

PORTRAYAL OF SCHOOL CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS IN FOUR ARMENIAN
AND JAPANESE TV SERIES

by

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Introduction

Films, movies, dramas, among other media, are often considered to show or criticize our reality. Some films showcase the ideal that the filmmaker believes will be useful to the audience, while others try to depict society as close to reality as possible. Films allow us to analyze and understand people's social lives and reveal how they react and reflect on different phenomena and issues worldwide. It can also blur the line between reality and imagination (Georgo, 2017). For these reasons, I have decided to research the portrayal of social issues and conflict resolution in Armenian and Japanese high school dramas.

Schools all over the world often have many problems, among which bullying is especially concerning. It is a complicated behavior that is influenced by both individual and social factors. For my capstone, I have selected four dramas to analyze, of which two are Armenian: *Golden School* (2017) and *The Last Teacher* (2019), while the other two are Japanese: *Great Teacher Onizuka* (2012) and *Class 3-A: Mr. Hiiragi's Homeroom* (2019).

Golden school («Ոսկե Դպրոց») is a situation comedy about a thief that hid his stolen jewelry in a construction site. After completing his prison sentence, he comes back to find his hidden treasure but sees that the construction site had now become a school. Thus, he decides to infiltrate the school as a history teacher to find the gold, in the meantime getting close to the students and teachers. Another comedy is *Great Teacher Onizuka* (2012), (henceforth *GTO*) which is a remake of a drama and anime series based on a popular manga of the same name. It is about a former bike leader, Onizuka, who, after helping one of the students at school, is promoted from a part-time gardener to a full-time teacher in charge of the worst class in the school. Due to his new role, Onizuka becomes involved in many school issues and tries to help better his students as much as possible.

The next two series have a more serious tone. Similar to the other two TV series discussed above, *The Last Teacher* («Վերջին ուսուցիչը») is also about a new teacher at an Armenian school. The story revolves around a class where a major incident is reported a month before their graduation, leaving some of the students on the verge of expulsion. Just like in *GTO*, this class is also considered by the teachers as the most problematic in school. However, the newly appointed teacher, Mamyan, does everything in his power to help solve the students' issues. On the other hand, *Class 3-A* (「3年A組: 今から皆さんは、人質です」) is about a classroom being taken hostage by a teacher wanting to reveal what happened to a student who committed suicide after being bullied in real life and on the internet. Although the setting is quite different from the other series, “Class 3-A” showcases many issues such as jealousy, threats, and the dangers of social media that would be relevant for my analysis.

Besides comparing the different patterns in the presentation of school issues shown in Armenian and Japanese dramas, my research will also include an examination of how the teachers are portrayed, especially what concerns their role in solving those issues. While there is some research that discusses school bullying in Japanese cinema, the same cannot be said about Armenian TV series. So, my research will also analyze how Armenian dramas present scenes of bullying and conflict resolution (which is usually somehow connected to the arrival of a new teacher).

Literature Review

In order to adequately analyze the portrayal of bullying and other school issues in film, I will be using articles and studies that provide a theoretical framework for my analysis. To understand the context and some of the choices made in the plot, I would also need to study

articles that discuss school problems, such as bullying, in Armenian and Japanese schools. Finally, in order to research the portrayal of these themes in film, I have also selected some existing studies that examine this topic and also discuss the role that the school system and teachers have in solving the issue.

Film analysis

Since my goal is to get a deep understanding of the dramas I have chosen, I will be primarily using content analysis and theoretical frameworks such as film theory and the social construction of reality. As Georgo (2017) mentions, film theory is also part of cultural studies. Since it also allows us to understand and think about our social world, we also usually find important meanings in them. Thus, films also show us the possible social construction of the world, displaying behavior that should or should not be followed and allowing the audience to learn. For the research to be effective, sub-themes need to be clearly defined, which would be done using the SPEAKING model. SPEAKING is an acronym: Setting (time and place where the situation (fights, meals, etc.) happens); Participants (the characters (their relationship, gender, age, and the power dynamic)), Ends (the intentions and goals of the individual regarding the situation), Act (the topic or the spoken words within the situation), Key (tone of voice or manner of speech), Instrumentalities (the styles of speech, such as language, dialect, linguistic code, etc.), Norms (the social rules, which constitute the interactions and interpretations of a situation), Genre (the type of situation) (Georgo, 2017).

Additionally, semiotics will also be analyzed as they are an integral part of cinema. When combined with others in different contexts, certain signs become codes that help understand the character's purpose even more. Another concept that will be useful is conventions, as they present the established way of behavior and display the filmmaker's goal of showing the

audience various scenes in specific ways. (Reeper, 2013) Since characters are also an integral part of film, I will also use character analysis, mainly of the teacher, by using the methods provided in Jens Eder's article "Understanding characters" (2010). Those include the five levels of character-related viewer reactions and the four parts of the "clock of character" (Artifact, fictitious being, symbol, and symptom"). To fully comprehend the character, the author suggests first examining the features of the fictional being, then how it is constructed (artifact) and its relation to other characters. And after accumulating enough information about the character, moving on to the symbols and symptoms.

Bullying and school issues in Japan and Armenia

Although not researched as widely in Armenia, bullying in Japan is considered a complex and concerning problem, so, unsurprisingly, many dramas and movies set in schools usually have depictions of bullying. In a 2017 survey report by Save the Children Armenia, 84% of the participants believed that Armenia needed to put more effort into preventing bullying.

Additionally, 35% and 38% of the respondents mentioned that they saw bullying at least 1-5 times in schools and saw someone getting hit or punched that or the previous year, respectively. However, most of the participants (90%) answered that they were not being bullied or subjected to violence, indicating that the bullying in Armenia may not be as severe (though there is always the possibility that the respondents were not completely truthful in their answers) (Save the Children Armenia, 2017).

As mentioned, bullying in Japan or *ijime* is a well-known problem in the country. Some characteristics of bullying mentioned in Kanetsuna's (2015) paper "Insights into Japanese *ijime* through a comparison with bullying in England" were physical and verbal abuse, which was

considered as bullying by students in both England and Japan. Another characteristic, mainly present in Japanese students, was attacks on relationships in groups, such as being ignored by classmates or left out, which the author explained by the students' need to fit in and be part of a group (Kanetsuna, 2015). However, in the current world of evolving technology, another form of bullying, namely cyberbullying, is becoming a problem for the youths. Some differences between traditional and cyberbullying Reinis Udris mentions in his article "Cyberbullying in Japan" (2015) are the ability to conceal one's identity, the use of the internet by anyone at any time of the day (since it is open for most everyone). Another characteristic is that the internet is a place where any media, like a video or a photo, may spread very quickly and negatively affect the victim.

The portrayal of school violence and teachers in different Japanese media

Teachers are an integral part of a school and are tasked with keeping peace and order in class. Due to this aspect of their job, they usually play an essential role in their students' lives. Japanese dramas and films also concentrate on this aspect. Many TV series set in school also put the teacher as one of the main characters that help solve the problem, be it bullying or other types of violence. According to Kiejziewicz (2018), many of the scenes of bullying depicted in dramas are taken from real-life, and usually showcase the incompetence of the other teachers and failures of the school system. Bullying is usually closely connected to suicides or at least attempts. Still, since such things would tarnish the school's reputation, principals and teachers are more likely to try and cover up what happened. Some dramas also portray schools as having some groups of students that seem to have more influence in school than the teachers, whether through monetary or violent means. Usually, in this type of event, a new teacher is transferred to

the school who goes against such methods of control. These new teachers are typically shown as very passionate about their work and concerned about their students, even engaging with them in private settings. Usually, they are the ones that lead to the students either reconsidering their actions or standing up for themselves when faced with bullying (Yamada, 2010).

To reiterate, my literature review consists of three parts: theoretical frameworks of film analysis, studies describing bullying and school issues in Armenia and Japan, and the portrayal of such school conflicts and teachers in Japanese films. While there is some research that discusses school bullying in Japanese cinema, the same cannot be said about Armenian TV series. So, my research will also analyze how Armenian dramas present scenes of bullying and conflict resolution (which is usually somehow connected to the arrival of a new teacher). The analysis may also allow me to see what differs in the settings of Armenian and Japanese schools that may be connected to the type of bullying portrayed in film.

Research Questions

Film provides a medium for the depiction as well as criticism of the real world, which is why it was chosen as the primary subject for my analysis. The main goal of my capstone is to compare/contrast the portrayal of school issues, particularly bullying, in Japanese and Armenian TV series, and to understand how big of a role is given to the teacher to solve those conflicts. Therefore, my central research question is, “What are the differences in the portrayal of school issues and conflict resolution in Armenian and Japanese TV series?” Also, since the teacher usually plays a central role in solving the conflict, my second question will be, “What is the teacher’s role, and how does it connect to the resolution of the conflict, as presented in the TV series?”

Methodology

To study the portrayal of social issues and conflict resolution in Armenian and Japanese high school dramas, as mentioned before, I will analyze four TV series: “Golden School” (2017), “The last teacher” (2019), “Great Teacher Onizuka” (2012), “Class 3-A” (2019). The series were chosen based on their content (primarily set in high school and contain at least a few school conflicts/scenes of bullying), the year of release, and genre (one comedy and one drama from both Japan and Armenia).

My primary methodology will be film analysis. In particular, I will do a semiotic and contextual analysis of the series and use the SPEAKING model to note down important points from the scenes. During the first viewings of the series, I will separate scenes specific to the conflicts (mainly bullying) and those connecting to conflict resolution. A second viewing will be used to recheck the scenes already chosen to see if any were missed. Next, I will separate the scenes that are connected to the teacher’s role in the conflict. This action will be done during the first and second viewings of the series.

After I have completely separated the needed scenes into their respective groups, I will use the SPEAKING model to categorize some of the basic information from the scenes. This will be followed by an analysis of the scenes in each series, I will more closely examine the mise-en-scene and camera angles of the conflict and the corresponding resolution scenes while also using semiotics. This will help understand the idea behind each scene and what the film may be trying to show the viewers. While studying the scene composition, I will also do a character analysis of the victims, bullies, and the role the main teacher plays in resolving the conflict, as it is one of my sub-questions. To answer it, I will research the teacher’s speech patterns, their attitude

towards the problem, their interactions with the students involved in the conflict, and the situations that lead them to the solution. All of this information will then be summarized to showcase what each show believes to be a good teacher.

Analysis

Plot and Characterization

Japanese TV series

Great Teacher Onizuka

The story of *GTO* (2012) centers around class 2-4 on their journey to accepting the death of a former classmate and getting over their distrustfulness of teachers. From the beginning, the viewers are shown that the students do not have a great relationship with their teachers. For example, the class leader, Aizawa Miyabi, tries to get her assistant teacher, Fuyutsuki Azusa, into trouble by asking her to take care of a few dangerous-looking people making loud noises in the street. The viewers also learn that class 2-4 is considered a group of problem students who actively participated in “Homeroom teacher bullying,” which is why they only had the assistant teacher in charge of their class at the beginning of the series. Some of the school conflicts shown in the series include blackmail and money extortion, students refusing to go to class, the teaching methodology which brought forth the disaster, and the students losing their unity.

Impressions of others regarding the class

Most of the teachers, aside from Mr. Onizuka, Ms. Fuyutsuki, and the Chairman of the school, describe class 2-4 quite negatively. After officially joining the school as a teacher, the

nurse gives him a mountain of medicine that she believes will help him when he gets stressed. The teachers describe it as one of the biggest problem classes since the foundation of the school, changing homeroom teachers three times in the previous year. Because of this, Mr. Onizuka at first thought that they would be the same as other delinquents. However, this class relied more on strategy than brute force when tormenting their teachers. Although the other teachers often underestimate him, they cannot deny that he has positively impacted the students' lives.

Similarly, Ms. Fuyutsuki is usually scolded for not being able to control the student and protecting them. At the same time, the Headteacher and his assistant typically try to use the problems created by the students to fire Mr. Onizuka. There is always a sense of knowing your place and not doing more than the bare minimum as a teacher. For example, when Onizuka decided to make home visits to each student, the other teachers do not react fondly to the idea, saying that "They [high school students] are already adults. Once they are out of school, they are outside our jurisdiction."

Portrayal of the victim

The victims are usually acquaintances with their bullies, at times having a previously good relationship that went south for various reasons. For example, in the fourth episode centered around future dreams, one of the main characters, Nomura Tomoko, is constantly put down by both her classmates and parents, getting called "Toroko" (a play on words using her name and the word "toroi," meaning "slow"). Despite being childhood friends with Miyabi, who was also part of the reason she wanted to become a singer, Miyabi decides to pressure her into giving up because Tomoko chose to take Mr. Onizuka's help. Similarly, Yoshikawa Noboru, the victim from the first episode, was also friends with his bully Uehara Anzu. However, after he ran

away when she was in trouble during middle school, Anzu changed her attitude toward him and began using threats to make him do what she wanted. This sense of guilt was part of why Noboru had resigned himself to their antics without much resistance.

Portrayal of the bully

The bullies are usually portrayed as quite antagonistic at the start, but later in the episode are given a backstory to the reasons they resorted to such actions, garnering sympathy for their behavior. For example, in the second episode, the viewers are introduced to Katsuragi Miki, whose father is the police chief and does not show her affection. So, in order to catch his attention, Miki constantly abuses an emergency call button on her phone for false accusations, which gets Onizuka into trouble as he goes to try and persuade her to come back to school.

However, the portrayal is somewhat different for the series' first main antagonist Aizawa Miyabi. In the beginning, she is portrayed as the leader of the class, being the class representative, who is also revealed to be the main ringleader behind the "teacher bullying." At first, she seems to be kind and rule-oriented. Her classmates seem to love and respect her. However, the viewers may notice that despite her seemingly innocent appearance, the music and editing hint at her bigger role. In the second episode, it becomes apparent that she is leading the class in their challenge to get rid of Mr. Onizuka. She was the instigator behind Miki's plan to get Mr. Onizuka arrested for attempted rape and the disappearance of the culture festival money. Throughout the series, we are given hints as to why the class continued participating in the "Teacher bullying," and the students slowly begin to open up to Mr. Onizuka.

Miyabi finally comes back to her senses after she goes too far and almost causes her friend, Kanzaki Reimi, to become completely isolated from everyone because of her heritage

(conceived from a sperm donor). Kanzaki reminds her and everyone of the fun times they had while Mizuki Nanako was alive. This incident helped bring the class together like it was with when Nanako. Throughout the series, many of the bullies, especially those from Mr. Onizuka's class, go through a redemption arc, usually triggered by his speech. Such storytelling may signify that even school bullies have the ability to change their attitudes if someone is willing to listen to them and show them the right way.

Portrayal of the teacher



An important aspect of characterization is the fashion style of the character. In the show, Onizuka usually wears a thin undershirt with a light-colored blazer and dark pants with chains. He also wears a cross necklace, but as there is no mention of Christianity in the show, it can be interpreted as a sign of a savior. Onizuka's style is closer to a business casual attire, which indicates that he is serious about becoming a teacher for the students. However, unlike the other teacher dressed strictly professionally, he is also someone who wants to connect to the students. The chain/accessories in his attire and dyed hair also allude to his past as a delinquent since those are forbidden in most Japanese schools.

Most of the episodes begin with showing what the main conflict is and who the participants are, followed by Onizuka getting into trouble or foreshadowing the resolution. For example, in the third episode centered around compensated dating, after being introduced to what Kawae Haruka's work is like, we are shown Onizuka in the classroom comparing the fresh and new smell of Haruka's bag to the old and used Kunio's bag. The resolution of this conflict,

where Haruka did whatever she could to buy branded items and keep up the image of a rich girl, was Onizuka burning clothes to explain that the significance of things does not come from their price, and you should not put a value on yourself based on what you wear. Afterward, the story follows Onizuka trying to better his relationship with the students, finding out about the problem, allowing them to try and solve it first before bursting in of things become too dangerous. The episodes typically contain short speeches by Mr. Onizuka about the lesson that should be taken from that particular class.

Mr. Onizuka was introduced to the viewers as someone that could use unconventional means to solve a conflict. In the first episode, he saves Ms. Fuyutsuki by cutting off the hair of one of the troublemakers and fighting them while “coincidentally” tripping them over. We soon learn that he and his two friends are former members of a famous motorcycle gang, thus instilling fear into people from the dark side of society when they try to make trouble with his students.

Most resolutions to the problems at school are usually directly or indirectly related to Mr. Onizuka, who constantly repeats that he wants to become friends with the class. Understanding what it may feel like to have teachers that may take advantage of you, he tries to be much friendlier with them and teach them important life lessons when they stray from the path. An important thing to note is that in most cases, Mr. Onizuka allows, and at times even pushes the participants of the conflict or those close to them to try and solve the problem themselves before coming in and saving them if things become dangerous. In many cases, especially as the story progresses, the viewers see the class slowly becoming more united and helping each other when it seems Mr. Onizuka will not make it. After being saved by him (literally and figuratively), the

students laughing at Mr. Onizuka's treatment change and try to help the troubled students in the next episode.

A change is also apparent in the teacher's attitudes. For example, the Headteacher who was adamant about firing the unconventional Mr. Onizuka became much more sympathetic toward the students after a new and much stricter Chairman came to the school. Despite previously using the word "Kuzu" (trash) to describe the problematic students at school, he gets angry at her after hearing it from the new Chairman. The Headteacher tells her that she can call him whatever names she pleases, but students are not trash. With this statement, the other teachers also remembered what it meant to be one and who the school was supposed to support.

Another important teacher character is Ms. Fuyutsuki, who was portrayed as someone who believed in her students but is too timid to actually try and help them. Thanks to Mr. Onizuka, she decided to seriously try to become closer to the students. However, her attitude toward the student seemed to be somewhat insincere, as when one of the students, Kujirakawa Fuyumi, confided in Ms. Fuyutsuki her worry, she appeared to dismiss it as something insignificant, not thinking that her student had a complex. In episode six, which is centered around her change as a teacher, she suddenly becomes the target of Miyabi's group, who claim to be doing it on Kujirakawa's behalf. During this time, she gets anonymous letters telling her to resign, a funeral photograph on her desk in the classroom calls from unknown numbers asking for illicit services, and finally getting locked up in the bathroom and thrown water. However, after getting lectured by Mr. Onizuka, she finally understands that she should look at the other head-on as an equal.

Class 3-A: Mr. Hiiragi's Homeroom)

The most significant conflicts presented in this series were the classroom and cyberbullying that Kageyama Reina, the student who committed suicide, had experienced. After a fake video of Reina using doping surfaced on the social media site "Mind Voice," most of her classmates turned against her and started bullying her. To protect her closest friends from experiencing similar hardships, she did not let them defend her in front of everyone, and in the end, decided to cut her ties with them. However, as the story progresses, it is revealed that the greatest reason she could not endure it anymore was cyberbullying. Because of it, Reina became very paranoid and started hallucinating hearing people say things they did not. Mr. Hiiragi, their homeroom teacher, understood her feelings because his friend had also gone through a similar situation. However, regretting that he could not save her, he decided to stage a hostage situation and broadcast it on "Mind Voice."

Portrayal of the victim

The biggest victim in the series is Kageyama Reina. After experiencing bullying both on and offline, being betrayed by someone she considered a friend (Kaho), and hallucinating, she completely lost herself. At the start, Reina was portrayed as someone who seemed mentally strong. She was a great athlete and was popular in her class. However, because of her achievements, she was also the subject of envy and jealousy. This probably played a big part in why her classmates did not try to stay by her side. Unlike *GTO*, where despite believing that she was the thief, the classmates tried to console Mizuki Nanako, who shared the same fate as Reina, in this series, Reina had no one to defend her. And, even the small number that did exist may

have also been targeted if they associated with her, which is why she had severed her ties with the others.

Despite seeming strong on the outside, Reina was actually quite weak. Sakura had also told her that she was strong, so Reina could not confide her worries to her, which is why she frequented Mr. Hiiragi's art room.

Portrayal of the bully

In the classroom, Reina was mainly bullied by her own classmates, who scribbled hurtful words on her desk and completely ignored her, believing a video from the internet. The students connected to the spread of the video were all given backstories as to why they helped it. After getting exposed one by one throughout the series, they learned valuable lessons from Mr. Hiiragi and changed their attitudes for the better. For example, after it is revealed that Usami Kaho, a student who stalked Reina and made her feel paranoid, was the one who uploaded the video, she gets at first rejects that she had done something terrible. However, after getting lectured by Mr. Hiiragi on the importance of imagining yourself in another's shoes and communicating your feelings with the other students, her attitude begins to change. In the next episode, she sees what it is like to be on the receiving end of bullying when no one is on your side. After such experiences, she becomes calmer, and it seems like a weight was taken off her chest. Her hair became untied as if to symbolize that she was now free from her constraints.

Perhaps due to the tense atmosphere in the first few episodes, the students are very quick to change sides and start hurting someone else to feel better about themselves. Most of the time, they would pick on the person that seemed to be in the most vulnerable position at that time and

start blaming them for things like Reina’s death (Kaho) or smelling bad, even though everyone had not taken a shower for days (Uozumi Hana).



Figure 1: Mind Voice comments (episode 10)

The other biggest antagonist of the series was the social media app “Mind Voice.” The episodes usually started and ended with comments from the app are shown on the screen. With each new clue about why Reina committed suicide revealed, more and more people seem to be tuning in to watch it. The comments are usually a reaction to what is happening, though many of the users seem to be finding entertainment despite being told that if anything goes wrong, the students may die. Their attitude towards Hiiragi also fluctuates. Unlike the students, who, towards the end, learn the power of words and the necessity to check the information they get, the users mainly react in a collective.

For example, after it is revealed that one of the teachers of the school was behind the fake video, another video surfaced that showed said teacher, Mr. Takechi, as the person Reina had met and was possibly murdered by. The users started cyber bullying him to the point that he also started hallucinating like Reina. At this point, Hiiragi was considered a hero who avenged Reina. However, soon someone found that the video was fake, and it actually showed Hiiragi instead of

Takechi. This time, the mob turned against Hiiragi and started insulting him instead. However, this was also not the full story. In reality, the whole video was staged, and instead of Reina, the other person was only an actress.

This portrayal of the harmful and easily deceivable nature of social media was at the heart of Hiiragi's revenge. He wanted to teach the many social media users that words can harm just as much as physical injuries. When he gave his speech to them, it was apparent that many did not even think that they were responsible for what their words may have done. Writings such as "It had nothing to do with us" and "If she couldn't take it, she shouldn't have been on it" were shown all over the screen. However, it seemed that his speech had impacted at least some of the users, as the viewers are shown a scene where one such user is about to write a hateful comment but decides against posting it.

Portrayal of the teacher



Since most events in this tv show are happening during a hostage situation, the clothes the main cast wears rarely change. Mr. Hiiragi wears multiple layers of clothing, starting with a white high-collar shirt to a gray

coat. The numerous layers of clothing most likely symbolize the many layers to Mr. Hiiragi's character. The choice of having darker colors on the outside and lighter colors on the inside could be alluding to him appearing evil at first glance. Still, as the mystery gets more and more unfolded, the students see his gentle side, which wishes to guide them towards a better future.

His glasses also play an important role as a tool for determining if what he is saying is the truth or a lie. It was a game he introduced early on in the series but used a bit later when many of the students had already forgotten it.

In the beginning, Mr. Hiiragi is portrayed as someone that does not speak up much. His students clearly underestimate him and do not respect him. The other teachers also do not have a strong impression of him. However, the series shows that he is intelligent and ambitious, as well as physically strong. After learning that his pancreatic cancer had recurred, and he only had at most a year to live, Mr. Hiiragi decided to try and change the world for the better, especially his students who would soon graduate. In each episode, with each accomplice revealed, Mr. Hiiragi listened to their side and gave answers that would teach the listener the impact their actions and words could have on someone's future. Most of the time, the lectures were done more or less calmly, and despite clear signs of anger and frustration in his eyes, Mr. Hiiragi did not speak coldly to his students. This ability was probably one of the ideal characteristics of a teacher that the series wanted to emphasize.

Another theme that was consistent throughout the series was trust. Whenever Mr. Hiiragi took his glasses off, that meant that whatever he would say next would be a lie, similar to how the eyesight may be blurred and incorrect when one is not wearing appropriate glasses. His main goal was to teach his students to think for themselves, which is why he constantly emphasized the phrase "Let's think."

The other significant teacher, Takechi Yamato, who was the one that put in the request for Reina to be dealt with, is also of interest. At first glance, he may seem like a perfect teacher loved by both students and teachers. However, that may have all been a facade. Unlike Mr. Hiiragi, who was more reserved before the incident, Mr. Takechi appeared to crave attention, to

the point of even using the hostage situation as a way to extensively promote himself. In order for him to learn his lesson, Mr. Hiiragi had uploaded a completely fake video where it implied that Mr. Takechi killed Reina. Afterward, his social media got bombarded by angry users who made him experience similar hallucinations to that of Reina. He was also involved in firing a teacher, who was also Mr. Hiiragi's friend, that had caught him cheating to get more students into certain schools to acquire a high evaluation from influential politicians. However, after Mr. Hiiragi's final speech, he shows remorse and apologizes to her.

The ideal teacher portrayed in the series is not perfect. He has his flaws, as well as strong points. However, what is most important is that he is doing his primary job: teaching his students skills that will become useful in their future. Unlike the other Japanese series, in this one, the teacher is usually directly involved in resolving the conflict, and rarely someone else steps in together with him.

Armenian TV series

The Last Teacher

The story of this series is based on the experience of a new teacher of Armenian literature to a class that will be graduating soon, which is why to them, he is their "last teacher." Mr. Mamyan was sent to the new school because of disagreements he had with the previous principal. The new class he was assigned to recently had a scandal where one of the students, Mari Melikyan, was seen dancing half-naked in front of a few classmates by the chemistry teacher, Sona Miqaelyan. Because of the incident, the principal is pressured to expel and punish a few students so that a similar incident does not occur. Mr. Mamyan becomes closer to the class in such circumstances.

The portrayal of the victim

Most of the students from class 12 B are also given backstory with different problems, such as a single mother household, leaving the homeland, and divorcing parents. The biggest victim in the series appears to be Mari. After her stripping incident, she decided to stay at home until Mr. Mamyan was able to persuade her to come back. Unlike the Japanese series, the whole class does not cooperate in the bullying of the victim. Even when Gayane was insulting her, the students were able to discuss amongst themselves and showed disdain in her talking that way about their classmate, no matter the reason. Gayane's reason for being mean to someone else seems to come from a family complex since her home life is not as happy as she wants to present. The students in the Armenian series seem to be more connected than in the Japanese ones, as they mostly do not sever their ties with each other unless someone crosses the line.

The portrayal of the bully

Although there is no designated antagonist in the series, a few characters are shown to bully or insult others. If the perpetrator is from class 12 B, they are given a backstory that allows us to see behind the scenes of their behavior. Gayane is one such student, who throughout the majority of the series, is shown to be quite easily irritated and jealous. After the incident, she would frequently refer to Mari as a "slut" behind her back and constantly seemed to want to start trouble, like when she told Tigran that it was his girlfriend Alina that got catcalled, knowing that he could not control his temper. She also strongly condemned Mari after she decided to come back, and some students from the other class began making inappropriate remarks towards her after surrounding her. She blamed her because the boys from the class saw it and started fighting

with the students from the other class, and could possibly get seriously hurt. She also seemed to be jealous of Mari and Alina because they had people that cared about them despite the things they did while her family was falling apart.

A significant conflict that happened in school was the self-proclaimed trial of Ashot Qanqanyan, who, under the influence of his father, decided to betray his fellow students and sent an anonymous letter to the minister and principal about what transpired that day, forcing the principal to have to choose two students to expel. Once he got caught, the guys decided to beat him up and bind him on the floor until Mr. Mamyán came. In this instance, the bullies can be interpreted as the good guys punishing the one who strayed from them. However, after Mr. Mamyán's speech about the responsibility we have towards those we have befriended, the atmosphere seems to change. This is also the turning point for Gayane, who sympathizes with Ashot after her parents' divorce was finalized. In the end, the bullies are shown to be remorseful and understand that their methods were not appropriate.

The portrayal of the teacher

We are introduced to Mamyán after the passing of the previous literature school. When he comes back home, he tells his mother in a gloomy and tired tone that he had to transfer schools because the principal deemed him to be a bad teacher. However, through his and his mother's speech, we learn that he is passionate about his occupation and cherished his students. At the new school, the principal tells him about the 12-B class that he will be teaching at, comparing it to Dante's "Inferno," which would be seen as an animation movie next to that class. Most of the other teachers also seem to agree with this viewpoint, but Mr. Mamyán is not swayed, even when the students try to disrespect him. He is portrayed as a serious teacher who

believes in giving students the freedom to choose. He knows when to be strict and when to be humorous so that the students are not cautious of him but also do not look down on him. During the first class, he told the students that his one rule is that anyone who does not want to take his class can go; the exams would be graded based on their performance at that time. Mr. Mamyán's first homework for them was to write an essay about themselves, which was later criticized by one of the other teachers who believed that students needed to be controlled. From the start, it shows that his goal was to get to know the students and give them freedom instead of putting them into a mold of what a good student should be.



Mr. Mamyán's attire usually consists of a shirt (checkered or white), above which he either wears a dark-colored sweater or a light jacket. He wears both jeans and pants, sometimes in light, sometimes in dark shades. Even when he wears colors, they are usually muted and dark on his upper body. Despite the cool colors present in his style, it gives the impression of warmth due to the fabric of the clothes. The cool colors may represent his calm demeanor, while the soft fabric shows his friendly attitude towards his students.

Mr. Mamyán's compassionate side is most strongly shown in his relations with the students. After learning about Mari's incident, he decided to visit her because she had not gone

to school since. After talking with him, Mari seemed to regain some of her courage to go to class if he would come into school together with her. When problems inside the school occurred, Mr. Mamyán tried his best in order to reach a solution that would not damage his students' reputation. Each episode of the series contains at least one scene where he would give a lecture to the students about a topic that is relevant to some of their struggles, such as love and friendship. According to the librarian, thanks to him bringing examples from literature during class inspired the students to read some of those works. Mr. Mamyán mainly uses his words to make his students understand their mistakes and make the right choice, such as when he gave a lecture to Tigran, who had raised his hand at his girlfriend because she replied to a message from an unknown guy.

He never uses violence to solve a problem, despite being tall and seemingly masculine. He also never raises his voice at the students, no matter how mad he may be. His clothes, like most of the others, use dark colors with a white shirt underneath the sweater. We slowly get glimpses of his warmer side as he gets more comfortable with the other students. He typically knows his limits and does not try to solve the class conflicts by himself. For example, after giving a test to the male students involved in the incident, where they had to choose one of them to be expelled for the others not to get punished, the students decided to give him blank papers. With this, he made up his mind to help them as much as possible, even trying to persuade his former classmate who became the minister of education.

Golden school

This last show is about a former prisoner finding out that the gold he buried at a construction site before getting caught was now in the underground storage of a school. In order

to find and take back the gold, he disguises himself as a history teacher and does everything possible to get to the gold without anyone noticing. Along the way he also develops feelings for one of the teachers, whose sister is the best student in his class. The relationship between the students seems to be more or less good, although they do enjoy calling others names and pulling pranks on the teachers.

The portrayal of the victim

As this series is a sitcom, there aren't that many sins of serious conflict. However, one recurring setup is the insults and occasional bullying received by Ani Yesayan. Ani is the humblest student in her class. She is serious about her studies but does not hesitate to talk back to her close friend Max. Because of her personality, she is targeted by the posh group of her class. She usually endured the insults from her classmates, at times even insulting them back. However, one time when her teacher also severely hurt her spirit of wanting to actually learn something in class, she cried and ran out of the classroom. Another major incident was when she almost got her hair cut off by Masha Sahakyan and Vika Mirzoyan because after seeing Masha's rude behavior, her boyfriend Davit began showing interest in Ani. Fortunately, she was saved by the excellent timing of Mr. Tovmasyan.

Mr. Tovmasyan, as well as other teachers of this class, had also fallen victim to their pranks, to the point that when the new teacher came, the previous homeroom teacher told him to be careful when coming into the classroom. Some teachers responded to the constant pranks by quitting their jobs soon after, while others, like Mr. Tovmasyan, try to bribe them to be silent during class by giving them high grades for doing nothing.

The portrayal of the bully

The student bullies were at first portrayed as overconfident, pretty social media-obsessed people. However, as time goes on, they showed a different side of themselves that made it understandable why the class was not completely divided despite insults being seemingly everyday occurrences. To not make the insults too repetitive, the writers came with creative expressions that went beyond simply a few words. One such instance was when Mr. Tovmasyan began insulting Ani because she was couldn't take any more of his irresponsible behavior. He even went so far as to point out that she was probably so clumsy that she could not even confess her love to her crush.

The portrayal of the teacher



The teacher in this series plays two roles: one as a former prisoner that wants to find the gold that he hid under the school before he got caught and another as the amazing history teacher that is strict with his students. He is in either a full suit or in a business casual attire at school for most of the show. Mr. Tovmasyan usually wears either a T-shirt or a white shirt underneath a royal or dark blue blazer. His pallet is generally dark, though, as mentioned, he sometimes wears a light-colored shirt, which can be connected to his past as a convict. The same is true for his casual wear when he is not pretending to be a teacher (usually dark or black colors). His attires at school show his commitment to the

role, although it can also be taken as ironic since the students rarely see him acting as an actual teacher.

Unlike the other shows where the teacher was a character that seemed to be quite passionate about his students, in this series, Mr. Tovmasyan appears to be the complete opposite. Set-up-wise, he is close to Mr. Onizuka, who also had violent tendencies. However, whereas Onizuka was always showing himself the way he really is, Mr. Tovmasyan was acting as an elite teacher in front of the other professors. He was mainly wearing a suit in school but was not afraid to show his irresponsible behavior in front of his students. However, perhaps feeling familiarity with the teacher, the students soon began trusting and liking him, or at least were not opposed to doing what he asked them of. For example, when the class decided to skip school but an important inspector came, he went around collecting his students and they came with him with minimal resistance. He also began showing a more caring side to one of the teachers, Lusine, who was also Ani's sister whose boyfriend seemed to be neglecting her after becoming famous. Mr. Tovmasyan did not really help solve major problems in the school. Those he did were usually either caused by him or accidental. Since the story was not very serious, it did not tackle many major problems at school.

Camerawork

Japanese TV series

Great Teacher Onizuka

There is much usage of cuts throughout the series. Especially when trying to show a cool action scene (ex. Onizuka coming to save one of the students), the main character is shot from different angles, mainly through close-ups in the beginning until his full figure is revealed. Close-ups of lips are used when trying to emphasize certain words, and when combined with the sound design of the scene, showcase either the listeners' emotions about what they heard or the value that person places on it.



Figure 2: Onizuka (episode 3)



Figure 3: Onizuka and Miki (ep. 2)

When conflict occurs, the camera becomes shaky, similar to how it is shot for action scenes, symbolizing the unsettling feelings of the characters. There is also much usage of moving crane shots to showcase the place an event may take place. If the conflict resolution is done through an action scene, the camera is in closer proximity to the character. Especially if Onizuka is trying to teach his students about something through an action scene, he is shot from a lower angle that moves closer to his face and shows his confidence (*Figure 2*). Shooting the scene in this way shows that at that moment, he is superior to the student. On the other hand, if the

resolution is more peaceful, the camera at first is faraway and slowly comes closer to the characters (*Figure 3*). This type of technique can mean that despite the teacher-student relationship between the characters, the student is open to the possibility of being taught something valuable. Dutch angles combined with a certain tune create an atmosphere of uncomfortableness and mystery, showing that the relationship between the characters that are present in the scene may not be as good as it seems.

Class 3-A: Mr. Hiiragi's Homeroom



Figure 4: Sakura (episode 1)



Figure 5: Sakura (episode 1)

When showing the present time in the classroom during a conflict, the scenes have a cool-toned atmosphere, with many whites and dark blues (*Figure 4*). On the other hand, the flashbacks are mostly shown with a warm tone (*Figure 5*), unless it's a scene of bullying, in which case it becomes grayish. As the story progresses, the students eventually get out of that closed classroom onto the rooftop of the building where they are free. The constraint between the colors used in the classroom and the flashbacks could be attributed to the meaning they carry for the characters. Although in many of the flashback, something bad happens, they generally also carry a sense of happiness before the incident and guilt over the students' actions. The rooms cool tones can symbolize the division and sadness that the students feel about their situation and

the information that is revealed. In the resolution section of the episodes, a certain somewhat peaceful but at times restless melody usually plays. Once the students decide to believe in Mr. Hiiragi, the classroom seems to become brighter and warmer until they do something that goes against his teaching.

The whole classroom is usually shown from a high angle when Hiiragi tries to explain something to them, while he is shot from a low angle. Once they are on the same page, it's from a standard angle. Otherwise, the camera angles correspond to the height of the other person. This symbolizes the power dynamics between the teacher and the students. When one of the participants is agitated, the camera becomes somewhat shaky. From episode 7, POV filming techniques begin to be used, mainly from the perspective of Mr. Takechi. The intent was most likely to show the viewers what cyberbullying can do to someone, although it is used on a negative character.

Armenian TV series

The Last Teacher

Arguably the most significant conflict of the series is Mari's incident that divided the class. Before it happened, the previous scene of the hallway was shot from a Dutch angle, perhaps to signal that what will happen next will have negative consequences. When Mari was stripping, there were several close-ups of her body parts. However, as she was mostly clothed with a few buttons unbuttoned the upper part of her shirt, the shot did not feel sexual, although it was uncomfortable. To show the spread of the rumors about the incident, the scenes are shot and edited in a way that people in different groups continue telling it from where the previous characters ended it.



Figure 6: Mari and Lusik (episode 5).



Figure 7: Gayane and mom (ep. 11)

There are several scenes where Mari is with her friend in the brightly lit kitchen, but in the shot, you can also see the darkness of her bedroom (*Figure 6*). Even when her mother is together with her in the bedroom, the room is dark, with only a soft light coming from the nightstand. Such scenes can symbolize the sadness in her heart, as the bedroom is considered a place one can be most vulnerable in. When trying to show the relation between two characters, the shot composition is slightly different. For example, when Gayane was arguing with her mom about leaving her family behind, Gayane did not have full one-shots. It was almost always with her mother in the background or foreground. However, in the case of her mother, Gayane was not in the shot, and the camera was usually further even if they were both in the scene (*Figure 7*). This may signify that her mother had already made up her mind about leaving her family, but Gayane still wanted to be together. On the other hand, if both characters understood each other or decided that nothing the person in front of them said could be right/wrong, then the characters were shown alone without many instances of two-shots (unless the student understood his mistake).

Golden School



Figure 8: Mr. Tovmasyan and Ando (episode 2).

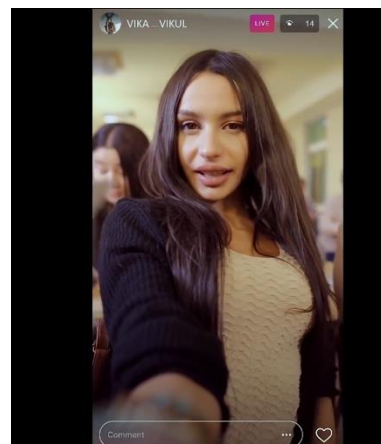


Figure 9: Lika (episode 4)

As *Golden School* is a sitcom, it utilizes a laughing track, signaling to the viewer which parts were supposed to be comedic. As such, most of the lighting in the series is quite bright unless the place is supposed to be a secret or at nighttime. The camera angles and shot compositions are also average, as it utilizes the basic filming techniques with the camera rarely moving during a shot. Due to the nature of the genre, the tv series most likely used multi-camera style set-up for filming. However, a few fun shooting methods are used to interest the viewer more, such as a phone view during a live stream (Figure 9) and showing multiple panels when the characters are talking on their phones (Figure 8).

Summary of findings

A continuous theme throughout the Japanese series is that no one should help the victim, and ignoring them is the basic line everyone should cross. If someone goes against this rule, that person will also become a victim of bullying. Such themes of exclusion and targeting seem to have been present in Japanese cinema since the early 2000s, in movies such as *The Neighbor No. Thirteen* (*Rinjin 13-gō*, 2005) and *Dead Run* (*Shisso*, 2005). However, the films discussed in Kiejziewicz's (2018) article mainly concentrated on the negative effects of witnessing or being a

victim of bullying and did not present a solution for such problems. On the other hand, Japanese TV series, including the ones discussed in this study, did suggest a solution: a new teacher that has not been influenced by the conventional educational environment and is not afraid of becoming close to the students and guiding them to not fall into darkness.

Contrary to the Japanese series, the teachers and students in the Armenian series in the Armenian series are not completely unified in their opposition to the new teacher's methods. Most of the teachers, aside from the vice-principal, from *Golden School* did their best to get along with the new teacher and give advice if necessary. And despite the dancing incident in *The Last Teacher*, some of the teachers even tried to persuade Ms. Miqayelyan to take back her complaint so the students would not be expelled. Many of Mari's classmates also stayed by her side despite a few problems the rumor started. However, similar to the Japanese series, the appearance of a new teacher is still necessary to solve the actual issue and change the attitudes of the remaining faculty and students.

So, as can be noticed, most of the tv series have a central structure in common: the students have a conflict due to an incident in the past, a new teacher appears in front of them during that time, and with his help, they slowly change their ways and overcome the trauma. The conflict portrayal in the Japanese tv series seemed to be much more severe than in the Armenian ones. Themes of suicide, bullying, isolation were much more strongly shown in those, which is consistent with Kanetsuna's (2015) analysis of the situation in Japan. Another difference was the usage of violence in conflict resolutions. In *GTO*, the protagonist is a former motorcycle gang leader who does not hesitate to fight anyone to save his students. On the other hand, in *Class 3-A*, most of the violence is directed at the students, especially male ones. However, the Armenian series do not have much violence. The teachers either mainly use their words and tone of voice to

subdue a conflict (*The Last Teacher*) or have fights that do not necessarily involve the students (*Golden School*).

Another point of difference was the portrayal of the central conflict. In both Japanese series, the problem was suicide due to bullying, including stalking, isolation, and breaking trust. However, Armenian issues were much more subtle, the most severe one being “slut-shaming” in *the Last Teacher*. This phenomenon is somewhat unsurprising since, according to the survey done by Young Voices-Armenia, the percentage of students who witnessed a classmate getting bullied or being a victim of bullying was much lower (Save the Children Armenia, 2017). The end goal of most of the series, aside from *Golden School*, seems to be the unity of the class. As was explained, the past trauma had either created an unhealthy atmosphere in the classroom or had outright divided it, especially in the Japanese series.

Interestingly, most, if not all of the victims, were students who excelled in something. For *GTO*, Mizuki Nanako was loved by her classmates for her photography skills, and her photos were used in the end to showcase that the class had finally overcome the trauma and become one. In *Class 3-A*, Kageyama Reina was able to win a national tournament in swimming, which was one of the biggest reasons she was envied. One of the protagonists of *the Last Teacher*, Mari Melikyan, was considered the best dancer in the school, and impulsive dancing became the reason for her issues with the school. Finally, Ani Yesayan from *The Golden School* was the best student in class, always getting teased for her seriousness. On the other hand, most of the bullies were usually well-off students who had problems in their personal lives.

Regarding the camerawork, each of the series had unique elements that brought out the atmosphere of the scene. *Class 3-A* had different colors for the past (warm-toned) and present (cool-toned), which corresponded to the atmosphere in the classroom and the relationship of the

students at the time. *GTO* made great use of different angles to portray the relationship between teacher and student, at times being domineering, while at others, more caring and equal.

Although much more subtly, a similar technique was also used by *the Last Teacher*, whose camera angles and lighting attempted to showcase the atmosphere and problems present for the characters. Finally, the most different series of the ones that were discussed was *Golden School*, in which the lighting was mostly vibrant, and the movements of the camera were more or less quite still, except for a few unique scenes (ex. Instagram live through a phone screen).

Limitations and directions for future research

The most obvious limitation of this research is the small number of selected works that are presented. The analysis focuses on only two series from each country, and most of them have the same premise of school problems that get solved by the newly appointed teacher. As such, it does not discuss the full extent of its portrayal, be it the conflicts or the characters or the resolutions. Another limitation is that the primary teachers are male in all of the series, which is why the analysis only focuses on the portrayal of one gender. So, if a similar study is conducted in the future, it should also include female main teachers. An appropriate example, similar to *GTO*, could be *Gokusen*, which is a story about the granddaughter of a yakuza family who has decided to become a teacher and has to hide her identity while teaching a class of delinquents. For this analysis, this series was not chosen because it was made in the early 2000s, while the chosen ones were from the 2010s.

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, future research could focus on increasing the sample size of tv series that fit the criteria. Another suggestion could be adding interviews with the target audience (high school students) of the nations to learn about their opinion on the

accuracy of their country's behavior. This point would confirm if the issues presented happen in real life to that extent, or it is exaggerated. Also, it would be useful to find out the reception the shows got both from students of the original country and another. Since most of the shows that focus on this topic are didactic, it would be significant to learn if the show was able to successfully send its message, and if some cultural differences would result in different interpretations. Another avenue for research could be an in-depth analysis of the situation in Armenia and its impact on the media, and vice versa.

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