

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Filozofická fakulta
Katedra asijských studií

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Zobrazenie rodovej problematiky v juhokórejských drámach: Postavy Ajeossi
v pozitívnom svetle ako výzva pre feministické rámce?

The Portrayal of Gender Issues in South Korean Dramas: Ajeossi Characters
Cast in a Positive Light as a Challenge to Feminist Frames?

OLOMOUC 2024 Bc. Jaroslav Martinec
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This thesis aims to examine the representation of gender issues in South Korean dramas, with a focus on the portrayal of *ajeossi* (middle-aged man) characters and their role in shaping cultural attitudes towards gender roles and feminism. By analysing two popular dramas, this study aims to understand how these representations mirror reality or construct it. Some portrayals of *ajeossi* characters form a counter-discourse to popular feminist discourses that see these men as responsible for patriarchalism. Through a close reading of the chosen dramas, the research will reveal a concept of *ajeossi* that is part of the cultural lexicon of most Koreans but is contested: a positive, sacrificing character that deserves mercy and pity. This stands in contrast to competing public discourses that vilify and express disgust towards *ajeossi*. This study sheds light on deep and fundamental divides in Korean society that are multi-layered and warrant unbiased attention.

Anotácia

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Táto práca sa zameriava na skúmanie reprezentácie rodových otázok v juhokórejských drámach so zameraním na zobrazenie postáv ajeossi (mužov stredného veku) a ich úlohu pri formovaní kultúrnych postojov k rodovým rolám a feminizmu. Analýzou dvoch populárnych drám sa táto štúdia zameriava na pochopenie toho, ako tieto reprezentácie odrážajú realitu alebo ju konštruujú. Niektoré zobrazenia postáv ajeossi tvoria protiklad k populárnym feministickým diskurzom, ktoré považujú týchto mužov za zodpovedných za patriarchalizmus. Pozorným čítaním vybraných drám táto štúdia odhalí koncept ajeossi, ktorý je súčasťou kultúrneho lexikónu väčšiny Kórejčanov, no je sporný: pozitívna, obetavá postava, ktorá si zaslúži milosť a súciti. To je v protiklade s konkurenčnými verejnými diskurzmi, ktoré hanobia ajeossi a vyjadrujú ich znechutenie. Štúdia vrhá svetlo na hlboké a zásadné rozdiely v kórejskej spoločnosti, ktoré sú viacvrstvové a vyžadujú si nezaujatú pozornosť.

Na tomto mieste by som sa chcel poďakovať vedúcemu diplomovej práce Mag. Andreas Schirmer, Dr. pre jeho ústretovosť, odborné vedenie, cenné rady a pripomienky počas vypracovávania tejto práce. Ďalej by som chcel poďakovať svojej rodine a blízkym priateľom za ich podporu a motiváciu.

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Table of Contents

- Transcription** 8
- Background and Context** 11
 - Background..... 11
 - History of Feminism in South Korea 12
 - The #MeToo movement in South Korea 14
 - Context 14
- Aims and Objectives** 16
 - Research Question and Goals..... 16
- Literature review** 17
 - Gender roles and expectations in Korean society..... 18
 - Feminist discourses and their critiques of *ajeossi* characters..... 19
 - Media and its role in shaping cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism 21
- Methodology**..... 22
 - Criteria for Selecting the Two Dramas for Analysis:..... 23
 - Data collection and analysis 23
 - Justification for Choosing Specific Dramas:..... 25
 - Limitations 26
- Korean Drama *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* (미생 - 아직 살아 있지 못한 자)**..... 27
- Portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *Misaeng***..... 29
- Korean Drama *My Mister* (나의 아저씨)** 34
- The portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister*** 37
- Comparisons and contrasts between the portrayals** 45
- Discussion**..... 49
 - Reflections on the findings 50
 - Implications for cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism..... 51
 - Limitations and future directions for research..... 52
- Conclusion** 53
- Resumé**..... 55
- References** 57

Transcription

For the transcription of Korean expressions into English in the text of this study, the Revised Romanization of Korean is used. The names of actors and some characters are given in the thesis in the format in which they are either generally experienced or in which they are given in the original works.

Introduction

South Korea is a rapidly developing country that has experienced significant societal changes in recent years, particularly concerning gender roles and expectations. The portrayal of gender issues in South Korean media, particularly in popular dramas, has become an increasingly important topic of discussion, as it reflects and potentially shapes cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism. The focus of this work is to contribute to this discussion by examining the representation of *ajeossi* (“uncle,” middle-aged man) characters in South Korean dramas and analysing how these portrayals construct and challenge cultural attitudes towards gender roles and feminism.

The choice of *ajeossi* characters is particularly significant, as these middle-aged men have been both celebrated and vilified in public discourse in recent years. While some feminist discourses have criticized *ajeossi* characters as symbols of patriarchalism and male privilege, others have praised them as sacrificing, sympathetic figures worthy of empathy and understanding (Baruna, 2022). By analysing the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in two popular Korean dramas, in this study, I aim to understand how these portrayals reflect and potentially challenge these competing discourses.

We must bear in mind that most of nowadays *ajeossi* were born or grew up during the most interesting and at the same time difficult times for Korea and Korean society. The 90s, when the adult life of many of today’s *ajeossi* started, were a period of rapid growth at first. This ended in 1997, bringing hard years (Kihwan, 2006). It is important to consider this because *ajeossi* means “middle-aged man” in the most basic definition. It is hard to be precise, however. Any adult man could be called an *ajeossi*. Men from their mid-thirties to their early sixties qualify best, however.

In addition to analysing the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters, this paper will also examine the broader cultural and historical factors that have shaped gender roles and expectations in Korean society. This contextualization is crucial to understanding the significance of media representations of gender issues and their potential impact on cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism.

In the following chapters, I will first provide background and context for the thesis on gender issues in South Korea, including a review of the literature on gender roles and expectations in Korean society and feminist critiques of *ajeossi* characters. I will then describe the methodology used in this study, including data collection and analysis methods. After analysing the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in the chosen dramas, I will discuss the

implications of these findings for cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism in South Korea. Finally, I will summarize the findings and contributions of my research and suggest directions for future research.

Just one small additional observation regarding the meaning of *ajeossi* can show us how it is perceived to be called by this term. If we consult the *Standard Korean Dictionary* (표준국어대사전, Pyojungugeodaesajeon), then the first meaning is that it refers to a man in the same line as his parents, except for his father's brother, which means someone with respect or knowledge. Another neutral meaning is commonly used to address an adult man or a word for an uncle who is the husband of one's aunt. But there is one not-so-nice meaning: *ajeossi* can be a word for an unmarried father's younger brother. Usually, it is someone like, as already mentioned, a middle-aged man between his 30s to his 60s but nowadays even younger people can call themselves or others would call them like this because of their display an old-fashioned behaviour or maybe they are just using *ajae gaegeu* ("dad jokes"). Allegedly, those jokes are usually lame and not popular to hear (Choi, 2018).

And what is *ajeossi*? *Ajeossi* is a Korean term used to address or refer to middle-aged men, typically between their late 30s to 50s. It is somewhat equivalent to the English term "uncle" but is more commonly used in Korea as a respectful or familiar way to address an older man who isn't elderly.

The term *ajeossi* carries a sense of respect and is often used by younger individuals or by people in service industries when addressing middle-aged men. However, it is a colloquial term, and its usage can vary based on the context and the relationship between the speakers.

In addition to being a term of address, *ajeossi* has cultural connotations in South Korea. It is associated with certain societal stereotypes or expectations regarding middle-aged men, including being seen as a figure of authority, responsibility, or even as a provider within a family or societal context.

In media, including Korean dramas or films, the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters often reflects these societal expectations and can explore the complexities of their roles within families, workplaces, or society at large. The representation of *ajeossi* characters in media sometimes delves into their struggles, aspirations, and their place within evolving social dynamics.

And nowadays there is even a new wave of new *ajeossi*. However, this term has transitioned into *ajae*, a more amiable variation of *ajeossi*. Moreover, the term *ajae fatale*, a playful twist on *homme fatale*, embodies middle-aged men in their 40s and 50s who prioritize grooming and style. This term celebrates men who invest in their appearance and grooming,

regardless of budget, signifying a shift towards personal expression and individualism beyond conventional societal expectations. These *ajae fatales* are recognized not just for fashion, but for embracing a lifestyle that prioritizes self-expression and self-care, reflecting changing attitudes towards masculinity and personal presentation in Korean society (Kim, J. 2016).

Background and Context

Background

Gender roles and expectations have been an important topic of discussion in South Korea for many years. These discussions have been shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and political factors. One of the most significant of these factors is Confucianism, which has traditionally played a significant role in shaping gender norms in Korean society (Park, 2001; Koh, 2008; Mun, 2015; Craddock, 2022).

Confucianism emphasizes the importance of hierarchical relationships and social order, and this has been reflected in traditional gender roles. Men have been expected to be the primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women have been expected to be subordinate to men and fulfil domestic duties (Midha, 2018). These gender norms have persisted in Korean society to varying degrees, even as the country has undergone rapid modernization and globalization.

In recent years, however, there has been growing criticism of these traditional gender norms, particularly among feminists and younger generations. This criticism has been fuelled by a range of social and political developments, including the rise of the #MeToo movement, the increasing participation of women in the workforce and public life, and changing attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity.

Media have played a vital role in shaping cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism in South Korea. At the same time, Korean dramas have become a global cultural phenomenon, with millions of fans around the world. These dramas often reflect and reinforce cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations and have been the subject of much debate among feminists and other social critics.

Against this backdrop, *ajeossi* characters have emerged as a particularly contentious issue. On the one hand, these characters have been celebrated as symbols of Korean values and culture, embodying the ideals of sacrifice, loyalty, and filial piety. On the other hand, they have been criticized by feminist discourses as perpetuating patriarchy and male privilege (Baruna,

2022). By examining these portrayals in their broader cultural and historical context, the objective is to shed light on the complex and contested terrain of gender issues in South Korea.

History of Feminism in South Korea

We need to look at gender roles and the rise of feminism in Korea over the 20th and 21st centuries to see what kind of relationship there is between women and men (in our case only middle-aged men *ajeossi*) in society. Even nowadays the perception of *ajeossi* in media, on the internet etc. changes.

The history of feminism in Korea is complex and multi-faceted, spanning many decades (Tetreault 1994, Lee 2007). The first wave of feminism emerged during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) when Korean women were exposed to Western ideas about women's rights and gender equality. During March 1st Movement for Independence in 1919 displayed women's active participation, they were advocating not only for national liberation but also demanding gender equality. The Korean Women's Association was established in 1920, focusing on issues such as suffrage, education, and labour rights. In the early 1900s, women began organizing themselves into groups, publishing feminist literature, and advocating for reforms such as greater access to education and suffrage.

During the 1950s–1960s, South Korea underwent rapid economic growth and social transformation. While this brought new opportunities for women to enter the workforce and gain greater independence, it also created new forms of gender inequality and discrimination. Women faced exploitation and discrimination in the workplace and at home. During this time, the term *ajeossi* began to be used to refer to older, married men who held positions of power and authority in society. Women also faced discrimination in areas such as education and access to healthcare.

Feminist activism began to grow in South Korea during the 1970s–1960s in the wake of student protests and other social movements during the democratization period. Women's groups organized around issues such as abortion rights, workplace discrimination, and domestic violence. However, feminists were often marginalized or silenced by the authoritarian government. Feminist activism during this period was linked to broader movements for social justice and democratization.

The democratization of South Korea in 1987 provided a more favourable environment for feminist activism in the 1990s (Lee, 2007). Women's studies programs were established at universities, and feminist NGOs began to address issues such as domestic violence, sexual

harassment, and the gender pay gap more openly. In 1993, the government passed the Basic Law on Gender Equality, which guaranteed women's rights and mandated gender mainstreaming in all aspects of government policy (Moon, 2002).

Feminism in Korea has become increasingly visible and vocal in recent years, thanks in part to the rise of social media and the #MeToo movement. Women's groups have organized mass protests, online campaigns, and other forms of activism to address issues such as the gender pay gap, reproductive rights, and sexual violence. In 2015, a group of women in Seoul launched a campaign against the practice of “molka” or hidden cameras (Jeong 2020), which are used to spy on women in public spaces. In 2018, tens of thousands of women took to the streets in Seoul to protest the use of spy cameras and other forms of gender-based violence. The same year, the government passed a law mandating harsher penalties for sexual offences and providing greater support for victims of sexual violence.

Despite these achievements, gender inequality and discrimination persist in Korea (Barraclough 2022). Women continue to face barriers in education, employment, and politics, and sexual violence and harassment remain serious problems. Feminist activists in Korea are continuing to push for change and challenge the patriarchal norms and power structures that underlie these issues.

With all the challenges that feminist activists have faced; they have made considerable progress in advocating for gender equality and challenging patriarchal norms in Korea. However, there is still much work to be done to address issues such as the gender pay gap, sexual harassment and violence, and the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and leadership (Barraclough 2022).

Throughout its history, feminist activism in Korea has faced many challenges and obstacles, including conservative social attitudes, patriarchal norms, and government repression. However, feminist advocates continue to fight for gender equality and social justice, and their voices are increasingly being heard both within Korea and on the global stage.

Even with all these achievements, however, gender inequality and discrimination persist in Korea. Women continue to face barriers in education, employment, and politics, and sexual violence and harassment remain serious problems (Baruna, 2022). Feminist activists in Korea are continuing to push for change and challenge the patriarchal norms, and power structures that underlie these issues (Sussman, 2023).

The #MeToo movement in South Korea

The #MeToo movement in South Korea began in January 2018 (Sample, 2020), when prosecutor Seo Ji-Hyun came forward on national television to accuse a senior colleague of groping her at a funeral in 2010. Her bravery inspired other women to share their own stories of sexual harassment and assault, leading to a wave of allegations across various industries, including entertainment, academia, and politics.

One of the most high-profile cases involved popular actor and director Cho Jae-Hyun, who was accused of sexually harassing and assaulting multiple women throughout his career. He initially denied the allegations but eventually issued a public apology and resigned from his positions at a university and theatre company. (Noh, 2018)

Other prominent figures who were accused included former presidential candidate Ahn Hee-Jung, who was accused of raping his secretary (Haas, 2018), and former theatre director Lee Youn-taek -suk (Choe, 2018), who was accused of sexually assaulting a female actress. Both men denied the allegations but ultimately resigned from their positions.

The #MeToo movement also brought attention to issues such as workplace harassment, the use of hidden cameras to film women in public spaces, and the prevalence of sexual violence in South Korean society. It sparked discussions about the need for legal and cultural reforms to better protect women and hold perpetrators accountable.

Despite the progress made by the movement, there was also backlash and criticism, with some accusing the movement of promoting a “witch hunt” mentality and unfairly targeting men—some women who came forward with allegations faced online harassment and threats.

In the years since the movement began, there have been some changes made in response to the allegations. The government passed new laws aimed at preventing sexual violence and protecting victims, and some companies have implemented new policies to address workplace harassment. However, many argue that more needs to be done to address the underlying cultural attitudes towards gender and power that allow such behaviour to occur.

Context

The portrayal of gender issues in South Korean media has been the subject of much scholarly and public debate in recent years. While Korean dramas have become a global phenomenon, their representations of gender have been criticized for perpetuating patriarchy and traditional gender roles. At the same time, these dramas have also been praised for their

depiction of complex and nuanced characters, particularly middle-aged men or *ajeossi* characters (Santos, 2023).

Existing research on gender and media in South Korea has highlighted how Korean popular culture reinforces and challenges traditional gender roles. Some scholars have argued that Korean dramas reinforce gender stereotypes by presenting women as passive and subservient to men, while others have highlighted how these dramas subvert traditional gender roles by depicting female characters as strong and independent (McHugh 2005; Baldacchino, 2020). However, little research has been done on the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas and the possible implications of this portrayal for gender discourses.

In addition to the scholarly debates, the portrayal of gender in Korean dramas also reflects broader social and cultural trends in South Korea. The country has experienced significant social and economic changes in recent decades, including the rise of feminism and the increasing participation of women in the workforce and public life. At the same time, traditional gender norms and values have persisted, leading to ongoing debates and tensions around gender issues.

The portrayal of men in television dramas and films and how they have evolved have been subjects of analysis in linguistic and cultural studies (Kim M. 2014; Yi 2013; Hwang 2008). Yi Hwajeong (2013) examined the depiction of male lead characters in melodramas aired from 1992 to 2012. Her study reveals a gradual shift away from the traditional male image and the emergence of more androgynous male representations in drama texts.

Kim Mira's research (2014) explores how television has transformed its depiction of hegemonic masculinity and the idealized concept of manhood, which were previously supported by a patriarchal system that viewed gender roles and identities as social constructs. These changes align with significant societal shifts. To illustrate this, she conducted a narrative analysis of two popular entertainment programs, namely "Dad, Where Are We Going?" and "Superman is Back." These shows have gained substantial viewership recently. They both focus on placing child-rearing and housework, traditionally associated with women's roles, at the forefront. They present idealized portrayals of non-authoritarian fathers who openly express their emotions, deviating from the conventional strict and authoritative father figure. In doing so, they propose a new form of masculinity. However, Kim Mira also highlights that these programs, by turning child-rearing and housework into a sort of game, fail to convey the everyday oppression and challenges that these responsibilities often impose on women.

The two dramas chosen for close reading, *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, provide a particularly interesting case for analysis. Both dramas feature *ajeossi* characters in prominent roles, and

both have been praised for their depiction of complex and nuanced characters. *My Mister* has been noted for its portrayal of male vulnerability and emotional complexity, while *Misaeng* has been praised for its realistic depiction of workplace dynamics and the challenges faced by both male and female characters. By analysing these dramas in-depth, the focus of this work is to provide insights into the complex and contested terrain of gender issues in contemporary South Korea.

It is important to mention this brief overview of feminism in Korean society because it is shaping all media and views of *ajeossi* too. One good example can be the *ajae gag* which is usually unfunny jokes made by *ajeossi* in workplaces for example. According to Choi (2018), those jokes are received not in the best way and sometimes they can create a hostile environment for the teller of the joke. Telling a joke like that will make of *ajeossi* those unfunny, clueless middle-aged men or bosses at companies where we even must laugh for them. But there is even a trend to change that view in media like commercials and dramas. That all can be said because of the rise of feminism in society and the import of different masculinity from the Western media. Choi mentions the example of a few commercials where our main protagonist is an *ajeossi* who looks good, has a nice suit and has a good style, and even if he is telling those unfunny jokes, it is all right because he remains popular, nonetheless. This contrasts with the other image, which is mentioned in his thesis, that is, that *ajeossi* are perceived as clueless, having no style at all which means a not well-fitting suit, no manners, and still living in the past more often than in the present.

Aims and Objectives

Research Question and Goals

The goal is to answer one main question and that is: “How are *ajeossi* characters portrayed in two popular South Korean dramas, *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, and what are the implications of this portrayal for gender and feminist discourses in contemporary South Korea?” To answer this question, study will examine the following sub-questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of *ajeossi* characters in South Korean dramas, and how do they differ from other male characters?
2. How are *ajeossi* characters portrayed in *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, and what are the similarities and differences in their representation?

3. How do these representations contribute to, or challenge, existing power dynamics and gender roles in South Korean society?
4. What are the implications of the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in these dramas for cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism in South Korea, and how might they shape future discussions and debates around these issues?

By addressing these sub-questions, the paper aims to provide a detailed analysis of the representation of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister* and *Misaeng* and its relationship to broader discourses around gender and feminism in South Korea.

Essentially, the objectives involve dissecting and contextualizing the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters within chosen South Korean dramas. By providing hopefully an unbiased analysis of the differing perceptions of *ajeossi* characters in Korean society, the study seeks to shed light on deep and fundamental divides that are multi-layered and require attention.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between media representations, cultural attitudes, and social change in South Korea. By examining the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in popular South Korean dramas, it seeks to shed light on how media representations may contribute to or challenge existing power dynamics and gender roles.

The thesis is particularly relevant considering the rapid societal changes that South Korea has undergone in recent years about gender roles and expectations. As such, it has the potential to provide insights into how media representations may shape or reflect cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism in rapidly changing societies like South Korea.

Furthermore, this study contributes to a broader conversation around the role of media in shaping cultural attitudes and social change more broadly. By providing an in-depth analysis of the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in popular South Korean dramas, it highlights the importance of critically examining media representations to better understand how they may influence and reflect broader cultural attitudes and social dynamics.

Literature review

One key area of focus within the literature review will be a review of previous studies on the representation of *ajeossi* characters in South Korean dramas. This will include an exploration of how these characters have been portrayed in previous dramas, as well as how these portrayals have been received by audiences and critics.

Additionally, the literature review will seek to identify the underlying cultural and social factors that may shape the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in South Korean media. For example, it may explore how traditional gender roles and expectations in South Korean society have influenced the portrayal of male characters in media, or how changing societal attitudes towards gender and feminism have led to new representations of *ajeossi* characters in recent dramas.

By reviewing existing scholarship on these topics, the literature review will provide a foundation for the current thesis and highlight key areas where further research is needed to better understand the representation of gender issues in South Korean media.

Gender roles and expectations in Korean society

Gender roles and expectations in South Korean society have undergone significant changes in recent decades, particularly as the country has rapidly developed economically and socially. However, traditional gender roles and expectations still exert a strong influence on many aspects of Korean culture, including media representations of gender and relationships.

For example, many scholars have noted that South Korean media often reinforces traditional gender norms, with women typically depicted as passive, submissive, and dependent on men, while men are portrayed as strong, assertive, and in positions of power (McHugh 2005; Baruna, 2022). These portrayals can be seen in many popular Korean dramas, where male characters often take on the role of protector or provider, while female characters are often in need of saving or support.

Additionally, South Korean society places a strong emphasis on hierarchical relationships and age-based social hierarchies. This can be seen in the frequent use of honorifics and formal language to show respect to older or more senior individuals, as well as in the ways that power and authority are distributed in many social and professional contexts.

These cultural factors may influence the portrayal of gender and relationships in Korean media, including the representation of *ajeossi* characters. By examining the historical and cultural context of gender roles and expectations in Korean society, this subchapter will provide important insights into how media representations of gender are shaped, and the challenges that feminist perspectives face in advocating for greater gender equality in South Korea.

Despite these traditional gender norms and hierarchies, South Korea has also seen considerable progress in promoting gender equality and challenging gender-based discrimination. For example, the country has implemented several policies and initiatives aimed

at reducing the gender pay gap, increasing the representation of women in politics and other leadership positions, and combating sexual harassment and assault.

Moreover, feminist movements in South Korea have become increasingly visible and influential in recent years, particularly in response to a series of high-profile cases of sexual violence and harassment. These movements have pushed for greater awareness of gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as for changes in laws and policies to better protect and empower women and marginalized gender identities.

Despite these advancements, however, challenges remain in promoting gender equality and changing cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations. In particular, the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean media provides a useful case study for examining how cultural norms and values can conflict with feminist ideals, and how media representations can shape and reinforce these attitudes.

To conclude, this subchapter on gender roles and expectations in Korean society will provide an important foundation for understanding the broader cultural context in which gender issues are discussed and represented in South Korean media and will inform the subsequent analysis of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas.

Feminist discourses and their critiques of *ajeossi* characters

Feminist discourses have been prominent in South Korea in recent years, as the country grapples with a range of gender-related issues, including the gender pay gap, workplace discrimination, and sexual harassment. Feminist activists have been particularly vocal in their criticism of the portrayal of male characters in Korean popular culture, arguing that such portrayals perpetuate patriarchal norms and reinforce gender inequality (Park, 2001; Koh, 2008; Mun, 2015; Craddock, 2022).

Ajeossi characters are typically middle-aged men who are portrayed as powerful and influential figures in Korean society. Feminist critics argue that such portrayals reinforce the patriarchal power structures that underpin Korean society and that the *ajeossi* character is emblematic of how men are privileged over women.

However, there are also critiques of feminist discourses themselves. Some argue that the feminist movement in South Korea has been too focused on gender as a binary construct and that this has limited the movement's ability to address the full range of gender-related issues in Korean society. Others argue that feminist critiques of popular culture have been too narrow in their focus and that they overlook the complex ways in which popular culture both reflects and

shapes social attitudes towards gender. Then there is still ongoing expression of strong dissatisfaction with existing social inequalities, workplace discrimination and lack of opportunities in the workforce and companies (Hoffman 1995). Nowadays a lot of women are employed only as temporally workers because of possible families or children in the future, even if so this decision is not by them. This inequality is also reflected in the significant wage gap and the comparatively lower representation of women in the workforce (Lee 2023, Ha 2023).

These critiques highlight the ongoing debates and discussions within the feminist movement in South Korea about the best ways to address gender inequality and promote social justice. Some feminist advocates have responded to these critiques by broadening the movement's focus to include issues such as LGBTQ+ rights (Barracough, 2022), disability rights, and class inequality. Others have called for greater collaboration with other social justice movements and a more intersectional approach to feminist activism. Despite these internal debates and disagreements, however, feminist activists in South Korea remain united in their commitment to challenging gender inequality and creating a more equitable and just society for all.

Feminist discourses have been active in South Korea since the 1980s when the country began its transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic society. Since then, feminist activists have been fighting for gender equality and women's rights, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations (Hoffman 1995). They have been critical of the *ajeossi* character type, which they see as embodying patriarchal values and attitudes. According to feminist critiques, *ajeossi* characters are often powerful and authoritative, occupying positions of privilege in society, while women are relegated to submissive and subordinate roles. *Ajeossi's* characters are also seen as embodying conservative and oppressive attitudes towards gender and sexuality, reinforcing the patriarchal structures that limit women's agency and autonomy (Koo, 2015).

Their critique of *ajeossi* characters can be seen as part of a broader challenge to the traditional gender roles and expectations in Korean society. In the past, men were expected to be the breadwinners and heads of households, while women were expected to be obedient and submissive wives and mothers. However, as the country has modernized and urbanized, these traditional roles have been increasingly questioned and challenged. Women have entered the workforce in large numbers, and their education levels have risen dramatically. At the same time, men have faced new challenges, such as increased competition in the job market and changing expectations around masculinity. In this context, *ajeossi* characters can be seen as

representing a traditional masculinity that is increasingly out of step with the realities of contemporary Korean society.

However, not all commentators agree with the feminist critique of *ajeossi* characters. Some argue that *ajeossi* characters can be seen as embodying positive values such as loyalty, honour, and sacrifice and that they are not inherently patriarchal or oppressive (Woo, 2018). For example, in *My Mister*, the main character, played by actor Lee Sun-kyun, is a middle-aged man who is struggling with depression and family problems. Despite his flaws, he is portrayed as a complex and sympathetic character, capable of growth and redemption. Some critics have argued that this portrayal of an *ajeossi* character challenges the simplistic binary between patriarchal and feminist discourses and suggests that there is a more nuanced and complex reality to be explored.

Media and its role in shaping cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism

Media plays a crucial role in shaping cultural attitudes towards gender roles and feminism, especially in a rapidly changing society like South Korea. In recent years, South Korea's media industry has experienced significant growth and has become a major cultural export around the world. South Korean dramas have gained a massive following globally, with many fans praising their engaging storylines, unique cultural insights, and aesthetic appeal (Littleton, 2022).

However, media representations are not just reflections of societal norms but also contribute to the construction and reinforcement of cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism. Studies have shown that media can shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours towards various issues, including gender roles and feminism, like housekeeping, birthrate issues, etc. (Wallace, 2006; Women's UN Report Network, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to analyse media representations to understand how they shape cultural attitudes towards gender roles and feminism. Still, one big issue is adoption in Korea and how it was and is perceived in the media (Kim, 2021).

While occasionally falling into established stereotypes, these dramas also challenge societal paradigms. *My Mister* explores complex character dynamics, transcending conventional gender norms, while *Misaeng* navigates workplace intricacies, potentially reshaping perspectives on gender roles. For example, in *My Mister*, at the beginning the main breadwinner is wife of the main character, and he is doing laundry, cleaning the house and doing groceries. And for example, *Misaeng* shows how the male workplace can behave towards

women on the same team. Another situation that how only a female higher manager is trying to work and take care of her family at the same time.

These shows are far from being passive reflections. They actively mould opinions and perceptions. Examining the depiction of *ajeossi* characters within them offers a unique window into how media influences and challenges societal attitudes regarding gender roles and expectations in South Korea. The producer of *My Mister* aims to engage Korean middle-aged men, a notoriously challenging audience, by presenting stories that resonate with their experiences.

Methodology

The main goal of my research is to analyse the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in two South Korean dramas and explore how they represent gender issues in society. To accomplish this goal, a qualitative research approach is to examine the content of the dramas, seeking patterns, themes, and meanings that possibly contribute to our understanding of gender roles and feminism in South Korea. The criteria for selecting these dramas are that they both feature *ajeossi* characters in prominent roles, and they both explore gender issues in Korean society.

I will analyse the dramas through close and repeated viewing, an approach that will certainly produce a wealth of notes that are important for identifying themes emerging from the viewing and understanding the context. The themes will be developed from the research questions and will focus on how this representation relates to gender issues in society. I will try to analyse and find out how the representation of *ajeossi* characters in the dramas intersects with broader social and cultural discourses related to gender and feminism.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the methodology that will be used to find answers to questions. A deep dive into the world of these characters in dramas, will enable a systematic examination of the dramas and provide insights into how they represent gender issues in Korean society.

In summary, the methodology section of the investigation will provide a detailed account of the research approach, sampling method, data collection procedures, and analysis methods used to explore the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in South Korean dramas.

Criteria for Selecting the Two Dramas for Analysis:

Relevance to Ajeossi Representation - The primary criterion for the selection of the dramas involves a keen focus on the presence and significant portrayal of ajeossi characters within the narrative. These dramas must prominently feature ajeossi characters to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of their representations.

Diversity in Narrative Context - Additionally, the selection will prioritize diversity in the narrative context and themes represented within the chosen dramas. This criterion aims to ensure a broad spectrum of societal themes, allowing for a nuanced exploration of ajeossi characters' roles within different societal contexts.

Popularity and Cultural Impact - The chosen dramas should exhibit considerable popularity and cultural impact within South Korean media and society. This criterion ensures that the selected dramas possess substantial viewership and influence, facilitating a more extensive understanding of how ajeossi characters are perceived by the wider audience.

Temporal Relevance and Production Year - Furthermore, temporal relevance will be a factor in the selection, prefer dramas that have been produced within a relatively recent timeframe. This criterion aims to align the analysis with contemporary societal dynamics, enabling a more relevant exploration of current perceptions of ajeossi characters.

Diversity in Ajeossi Portrayals - The selection will strive to encompass diverse portrayals of ajeossi characters, encompassing both positive and potentially contentious representations within the chosen dramas. This criterion aims to provide a comprehensive view of how these characters are depicted across different narrative arcs.

Availability and Accessibility - Lastly, practical considerations such as the availability and accessibility of the dramas for comprehensive analysis will be taken into account. This criterion ensures that sufficient resources are available for a thorough examination, including accessibility for in-depth scene analysis, dialogue scrutiny, and character development study.

The application of these criteria will facilitate the meticulous selection of two dramas that offer diverse and substantial material for the comprehensive analysis of ajeossi character representations and their implications within South Korean societal and media contexts.

Data collection and analysis

The two dramas chosen for analysis are *My Mister* and *Misaeng*. Data will be collected by watching and taking notes on each episode of the selected dramas. In addition to that, secondary

data such as academic articles, reviews, and interviews with the cast and crew of the dramas will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context of the dramas. The analysis will focus on themes such as character traits, social roles, and relationships, and how they relate to gender and power dynamics.

The primary method of data analysis will be a close reading of the selected dramas, with a particular focus on the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters and how they relate to gender issues and feminist discourses. This analysis will involve examining key scenes and dialogues, as well as character development and interactions, to identify themes and patterns related to gender roles and expectations. That close reading will provide a multifaceted view of the representation of gender issues in South Korean dramas and will allow for a nuanced analysis of the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters.

For the data analysis, I will rely on close reading and note-taking of the two selected dramas, *My Mister* and *Misaeng*. It will be very practical in this way because I expect visible signs and at the same time frequently repeating features.

To conduct the analysis, I will first watch both dramas in their entirety and take detailed notes on scenes and dialogues that are relevant to my research questions. My conceptualization of these themes and categories will be further refined based on the research questions and the literature review and will be refined during the analysis.

Once the data are coded and categorized, I will analyse the patterns and themes that emerge from the data to answer the research questions. This analysis will involve comparing the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in the two dramas, as well as examining the relationship between the portrayal of these characters and feminist discourses and cultural attitudes towards gender roles and expectations. The goal is to examine how these portrayals contribute to the formation and reflection of cultural attitudes concerning gender roles and feminism in South Korea.

The data will be collected through a systematic viewing of the two dramas. Each episode will be viewed multiple times to ensure accuracy in the analysis. The researcher will take detailed notes on the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters and their interactions with other characters in the dramas. The data will then be analysed comparing them, with a focus on identifying common themes and patterns in the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters.

Justification for Choosing Specific Dramas:

Richness in Ajeossi Representation - The selected dramas, *Misaeng* and *My Mister*, have been chosen due to their rich and multifaceted portrayal of ajeossi characters throughout the narrative. These dramas prominently feature ajeossi personas, allowing for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of their representation, character development, and societal impact.

Varied and Diverse Contexts:

Moreover, the choice of these specific dramas stems from their ability to offer diverse and varied societal contexts, narrative themes, and character dynamics. *Misaeng* and *My Mister* encompass a spectrum of societal themes and settings, enabling a nuanced exploration of ajeossi characters' roles in different societal contexts and interpersonal relationships.

Alignment with Contemporary Relevance - These dramas were selected based on their temporal relevance, as they are contemporary productions that reflect current societal dynamics and evolving perceptions of masculinity and gender roles within South Korean society. Their recent production aligns the analysis with contemporary cultural attitudes, ensuring relevance to present-day discussions.

Influence and Cultural Significance - Furthermore, *Misaeng* and *My Mister* hold significant cultural influence and viewership within South Korea, contributing to their selection. Their popularity and impact on societal discourse make them crucial subjects for analysis, allowing insights into how ajeossi representations within these dramas shape cultural attitudes and perceptions.

Availability and Analytical Feasibility - These specific dramas were chosen due to their accessibility and availability for comprehensive analysis. They offer ample material for thorough scrutiny, including accessible dialogue, scenes, character development arcs, and thematic exploration necessary for a robust analysis of ajeossi character portrayals.

The selection of *Misaeng* and *My Mister* is rooted in their capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of ajeossi character representations within diverse societal contexts, their cultural impact, and their alignment with contemporary discussions on gender roles and expectations in South Korean society. By utilizing the 'close reading' methodology, the study will endeavour to provide a meticulous analysis of ajeossi characters, unravelling their multifaceted representations and their implications for gender roles, societal expectations, and power dynamics within South Korean cultural narratives.

Limitations

One limitation of this work is the focus on only two specific Korean dramas. While these dramas were chosen for their popularity and representation of *ajeossi* characters, they may not necessarily reflect the wider range of dramas and media in South Korea. Additionally, the analysis will be limited to the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in the selected dramas and will not necessarily capture the full spectrum of gender issues in South Korean society.

Another potential limitation is the language barrier, as the researcher is not a native speaker of Korean. This may result in difficulties in accessing certain sources and analysing the dramas within the full linguistic and cultural context. To mitigate this, the researcher will rely on English translations and consult with experts in Korean language and culture.

In terms of limitations, one more potential constraint is the small sample size of two dramas that were selected for analysis. These dramas may not be representative of all South Korean dramas or South Korean society. Additionally, the data collection and analysis methods used in this paper may have some limitations, such as subjectivity in interpretation and potential bias in the selection of data. Another limitation could be the lack of access to primary sources, such as interviews with actors, producers, or writers, which may provide further insight into the representation of *ajeossi* characters in South Korean dramas.

Furthermore, there may be ethical considerations related to the portrayal of gender roles and expectations in South Korean dramas. It is important to approach the analysis of these representations with sensitivity and awareness of the potential impact on different audiences.

Several limitations of my research must be considered when interpreting the results. Additionally, the thesis is limited to only two dramas, which may not be representative of all Korean dramas or accurately reflect the range of gender roles and expectations present in Korean society. Finally, the paper is limited to the analysis of on-screen representations and does not consider the perspectives of the audience or the broader cultural context in which the dramas are consumed.

While this study aims to provide insights into gender roles and expectations in Korean society through an analysis of two popular Korean dramas, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research. Firstly, the sample size of two dramas may not be representative of all Korean dramas or Korean society. Therefore, this may not be generalizable to other Korean dramas or the broader Korean society.

Korean Drama *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* (미생 - 아직 살아 있지 못한 자)

The exploration begins with *Misaeng*, a drama narrating the trials faced by young individuals manoeuvring through South Korea's competitive job market. Opposite to *My Mister* which is more about the healing and growth of the main character *Misaeng*: is more just about the Korean workplace and how to survive it in some ways. Full name is *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* or in Korean 미생 - 아직 살아 있지 못한 자 (*Misaeng - ajik sara itji motan ja*). What can be translated like *Misaeng* is in Go or Baduk terminology meaning “an incomplete life” which means “not yet” - Mi (미) and “birth” - saeng (생), meaning “not yet alive”. The second part is just something like “Those not yet living/alive,” which meaning behind can work now hard and we will live later in our lives when we retire.

Misaeng is a popular Korean drama that aired in 2014 and became a cultural phenomenon. It is based on a webtoon of the same name by Yoon Tae-ho. This webtoon was released on the webtoon portal of Daum between 2012 and 2013, and then the first volume in book format was published on the 15th of September 2012. Even though it is a little bit older but still relevant for how it portrays *ajeossi* in media. The show tells the story of Jang Geu Rae, a young man who dreams of becoming a professional Go player but must give up his dream due to financial difficulties (Gardner 2020).

Instead, he enters the corporate world as a temporary worker, working for the trading company One International. The show follows Geu Rae's struggles as he adapts to the cutthroat corporate environment and tries to find his place in the company. The drama received critical acclaim for its realistic portrayal of office culture in Korea. The drama consists of a total of 20 episodes, each running for approximately 60 minutes.

Misaeng is known for its realistic portrayal of office life in Korea, including the long work hours, high-pressure environment, and hierarchical culture. It also tackles themes such as social mobility, gender discrimination, and the struggle to balance work and personal life. The drama was highly acclaimed for its storytelling, writing, and acting, and won numerous awards including Best Director, and Best Actor at the 2015 Baeksang Arts Awards (Lee & Kim 2015). It is based on a webtoon of the same name and was a huge success when it aired in 2014. In the production team was director Kim Won Suk who helmed the series. He is known for his work on other acclaimed dramas like "Signal" and "My Mister. The screenwriter was Jung Yoon Jung

who adapted the webtoon into a screenplay for the series. And it aired on tvN network, a South Korean cable channel known for broadcasting diverse and high-quality content.

It tells the story of Jang Geu Rae, a former baduk player who starts working at a large trading company as a low-level intern. Throughout the drama, Jang Geu Rae faces many challenges in his new job and struggles to navigate the office politics and hierarchy. He is often looked down upon by his colleagues because he does not have a traditional education or background in business. Despite these obstacles, Jang Geu Rae works hard and eventually earns the respect of his colleagues. The drama highlights the importance of perseverance, determination, and hard work, and how it is possible to succeed even if workers don't fit into the traditional mould of what a successful businessperson should look like.

Misaeng also explores themes of friendship, loyalty, and the sacrifices that people are willing to make for their careers. The supporting cast of characters is all well-developed and adds depth to the story, including Jang Geu rae's mentor and boss Oh Sang-Shik, who has his struggles and challenges in the company. The series is also known for its realistic portrayal of office life in Korea, including the long working hours, high-stress levels, and intense competition. It supplies insight into the corporate culture of Korea and how it can affect the personal lives of those who work in it.

After all, *Misaeng* is a thought-provoking and emotional drama that offers a unique perspective on the challenges faced by young professionals in the corporate world. It has become a beloved classic in Korean drama history and is still popular among viewers today (Gardner 2020).

Misaeng features a diverse ensemble cast, each playing a significant role in the narrative. Here are some of the main characters:

1. Jang Geu Rae (Played by Im Si-wan): He's the central character, a former Baduk (Go) player who enters the corporate world as an intern. Geu Rae faces various challenges as he navigates the complexities of office politics and corporate culture.
2. Oh Sang Shik (Played by Lee Sung-min): Oh Sang Shik is a veteran sales team leader who becomes a mentor figure for Geu Rae. He's experienced in the corporate world and guides the younger interns.
3. An Young Yi (Played by Kang So-ra): An intelligent and ambitious intern, An Young Yi works hard to prove herself in a male-dominated workplace. She's skilled and determined, striving to overcome the challenges thrown her way.

4. Jang Baek Ki (Played by Kang Ha-Neul): Baek Ki is another intern who forms a close friendship with Geu Rae. He faces his struggles and aspirations within the company.
5. Han Suk Yool (Played by Byun Yo-han): Suk Yool is an unconventional and free-spirited intern. His unique approach to work and life stands out among the traditional office environment.
6. Chief Manager Kim (Played by Kim Dae-myung): He's a well-respected manager in the company who plays a significant role in guiding the interns.

The dynamics between the characters and their respective teams play a crucial role in shaping the narrative.

1. Sales Team 3: This team, led by Oh Sang Shik, becomes a focal point of the story. Jang Geu Rae, the main character, starts his internship here. It's a sales team that faces challenges and pressure to meet sales targets. Geu Rae's struggle to adapt and contribute effectively forms the core of this team's dynamic.
2. An Young Yi's Team: An Young Yi works in another team within the company. As one of the few female interns, she faces gender-related challenges in a predominantly male-centric workplace. Her journey within her team showcases the hurdles and discrimination she encounters while striving to excel.
3. Intern Relationships: The relationships between the interns are pivotal. Geu Rae forms a close friendship with Baek Ki, supporting each other through the difficulties of the workplace. An Young Yi, although facing her challenges, tries to navigate the competitive environment while forging connections with her colleagues.
4. Manager-Intern Relationships: Oh Sang Shik's mentorship of Geu Rae and the other interns is a significant aspect. He guides them through the complexities of office politics, providing valuable insights and lessons about survival in the corporate world.

Portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *Misaeng*

A prominent feature of the drama is the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters, who serve as bosses, mentors, and colleagues to the younger characters. In this subchapter, the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *Misaeng* will be analysed in depth, with a focus on their characterization,

relationships with other characters, and overall representation in the drama. Additionally, the subchapter will explore how *Misaeng* both reinforces and challenges traditional gender roles and expectations in Korean society through its portrayal of *ajeossi* characters. Through this analysis, the subchapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how *ajeossi* characters are represented in contemporary Korean dramas, and how these representations intersect with broader cultural attitudes towards gender and power dynamics.

What is interesting is that this drama is in many ways completely different from *My Mister*. This drama shows only the hardships of the workplace and everyday life in corporate whereas *My Mister* shows more life struggles outside of corporate. There is missing any romance or even some kind of workplace romance or dating specifically.

Misaeng, also known as *Incomplete Life*, is a 2014 drama series that explores the lives of employees working in a fictional company called One International. The drama addresses the challenges and hardships faced by young people in South Korea's highly competitive job market and the corporate world.

Like *My Mister*, *Misaeng* also features *ajeossi* characters in prominent roles. These characters are portrayed as experienced professionals who hold senior positions in the company. I will analyse their portrayal in terms of their behaviour, actions, and attitudes towards other characters, particularly female characters. I will also explore how their portrayal differs from the *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister* and whether there are any similarities between the two dramas in their depiction of *ajeossi* characters.

What is interesting is that even though this drama primarily revolves around the workplace and the presence of *ajeossi* figures in companies, there is a notable absence of typical *ajeossi* gags. This absence might be intentional to keep viewer satisfaction, preventing potential viewer frustration with the writers. Throughout the show, several jokes depict the behaviour or characteristics associated with *ajeossi* figures. For example, one joke used by a member of Team 3 goes like this: 'I have a new cologne. Want to smell it?' Then they extend their palm to the listener. When the listener tries to smell it, they get knocked on their forehead. His name, Geu Rae, resembles a dad joke in itself as it sounds similar to “그 래,” meaning “yes” or agreement in Korean. Some kind of joke is because we think that interns in those big companies should always say yes or agree to their bosses which is usually *ajeossi*. Another old basic joke at workplaces all around Korea is about the open fly. It goes usually like this: One person stands up and a colleague says they have an open fly, and they would look down and that colleague would then say that they know how to properly bow and show respect to someone. It is one of many classical Korean *ajeossi* jokes which are so frequent and unfunny that again it can bring

more frustration and hatred than fun and laughter. Even if this one is more likely taken between colleagues.

In episode 11 company made some business proposals and found out that one of members of the team 3 was taking money from the company. Our main *ajeossi* found out informed his supervisor and asked for advice. Our *ajeossi* have strong standards and values. His supervisor told him that they should go by books which means to do the right thing and to do an audit. That led to a situation of big company scale audit and meant they were “whistleblowers” who were looked down on from other teams because they were afraid, they would tell on them too. But our team 3 was strong and went on even though they were ostracized. In the same episode was even some misogyny about being a woman in the workplace. This is not so great but still shows the old ways of older generations of *ajeossi* that women are weaker for the workplace because they would get pregnant and leave others (men) working harder. The last thing of this episode important for us was the “*ajeossi gag*” which I already mentioned about that new scent of cologne.

Another showcase of the behaviour of *ajeossi* at companies is a lot of drinking. Almost every episode is some drinking with colleagues or even alone after something important or bad happened to that person. Episode 14 is about telling our manager to Geu Rae that he has to learn to drink and even hate it is part of the learning process. Korean society is marked by drinking, not only for recreation but also often involving heavy drinking. It's commonly seen in business settings, after work hours, or to unwind after tough days before returning home and starting the next workday. Of course, not only men are drinking.

The persistent notion is that an *ajeossi* often feels compelled to take care of everyone subordinate to him, including managers, interns, and other younger colleagues. From the first episode until the last one, there are many highlights of care for Geu Rae and others. Even if we learn that in episode 15 there is no chance for him to be a full-time worker, which is the dream of many Koreans, then our *ajeossi* has been frustrated with that situation for some time. Even though he had to be blunt and rude, he conveyed to Geu Rae that aspiring to become a full-time worker was unattainable due to his background. In the same episode, the writers try to lighten the mood, but one manager's attempt at an *ajeossi gag* with the eau de cologne falls flat when his victim simply responds, “It's not funny.”

Throughout the series, instances of employee care were evident, often reflected in a significant Korean saying, where being considered part of a team or valuable to an '*ajeossi*' is likened to being 'our child' (우리 새끼, uri saekki).

In the second episode, an important scene unfolds as Sales Team 3 encounters another team after a night of drinking. During a managerial exchange, Oh Sang-shik stresses the significance of caring for everyone to secure promotions. This concept centres around optimizing team performance, ultimately resulting in collective promotions earned through hard work and exceptional results.

The emphasis on 'better results' correlating with earlier promotions for managers and their subordinates is recurrent throughout the series. This phenomenon is encapsulated in the term 'office politics,' denoting both written and unwritten rules governing the pursuit of promotions. Like every time listen to your supervisors, attend every team building, usually heavy drinking with your boss, and other things connected to the life of *ajeossi* at companies (Çakar, 2015). Behaviour like this was for a long time encouraged in companies because it was the only way they knew. The longstanding influence of Confucianism in Korean society, coupled with extended work hours, often resulted in post-work drinking sessions as a means to unwind. All these activities are under “office politics” and by this thinking, a lot of business meetings with other managers or companies for doing trade and cooperation.

Of course, the series shows us and is trying to show us that workers in the drama should not tolerate old ways of the workforce and the workplace and to learn how to work around things and even show managers which we would already call *ajeossi* how to improve and behave for the 21st century. One important part of this is to work done according to the salary. This information was particularly intriguing to me, although it was introduced in the 16th episode, which I found a bit delayed. Still important information told by our *ajeossi* because there is still a big issue with overtime in Korea without additional pay for that overtime. Currently, the standard workweek is 52 hours, but it may change at any time (Yim, 2022; Moon, 2023).

The interesting part of the life of our *ajeossi* is mentioned in the 17th episode around half into the episode. In this episode, we hear another wisdom from Sang Shik “If you follow a fly, you’ll end up in the toilet. But if you follow a honeybee, you’ll end up in a flower garden. Geu Rae smiles: “So that’s why I’m in a flower garden.” Another impression for a new generation of middle-aged men is manners and consciousness. Those important guidelines of life are present during the whole drama by our main *ajeossi* team 3 manager Sang Shik. Later, we learned that Deputy Director Sun collapsed on her way from the airport from overwork and stress. She was after flights and meetings but even fought with her husband who told her to quit her job after his promotion. She did not want to quit because of her career and hard work. She was the only higher manager or director who was a woman during the whole show. This is one

of the things which are specific to stereotypes in Korean workplaces and households. The last thing we learn about the Korean workplace in the second to last episode is the so-called “Korean Work Environment Rule” which is told by Han Seok-yool to Jang Baek-gi, and that is: “The list of your boss’ likes will be your bible. You laugh at their jokes even if they’re not funny. You should like the same food. You need to smoke with them. Music, art, politics. You need to like everything they like. Do you know what is above all of those? Taste in women. You must agree with him on that no matter what. Okay? But that’s only if you like that person.” Just a few seconds after this talk come scene manager from the Source Team and Ahn Young-Yi, talked about women from earlier in the same episode (Episode 19) and she at once agreed with the manager and even said that she is trying to learn to be cuter. Which he like her supervisor completely approved. On that note, Han Seok-yool says that she knows what she is doing opposite to Jang Baek-gi.

After seeing all this behaviour, which is shown during all episodes in many ways, for example saying yes to anything, being quiet while yelling at someone in your team by your manager and other things that were already mentioned. In other words, it is often like your manager or boss is always right even if it is impossible to do or a completely wrong idea. To show even one of these situations of yelling at the whole team in episode 16, the head manager of the Source Team came while they were trying to deal with some issues with some business. He took the telephone and yelled even at the person on the other side while the team was trying to figure out what to do. Then he yelled at them to come closer and started yelling at them all and pushed all with the telephone, all the men of the team until he came to Ahn Young-yi. He wishes to not just push her but hit her head with it. While raising his hand, the team leader and supervisor of Ahn Young-yi yelled to stop, took the phone, and finished nicely that call. During that Main Manager was just standing there flabbergasted. The team leader then told him that he wished that he would not hit him or anyone else. This behaviour is often mentioned in other media or internet, so it is based on real situations.

But this unpleasant situation is only one example which all happened before with the same team and the same Main Manager. He is known for his rude behaviour, strong language, humiliation, or underestimation of other younger employees or more of the time women in the office. The best showcase was that almost hitting Ahn Young-yi by phone. His role in all series in my opinion should show us that bad or wrong *ajeossi* type at workplaces all around Korea. This old style, bad style and without manners *ajeossi* opposite to our Manager of Sales Team 3 Oh Sang-shik. Who is in many cases the one who is listening to other colleagues, trying to give

them advice, help them or mentor them without asking anything in return or trying to show his position of power in the whole organization.

Another part of the drama is showing us moments when our *ajeossi* are at home or interacting with their families. Showing us the important dynamics of life balance in workplaces in Korea. A lot of times it is already late at night when they return home and just watch the kids asleep. Or when even having a really hard day or day at work while receiving a call from family they immediately sound happier and more alive. All that they are doing is for family and reputation of how well they can support them and help with budding foundation for future generations.

Korean Drama *My Mister* (나의 아저씨)

In this chapter, the analysis will focus on the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister*, specifically examining their character traits, actions, and relationships with other characters. Through a close reading of selected scenes and episodes, the thesis aims to identify patterns and themes in the representation of *ajeossi* characters. The analysis will also consider the impact of cultural and societal factors on the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in the drama.

In that way first Korean drama I will look at is *My Mister* (in Korean 나의 아저씨, *Nau* *ajeossi*) which personally would be curious to translate even like *My Uncle* because mister can have different connotations. It is a South Korean television drama series that aired on tvN between March and May 2018 (<http://koreandrama.org/my-mister/>, accessed on 12 November 2021). It was directed by Kim Won-Seok and written by Park Hae-young. The drama stars Lee Sun-Kyun as Park Dong-hoon, a middle-aged engineer who is struggling with his job and family problems, and IU as Lee Ji An, a young woman who works as a part-time worker in a company where Dong-hoon is employed. The drama explores the relationship between the two characters and their struggles in life. The series consists of a total of 16 episodes, each running for approximately 60 minutes. *My Mister* is a good example of a drama where the romantic storyline does not overtake social themes—in this instance, personal vs. power relationships in Korean companies and the choice dilemma between moral and deontological integrity vs. the accommodation of the demands and pressures of a highly competitive, cynical professional environment. A topic that was already touched upon by the series' director, Kim Won-Suk, in a previous 2014 mini-series, *Misaeng*, also broadcast by the same tvN network. The writer of the show was Park Hae Young, and she is best known for writing television series like *Another*

Miss Oh (2016) and *My Liberation Notes* (2022). For *My Mister* and *My Liberation Notes* she won 55th Baeksang Arts Awards (Kim 2019) and 59th Baeksang Arts Awards (Kim 2023) respectively. The drama won even in the category of Best Drama at the 55th Baeksang Arts Awards (Yoo 2019). This shows that this drama was well-received.

The series received critical acclaim for its realistic portrayal of the characters and their struggles (Santos 2023). It was noted for its mature and serious tone, which was a departure from the usual romantic-comedy themes of Korean dramas. The show dealt with heavy themes like depression, familial abuse, and economic hardships. It was the highly anticipated drama series "My Uncle" on tvN, which is set to premiere in the first half of 2018 and has finalized its main cast. Leading the ensemble are Lee Sun-gyun, IU, Na Moon-hee, Oh Dal-soo, and Song Sae-wook. Production for the show is expected to commence soon.

One of the notable features of *My Mister* is the portrayal of the *ajeossi* (middle-aged men) characters in the show. The drama depicts the lives of middle-aged men who are struggling with various issues like unemployment, financial difficulties, and marital problems. The *ajeossi* characters in the show are depicted as flawed individuals with complex personalities, which is a departure from the usual portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas. The drama tactfully navigates through themes of hardship, sacrifice, and redemption, portraying a genuine and heartfelt narrative of individuals grappling with their inner turmoil while seeking solace and understanding in each other.

The drama also touches on important social issues, including workplace harassment, family relationships, and societal pressures on women. A lot of these are feminist themes, as they portray the struggles of female characters in a male-dominated society. Lee Ji An, the female lead, is portrayed as a strong and independent woman who can overcome the obstacles in her life despite facing discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

In conclusion, *My Mister* is a thought-provoking and emotionally charged drama that has received critical acclaim for its nuanced portrayal of its characters and its exploration of important social issues in Korean society (Santos 2023). It was a critical and commercial success, and it is regarded as one of the best Korean dramas of 2018. Drama features a range of complex characters, each with their unique personalities, motivations, and struggles.

The main characters of *My Mister*:

1. Lee Sun Kyun as Park Dong Hoon: He portrays an upright and stoic middle-aged engineer facing challenges in both his professional and personal life. Dong Hoon

navigates through workplace politics while dealing with family issues, displaying resilience and quiet strength.

2. IU (Lee Ji Eun) as Lee Ji An: IU takes on the role of Lee Ji An, a young woman with a difficult past who works as a temporary employee. Her tough exterior hides a vulnerable side as she navigates life's hardships, forming an unlikely bond with Dong Hoon.
3. Park Ho San as Park Sang Hoon: Park Sang Hoon is Dong Hoon's older brother, a not successful businessman with a contrasting personality. His relationships and actions deeply impact the narrative.
4. Song Sae Byuk as Park Ki Hoon: Park Ki Hoon is Dong Hoon's younger brother, striving to establish himself in the entertainment industry. His interactions with the family play a significant role in the storyline.
5. Jang Ki Yong as Lee Kwang Il: Lee Kwang Il is a key character connected to Ji An's past, and his presence creates tension and conflict, intertwining with the lives of other characters.

The main relationships between the characters are intricate and pivotal to the storyline:

1. Park Dong Hoon and Lee Ji An: The central relationship in the series revolves around the unexpected bond between Park Dong Hoon, an earnest engineer, and Lee Ji An, a young woman with a troubled past. Initially, their connection is purely circumstantial, but as they navigate their challenges, a deep and nuanced relationship forms, characterized by mutual understanding, empathy, and support.
2. The Brothers - Park Dong Hoon, Park Sang Hoon, and Park Ki Hoon: The dynamics among the Park brothers are complex. Dong Hoon, the middle brother, harbours a deep sense of responsibility towards his family, especially towards his unemployed older brother, Sang Hoon, and aspiring entertainer younger brother, Ki Hoon. Their interactions reveal familial tensions, aspirations, and conflicting personalities, adding depth to the family dynamics.
3. Lee Ji An and Her Peers: Ji An's relationships with her peers at work shed light on her guarded nature and the struggles she faces. Her interactions with colleagues, particularly those unaware of her troubled past, show glimpses of her vulnerability and the complexities of maintaining personal boundaries.
4. Professional Relationships: The drama also delves into the intricate dynamics within the workplace, portraying office politics, friendships, and conflicts among

colleagues. Dong Hoon's workplace relationships, especially with his colleagues and superiors, highlight themes of loyalty, betrayal, and ambition.

The portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister*

In the drama *My Mister*, *ajeossi* characters are prominently featured and play important roles in the narrative. These characters are depicted as middle-aged men who are often struggling with issues such as financial hardship, family problems, and personal demons. Through their interactions with other characters, the various *ajeossi* in *My Mister* reveal complex and nuanced personalities that challenge traditional stereotypes of older men in Korean society.

To analyse the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister*, I conducted a close reading of the drama's episodes and scenes that feature these characters. My analysis focused on identifying the various ways in which the various *ajeossi* are represented, including their behaviours, attitudes, relationships with other characters, and overall character development throughout the series. I also paid attention to how the drama frames and contextualizes the *ajeossi's* experiences within larger social and cultural contexts.

The male lead character of *My Mister*, Park Dong Hoon, is an engineer in a big Korean company who is currently stuck at a dead end of his career. His personality is shown a little bit immediately in the first episode. Suddenly woman screams, all the men stand up, and everybody's attention is pointed at the flying insect. We do not know what it is until we learn that it is a little ladybug that lands on the arm of Lee Ji An. That Park Dong Hoon is the male lead character of the story becomes instantly apparent, as he is the only one stepping forward to protect that little being, declaring with a single posture of the body his kind nature, and his respect for the beauty and fragility of existence. His friends warmly describe him as a nerd, a great professional but socially shy and reserved. He gently tries to pick up the bug and put it outside.

After that he starts observing Lee Ji An and realizes that her thinness and paleness conceal malnutrition—she steals the packets of freeze-dried beverages that are freely available for employees, as if she had nothing else to eat. He is also impressed by her shabby sneaker shoes, which she wears without socks, inadequate for the freezing Korean winter. Her skin is moreover often swollen, and under the sunglasses that she always wears indoors, making her look so odd and grim, he notices some bruises. It shows us his care for his subordinates. His interest is driven by a sort of sympathy and sensitivity toward suffering. To his collaborators—the team of engineers he directs, whose task is checking the structural stability of buildings that need

certification—he says: “Don’t you feel sorry for her?,” referring to Lee Ji An; “I feel bad for people who look tense. It gives you an idea about their past. Kids grow up quickly when they’re hurt. I can see it. That is why I feel bad for her. I’m scared to know what happened to her.”

When Park Dong Hoon—after having joined the difficult descent with the granny in the cart and the even harder ascent back home giving the granny a piggyback—says to Lee Ji An: “You’re a good person,” something nobody ever told her before, he treats her as a peer. She has earned his respect, one that reflects, more than physical appearance, her dedication, effort, intrinsic worth, and her capacity to stay close to her loved ones despite all difficulties. Many times, other employees complained about Lee Ji An with Park Dong Hoon, and when one of these asks whining: “Can’t we fire her and hire someone nicer? It’s not like we ask for much, but she’s so cold whenever we ask for anything. I can’t even talk to her because she’s so scary,” he gravely replies: “She’s more respectful of her superiors than you are, at least. Don’t make me fire you.” Then, not unlike a Taoist sage would have it, he addresses the annoying employee: “There’s a person who is quiet, amicable, and friendly and yet doesn’t take care of anyone else. And then, there’s a person who may be bitchy and stoic . . . but always takes care of someone. So, which of the two is the truly nice one?” There is a sort of human misery that unites them and makes them alike in the toughness of the ordeals each of them must go through to survive.

A fitting example is offered by the girlfriend of Park Dong Hoon’s younger brother, a young actress who can’t act, who makes no mystery of what she thinks and feels, joyously and shamelessly sharing with all others her most personal thoughts, and, especially at the beginning, making all the men in the group feel embarrassed. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there is Park Dong Hoon who has a tough time sharing his concerns—the ostracism he suffers in the workplace and her wife’s cheating on him—even with his beloved brothers.

The only person who is aware of the miserable condition Park Dong Hoon is in and that he is striving to conceal, especially to those closest to him, is none other than Lee Ji An. He tells his brother: “There’s someone . . . who knows a lot about me. And . . . I think I know a lot about her too”. He then adds: “I’m sad . . . that she knows who I am.” This is, metaphorically, an experience of nudity. To better understand this passage, let us think about how it feels to be seen physically naked. In the absence of exhibitionism, this may be embarrassing and humiliating for both men and women, but for the latter the implications are different.

The fact that Park Dong Hoon—despite being unaware that the young woman listens to his conversations—has realized that she can read deeply through him (“There’s someone . . . who knows a lot about me”) is an important check as far as the test is concerned and marks a crucial passage as he does not feel irritated by the intermission as much as he could. The sadness

that he feels (“I’m sad. that she knows who I am”) is everything but irritation, it rather amounts to a feeling of inadequacy. The misery Park Dong Hoon is currently experiencing has something in common with the one Lee Ji An has endured daily since she was a little girl—a misery made of exploitation, injustice, abuse, guilt, suffering, and loneliness. As Park Dong Hoon feels increasingly unable to face the many issues nagging him all along, he senses that maybe that young woman is the human being who more than anyone else goes through a similar kind of sorrow, and this is the reason why the two end up recognizing each other. There is a telling scene just before the midpoint of the drama, in episode 6, which represents the core of their relationship, and which resumes all these aspects in one situation: getting to know one so deeply to overcome any defensive barrier and to unveil all weaknesses and vulnerabilities, including blemish and guilt, and despite this ‘standing on their side’.

Park Dong Hoon is a witness of the abuse suffered by Lee Ji An in the workplace, by one of the members of his team. When asked about the reason for the man’s hostility towards her, it becomes apparent that he harbours a significant grudge against Lee Ji An because she had previously slapped him in public. The humiliation did not have consequences in terms of gossip because the slapping happened at the end of a company dinner when most people already had walked away, and the remaining ones were drunk. However, the scene nevertheless fueled the employee’s rage against Lee Ji An who showed so little respect toward a senior colleague. To solve the issue, Park Dong Hoon makes sure to meet with her alone, at the end of the workday, and addresses her asking for the reason behind her act: “How could you be so reckless as to slap someone?” he scolds her whereas she remains silent. He goes on to argue that this kind of thing only happens on the TV but should never happen in real life: “Why did you hit him? Did he insult you? Or hit you? I asked you why you hit him!” Then, she answers with the usual, disarming sincerity: “Because he was insulting you.” Park Dong Hoon is left speechless, as she goes on: “He was saying that if he were you, he would’ve quit already and that it’s difficult to work for a superior who’s being abused. And that this entire situation isn’t Do Joon Young’s fault . . . but the fault of the pitiful Manager Park.” The next showcase of his wisdom about life and how to endure it was in episode 8 when he said “In a way, life is a battle between external and internal power, and whatever happens, if you have internal power, you will endure.” to Ji An.

One of the most interesting sides of the male lead character of this drama is his capacity to bounce back in moments of difficulty, to manage to keep his dignity intact despite the infamy that pours upon him, reaffirming his leadership even when the employees consider him a loser. He calls his team member on the phone and tells him he now knows why he was slapped, and

when the other defends himself by claiming he was drunken and does not remember he said such things, Park Dong Hoon gets loud: “Don’t say you didn’t know, you bastard.” The other remains afflicted and speechless as Park Dong Hoon, still screaming, doubles down: “Say that you’re sorry. Say it ten times, right now.” The atonement ritual is carried out by the employee with conviction and relief, in the awareness to have received forgiveness for that petty act of disloyalty, as Park Dong Hoon closes the incident: “Let’s not be like this, okay? I don’t want you to cause me pain”. Lee Ji An is a witness to the call, staring at the pavement with her back leaning against a house wall, carefully listening. He turns to her and, still tense, tells her: “Everyone talks trash about everyone behind their backs. Do you think they won’t, just because you’re close? People aren’t so simple like that. I talk trash about people behind their backs, too. It happens. Who cares? Why would you tell me? What did you expect me to do? This is so humiliating.” However, then he adds: “I am sorry. This is all my fault, and yet . . . —he pauses— . . . Thanks. For hitting him.” At this point, he offers her something to eat and drink. For them, this has become almost a ritual. He gives her the possibility to have at least a decent meal a day, but in the beginning, the dinners are unpleasant. He fears being recognized so that their dining together would spark misunderstanding and gossiping, whereas she viscerally despises him for being a privileged guy with no financial worries and yet not sly enough to avoid trouble. Now, however, the situation has evolved, and both seem to savour this recurring moment that closes their day.

Park Dong Hoon explains to her that the next time she happens to overhear someone badmouthing someone else, she would better pretend not to have heard anything: “It’s more polite to pretend as if you didn’t hear. If you end up telling them . . . the person whom you told will start avoiding you”—something that he is not doing, though. “It’s difficult to be around a person . . . who saw you so vulnerable. And you end up not wanting to see them.” He, instead, despite the humiliation just experienced, keeps on staying by her side. “It’s fine, as long as nobody knows. Things like these aren’t a big deal. If nobody knows . . .”—but now, he is not thinking of her, but of her wife and her lover: “Then it’s not a big deal.” Lee Ji An too now suddenly visualizes another scene and recalls herself stabbing a kitchen knife in the back of the man she killed years ago. Is it enough to pretend that nothing has happened? In a low voice, with her usual gloomy tone, she offers an alternative point of view based on her experience: “Then . . . They’ll be scared until someone does find out. In case someone finds out . . . and they’ll always wonder who might know. And, whenever you meet someone new, you’ll wonder: ‘How long will it be until they find out?’ or ‘Do they already know?’ Sometimes . . . I wish that

I could just have it displayed on the LED billboards for everyone in the world to see . . . instead of living in such fear the rest of my life.”

However, he is not worried about how serious her guilt might be, because she has already passed his test, and then he says something surprising that nobody told her before: “I’ll pretend that I don’t know. No matter what I may hear about you . . . I’ll pretend that I didn’t hear it.” He has accepted her as she is, and assimilating her to his feelings, he asks her to do the same with him: “So promise me this. That you’ll pretend that you didn’t hear it,” and opening up, he confesses to her: “I’m scared because I feel like you know everything without me even telling you.” This promise will be kept by both. She will quietly guard the secrets she has learnt while spying on him, making use of such information to protect him even against her interest and, especially, her freedom. He will instead pick a fight with the young loan shark that has long been haunting her, and when the latter reveals to him that Lee Ji An has indeed killed a man and that man was the loan shark’s father, a reason why she deserves all the torment he may inflict to her, Park Dong Hoon realizes that she must have taken such an extreme resolution only to save her granny from further violence. So, he replies: “I’d have killed him if I were her, too . . . I’d kill anyone . . . who beat up my family.” An instinct of protection, when it leads to self-sacrifice for the other, is a feeling that, if directed at an opposite-sex potential partner, goes hand in hand not only with a more than ascertained compatibility but with the possibility that is what *ajeossi* should do by his conscious.

This is also what happens to Park Dong Hoon, who while being at the office always looks around for Lee Ji Han to check what she is doing. Or, when passing by the restaurant where he brought her to dine the night before, he pops in and asks the owner whether he has seen her coming again. Or, when escorting her back home, takes time to talk to her. While at the pub with his friends, he keeps on talking about her: “Some kid told me . . . that she’s 30,000 years old . . .”

For Park Dong Hoon, these are small but highly craved treats that help him survive, distractions from his burden of anguish—they are, among other things, serotonin shots that ease up that anxious feeling of being on the verge of going crazy. Grateful to her for making him feel good, and prompted by the desire to support that young, 20-something woman who reckons herself only when she is running—maybe because running makes her feel like she is fleeing away—he starts to carefully put at her disposal his maturity, and, reflecting with her on the lessons learnt from life experience, he eventually helps himself too. For instance, by being reminded how crucial it is to rely upon internal assets that may help one face external pressures, just like for a building it is important to resist the force of the wind and the strikes of the

earthquakes, and to carry its weight: “No matter what happens . . . you’ll be able to withstand anything if you have sufficient internal forces”.

Park Dong Hoon is trying to ignore his feelings to keep on with his lifeless marriage, even as his wife accuses him: “You’re not trying to keep this marriage together because of your love for me. Are you?” convinced as she is that the only plausible reason for his perseverance has nothing to do with their relationship but is a mere concern not to let down his mother and brothers who would suffer from their divorce. He tries to explain: “I don’t want to make you miserable just to make it easier for me,” that is, not to retaliate to her similarly: “I just don’t know how to end this relationship that we’ve maintained for twenty years. Where am I supposed to start? I thought I could get through it if you didn’t know . . . but that’s too difficult to do now. For both of us.” To his dearest friend, who left everything behind to become a Buddhist monk at an early age, he confesses: “I’m forcing it. I’m forcefully holding on to a heart that wants to fly away.” Complaining: “I don’t know how to live anymore.” Moreover: “I just thought that if I sacrificed myself life would go on just fine.” His friend reproaches him: “Who do you think you are to make sacrifices? I suppose you want to call it a sacrifice because you worked your ass off and yet you accomplished nothing, and you’re not happy either,” final advise him: “Be shameless and focus on yourself. You’re allowed to do that.” From this moment on, his constant effort at self-repression makes way to Park Dong Hoon who accepts to be furious, and who vents his frustration by punching anything within reach, from his house’s door to the company’s CEO who stole him both his wife and his career.

Even the first and only kiss exchanged by the two main characters, which is the kiss she steals from him to frame him with an accusation of sexual abuse, does not affect Lee Ji An. She justifies herself with him again by following her conscious: “It looks like your life sucks just as much as mine . . . and I’m the most miserable-looking person here. I wondered if I’d be less bored . . . if I tried kissing you. I tried it out because I wondered if it’d be fun, even for just a moment. But I was still bored, and it was no fun at all. It was the same.”

In addition, there is Park Dong Hoon’s attitude in response to that kiss: he is infuriated, and yells at her: “Do I look easy to you? After seeing me flustered when I received a bribe did you think I’d follow you around like a dog because you saved me once? Did you think I’d be happy and forever grateful to you if you approached me first? Are you having fun? Is it fun playing with an old middle-aged man?” His fury also stems from the self-awareness of his so far irreprehensible attitude, as he carefully made sure not to abuse his senior position, of his life experience that he could have otherwise exploited to be seductive toward her.

Lee Ji An, who is searching for Park Dong Hoon's weaknesses to frame him, starts spying on him using a trojan horse furtively installed on his mobile phone. This way, she can listen not only to his phone conversations but also to all the kinds of sounds that are captured by the phone in its surroundings, even when not in use. Lee Ji An then peeks into Park Dong Hoon's most intimate life and comes to know all his private vicissitudes, his deepest feelings—and much more.

An interesting scene to show us who Park Dong Hoon is, is when he shows up with a luscious fruit basket in hand at the office of a rather rude person, who had previously humiliated his elder brother simply because the latter's job consisted cleaning of the common areas of the condo where that person lived. Such a person had forced Park Dong Hoon's brother to apologize by kneeling before him for having accidentally bumped into him, and unfortunately, Park Dong Hoon's mother was a casual witness to that scene. We hear Park Dong Hoon addressing the perpetrator, who is sitting at his office desk: "I've . . . kneeled before too. I've also been slapped and cussed at. But thankfully my family doesn't know about it. I acted like nothing happened and went home with some food. I ate dinner like nothing happened. Yeah, it was no big deal. No matter what I'm subjected to . . . it doesn't matter as long as my family doesn't know. But you can't . . . do something like that in front of someone's family. If you do that in front of their family . . ." Then, Park Dong Hoon goes on: "Then. . . I could kill you"—which shows us that even killing someone would be a possible solution if someone is humiliated or cornered. After that, Park Dong Hoon, said: "My mom saw it. So, I'm capable of doing anything to you right now." At this point, Park Dong Hoon pulls out of his bag a big hammer. The other man turns pale as Park Dong Hoon starts hitting the office walls while shouting, he's a structural engineer assigned to surveillance checking of security norms for buildings, who is entitled to denounce and stop any in-house public activity in the case of construction irregularities. Still shouting and hammering, he starts listing all the possible irregularities as he intently pokes holes into the walls. The scene is insane, but the result is the man coming to visit Park Dong Hoon's mother at her house, kneeling and apologizing to his brother, and offering as a gift the fruit basket that Park Dong Hoon previously brought to the office for that purpose. We can be distraught by Park Dong Hoon's sudden show of force, resolution, and violence—he who up to that moment had looked so meek, submitted, and timid, kind of transfigured himself, turning from victim into avenger. He didn't have to kill—he inspired fear, obtaining respect, and doing justice.

During the discussion between the CEO who enviously wants to destroy Park Dong Hoon and Lee Ji An: "Eating with him and drinking with him. Does that mean that he likes me?" After all, it is a common habit to meet and eat together, and many people do this when they

want to get something from others. However, the CEO, who has been acquainted with Park Dong Hoon since college times and knows him very well, has developed a competitive obsession with him, when asked: “Don’t a lot of people do that?” dryly answers: “Not Park Dong Hoon. If he eats or drinks with someone that means he likes them....”

Given the strong psycho-emotional role that food takes on in Korean culture, in terms of carrying on the tradition, connecting to ancestors’ legacy, and symbolically encompassing family relationships, elective affinities and cohesion among people with similar cultural, economic or social backgrounds (Chung et al. 2016; Lee and Kim 2018), it is not surprising that the psychological integrity of a reserved, shy man such as Park Dong Hoon manifests itself also and especially in considering his meals—those with his mother and brothers, with his wife, with his staff, with his friends at their habitual neighbourhood joint—as a tangible expression of his feeling of bonding, affinity and affect for them.

There are pieces of conversations which provide us with information about Park Dong Hoon and how he treats others. For example, people were buying food for Lee Ji An, but they stopped four times which she translated as that’s enough and then not nice people. He told her: “They were. Four times is still a lot. After all, there are plenty of people who didn’t even help you once. I get where you’re coming from. But my life is no better than yours. And I’m not buying you food because I pity you. I’m treating you to thank you.” To thank her for being something positive to him, for being an unexpected intermission that is somehow helping him to get through what is likely the toughest period in his life. After that, he told her “I’m only treating you because you deserve it.” The consideration she has earned is strictly related to the impression that she made on him and by all that happened during the whole drama and is in one sentence for her what changed her a lot which is: “You’re a good person.” If he protects Ji An, whose hardship has deeply moved him due to her unfortunate circumstances, he, in turn, is rescued.

He becomes for her what Koreans would call a *samch’on* or exactly *ajeossi*, an elder guy from the family, father’s brother, that buys her meals and drinks, who looks for her when she is fleeing finds her and brings her to the hospital to fix a broken bone and talks to her teaches her how to access public assistance to cure her disabled granny, and finally find her a home and a vicarious family ready to welcome and show her affection. For her, he confronts the son of the loan shark and makes an offer to repay the missing part of her debt only to realize that the other does not want the money back but prefers to destroy her life because of the guilt she must (but can never) redeem is that of having killed his father. Then, he engages in a wild fistfight with the young criminal, which goes on until both fighters are completely exhausted.

Nobody ever took her defence. Nobody fought for her, and nobody ever justified her by saying that, in her position, they would have done the same: “I’d have killed him if I were her, too. I’d kill anyone . . . who beat up my family!” With these words, which Lee Ji An listen to through the hijacked phone, she is finally acquitted of her guilt and for the first time, she desperately weeps—a liberating cry.

The drama closes with a promise, with the reciprocal desire to meet again. Neither of them is any longer the gloomy, depressed person they once were, and Lee Ji An, with her “I’ll buy you a meal” has signalled her intention to restart their relationship in future on new grounds. We can even explain that now she wants to repay him for all the good that her *ajeossi* or mentor did for her.

Comparisons and contrasts between the portrayals

This section aims to compare the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *Misaeng* and *My Mister*, highlighting both similarities and disparities in their representations. One focal comparison lies in the age and background of the *ajeossi* figures. In *My Mister*, Park Dong-hoon, the *ajeossi* character, is in his forties and works in an architecture firm. Conversely, in "Misaeng," Jang Geu Rae, the *ajeossi* character, is in his thirties and serves as a temporary worker in a large corporation. Another aspect under scrutiny is the relationships these *ajeossi* characters establish within their respective dramas. For instance, Park Dong-hoon shares a complex relationship with his younger colleague, Lee Ji An, while Jang Geu Rae forms a close bond with his senior colleague, Oh Sang-shik. Through an analysis of these character portrayals, this section aims to illuminate how Korean popular culture constructs and presents gender roles and expectations.

Misaeng and *My Mister* serve as prime examples of Korean dramas that intricately explore the human experience, albeit through markedly different narrative approaches. *Misaeng* is situated in the corporate realm, meticulously unravelling the challenges faced by office workers. It starkly portrays the hierarchical structure and the demanding nature of the workplace, encapsulating the struggles of climbing the corporate ladder amidst cutthroat competition and dynamic office relationships.

Conversely, *My Mister* adopts an introspective approach, delving into the emotional lives of its characters amidst familial complexities and personal challenges. This drama intricately explores themes of resilience, empathy, and personal redemption, creating a deeply touching atmosphere. Through narratives of familial strife and personal trauma, it illuminates the quiet

strength found in unexpected relationships, resonating emotionally by diving into the intricacies of human emotions and the transformative power of empathy and compassion.

The dramatizations in *Misaeng* and *My Mister* symbolize the complexity of human life through distinctive lenses. *Misaeng* focuses on corporate challenges, highlighting the cutthroat workplace hierarchy and the struggle for advancement. Meanwhile, *My Mister* delves into personal intricacies, touching on resilience, empathy, and familial relationships.

The character dynamics vary significantly between the two series. *Misaeng* emphasizes office dynamics and power struggles, while *My Mister* explores personal challenges and the interconnections between characters, particularly emphasizing the bond between the leads. While *Misaeng* employs a linear narrative focused on professional growth and workplace hurdles, *My Mister* utilizes a multi-layered storytelling approach, uncovering intricate lives. Both dramas delve into resilience, societal expectations, and personal growth through unique lenses shaped by their distinctive contexts.

Visually, *Misaeng* maintains a serious tone, capturing workplace challenges realistically. In contrast, *My Mister* navigates through moments of melancholy, interspersed with instances of human connection. The themes explored in each drama offer diverse perspectives on societal norms and individual struggles. Both dramas portray heavy drinking as a common occurrence among ajeossi characters. Whether it's after office meetings, work-related gatherings, spending time with their families, or socializing with other ajeossi friends, the depiction remains consistent across both shows.

In terms of character portrayal, *Misaeng* features a diverse corporate ensemble, while *My Mister* delves into the personal lives of its characters, exploring their emotional complexities and interconnectedness. The tonal variation and cultural contexts contribute to the distinct storytelling styles of these dramas, enriching audiences' understanding of life's complexities.

Considering character dynamics, *Misaeng* emphasizes corporate intricacies, while *My Mister* highlights more personal relationships and the impact of past traumas. Both dramas excel in presenting nuanced character development and engaging narratives, resonating with audiences through their unique approaches to storytelling.

Ultimately, *Misaeng* emphasizes professional struggles in a competitive world, contrasting with *My Mister*, which centres on personal relationships and resilience in the face of adversity. These contrasting yet complementary portrayals offer rich insights into human experiences within corporate and personal spheres.

Now delving into the specifics of the drama, *My Mister's* protagonist, Park Dong Hoon, grapples with professional stagnation and personal turmoil in a toxic work environment marked

by office politics and family discord. His life is burdened with the challenges of an unfulfilling job, financial strain, and emotional turmoil stemming from familial conflicts. It also portrays his involvement in household chores more than his wife, reflecting shifting gender roles. Contrarily, she is depicted as the breadwinner, often returning home late, while he tends to household chores.

In contrast, Oh Sang Shik from *Misaeng* faces a different set of daily struggles. While dealing with financial constraints, Sang Shik primarily yearns for a career shift, navigating office politics and striving for advancement within a rigid corporate structure. His focus centres more on career progression than intense familial issues, unlike Dong Hoon. It is notable that Oh Sang Shik's family is not frequently depicted in the series. More often, we witness him communicating with his wife and family over the phone while working late or returning home at significantly late hours.

Dong Hoon's workplace embodies toxicity, marked by political manoeuvres and power struggles, contrasting with Sang Shik's challenges driven by career aspirations and corporate limitations. Despite their unique paths, both characters offer diverse insights into middle-aged life's complexities, portraying varied facets of daily struggles and aspirations within their distinct settings. Interestingly, in both cases, their experience in the workplace has led them to start their own companies with the same focus as their previous corporate positions.

The narratives of *My Mister* and *Misaeng* diverge, presenting contrasting yet complementary portrayals of the intricate lives and struggles faced by individuals navigating the challenges of work and personal spheres, ultimately enriching the viewers' understanding of life's complexities. Both dramas offer rich storytelling and compelling character arcs, resonating with audiences through their unique approaches to storytelling, thematic exploration, and the emotional depth of their narratives.

Additionally, the cultural contexts woven into the storylines offer different insights. *Misaeng* provides a critical examination of corporate culture in South Korea, shedding light on societal expectations, hierarchical structures, and the challenges faced by individuals striving to navigate this environment. Meanwhile, *My Mister* explores familial and societal pressures, shedding light on generational differences and the impact of past experiences on present lives. It is depicted, particularly during Park Dong Hoon's quarrel with his wife regarding their marriage and her relationship with his superior, that he doesn't even know what she wants anymore. Through her perspective, it is revealed that his family never truly accepted her, despite her efforts to showcase her devotion to his mother and brothers. She feels that she remains

secondary to his mother and brothers, while ideally, she and their son should hold the primary position in his priorities.

So, the main distinction between these two dramas lies in their focus. *Misaeng* exclusively revolves around office life within a Korean company. From the first to the last episode, it solely delves into the struggles within a company and the everyday life associated with it. Conversely, *My Mister* delves deeper into life outside the office, especially the challenges faced by the characters within their families and their navigation of Korean society.

For instance, in *My Mister*, Team 3 engages in projects, attends business meetings, and endeavours to meet their company and division goals for promotion or financial rewards. On the other hand, we witness the life struggles of Park Dong-hoon and Ji An throughout the entire show. A few notable instances include Ji An's grandmother's death, where initially she is alone but later Dong-hoon's older brother calls everyone from their neighbourhood, whom we met during the show, to help with the funeral arrangements and attend the service. Another instance is when the ajeossi gather at their childhood friend's bar, where they discuss life while trying to find solace in laughter and camaraderie. While mentioning Team 3 in *My Mister* there is interesting connection between both dramas and that is both teams are number 3. That can be goal of producer or writer to show us that those teams are outcasts, last from three teams and unsuccessful.

Around halfway through episode 4, an intriguing metaphor arises regarding Park Dong-hoon. It occurs after a drinking session with his subordinates after work. Dong-hoon points to a building next to the bar, comparing himself to it. Confused, his colleagues dismiss the analogy, deeming it strange. He elaborates by pointing out the plaque bearing the building's construction year, which aligns with his birth year. It seems like an allegory representing his life, hinting at the life of an ajeossi. One of his colleagues even jokes that the building is shaped like Dong-hoon's back under the weight of work and life. This metaphor offers a universal insight into the life of an ajeossi or middle-aged man in Korea, possibly extending to a more universal idea. This metaphor is also applicable to the portrayal of the manager from *Misaeng*, Oh Sang-shik. While they are different personalities, the core value of caring for others and being close to friends and family is pivotal for both, and indeed, for many ajeossi.

The psychological and emotional barriers faced by Ji An in *My Mister*, linked to a past of violence and abuse, are gradually overcome, primarily through her daily interaction with the warm and embracing voice of the male main character. This voice defies the young woman's negative expectations, shaped by her dysfunctional family experience. Leaving everything behind ends up fortifying her and bringing about a radical change in the female lead's life,

literally reconstructing her existence on new foundations. All this transpires thanks to the relationship and mentorship she receives from her manager, who was initially her mentor. He shows her different ways of life, and shares advice, and experiences as someone older. Again, it's the older men, a characteristic of the *ajeossi* in Korea, who strive to guide younger colleagues and those around them.

Such relationships, akin to those portrayed in both dramas, often exist in real life. In societies where parents work long hours and are frequently away from home, having a figure like an '*ajeossi*' is invaluable for many individuals. The term '*ajeossi*' extends beyond its literal meaning, embodying a close figure serving as a role model, offering wisdom and support for personal growth. For some, an '*ajeossi*' might be the primary figure of guidance in their life, similar to the role of an uncle or *samch'on* within a family. Although '*ajeossi*' typically isn't a family member, the term is sometimes interchangeable within society, representing a mentor-like figure.

Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the earlier episodes of *My Mister* and *Misaeng* will be discussed. Specifically, the portrayals of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister* and *Misaeng* will be analysed in terms of their adherence to or subversion of traditional gender roles and expectations. The portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in these dramas is significant because it reflects and shapes cultural attitudes towards gender and age in Korea. By examining how these characters are represented in popular media, we can gain insight into larger societal trends and potentially find areas for improvement in terms of gender equality and representation.

It is interesting to find that both show the life of *ajeossi* in society but in really different ways. *My Mister* is more about the relationship and healing between Ji An and Park Dong Hoon and not so much about the workplace. In *Misaeng*, on the other hand, the focus is on the workplace and how employees are surviving the everyday struggles of life in Korean society.

There is another noticeable difference in how they demonstrate care, particularly about their concerns, reminiscent of previous situations. Park Dong Hoon holds the central role as an *ajeossi* in his neighbourhood, highly respected because he continues to work in a major corporation among other *ajeossi* in his vicinity. His ability to manage everything holds significant importance within his circle of friends, all similarly classified as *ajeossi* due to their age. As the sole individual currently employed in a prominent company, his friends are delighted for him but also maintain a level of pressure, emphasizing the necessity for his success.

It's almost an unspoken rule that at least one among them should hold a prominent job with a good salary.

On the other hand, *Misaeng* does not focus on a neighbourhood, but rather on the intricate dynamics within a single large office or a few teams situated on one floor. The narrative revolves around the lives of four central protagonists and their respective teams, where nearly everything significant is tied to their workplace. Even interactions outside the company orbit around work-related themes like supervisors, promotions, and similar aspects.

Misaeng is looking at not so wide perspective of some neighbourhoods or big social groups of people. But zoom in on one big office or just a workplace of a few teams on one floor. Everything important is happening around the four main protagonists and their teams. Whatever that can be it is still more or less connected to their workplace. Every interaction even outside of the company is again about work, supervisors, promotions etcetera.

In essence, both dramas offer insights into the modern *ajeossi* archetype. It transcends the outdated image of an older man with antiquated style, manners, or jokes, portraying them as individuals who are supportive, attentive, and willing to offer sound life advice, when necessary, rather than when convenient. For instance, in *Misaeng*, Oh Sang-Shik emerges as a pivotal figure. He extends help to young employees dealing with workplace challenges or tasks, often appearing at the right moment to provide guidance or lend a listening ear without involving their supervisors.

Reflections on the findings

In this subchapter, I will reflect on the findings of the analysis conducted in the earlier chapter. Based on the analysis of the two dramas, it is clear that the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas is complex and multifaceted. While there were some similarities in the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in both *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, there were also notable differences.

Interesting thing is that the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas is influenced by various factors, including cultural norms and values, gender roles and expectations, and the media industry's influence on shaping cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism. In both *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, the *ajeossi* characters were depicted as flawed individuals who struggled with personal and professional challenges. However, the way their characters were portrayed differed in terms of their social status, age, and relationships. Most of these

differences are shaped by the strong influence of Confucianism, a philosophy that still holds great sway in Korean society (Mun, 2015; Midha 2018).

Another significant observation is the impact of *ajeossi* character portrayals in Korean dramas on viewers' beliefs of gender roles and expectations in Korean society. While the dramas analysed offered instances that challenged certain gender stereotypes, they also perpetuated others. For instance, in one drama, the portrayal of the *ajeossi* character's wife as the family breadwinner challenged traditional gender norms, deviating from the conventional belief of male dominance in providing for the household. However, in another drama, the *ajeossi* character himself kept the primary breadwinner role, conforming to conventional gender expectations of male provider roles.

Adding to the exploration of changing dynamics, *My Mister* depicted Park Dong Hoon initially having a lower income than his wife, who became a lawyer with a substantial salary, subsequently assuming the role of the family breadwinner. In general, the findings suggest that the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas is a complex and nuanced issue that requires further exploration and analysis. Future research could focus on examining how *ajeossi* characters are portrayed in other forms of Korean media, such as films and variety shows, and how these portrayals affect viewers' perceptions of gender roles and expectations in Korean society.

Implications for cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism

By examining the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, insights are drawn into the complex relationship between gender roles and expectations in Korean society and the representation of these roles in the media. Both dramas aim for a high level of realism, which gives us a chance to see the Korean work environment essentially as if it were real. We can see that in both offices there are fewer women in ratio to men. In *My Mister*, there are almost just background characters to keep the story flowing besides of course Ji An, but she is the main protagonist. In *Misaeng* it is not different. Few teams are women, and only one woman is a team manager from many teams we had a chance to see during the series and there are not any women in higher positions at the company. The proportion of men and women at the workplace is shown even with our interns and then four main newbies in *Misaeng* where only one of them is a woman.

The findings suggest that the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly in terms of male dominance and female submissiveness. However, the paper also reveals a shift towards more nuanced and complex portrayals of *ajeossi* characters in *Misaeng*, which challenge these traditional gender roles and expectations. This example can be shown during a series of how Park Dong Hoon is taking care of the household while his wife is working late. He did all things like cleaning, doing laundry, taking the trash out, vacuuming and so on which are mostly considered chores for women.

My study's implications hold significance in comprehending how media mould cultural attitudes concerning gender and feminism. By identifying the constraints of traditional gender roles depicted in media and presenting more intricate portrayals of *ajeossi* characters, Korean dramas have the potential to foster a more progressive and nuanced perception of gender roles and expectations within Korean society.

Limitations and future directions for research

The study has a few limitations that could influence the findings. Firstly, the sample size is small, focusing only on two dramas. Expanding the research to include a more diverse range of dramas could offer a broader perspective on *ajeossi* portrayals. Additionally, this study concentrates solely on Korean dramas within the Korean cultural context, which might differ in other cultural settings. Examining *ajeossi* representations in different cultural contexts could reveal varying results.

There are several potential paths for future research in this field. Investigating how younger male characters or male leads are portrayed in Korean dramas could offer a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, exploring the portrayal of female characters and their interactions with *ajeossi* figures could provide valuable insights.

Further research could also explore how these portrayals impact audience perceptions. Conducting surveys or focus groups to assess viewer interpretations and reactions to *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas could shed light on their influence on gender and feminist attitudes.

Although this research offers valuable insights into *ajeossi* portrayals and their implications for gender and feminism in Korean dramas, it's crucial to acknowledge that there's more to explore in this area.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters in two Korean dramas, *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, to explore the cultural attitudes towards gender and feminism in Korean society. Analysing these dramas provided valuable insights into how *ajeossi* characters are portrayed and the implications of these representations on gender norms and expectations.

The findings highlight the complex nature of *ajeossi* characters in Korean dramas. While these characters often embody power and success, the dramas also depict their vulnerabilities and challenges, challenging prevailing stereotypes of masculinity. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted how media shapes and reinforces cultural perceptions of gender and feminism through the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters, aligning with societal norms and expectations.

In terms of future directions for research, it would be valuable to conduct a comparative research of *ajeossi* characters in different genres of Korean dramas or across different periods. a comparative study examining *ajeossi* characters across various genres or historical periods of Korean dramas would be beneficial. Furthermore, exploring audience perceptions and responses to these portrayals could offer deeper insights into the media's influence on cultural attitudes regarding gender and feminism.

In this research I explored the portrayal of *ajeossi* characters within the popular Korean dramas *My Mister* and *Misaeng*, attempting to understand the structural characteristics and social significance of *ajeossi* in society. Analysis focused solely on these dramas, extracting examples that provided insights into the condensed representation of contemporary middle-aged men in Korean society.

The concept of *ajeossi*, as depicted in these dramas, showcases a departure from conventional patriarchal notions, revealing a spectrum of diverse male identities. However, despite this diversity, media representation often homogenizes these distinct identities into a singular portrayal, contributing to the perception of a uniform identity among Korean middle-aged men. *Ajeossi* appears to have moved beyond conventional patriarchal. According to Cohen (2016), the current concept of middle age has existed for only about 50 years, and how it is defined in terms of age range is meaningless. This is because a generation is a concept created in historical, social, and cultural contexts. Just as a middle-aged man cannot be reduced to a single identity, the male images that comprise *ajeossi* may be diverse. But when closely reading and watching modern media, we find a typification process that makes all Korean middle-aged men appear to not have one monolithic identity. Here, the connection between the sign (*ajeossi*) and the object (*ajeossi*-hood) is naturalized to appear as an inherent property.

The term 'ajeossi' encompasses a diverse range of ages, yet the media's typification often homogenizes all Korean middle-aged men into a singular identity. Through the analysis of 'My Mister' and 'Misaeng,' these dramas present positive portrayals of ajeossi characters, aiming to challenge and reshape established clichés. While some inaccurate or stereotypical characters occasionally appear, they are less prevalent than those built on fact. Both dramas try to break down some of these established stereotypes and present the viewer with reality instead. These results may be an indicator that the way *ajeossi* are represented in works of media is improving. However, such a strong conclusion would require analysis on many more works and research (Kim, J. 2016).

Individual films and dramas may be diametrically opposed to each other in this respect, and so it is not possible to judge the situation from an analysis of just two dramas. However, the assumption is that dramas and films that represent ajeossi and portray them and their personality realistically will increase as time goes on, and not only because of the current popularity of Korean dramas, and hence Korean culture.

Resumé

This work aimed to analyse the portrayal of South Korean *ajeossi*, workplace dynamics, and gender issues in two Korean dramas, *My Mister* and *Misaeng*. It centred on exploring the depiction of *ajeossi* and the associated character elements within these shows. The primary objective was to observe the information presented in *My Mister* and *Misaeng* and determine whether it solely relied on stereotypes or contradicted them as accurately as possible.

The theoretical segment discussed feminism, gender inequality, and the #MeToo movement in Korea, and how it is connected with the view of *ajeossi*. It involved a thoughtful selection process to determine the most suitable dramas for analysis. While *Misaeng* is more focused on the workplace, *My Mister* is more about relationships between the main characters and their surroundings. Close attention was paid to the appearance and role of *ajeossi* throughout the dramas.

In the practical part of the thesis, an analysis of a “close reading” of those selected dramas in full length was performed. In the end, it was 36 episodes with each episode being 70 minutes long. Not every scene was important for this study but on the other hand, it was impossible to choose only a few episodes from each series to conduct this analysis.

The dramas *Misaeng* and *My Mister* are an example of the positive influence of *ajeossi*. Those dramas even show us the differences between old-style *ajeossi* and new-style *ajeossi* which is even called *ajae fatale*. While the series does feature some inaccuracies or occasional stereotypical characters and situations, they are notably less prevalent than those rooted in reality. *Misaeng* shows us life real-life situations in workplaces, which many Koreans experienced during their lives and shows the positive impact of *ajeossi*. This real-life means a lot of people can empathize with the situations going on in the drama. Almost the same applies to *My Mister*, with the only difference being that this drama is more about deep connections with your subordinates, colleagues, or your close neighbourhood. This may indicate that the way Korean society looks at or thinks about *ajeossi* is changing. It could potentially illustrate a path toward an improved future, demonstrating the potential evolution in workplace practices.

Based on the results of this analysis, we can conclude that the dramas *My Mister* and *Misaeng* are examples of the positive behaviour of *ajeossi*, both in and out of the workplace. Although some inaccurate or even stereotypical characters appear in the series, they are still present to a lesser extent than those based on reality. *Misaeng* and *My Mister* attempts to break down some of these stereotypes and introduce the viewer to reality. These results may be an indicator that the way *ajeossi* are represented in dramas is improving. But such a strong

conclusion would require an analysis of a much larger number of Korean dramas which contain a strong *ajeossi* character.

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