

# Female Workers in South Korean vs. Japanese Drama Series: Remake of *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*

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## Abstract

*The complex phenomenon of the workplace in South Korea became the main focus of Misaeng: Incomplete Life drama series. One of the issues that was brought up in the drama series is the issue related to female workers. In 2016, Misaeng: Incomplete Life was made into a remake version by Japan, which is Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain drama series with a storyline that is almost similar to the original drama series. This research aims to examine how Misaeng: Incomplete Life drama series and its remake, Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain drama series, depict issues related to female workers. This research is descriptive qualitative with textual analysis. The result of this research shows that the depiction of female workers in Misaeng: Incomplete Life and Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain has similarities and differences. In general, Misaeng: Incomplete Life and Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain both depict women as people who are more inferior than men. This depiction is still correlated with Confucianism which developed in Japan and South Korea. Meanwhile, the differences that occur in both drama series happen because of socio-cultural differences in Japan and South Korea. Therefore, Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain is classified as creative remake drama series. This creative remake was made to accommodate the socio-cultural differences between Japan and South Korea.*

**Keywords:** *Female Workers, Remake, Japanese Drama Series, South Korean Drama Series*

## 要旨

韓国の職場の複雑な現象は、ドラマシリーズ『ミセンー未生ー』の主な焦点となる。このドラマシリーズで取り上げられた問題の一つは、女性労働者に関連する問題である。2016年に『ミセンー未生ー』は日本でリメイク版『Hope～期待ゼロの新入社員～』として制作され、オリジナルのドラマシリーズとほぼ同じストーリーラインを持っている。本研究は、『ミセンー未生ー』とそのリメイク版の『Hope～期待ゼロの新入社員～』が女性労働者に関連する問題をどのように描いているかを検討することを

目的としている。本研究はテキスト分析を用い、記述的質的研究である。本研究の結果、『ミセンー未生ー』と『Hope～期待ゼロの新入社員～』における女性労働者の描写には類似点と相違点があることが示された。一般的に、『ミセンー未生ー』と『Hope～期待ゼロの新入社員～』はどちらも女性を男性より劣る存在として描いている。この描写は、日本と韓国で発展した儒教思想と関連している。一方、両方のドラマシリーズにおける違いは、日本と韓国の社会文化的な違いによるものである。したがって、『Hope～期待ゼロの新入社員～』は創造的なリメイクドラマシリーズと分類される。この創造的なリメイクは、日本と韓国の社会文化的な違いを考慮するために作られた。

キーワード：女性労働者、リメイク、韓国ドラマ、日本ドラマ

## 1. Introduction

Female workers in Japan have undergone some inequality treatments at their workplace. There are differences in the sum of wages earned and the chances of pursuing higher career paths between male workers and female workers (Fairuzahra & Ong 2020). Male workers have a greater possibility to gain higher wages and more chances to pursue their careers than female workers (ibid). Moreover, female workers have more risks of being victims of harassment, such as sexual harassment (Belarmino & Roberts 2019, 275), power harassment (Roberts 2014, 27), and maternity harassment (Fairuzahra & Ong 2020, 69).

Not only in Japan, the phenomenon of inequality in the workplace can also be found in South Korea. Seo & Toh (2023) explained that the number of female workers in South Korean automotive corporations is lower than the male workers. Moreover, Seo & Toh also mentioned that Hyundai, as one of the biggest automotive corporations in South Korea, had recruited some female workers through a contract basis via staffing companies (ibid). Lee (2017) also mentioned that the number of female workers in South Korea who work at manufacturing is lower than those who work at FnB and hospitality. It means that there is classifications of employment based on gender in South Korea, as Jung (in Seo & Toh 2023) explained.

According to statistics, the percentage of female workers in Japan was 53%, while the male workers was 69% (Statista 2023a). Meanwhile at the same time, the percentage of female workers in South Korea was 52,9%, while the male workers was 71,5% (Statista 2023b). These two data show that female workers in Japan and South Korea have a lower percentage than male workers. It means that workforce participation rate of female workers in both Japan and South Korea is still low.

The phenomenon related to female workers was then brought into drama series titled *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* (2014). This drama series tells about the life of newbies in a trading company while they faced challenges and hardships in their new workplace. In 2016, this drama series was made into a remake Japanese drama series titled *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* with the majority of the plot remaining the same.

This research focuses on the depiction of issues related to female workers in both *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and its remake *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series. The aim is to analyze how both drama series portray issues related to female workers in their plots. Therefore, this research limits its analysis scope by focusing only on the characters that play as female workers in both drama series.

There are some previous researches that related to this research. The first research is about female workers in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* that was written by Fairuzzahra & Ong in 2020. It was published in *J-Litera: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya Jepang* vol. 2 no. 2 by the title *Representasi Pekerja Wanita dalam Serial Drama Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*. Fairuzzahra & Ong focused their research on analyzing how female workers are represented in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series through the characterization of Kazuki Akane and Shiraishi Ryoko. This research used semiotic Barthes and a qualitative approach. Fairuzzahra & Ong argue that female workers are portrayed as individuals whose main role in the workplace is related to domestic responsibility, individuals who support their male coworkers, as well as individuals whose position is lower than their male coworkers.

This research is the continuation of Fairuzzahra & Ong’s previous research. While Fairuzzahra & Ong’s research focuses only on the portrayal of female workers in the Japanese remake drama series, the scope of this research will be broader. It aims to analyze how *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* as the original drama series depicting South Korean female workers and compare it to how *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* portrayed Japanese female workers. Based on preliminary studies, although *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* is the remake version of *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*, there are some aspects that are shown differently. Therefore, it can be argued that those differences impact how both drama series portrayed female workers. Hence, to understand this phenomenon more deeply, it is important to have research in the differences on the depiction of female workers in both *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series.

Other related previous research is *Aestheticizing Authenticity: Corporate Masculinities in Contemporary South Korean Television Dramas* that was written by Elfving-Hwang in 2017 and published in *Asia Pacific Perspectives* vol. 15 no. 1. In her research, Elfving-Hwang focused on the representation of “failed” male workers that depicted in South Korean drama series and how this representation becomes the portrayal of negative aspects of South Korean work environment in contemporary era as well as masculinity that implemented in the company. Elfving-Hwang used *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series as the research object since it has the narrative of the daily life of male workers in South Korea after the financial crisis in 1997. Elfving-Hwang argued that *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* has a narrative about the re-masculinization of male workers through excessive renewal of aesthetics and masculinity values in working class in South Korea.

Based on that explanation, it can be understood that both this research and Elfving-Hwang’s research use the same drama series as the research object. However, the focus of analysis in these researches is different. This research will analyze how *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* portrays female workers and compare it to its remake version, while Elfving-Hwang analyzed the masculinity of male workers in *Misaeng: Incomplete*

*Life* drama series. In other words, this research will discuss another aspect that has not been studied in Elfving-Hwang’s research, which is about issues related to female workers.

There is also research titled *Pergeseran Budaya dalam Film Remake Love You, Love You Not* that is related to this research. It was written by Annisa & Adi (2020) and was published in *Kalatanda: Jurnal Desain Grafis dan Media Kreatif* vol. 2 no. 1. Annisa & Adi’s research focused on how Thai culture is reconstructed through the Indonesian film titled *Love You, Love You Not* (2015), a remake of Thai’s film *I Fine, Thank You, Love You* (2014). The data in Annisa & Adi’s research were analyzed using discourse analysis Fairclough. The result of their research shows that the cultural shift that occurred in *Love You, Love You Not* could cause the discrepancy in Indonesian norms.

This research and Annisa & Adi’s research both discuss about the remake of a certain media. Therefore, Annisa & Adi’s research will be the reference to build the framework of this research to analyze the original drama series and its remake version. However, the research objects of these researches are different. This research uses the South Korean *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and its Japanese remake *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* as research objects, while Annisa & Adi used the Thai *I Fine, Thank You, Love You* film and its Indonesian remake *Love You, Love You Not* film. In addition, the focus of both researches is also different. This research focuses only on the portrayals of female workers in both the original drama series and its remake. Meanwhile, Annisa & Adi focused their analysis on the whole cultural shift that occurred in the Indonesian remake version.

Film remake refers to the newer version of the already consisting film (Grindstaff in Verevis 2006, 1). Furthermore, Braudy (in Larke-Walsh 2018) explained that remake can be found in any intertextual continuum, such as dialogues, scenes, shooting techniques, as well as explicit patterns of the previous film. Zanger (in Larke-Walsh 2018) made remake categorization into two types, which are intermedial and intramedial. Intermedial refers to the adaptation from one media to another media, while intramedial refers to the new version of a plot in the same media (ibid). Hence, it can be understood that the remake of a drama series has the same principle as the film remake, in which the remake of a drama series refers to the new version of an existing drama series with a similar plot to the original one.

Hilmes (in Perkins & Verevis 2015) mentioned that there are two types of remake. The first type is “creative”/“free” remake. In this type of remake, the company that wants to make an adaptation of a certain television program needs to buy the broadcast rights from the original rights owner first, then the adapted television program has to be changed in certain aspects to produce the newer and better version (ibid). The second type is “controlled”/“faithful”. In this type of remake, the original owner of the broadcast rights will supervise the process of adaptating the television program in order to protect the brands and franchises in international audience community (ibid).

## 2. Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative research which using textual analysis method. McKee (in Ida 2014) explained that textual analysis emphasizes the interpretation of a text. The text itself refers to the combination of signs (Thwaites et al. in Ida 2014). This method is used because this research aims to explore more about the depiction of female workers in *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and its remake *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series by analyzing the signs shown in both drama series.

The primary data sources of this research are South Korean *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and its Japanese remake *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series. *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* was released in 2014 and has 20 episodes. This drama series tells about Jang Geu-Rae, an ex-go player that starts to work as a contract employee in One International, a trading company based in South Korea. Jang Geu-Rae is stationed in Sales 3 Division as the subordinate of Oh Sang-Sik, the Head of Sales 3 Division. While working in One International, Jang Geu-Rae makes some friends with the other three newbies; Han Seok-Yul from Textile Division, Jang Baek-Ki from Steel Division, and An Young-Yi from Resources 2 Division. Together with those newbies, Jang Geu-Rae faces a lot of challenges and hardships while working as a contract employee.

*Misaeng: Incomplete Life* was then made into a remake version by the Japanese with the title *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*. It was released in 2016 and has 9 episodes. The plot of *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* is similar to *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*, in which it tells about Ichinose Ayumu who is an ex-go player that working in a Japanese trading company called Yoichi Bussan. Together with Hitomi Shogo from Textile Division, Kiriake Shinji from Steel Division, and Kazuki Akane from Resources 2 Division, Ichinose tries to overcome any challenges and hardships as a contract employee in Yoichi Bussan.

From those data sources, the data that would be analyzed are the scenes and dialogue excerpts that related to the issues of female workers. Therefore, the analyzed data will be focused solely on characters that play as female workers. In *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*, the data will be taken from any scenes and dialogue excerpts that are related to An Young-Yi and Sun Ji-Young. Meanwhile, in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*, the data will be taken from any scenes and dialogue excerpts that are related to Kazuki Akane and Shiraishi Ryoko.

The data analysis technique would be done in three steps. The first step was identification, in which the scenes and dialogues in both drama series would be selected according to the relevancy of this research objectives. Next is interpretation, in which the signs that contain the portrayals of female workers would be interpreted according to the relevant theory and concept. The last step is classification, in which the interpreted data would be classified based on the data patterns that are formed as the result of the interpretation. The conclusion of this research would be drawn based on those classifications.

### 3. Result

Based on the results of the analysis that have been conducted, the issues related to female workers that are portrayed in both *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series can be classified into four categories. The following description will explain each of the categories.

#### 3.1 Female Workers’ Unavoidable Domestic Chores in the Workplace

*Misaeng: Incomplete Life* has some scenes that show the female workers’ responsibility to handle every domestic chores in their workplace, such as making coffee, preparing the meeting room, buying and serving meals to their colleagues, and so on. One of them can be found in episode 5 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. An Young-Yi and Sun Ji-Young preparing the materials for a meeting.  
Source: *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 5 minutes 53.37.

Similar scenes are also shown in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series. This drama series has some scenes that show Kazuki working on domestic chores. One of them can be seen in episode 1 (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Kazuki serving drinks to the clients and her superior.  
Source: *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 1 minutes 24.23.

In addition, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* also portrays a scene about Shiraishi, whose status is the Head of Sales 1 Division, who can not abandon her responsibility as a housewife. A scene in episode 3 minutes 31.05 shows how Shiraishi is arguing with her husband via call regarding the duty of picking up their daughter. Shiraishi and her husband have had an agreement that they both will take turns picking up their daughter from the daycare. However, because of an urgent matter in his workplace, he can not pick up their daughter and instead tries to hand over his responsibility to Shiraishi. At the end of the argument, Shiraishi is forced to give in and she agrees to take over his responsibility for the day.

Then, in episode 4 minutes 21.18, Shiraishi once again gets a call from her husband who is asking her to pick up their daughter. Just like in the scene of episode 3, Shiraishi’s husband wants Shiraishi to take over his duty of picking up their child, without having any considerations that Shiraishi is probably just as busy as he is. However, in this scene, Kazuki accidentally hears their conversation. Kazuki then politely offers her help. Shiraishi accepts the offer and asks her to pick up her child.

These scenes clearly show that Shiraishi can not abandon her duty as a housewife and mother regardless of her whereabouts, whether she is in the workplace or her house. Moreover, when Shiraishi can not take some hours away from the office to take care of her child, her responsibility as a mother is taken over involuntarily by Kazuki, who is also a woman.

However these “picking-up child” scenes in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* are different from the original version. In *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 5, Oh Sang-Sik finds out about Sun Ji-Young’s dilemma—she needs to pick up her daughter, but she can not leave her job in the office. Therefore, he instructs Jang Geu-Rae to be her substitute to pick up her child from the daycare. However the real intention of the instruction is to keep Jang Geu-Rae away from the problem that happens with the other division.

From this explanation, it can be understood that in *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*, the responsibility of picking up a superior’s child from the daycare is handed over to the junior male subordinate. This responsibility is not done voluntarily, but because he is instructed by his direct superior instead. In other words, the reason for this “picking-up child” job that Kazuki and Jang Geu-Rae have are different.

### 3.2 Female Workers’ Role to Support Their Male Coworkers

*Misaeng: Incomplete Life* describes An Young-Yi as a competent female newbie with foreign language skills. In some scenes of this drama series, An Young-Yi is shown to have conversations with foreign clients using foreign language. Hence, Jang Geu-Rae asks her to answer the calls from foreign clients multiple times (Figure 3).



Figure 3. An Young-Yi answering a call from a foreign client.  
Source: *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 1 minutes 32.45

The same scene also happens in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*. Just like An Young-Yi, Kazuki is also described as a competent female newbie with foreign language skills. Therefore, Ichinose asks her to help him answer calls from a foreign client (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Kazuki answering a call from a foreign client.  
Source: *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 1 minutes 12.50.

From these two scenes, it can be understood that both An Young-Yi and Kazuki have more capabilities than their male counterparts. However, those capabilities are used as tools to support both Jang Geu-Rae and Ichinose, who do not have any foreign language skills, to solve their problem.

### 3.3 Female Workers’ Efforts to be Accepted by Their Surroundings

Both An Young-Yi and Kazuki are facing rejection and detestment from their coworkers when they are first appointed to work at Resources 2 Division. However, An Young-Yi and Kazuki show different attitudes toward their coworkers. At first, An Young-Yi is told to do all domestic chores given to her willingly, just as shown in a scene in episode 5 of *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*. In this scene, An Young-Yi is given a duty to serve food and drinks to her coworkers when having a division meeting (Figure 5). When this scene is being shown, there is a monologue by Jang Geu-Rae that describes each of the newbies’ states after their appointment as full-time employees in One International, including An Young-Yi’s. The monologue excerpt about An Young-Yi is as follows.

“Young-Yi has become quite good at delivery. [...] Two months ago, she was full of confidence and dignity as an intern. Not knowing the reason why, she is now trying to overcome the poor treatment she is receiving from her seniors.”

(Jang Geu-Rae, *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 5 minutes 02.19.)



Figure 5. An Young-Yi serving lunch for her coworkers.  
Source: *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 5 minutes 02.19.

Nevertheless, what An Young-Yi has done to her coworkers does not make them accept An Young-Yi. In episode 8, Jung Hee-Seok—An Young-Yi’s superior in her division—instructs her work on a carbon emission project as Ha Sung-Joon’s assistant.

However, since Ha Sung-Joon does not have a good impression of her, he asks An Young-Yi to get out of the project. Although An Young-Yi is reluctant at first, she finally gives up and leaves the carbon emission project as per Jang Baek-Ki’s advice.

“Well... The advice that you gave me. I decided to take it. [...] I decided to lose as you advised me. I concluded that the way to counter a spear is not to use a stronger spear or a shield.”

(An Young-Yi, *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 8 minutes 58.08)

Since then, An Young-Yi starts to do every little task that seems petty to her coworkers, such as refilling papers in the printer, getting staples refill, as well as throwing away the trash.

However, the main reason for An Young-Yi’s coworkers’ acceptance of her is not because of her attitude, but because of the harassment that is done by Ma Bok-Ryeol, the Head of the Resources Department, to all members of the Resources 2 Division. In episode 16 of *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*, Jung Hee-Seok gets a report by a call that one of the subcontractor companies is going bankrupt and it will surely bring loss to One International. This report is heard by Ma Bok-Ryeol that he gets angry and starts to shove every male member of the Resource 2 Division in the chest with the phone.

Then, as he tries to do the same to An Young-Yi, Jung Hee-Seok suddenly stands in the way with the excuse to put away the phone. Although Jung Hee-Seok is afraid of Ma Bok-Ryeol, he firmly asks Ma Bok-Ryeol to not harass any of the members of the Resources 2 Division. This scene becomes a turning point in the relationship between An Young-Yi and her coworkers in the Resources 2 Division.

The same situation also happens to Kazuki, who she receives responsibility to do domestic chores in the Resources 2 Division right after she joins. The chores include tidying up the meeting room (Figure 6) and buying meals for her coworkers. Ichinose’s monologue regarding his fellow newbies also emphasizes Kazuki’s states.

“Kazuki, who was the most capable newbie between us, is now only doing trivial chores. [...] She has to put up with the unreasonable attitudes from her superiors.”

(Ichinose Ayumu, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 3 minutes 04.59)



Figure 6. Kazuki tidying up the meeting room.

Source: *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 3 minutes 27.36.

However, compared to An Young-Yi’s case, Kazuki starts to be treated more fairly by Hiyama—a senior in her division who is in charge of supervising her—after she

successfully revises a rejected project proposal until it is approved by the Finance Division. In *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*, there is a scene in which Kazuki is ordered by one of her male coworkers to do a private matter. Knowing this, Hiyama suddenly sends Kazuki away for a work visit so that she does not have to do her coworker’s request. From this scene, it can be understood that Hiyama has an important role in helping Kazuki get away from the domestic chores in the workplace.

Hiyama’s acceptance and empathy for Kazuki are more evident after Kazuki is stubbornly trying to deliver some products to the harbor by driving a truck. This situation happens because there is a strike in the factory that results in having nobody to deliver the products directly to the harbor. Although Kazuki has no experience in driving a truck and tends to drive recklessly, Kazuki manages to deliver those products. However, her action makes Hiyama worried about her.

“Why were you doing unnecessary things! [...] You idiot! What would you do if anything had happened? Huh? It will be troublesome for the company if an employee gets injured. Don’t make me worried.”

(Hiyama Makoto, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 6 minutes 35.06)



Figure 7. Hiyama reprimanding Kazuki out of worry.

Source: *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 6 minutes 35.28

Based on the scene excerpts described above, it can be understood that Hiyama starts explicitly showing his concern to Kazuki. He even unconsciously grips Kazuki’s arms while telling her that he is worried (Figure 7). It explains that Hiyama is sincere about Kazuki’s safety. Besides, Hiyama’s action can also be interpreted as Hiyama’s acceptance of Kazuki as a part of his *uchi no mono*. *Uchi no mono* refers to people that belong to the same group (Mulya & Kirana 2018). In the workplace context, *uchi no mono* also refers to coworkers from the same company. Therefore, by being more empathetic towards Kazuki, Hiyama starts to regard her as his equal colleague as well as a member of the Resources 2 Division.

### 3.4 Female Workers’ Risks of Getting Abused and Harassed in the Workplace

Both *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* drama series have some scenes that portray abuse and harassment against female workers. Those abuse and harassment include physical abuse, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment. The scene that depicts physical abuse toward female worker can be found in *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 7.

After An Young-Yi secretly helps Sales 3 Division to solve a case of a missing document in Resource 2 Division, An Young-Yi receives more hatred from her fellow division members, including Ha Sung-Joon. In a scene of episode 7, An Young-Yi gives some advice to Ha Sung-Joon regarding a revision of a document. However, it makes Ha Sung-Joon get offended and in a moment of anger, he throws the document straight to An Young-Yi's face until she gets a paper cut on her face (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The document thrown at An Young-Yi's face by Ha Sung-Joon.  
Source: *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 7 minute 01.06.

The same scene also happens in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 4. In that episode, Hiyama throws his report papers to Kazuki out of anger. The reason for this violence is similar to the original drama series, in which Hiyama gets offended by Kazuki's advice to revise his report. Just like what Ha Sung-Joon does to An Young-Yi, Hiyama's action towards Kazuki also results in a papercut on Kazuki's face.



Gambar 9. Hiyama throwing his report papers to Kazuki.  
Source: *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 4 minutes 03.09.

Not only throwing his report papers, Hiyama also commits verbal abuse towards Kazuki. The verbal abuse consists of Hiyama's negative bias towards Kazuki; that Kazuki is reluctant to be appointed to Resources 2 Division. The dialogue excerpt of Hiyama's verbal abuse is as follows.

“Do you hate it so much? Huh? Do you hate our division? [...] Then, don't do anything as you please!”

(Hiyama Makoto, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 4 minutes 03.02)

Although both the original version and its remake version have similarities in the portrayals of abuse toward female workers, there is one difference in the location where the scenes take place. An Young-Yi gets physical abuse in the office pantry. The

witnesses of this abuse are just Jang Geu-Rae and Oh Sang-Sik, whom both accidentally stumble upon them while Ha Sung-Joon commits abuse. Meanwhile, Kazuki gets abuse in the workspace where other employees can witness it.

Besides physical abuse, An Young-Yi also gets verbal abuse from Ha Sung-Joon. It is shown in episode 5 of *Misaeng: Incomplete Life*. Below is the dialogue excerpt of the verbal abuse.

“This is why I don’t like working with women. They have no sense of sacrifice. What should I expect? Why are you just standing there? Aren’t you going to apologize? [...] Just go. I don’t want to see your face.”

(Ha Sung-Joon, *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 5 minutes 16.03)

In addition to the physical abuse and verbal abuse, both *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series and its remake *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* have some scenes that portray sexual harassment against female workers. One of the scenes that has the depiction of sexual harassment in *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* is shown in episode 11. It happens between Ma Bok-Ryeol as the perpetrator and Sun Ji-Young as the victim.

“Hey. I’ve been lenient with you because you are a woman. Hey, you should be grateful to your husband who can bear with living with someone like you.”

(Ma Bok-Ryeol, *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 11 minutes 25.25)

Meanwhile, in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*, the scene that contains sexual harassment can be found in episode 8. The sexual harassment is done verbally by Terasaka, the Head of Resources 2 Division, towards Kazuki.

“Tomorrow, come wearing a short skirt. You’re good at ogling at men, right? Sit next to the manager and please him. Understood?”

(Terasaka Kyosuke, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* episode 8 minutes 31.26)

Although both Sun Ji-Young and Kazuki are the victim of sexual harassment, the reactions between Sun Ji-Young and Kazuki are different. When becoming the receiving end of sexual harassment, Sun Ji-Young’s reaction is to fight back using an implicit threat.

“With two cases of sexual harassment, you wouldn’t just end up with pay cut.”

(Sun Ji-Young, *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* episode 11 minutes 25.38)

On the other hand, Kazuki’s reaction is just being silent. In that moment, the one who defends Kazuki is Hiyama. Hiyama speaks up for her and even threatens Terasaka that he will not hold back if Kazuki is getting another sexual harassment. Based on these two reactions, it can be understood that Sun Ji-Young has more bravery to fight back the perpetrator of sexual harassment, while Kazuki does not.

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the explanations of the data in the previous subchapter, it can be understood that the depictions of the issues related to female workers in South Korean drama series and Japanese drama series have some similarities. First, both South Korean female workers and Japanese female workers are portrayed as individuals who have a responsibility to do the domestic chores in the workplace, regardless of how trivial it is. These chores include serving meals and drinks to their male coworkers, tidying up the meeting room, and so on. In other words, the works that have to be done by female workers are not only beneficial to the company but also related to attending to the needs of their male coworkers.

Furthermore, although those female workers are in the workplace, they can not put away their responsibilities as housewife as well as mother. It can be seen from how Sun Ji-Young and Shiraishi both feel helpless when facing the matter of picking up their child from the daycare. Despite having an agreement with their respective husbands to take turns picking up their children, their husbands still can get away with their responsibility with the work-related excuses. On the contrary, both Sun Ji-Young and Shiraishi can not use the same excuses to counter their husbands. It seems that the duty of picking up a child is solely their responsibility to handle, no matter how busy they are in the workplace.

The solutions that are being offered by both the original drama series and its remake drama series are different. As previously explained in the previous subchapter, *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* gives a solution by making Kazuki initiate to pick up Shiraishi's daughter, while *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* gives a solution by making Jang Geu-Rae go pick up Sun Ji-Young's daughter. The solution that is shown in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* indicates that the responsibility of attending to the children's care is absolute for Japanese women. Hence, if a woman can not fulfill that responsibility, it can be taken over by another woman. The interventions of men in taking care of children are not something to be expected upon. Therefore, they can relinquish their responsibility related to the children's care or helping other people look after their children.

On the contrary, the solution that is shown in *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* is related to the assignment from the superior to the subordinate. This is not something relevant to the division or work between women and men in the domestic scope and the public scope. This kind of approach indicates that the focus of the issue is on the superior-subordinates relationship. Cho & Yoon (2010) explained that harmonious relationship in South Korean society relies upon seniority, so the loyalty to someone with higher status is seen as something important. Therefore, it can be understood that the scene where Jang Geu-Rae picking up Sun Ji-Young represents the harmonious relationship between Jang Geu-Rae, Oh Sang-Sik, and Sun Ji-Young. This harmonious relationship is formed based on Jang Geu-Rae's loyalty to his superiors, so he is willing to be ordered to pick up Sun Ji-Young's daughter.

The second issue is that regardless of their capabilities, the main role of female workers in the workplace is supporting their male coworkers. This issue is represented by An Young-Yi and Kazuki in both drama series. In the whole story, those characters

are praised as capable employees. In addition, they also have foreign language skills. However, their capabilities are used by their male coworkers—Jang Geu-Rae and Ichinose—to solve their problems, not for their own interests.

The third issue is how female workers facing rejection from their colleagues in the workplace. Both An Young-Yi and Kazuki get rejections from their fellow division members. Those rejections are shown through unfriendly manners and indiscriminate attitudes by their coworkers.

In the South Korean workplace, someone’s position in a certain group is deemed as important. People who are considered as the out-groups are unfamiliar people, people with whom never had any interactions before, and people with no possibility of interacting in the future (Hur & Hur in Cho & Yoon 2010). An Young-Yi is considered an out-group by the members of the Resources 2 Division since they feel unfamiliar with her and never have had any interactions with her before. Moreover, there is this stigma in South Korea that the loyalty of female workers is not as great as male coworkers because they have the possibility to leave the company for marriage and raising children (Yoon & Park 2022). This results in the negative prejudice that the members of the Resources 2 Division have of An Young-Yi. Therefore, the rejection against An Young-Yi is delivered by abuse and indiscriminate attitudes.

In South Korea, the action taken by the members of the Resources 2 Division toward An Young-Yi is considered workplace harassment. South Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor (in Park 2021) states that there are three aspects for an action to be considered workplace harassment: 1) using one’s superior position or relation in the workplace; 2) going beyond the appropriate scope of work; and 3) causing physical or psychological agony and worsening the working environment.

Moreover, Park (2021) also explains each of those aspects in more detail. First, the South Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor defines “using one’s superior position or relation in the workplace” as 1) “superiority” that makes the victim hard to fight back; 2) “superiority in position” means that the perpetrator taking advantages of his/her superior position to commit harassment; and 3) “superiority in the relationship” (ibid). Second, “going beyond the appropriate scope of work” includes 1) physical abuse; 2) verbal abuse; 3) an order to do personal business; 4) bullying, intended ignoring, or exclusion from the work; 5) repeated order of tasks not related to the work; 6) assignment of excessive workload; and 7) actions that obstruct the work performance (ibid).

The last aspect, “causing physical or psychological agony and worsening the working environment”, includes 1) the perpetrator creating an environment that makes the victim can not perform well in his/her work; 2) the victim getting negative impact physically or psychologically and the working environment worsening because of the perpetrator’s action, regardless of the perpetrator’s intention. Therefore, based on Park’s explanation regarding workplace harassment, what An Young-Yi has gone through can be considered workplace harassment. It is because the perpetrators are people who are superior to her, it involves physical and verbal abuses, and it causes negative impacts on An Young-Yi physically and psychologically.

On the other hand, Kazuki is also getting rejections from her coworkers because of the same reason. In Japan, there is this concept called *uchi-soto* to differentiate the

people from the same group (*uchi*) and the people outside the group (*soto*). Besides, just like in South Korea, Japan also has a stigma regarding female workers. It is said that female workers have the possibility to quit working within a certain period to marry and have children (Fukutake 1989). Hence, the members of Resources 2 Division have an assumption that Kazuki will eventually leave the company, thus they do not accept Kazuki as a part of their *uchi* in the first place. The rejections are shown through abuse and indiscriminate assignments to Kazuki.

In the Japanese context, what Kazuki's coworkers have done can be considered power harassment. Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (in Hsiao 2015) states that an action can be considered power harassment if it fulfills one of these criteria: 1) physical attack; 2) verbal attack; 3) emotional attack; 4) isolating an individual socially; 4) excessive work assignments; 5) ordering with the intention of demeaning the victim; and 6) intervening victim's private business. Hence, the treatments that Kazuki has received can be assumed as power harassment, since they fulfill at least two of those criteria; physical attack and emotional attack.

In other words, the rejection that An Young-Yi receives is in the form of workplace harassment, whereas Kazuki gets power harassment. Both workplace harassment and power harassment are defined as harassment in the workplace, thus it can be understood that both An Young-Yi and Kazuki get harassment as a form of rejection from their coworkers.

Nevertheless, how the male coworkers finally open up to An Young-Yi and Kazuki is because of different reasons. The turning point of An Young-Yi and her coworker's relationship happens when they become the victims of Ma Bok-Ryeol's harassment. Ma Bok-Ryeol's action has disturbed the *ihwa* and *kibun* in Resources 2 Division. *Ihwa* refers to harmony between one group and another group emotionally, while *kibun* is defined as a concept that emphasizes good mood and good situation (Cho & Yoon 2010). Preserving the *ihwa* means avoiding hurting someone's *kibun*. Therefore, Ma Bok-Ryeol action is not only hurting the *kibun* of every member of the Resources 2 Division but also disturbing the *ihwa* between Ma Bok-Ryeol and the Resources 2 Division.

This case makes the members of the Resources 2 Division feel empathetic toward each other. Thus, it creates solidarity among the members, including An Young-Yi. This solidarity tears down the border that the members of the Resources 2 Division build toward Kazuki. As a result, the members of the Resources 2 Division can finally accept An Young-Yi as a part of their group.

On the other hand, the reason Hiyama finally opens up to Kazuki is because of her perseverance and capability. In episode 5 of *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain*, Kazuki gets an assignment to revise a project proposal about carbon emission that has been rejected multiple times by the Finance Division. Although revising the rejected proposal is hard, Kazuki keeps trying to find the mistake in the proposal and think about the best solution. Because of her effort, the revised version of the proposal is approved and it impacts Hiyama's impression of Kazuki greatly.

According to the explanation above, it can be assumed that *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* wants to show the concept of *ganbaru* through the depiction of that scene. *Ganbaru* refers to Japanese philosophy of life, such as being hardworking, being patient,

being resolute in finding solutions, and not running away from the problems (Widiuseno 2018). By implementing the concept of *ganbaru* as her work ethic, Kazuki that got rejected by Hiyama at the beginning can slowly be accepted by him. In other words, *ganbaru* not only can solve any problems but also can become a strategy to change other people's perspectives about someone.

The last issue portrayed in both drama series is how female workers have a great risk of becoming a victim of abuse and harassment in the workplace. The abuse that An Young-Yi and Kazuki get from their coworkers is workplace harassment and power harassment respectively. In An Young-Yi's case, she receives workplace harassment in the form of physical abuse and verbal abuse. Meanwhile, Kazuki gets power harassment in the form of physical attack and emotional attacks. Both of them get negative impacts physically and emotionally from those abuses.

In terms of sexual harassment, both Sun Ji-Young and Kazuki receive sexual harassment from their superiors. The sexual harassment is shown as verbal abuse that offends Sun Ji-Young and Kazuki's sexuality. In Japan, although the problem of sexual harassment has already existed in the workplace for years, it is seen as something that happens personally among individuals (Huen 2007). Meanwhile, in South Korea, cases of sexual harassment happen a lot in the workplace even though there is special training to prevent it (Lee 2017).

There is a difference in how Sun Ji-Young and Kazuki reacting to the sexual harassment they receive; Sun Ji-Young fights back by treathening the perpetrator implicitly, while Kazuki does not fight back. Sun Ji-Young's reaction represents the implementation of the special training for sexual harassment cases in the workplace. South Korea has a specific law about sexual harassment, that is *Enforcement Decree of the Act on Equal Employment and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation*. Article 3 of this law states the explanation of preventing sexual harassment in the workplace as well as the procedures to handle sexual harassment cases and standards of action regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. This law seems to be beneficial for female workers as it can be reference for them to fight back when they become the victims.

On the contrary, the circumstances in Japan are different. Women in Japan have been taught to follow the mainstream to preserve harmony and homogeneity in their environment (Huen 2007). As a result, it affects the group ethos, thus it makes Japanese women have difficulty fighting against sexual harassment and gender discrimination (ibid). It is because if they try to fight, they will break the harmony within the group. This situation becomes the reason why female workers like Kazuki just stay silent when getting sexual harassment in the workplace.

According to the explanations about the issues related to South Korean and Japanese female workers, it can be argued that those issues can be simplified as the inferiority of female workers. The inferiority among South Korean and Japanese women can be traced back to the Confucian doctrines that were spreaded in East Asia. In one of the Confucian doctrines, harmonious relationships—which become the requirement to achieve social integration and stability—are created by respecting and following the tradition and social hierarchy (Zhang et al. 2006). Hence, interpersonal relationship is influenced by one's social status, such as gender, age, and position in society (Cho & Yoon 2010)

In addition, Chen (in Clark & Wang 2004) explained that woman is a follower; when she is young, she follows her father, when she is married, she follows her husband, when she becomes a widow, she follows her son. This doctrine becomes the foundation of *Three Obediences* that must be obeyed by women; obeying her father, her husband, and her son (Clark & Wang 2004). Therefore, it can be understood that the position of women in the context of Confucianist society is inferior than men. It also becomes the reason for unequal work division problems between female workers and male workers, relationship problems among coworkers, and a lot of cases of violence in the workplace.

## 5. Conclusion

*Misaeng: Incomplete Life* drama series is one of South Korean drama series that portrays the issues related to female workers. This drama series has been made into a remake version titled *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* with similar plots. The most evident similarity in both the original version and the remake version of this drama series is the depictions of female workers as individuals who are inferior to male workers.

Nevertheless, there are also some differences in the portrayals of the issues related to female workers in both drama series. The first difference is how the original version and the remake version show the sexual harassment scenes. *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* shows how the victim of sexual harassment fighting back against the perpetrator, while the victims of sexual harassment in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* tends to keep silent in order to keep the harmony in the group.

Another difference can be found in the reason for the acceptance of both An Young-Yi and Kazuki in their division. The reason for the acceptance of An Young-Yi related to the disturbance of *ihwa* and *kibun* within the Resources 2 Division. Meanwhile, the reason for the acceptance of Kazuki is the implementation of *ganbaru*. It shows how both drama series put different emphases to promote their country's values.

Finally, it can be concluded that *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* is classified as a creative remake. The reconstruction of some aspects in *Hope: Kitai Zero no Shinnyu Shain* was done to accommodate the differences in the social culture between Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, those differences also show how Japan and South Korea position and treat women in the workplace.

## 6. References

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