dong-eun's class homeroom teacher is straight-up abusive and takes out all anger on Dong-eun. In episode 1, when Dong-eun officially reports her abusers for school violence to the police, the teacher comes to the police station and acts as Dong-eun's legal guardian. He immediately scolds Dong-eun for reporting "a small prank" and after she drops out of school, he calls her and berates her for listing the abusers, all from rich families, as the reason as it resulted in the vice-principal confronting the class homeroom teacher about the violence going on in his class. When Dong-eun comes back to the school to take her

belongings, the teacher calls her up to the teacher's office and attacks her, slapping her across the face until other teachers stop him.

A more common representation of a teacher in Korean dramas is that of 2020 drama series *Itaewon Class*. In episode 1, when the main character Bak Saero-i comes to his new school he is welcomed with the sight of a bleached hair student punching and pouring milk onto another student's head. However, the teacher walking into the classroom just averts his gaze from the two students at the back of the room and even when Saero-i points out the bullying to him verbally, the teacher just shrugs his shoulders. The teacher's behavior is afterwards explained as even if he reported the bullying to the school administration, the bully's parents have immense power over the school, therefore nothing would have changed.

Because of this kind of representation in dramas, teachers could be viewed as incompetent and cowardly when dealing with school violence (Lee 2022). They are seen as selfish, caring about their career as a teacher more than their students' happiness and wellbeing.

2.6 Trauma

As both physical and mental abuse cause the victim to experience immense pain, most times it leaves some kind of trauma behind. The trauma can affect the victim's everyday life or be set off by a particular trigger (Arifin et al. 2023). As such, trauma should not be forgotten when telling a story of a school violence victim in popular media.

The Glory managed to portray the trauma of a victim of bullying in school well. Not only can the audience see the burn marks on Dong-eun's skin as a physical result of the abuse, in episode 6 Dong-eun experiences severe panic attack as the sizzling sound of meat cooking on a grill reminds her of the exact moment the abusers burnt her arms with the hair curler.

Another representation of school violence victim's trauma is the story of a broadcasting station writer Eun-bi in episodes 1 and 2 of the 2022 fantasy TV-drama *Tomorrow (Naeil)*. In high school, Eun-bi was constantly bullied by her fellow classmate Hye-won who forced Eun-bi to laugh whenever she clicked her pen. However, in a twisted turn of events, Hye-won has turned into a successful webtoon⁹ writer of a school violence victim's story. Eun-bi is forced by her broadcasting station to conduct an interview with Hye-won who at first fails to recognize Eun-bi when both finally meet in person again. However, when the recognition settles in, Hye-won immediately starts to berate Eun-bi, clicking her pen throughout the

⁹ Digital comic series.

interview and by doing so, triggering the trauma of Eun-bi's school days in her. Afterwards, Eun-bi has to hide inside their company's bathroom to calm down.

The representation of trauma caused by experiencing school violence in youth is rather realistic in South Korean dramas, emphasizing how being bullied takes a mental toll on victims. The story from *Tomorrow* even shows the unfairness of consequences for victims having devastating effects on their mental health even years after the abuse, whereas consequences for abusers are almost non-existent. All the more, abusers enjoy the luxury of being able to just forget about their wrongdoings (Sen 2022).

2.7 Sexual violence

The last common theme of South Korean school violence dramas explained and analyzed in this thesis is the sexual violence committed by a student on another student. Sexual assault appears in most of the TV-dramas mentioned in this thesis and is rightfully looked down upon.

In *The Glory*, Dong-eun is subjected to sexual assault from one of the abusers when he forcefully kisses her after being burned by the hair curler in the school gymnasium. She is also forced by the two male abusers to stand in the rain while wearing her white school uniform shirt, making it effectively see through and exposing her chest area. After an autopsy of the other school violence victim So-hui's body, it is found out she was pregnant at the time of her death. It stands to question whether she engaged in consensual sexual intercourse or whether she was raped by one of the male abusers prior to her death. The third victim of the abuse the audience gets to know is Gyeong-ran who admits she killed one of the abusers to get revenge for him raping her when they were still in high school.

Sexual assault is also depicted in *All of Us Are Dead* when the bullies forcefully take off the victim Eun-ji's shirt and record her naked upper body on their mobile phone. They then threaten the other bullied student to give them money for not uploading the video to the internet. After the zombie pandemic breaks out, even with zombies surrounding her, Eun-ji is desperately trying to find the phone inside the school and delete the video before it gets uploaded. She believes the video being uploaded for everyone to see would make her less of a human than becoming a zombie.

The representation of school violence perpetrators committing sexual assault or rape in TV-dramas is usually used to indicate the lack of basic compassion for other humans (Cuklanz 2020). Using this theme makes the audience even less sympathetic towards the offenders as sexual assault is objectively seen as a heinous crime committed by truly morally depraved individuals.

3. Behind the scenes of *The Glory*

After its release, *The Glory*'s portrayal of the physical abuse – burning the victim with a hair curling wand – reminded South Korean viewers of a case that had happened in 2006, at a middle school in Cheongju. The victim went through 20 days of torture-like abuse being beaten and burned by a curler, the offenders not allowing her wounds to heal. After the abuse came to light, the victim had to be hospitalized for 6 weeks to attend to her injuries. After *The Glory*'s release, this victim made a public appearance in a televised interview (*Jingyeokui Eonnideul* 2023) where she admitted she has not watched the series as she is too scared of being reminded of the abuse. Even 17 years later she remains traumatized, not being able to wear short-sleeve T-shirts in summer to not show her burn scars and having to tell hairdressers not to use a hair straightener or a hair curler because this would trigger panic attacks. She also revealed that only one of the perpetrators was arrested but did not face any real punishment. Of these perpetrators, one is now working as a nurse and another as a social worker (*Jingyeokui Eonnideul* 2023) which seems rather ironic considering the lack of empathy they had for the victim when abusing her.

The show's screenwriter Gim Eun-suk (*Descendants of the Sun, Goblin, Mr. Sunshine*) revealed in an interview that she was inspired by her daughter to write the screenplay. One day, the daughter asked Kim whether she would prefer her to be the victim or the perpetrator of school violence. During the press conference for the second half of the series (released in March 2023), Kim said she found the answer to her daughter's question while writing *The Glory* stating: "If my daughter is beaten to death, there might be a solution and that solution would be pulling all the perpetrators to hell because I have the money to do so" (Burt 2023).

The sad irony of the production of *The Glory* is that two important members of the production and cast team were also involved in school violence during their school days. Right before the release of the second half of the series, An Gil-ho, the show's director was accused of having been a school violence perpetrator in 1996, when he was a student in the Philippines. He first refuted this claim, but later released a statement through his law firm in which he apologized for the trouble he caused back then and offered a personal apology to everyone who was negatively impacted by the incident (Ha 2023).

The second person from those who participated in filming *The Glory* and was accused later of being a school bully was the actress Gim Hi-eora who portrayed I Sa-ra, one of Mun Dong-eun's abusers. The accuser claimed Gim used to belong to a school bully gang and

went around the school abusing others. Gim Hi-eora has since refuted this claim however confessed she did extort money from some of her classmates (Kim 2024b).

Conclusion

This thesis focused on school violence committed in South Korea and its representation in TV-dramas. The first chapter provides a detailed look on the current state of the issue, describing and analyzing important cultural specifics affecting it. The second chapter describes and analyzes the representation of various themes concerning school violence in South Korean TV-dramas of the last decade, its main focus being on the 2022 series *The Glory*. Last chapter offers an insight into the production of *The Glory* and what real life case it drew inspiration from.

First, a brief history of school violence being reported on by the local media in the second half of the 20th century was introduced, followed by the characteristics of both perpetrators and victims. The second section analyzed the impact of Confucianism on South Korean high schoolers, causing immense stress from having the obligation to retain their family's reputation by achieving excellent results in school. The third section described the problems victims face while reporting the abuse or speaking out about it later in life because of the current defamation laws. Next the forms of school violence were introduced along with data supporting the fact that currently the most frequent kind of abuse committed is the verbal kind. The consequences for perpetrators of school violence were found to be less impactful on their life than for the victims. However, the South Korean government is currently making an effort to change that by adjusting a few laws concerning the longevity of school violence being recorded in the perpetrator's school files.

Second, the themes appearing in South Korean TV-dramas centered around school violence were analyzed. The first section of the second chapter describes how the motif of revenge presents itself in *The Glory* and the possible harmful influence it could have on real victims of school violence. In the second section it is described how the economic inequality of South Korea affects the representation of social hierarchy between students on screen. The other themes frequently appearing in school violence centered TV-dramas include the physical violence and the shock value it brings, the teacher being a powerless bystander, the expression of unfairness between the victim's trauma and the perpetrator's willful ignorance and lastly the perpetrator's lack of compassion indicated by them committing sexual violence.

Last, the real-life story from which *The Glory* drew inspiration is introduced, revealing that the victim is still traumatized from the abuse and the perpetrators got away largely unscathed, unlike in the drama. This section is followed by the mention of two of the production and cast members on the set of *The Glory* who were also involved in school violence during their school days.

During the process of writing this thesis a new South Korean TV-drama centered around school violence was released, called the *Pyramid Game* (2024), based on a Webtoon comic of the same name. After the release, several schools in Jeonju reported cases of students trying to recreate the physical abuse portrayed in the series. Although most of the imitation is currently in the form of a game, some of the schools are concerned for the games to not turn to violence, as even torture techniques such as waterboarding were portrayed in the series too (Yu 2024). This issue would call for further research on the influence of the representation of school violence in TV-dramas on youth.

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