

# The Influence of Chaebol Solidarity on School Violence in South Korea: Insights from *The Glory*

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**Abstract.** School violence in South Korea is a pressing issue, surpassing the severity seen in many other countries. In an effort to address this problem, South Korea has turned to various movies and dramas to raise awareness and advocate for the prohibition of school violence. *The Glory*, a recent popular Korean series on Netflix, delves into the harrowing tale of a victim enduring school violence and seeking retribution. This research aims to dissect how *The Glory* portrays and sheds light on the issue of school violence, providing a clearer perspective on the current situation of school violence in Korea. Drawing upon cinematic and television dramas, as well as existing literature, this study seeks to gather information and ultimately provide insights into the problem at hand. Through a comprehensive examination, it becomes evident that in Korea, the entrenchment of plutocracy plays a pivotal role in the prevalence of school violence. Korea's economy heavily relies on conglomerate companies, and the nexus between Korean chaebol and the government is undeniable, wielding immeasurable power. Consequently, the influence of these conglomerates extends to the realm of school violence. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between plutocracy and school violence, offering valuable insights for fellow researchers studying this critical issue.

**Keywords:** School violence, Korean chaebol, chaebol solidification, *The Glory*.

## 1. Introduction

This year, a Korean drama named *The Glory* caught widespread attention. This drama is about a girl who suffers from school violence and through her step-by-step plan, she gets a complete and poignant revenge against her aggressors and bystanders. The drama grabbed the attention of the audience as soon as it was released. The first installment of *The Glory* accumulated a remarkable 25.41 million hours of viewership on the third day of release, ranking third in Netflix's Global Top 10 TV (Non-English) category. By its second week of release, the show accumulated 82.48 million hours of viewing, ranking first in the Global Top 10 TV (Non-English) category on the Netflix platform [1].

*The Glory* aired for two seasons and featured Moon Dong-eun, Park Yeon-jin, Jeon Jae-jun, Lee Sa-ra, Choi Hye-jeong, and Son Myeong-oh. Moon is the heroine of the entire drama, and she is a victim of school violence. She is determined to get back at the perpetrators and bystanders. Through her step-by-step careful layout, she eventually sends the abusers to jail. Park is the mastermind of school violence. She is arrogant and does not take others into consideration. Eventually, this personality leads her to jail. Jeon is a brash and unreasonable rich kid. He believes that money can solve all problems and looks down on petty families. Together with Park, he ruins Moon's life. Lee is a painter with a drug addiction and more of a bystander during the bullying of Moon. Choi is also one of the Five, but she is not as high up in the hierarchy as the first three. In the abusive group, she is a submissive who follows orders. Choi has always wanted to improve her status in the group of Five. Son is simple-minded and used to solve problems with violence [1].

The show's resounding success can be attributed to its resolute and intelligent female lead, whose every action is intricately woven into the fabric of revenge. Because of this, *The Glory* has a strong continuity. However, the most fascinating thing about this drama is its plot. The story starts with the unsettling topic of school violence. This choice lends the show a significant degree of realism, given that South Korea struggles with a pervasive issue of school violence. A report titled "Survey on the Current Situation of Campus Violence among College Students and Study on Preventive Measures"

revealed alarming statistics. It was published in the academic journal *Korea Youth Studies*, a part of the National Institute for Youth Policy Research (NIYPR) in South Korea [2]. According to the report, three out of every ten Korean students attending four-year universities have witnessed violence on campus. The problem of campus violence is not only frequent in primary and secondary schools but also in universities. Those who are victimized also bear psychological scars that are difficult to erase [3]. These scars will affect them for a long time and on many things. The psychological damage engenders fear, self-doubt, and a lingering shadow, exemplified by Moon's character in *The Glory*. For a long time, her wounds are accompanied by pain. The wounds inflicted by school violence leave emotional scars that far outweigh physical injuries. Consequently, some victims, like Moon, ultimately choose to abandon their education, as the power of abusers – typically hailing from affluent backgrounds – trumps justice, especially when confronted by a disadvantaged high school student.

The question arises: What causes such a severe prevalence of school violence in Korea? This essay looks into this TV drama *The Glory* to uncover the connection between Korean plutocrats and the issue of school violence. Employing a primarily textual analysis approach, it closely examines key episodes of *The Glory* to unravel the underlying causes and the prevailing state of school violence in Korea.

*The Glory* demonstrates that plutocrats play an important role in this issue. Indeed, the drama reflects the reality that children of the affluent often target economically disadvantaged students. However, what grants them the audacity to exert control? The answer is inextricably linked to the economic development of Korea. The children of plutocrats, enjoying ample resources, frequently wield their power to bully their less privileged peers. The intertwining of economic prowess and control translates to these incidents often being met with minimal consequences, thanks to the plutocrats' sway over government agencies, schools, and teachers. These connections are well illustrated in the drama *The Glory*, and the underlying purpose is to reflect the current state of school violence in Korea.

## 2. Chaebol Solidarity

### 2.1. Chaebol System

The severity of school violence in Korea can be attributed to the country's unique chaebol system. In Korea, plutocrats wield significant power, sometimes even surpassing that of the country's prime minister. The solidification of the zaibatsu class leads to school violence due to their wealth and power.

Ownership and dominance of Korean chaebol groups belong to a particular family and are controlled by the family. One or a few people in the family are highly in control of all business decisions. They manage their businesses in a simple and brutal way, generally adopting a dictatorial family management style that lacks democracy. Even if there are a few managers outside the family, their power is much less than that of the managers in the family. Moreover, since the chaebols are controlling shareholders, they are prone to internal manipulation, striving to maximize their own interests and exploiting the company's property. South Korea's chaebols could not grow without government funding. The relationship between the government and the chaebol groups is mutually beneficial. The government of Korea provides various incentives and favorable credit and tax policies to the chaebol firms, which leads to the blind expansion of Korean chaebols into different kinds of businesses.

### 2.2. The Relationship between Chaebol and the Government

In *The Glory*, three of the five persons who perpetrate violence against Moon's family are wealthy individuals. Among them, Park, the most dominant figure responsible for harming Moon, holds the highest rank. Additionally, her mother is related to the chief of the police department, which shields her from punishment when Park faces charges of bullying.

For those privileged but sightless affluent youths, there seems to be no incentive to be violent towards their classmates. These can be attributed to the pervasive plutocratic system. In the first season of *The Glory*, Moon questions why she is being bullied. Park says, "I can torment you without consequence, and you can't fight back, even when you're suffering, whether you go to the police or endure bullying from us. Simply because you're vulnerable."

Park is fully aware of her family's economic and social status, deriving pleasure from bullying her classmates at school. Moon is not the first victim of Park's bullying. The previous target is Yoon So-he. This animosity began with an encounter on the street where Yoon is wearing an imitation outfit resembling Park's, leading to teasing and videotaping by Choi Hye-jeong and Lee Sa-ra. Thus Yoon is targeted by Park. One night, during a confrontation at a penthouse, a lighter opened by Park is used to ignite a sweater that Yoon wears, but the situation escalates, leading to Yoon's death. While numerous questions remain unanswered, the case is eventually closed by the police as a suicide and Park manages to avoid deserved punishment.

South Korea's plutocrats and the government are in a mutually beneficial relationship, so the control of government agencies is even less of a concern. Collusion between government and business is a common phenomenon in Korea. The root cause is that the plutocrats are too powerful and have a strong hand in many areas [4]. On the one hand, the plutocrats, who have risen to prominence under the patronage of political largesse, have continued to capitalize on their close relationship with government officials for their own benefit; on the other hand, politicians have also relied on the support of major plutocrats for their election campaigns, and have counted on the plutocrats' economic growth for their political achievements [5]. The mutual transfer of benefits and support between politicians and chaebols has become the backstage mode of operation of South Korea's constitutional government [6].

### 3. Social Hierarchy

#### 3.1. Hierarchy among the Bullies

For generations, Koreans have followed one cardinal rule – hierarchy. This idea is deeply rooted in the heart of every Korean [7]. Hierarchy happens everywhere in Korea, like, family, school, and company. Then, there are several types of hierarchy, the senior and junior hierarchy, the appearance hierarchy, and so on.

In *The Glory*, the bullying hierarchy consists of different tiers, with Park Yeon-jin, Jeon Jae-jun, and Lee Sa-ra at the top, and Choi Hye-jeong and Son Myeong-oh at the bottom. The latter rely on higher-ups' power to act as aggressors, remaining at the bottom rung. Lee mentioned that, were it not for Moon's appearance, Choi would have been the next victim. Despite their efforts, they remain subservient to the upper class's whims. Choi's strategy involves leveraging her physical appeal to achieve her goals. During her student life, she even has an affair with the gym teacher to acquire access to the gym, enabling her to torment Moon. This secures her place in the group of five. She is used by others, but she escapes physical harm. Nevertheless, Choi herself is a potential bully. She transitions from being bullied to becoming an aggressor to protect herself. She is dedicated to marrying into wealth to ascend the social ladder, mirroring Park's path and aiming to escape her subordinate role. One episode showcases Choi choosing a diamond ring for her upcoming wedding. She is not concerned with aesthetics but the size. This also shows Choi's inner climber and inferiority complex. She also wants to be the superior member of the group of Five. Her situation exemplifies one of the worst hierarchies in Korea.

#### 3.2. Difference between the Bullies and the Victims

Choi's fortune is relatively better than Moon's, given her family circumstances. Moon's mother is a prostitute and hairdresser and her dad is long gone. Her mother does not care about Moon and rarely contacts her. Moon lives in a small and dilapidated room and relies on coins from a piggy bank. This terrible living situation renders her powerless against further bullying. After a very serious physical

injury, Moon decides to drop out of school, candidly citing school bullying as her reason and naming her abusers. Regrettably, this effort does not work out when Park's mother approaches Moon's mother bribing her with a substantial sum of money and altering the reason for dropping out. Subsequently, Moon's mother evicts her from their rented home, taking away her belongings. Throughout this ordeal, Moon's mother displays no empathy or remorse, underscoring the harm her family inflicted upon her.

The Korean chaebol brings not only economic abundance but also deeply affects the lives of commoners. There is a strong difference between rich and poor in Korea's economic level. Since most of the chaebol companies in Korea are family businesses, it is difficult for civilians to change or join the chaebol group. The positions in those chaebol companies are a dream place for many people, and there are a lot of applicants, but not many of them can actually get in [8]. Moreover, there is a significant difference in income between ordinary people and chaebol, which leads to discontent among the public. People's desire for money is also growing. Then when faced with temptation, it is hard for them to refuse. There, those below the plutocratic level become the target of the plutocrats' bribes and bullying [9].

## 4. The School System

### 4.1. The Cooperation between the School and the Chaebol System

The school serves as the backdrop for the unfolding drama and the inception of a harrowing nightmare. Among the figures implicated in this tragedy is the teacher, a concealed abuser who wields significant influence over Moon's life. In the realm of student-teacher dynamics, educators are typically the individuals that students turn to for support in the aftermath of school violence. In Moon's situation, her mother's inability to offer solace places a heavier reliance on her school teacher. Thus, the teacher assumes the role of her last hope for intervention. However, events take a stark turn as the teacher's response reveals his deeply ingrained biases.

When Moon summons the courage to involve the police, her homeroom teacher's reaction upon arriving at the police station is unexpectedly dismissive. He perceives the incident as an innocuous prank among friends, trivializing the need for police intervention. This discrepancy in treatment becomes glaringly evident as only Moon and Jeon remain at the station. The teacher's contrasting attitude toward the two students is particularly striking. His demeanor toward Jeon reflects concern and empathy, even inquiring about his well-being and meals. Meanwhile, his behavior toward Moon is marked by hostility and anger. This stark juxtaposition highlights not only the teacher's disparate treatment based on socio-economic background but also his gender-based bias.

The consequences of school violence compel Moon to contemplate withdrawing from school. In a bid to bring attention to the severity of the issue, she lists the names of her assailants in her withdrawal application, specifically citing school violence. However, her action unintentionally sparks the teacher's fury, as he fears that this notation could jeopardize his performance evaluation. This instance underscores the teacher's misplaced priorities, as he prioritizes his reputation over addressing the grave issue at hand.

Within the school context, another notable teacher is the infirmary teacher. When Moon, wounded from a hair straightener incident, seeks basic medical supplies from her, her response is markedly different. She exhibits genuine concern for her well-being, and her inquiry reveals her willingness to provide care. The dynamic shifts when another student, Park, takes credit for the violence against Moon. This disheartening moment sheds light on the complex web of power dynamics that permeate the school environment.

In the narrative, the teacher's attitudes and actions serve as a sobering reflection of the deeper societal biases that can infiltrate educational institutions. The educator-student relationship becomes fraught with biases, inequality, and a lack of accountability. As Moon's quest for justice unfolds, it highlights the imperative for a more inclusive, empathetic, and unbiased approach within the education system – a journey that resonates far beyond the confines of the drama.

In the aftermath of experiencing violence within a school, the teacher often emerges as the pivotal figure to whom students turn, seeking resolution and protection. Unfortunately, within the confines of *The Glory*, the homeroom teacher's character takes a distressing turn. Self-serving and corrupt, he demonstrates a stark contrast between his behavior towards students from affluent backgrounds and those in need. The teacher's actions reveal a disturbing trend prevalent in certain educational contexts, where issues of school violence are dismissed as mere jests among students, effectively shattering the trust and hope of those who seek assistance.

In *The Glory*, the homeroom teacher's willingness to flatter the plutocrat's family while sidelining the needs of students underscores the systemic flaws within the school's environment. Tragically, this inaction not only lets down the wounded students but also exacerbates their distress, causing them to lose faith in the system meant to protect them. This, in conjunction with the plutocrats' oppressive influence, serves as the proverbial final straw that burdens the students beyond their capacity. The abrupt departure of the infirmary teacher takes on particular significance within this context, hinting at a web of manipulation involving Park.

#### 4.2. The School System as a Potential Protective Factor

It is worth noting that the school nurse stood as a rare ally in Moon's quest for help. Paradoxically, this very act of support leads to the nurse's forced departure – a situation that prompts the question: What can instigate an ostensibly unproblematic teacher's exit? Here, the formidable power of Park's family becomes evident. In a society where plutocrats command significant influence over a range of domains, including education, orchestrating a teacher's departure becomes a straightforward task for a family of their stature [10].

The chilling reality portrayed in *The Glory* unveils the complex interplay between power, privilege, and manipulation that permeates certain educational systems. The narrative serves as a mirror reflecting the unfortunate truth of how entrenched interests can eclipse the well-being and future of vulnerable students. This dynamic, where those in power exert control even within the educational realm, echoes a broader societal challenge – one that necessitates addressing not just within fictional narratives but also in the real world, where equitable and just education remains an unmet aspiration [11].

### 5. Summary

This research finds that it is impossible to ignore the influence of Korean plutocrats on school violence. Due to the overpowering influence of plutocrats, they are able to control both governmental agencies and schools, ultimately leading to a distressing absence of recourse for the victims of school violence.

This study has specifically spotlighted the consolidation of the chaebol as a focal point, but it is crucial to recognize that multiple factors contribute to the severity of school violence in Korea, each warranting its own in-depth investigation. While this study delves into a specific aspect, the entrenchment of plutocratic power, it serves as a gateway to comprehending the broader landscape. By shedding light on this issue, more individuals can gain a lucid understanding of the magnitude and gravity of plutocratic influence. This awareness is instrumental in recognizing the immense prominence of chaebol within Korean society.

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