

Representing the Gwangju Uprising in *Youth of May* (2021) : Cultural Memory and Remediation

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Abstract: *The Gwangju Uprising of 1980 remains an important event in South Korean history and continues to be represented through various cultural media. This study examines how the uprising is represented in the television drama Youth of May (2021) and how these representations contribute to the formation of cultural memory. Using qualitative textual and visual analysis, the study analyzes dialogues, subtitles, and narrative elements from all twelve episodes of the drama. The findings show that the uprising is primarily represented through violence, loss, and suffering, with violence emerging as the dominant category. Furthermore, a comparison between historical sources and dramatic representations identifies four transformation patterns: emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization. Drawing on Astrid Erll's concept of remediation, this study argues that Youth of May reconstructs the historical memory of the Gwangju Uprising through character-centered and emotionally oriented narratives, contributing to the formation of cultural memory through contemporary popular media.*

INTRODUCTION

The media plays an important role in shaping how societies remember and interpret the past (Erll, 2011; Erll, 2025). Within the framework of cultural memory, memory is not preserved solely through historical records but is also constructed, circulated, and reinterpreted through various media forms (Erll, 2011). As one of the most widely consumed forms of popular media, television drama has become an important medium through which historical events are represented and communicated to contemporary audiences. Through narrative, visual imagery, and characterization, television dramas participate in the ongoing reconstruction of collective understandings of the past (Erll, 2011, 2025). Among the historical events that continue to be remembered and represented through media in South Korea, the Gwangju Uprising occupies an important position in the country's cultural memory (Shim, 2021; Lee, 2021).

One historical event that continues to occupy an important place in South Korean cultural memory is the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, also known as the May 18 Democratization Movement (Shim, 2021). It was a major pro-democracy protest against the authoritarian government in South Korea that lasted six days in May 1980, during which local residents took control of the city for several days before finally being forcibly suppressed by military forces (Morris, 2010). Due to strict media censorship at the time, this event was largely hidden from the general public until

foreign journalists began to reveal the brutality of the massacre (Kim, J, 2013; Kim, E., & Jeon, M., 2024; Library of Congress, n.d.). Consequently, the Gwangju Uprising has become a recurring subject in historical, political, and cultural representations in South Korea (Rhee, 2019; Shim, 2021). As the memory of the Gwangju Uprising continues to be reproduced through various cultural forms, television drama has emerged as one of the media through which this historical event is revisited and reinterpreted (Erll, 2011).

Among these cultural representations, *Youth of May* (2021) is a South Korean television drama that depicts the Gwangju uprising in 1980 through a fictional narrative focusing on ordinary individuals living through the events. The drama presents personal love stories within a broader context of political violence and social instability, allowing historical events to be experienced from an intimate and emotional perspective (*Youth of May*, KBS2, 2021). Television drama functions as a cultural text that engages with historical memory and collective trauma (Erll, 2011; Erll, 2025). As a result, the Gwangju Uprising is represented not only as a historical event but also as a lived human experience. Despite the growing number of cultural representations related to the Gwangju Uprising, questions remain regarding how such representations contribute to the construction and transmission of cultural memory (Lee, 2021; Rhee, 2019).

Although the number of studies on culture and trauma in film and media has increased, there is still a lack of research that specifically examines Korean television dramas as a medium of cultural memory. Previous studies tend to focus on cinema or general representations of historical trauma, while television dramas, which reach a wider audience and play a significant role in popular culture, have not been explored in depth (Lee, 2021; Rhee, 2019; Shim, 2021). In particular, few studies have specifically examined the representation of the Gwangju Uprising trauma in *Youth of May* (2021) using Astrid Erll's memory framework (Rankin, 2022; Vierthaler, 2020; Park, 2025). Consequently, there remains limited research that specifically investigates how *Youth of May* represents the Gwangju Uprising and how such representations contribute to the construction of cultural memory through television drama.

Filling this gap, this article argues that *Youth of May* (2021) represents the Gwangju Uprising through depictions of violence, loss, and suffering, while reconstructing historical memory through character-centered and emotionally oriented narratives. In this respect, the television drama acts as a cultural memory medium that re-presents the past and also participates in shaping and diffusing collective memory within current South Korean society.

METHOD

This study employs a textual and visual analysis to investigate how the Gwangju Uprising is represented in *Youth Of May* (2021) and how such depictions contribute to the formation of cultural memory (Rose, 2016; Krippendorff, 2018). This analysis is grounded in the concept of cultural memory proposed by Astrid Erll (2011), particularly the idea of remediation, which explains how historical memory is reconstructed through popular media representations (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

The primary data for this study consisted of dialogues, subtitles, and narrative elements selected from the twelve episodes of *Youth of May* (2021) that depict the Gwangju Uprising. Data selection was conducted by attaching screenshots of dialogue, subtitles and narrative elements that focus on the depiction of the Gwangju Uprising through three categories of analysis: violence, loss, and suffering (Rose, 2016; Krippendorff, 2018). Secondary data were obtained from journalistic, commemorative, and documentary sources discussing the Gwangju Uprising and compiled as Corpus A. These sources included Korea Herald, Korea JoongAng Daily, Arirang, UNESCO Memory of the World documentation, the Library of Congress research guide, Gi-Wook Shin's

discussion of Gwangju and South Korean democracy, and Korean Quarterly's coverage of ongoing truth-seeking efforts. Data derived from *Youth of May* (2021) were compiled as Corpus B and used to construct the drama's memory script.

This analysis was conducted in two stages. First, data from *Youth of May* were examined to identify how the Gwangju Uprising was portrayed in the drama. Relevant scenes were selected and categorized into three main categories: violence, loss, and suffering. These categories were used to analyze how the drama depicts military repression, experiences of loss, and the emotional and psychological consequences of the tragedy (Krippendorff, 2018). Through this process, this study identified the dominant patterns used by the drama to depict this historical event.

Second, the representations identified in the drama—which formed Corpus B—were compared with the historical representations found in Corpus A (Bowen, 2009). This comparison was then organized to produce a transformation map that identified how historical memory was transformed in the drama through emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization. Finally, the findings of the transformation map were interpreted using Erll's (2011) concept of remediation to examine how *Youth of May* contributes to the formation of the cultural memory of the Gwangju Uprising (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of selected scenes from *Youth of May* (2021). The analysis focuses on narrative elements, including subtitles and dialogue that depict the Gwangju Uprising. In particular, this section examines how the event is represented through depictions of violence, loss, and suffering. It aims to answer the research question on how the Gwangju Uprising is represented in the drama through these categories, as well as how such representations contribute to the construction of cultural memory (Erll, 2011; Erll & Rigney, 2009).

Representing the Gwangju Uprising in *Youth of May*



Figure 1. Military soldiers physically assault civilians in an open area, repeatedly striking them (Ep. 9, 00:11:45–00:13:30).

In the screen capture, violence is depicted as a direct manifestation of state power, wherein military authority is exercised through physical domination over defenseless civilians. Repeated blows against civilians, combined with their defensive body postures as a form of self-defense,

visually emphasize the power imbalance between soldiers and civilians, framing violence not merely as isolated aggression but as a systematic mechanism of control. From a visual perspective, the composition of the soldiers bodies and their spatial dominance reinforce this power structure, while the command “*Drag off all the college students!*” positions violence as something normalized. As a category of analysis, this representation aligns with Astrid Erll’s (2011) concept of media memory, particularly the process of selection, in which specific visual patterns of brutality are highlighted to construct a recognizable image of oppression in the Gwangju Uprising (Erll, 2009).



Figure 2. A civilian is shot by a military soldier, demonstrating the use of lethal force against unarmed individuals (Ep. 10, 00:09:13–00:09:57).

In this screen capture, the depiction of violence escalates into a lethal force when a defenseless civilian is shot without hesitation until he collapses on the spot. The spontaneous gunfire and the sudden fall of the victim create a powerful visual shock, while the command “*Shoot him now! Shoot him!*” reinforces the normalization of violence within the military at that time by presenting it as a deliberate and systematic act, not merely an accident. Narratively, this shifts violence from physical coercion to deadly domination, where human life is treated as a joke under state authority. Within Astrid Erll’s (2011) framework, this scene functions as a transmission, as its striking emotional intensity and imagery allow viewers to internalize the event as a traumatic experience, transforming historical violence into an emotionally charged cultural memory (Erll & Rigney, 2009).



Figure 3. Military soldiers fire bullets at a crowd of civilians, resulting in chaos and multiple casualties (Ep. 10, 00:24:51–00:26:15).

In this screen capture, a depiction of collective violence shows civilians running in panic as soldiers begin firing their bullets, creating an atmosphere of chaos and causing numerous casualties. Unlike previous scenes that focused on individual actions, this scene portrays violence as something systemic and widespread that affects the broader community. Visually, the chaotic movement of the crowd, the fragmentation of space, and the emotional reactions of the local residents depict fear and sorrow, creating an impression of extraordinary and uncontrollable violence. These elements extend the impact of violence beyond physical injury into an emotional experience. In relation to Astrid Erll's (2011) concept of memory media, this scene contributes to storage, where recurring visual and emotional patterns are embedded as collective memory, reinforcing the Gwangju Uprising as a representation of large-scale oppression and shared trauma (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

While the preceding scenes emphasize the physical manifestations of military repression, the consequences of violence extend beyond bodily harm. The drama subsequently shifts its attention to the experiences of loss that emerge from the deaths, disappearances, and unresolved consequences of the uprising. Through this transition, violence is no longer represented solely as an act of state coercion but also as a source of enduring absence and emotional devastation.



Figure 4. Discovery of human remains from the Gwangju Uprising triggers past memories (Ep. 11, 00:00:05–00:01:45).

In this screen capture, loss is depicted through a temporal distance in which the discovery of the remains of victims from the Gwangju Uprising reawakens memories of past violent tragedies. Rather than depicting death directly, the scene presents loss as an unresolved and enduring condition that continues beyond that historical moment. The presence of physical traces such as skeletal remains and personal belongings serves as a visual reminder of absence, thereby transforming loss into something both physical and mnemonic. Narratively, the characters' reactions bridge the past and the present, emphasizing that the consequences of the uprising continue to shape both individual and collective experiences. As an analytical category, loss in this scene aligns with Astrid Erll's (2011) concept of memory media, particularly the process of storage, in which remnants of the past are preserved and reanimated to sustain cultural memory over time (Erll, 2011).



Figure 5. The female main character is fatally wounded after being shot while protecting her sibling (Ep. 12, 00:37:11–00:40:07).

In this screen capture, loss is portrayed as a sudden and deeply personal experience through the death of a main character. The act of being shot while protecting her younger sibling highlights the relational and self-sacrificing dimensions of loss, where the emotional burden is intensified by familial bonds. Visually, the character's deteriorating physical condition and eventual collapse emphasize the unforgettable nature of death, while the dialogue reflects her concern for her younger sibling, reinforcing the human dimension of the tragedy. In stark contrast to previous scenes that depict loss as prolonged and unresolved, this scene portrays loss as swift and irreversible. Within Astrid Erll's (2011) framework, this representation functions as a transmission, as its emotional intensity allows the audience to internalize the event as a personal tragedy, thereby transforming historical violence into an emotionally charged cultural memory (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

Beyond the experience of loss, the drama also foregrounds the psychological and emotional consequences of living amid political violence. While loss is often associated with death and separation, suffering emerges through fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and vulnerability experienced by those who continue to endure the unfolding crisis. Consequently, the narrative expands from the representation of what has been lost to the lived emotional realities of those who remain.



Figure 6. A character panics while reporting a missing person during the outbreak of the uprising (Ep. 9, 00:02:32–00:05:24).

In this screen capture, suffering is depicted through psychological distress triggered by fear and uncertainty. The character's panic while reporting the incident reflects an emotional response to a sudden escalation of the crisis, emphasizing suffering as an internal condition and a sense of vigilance rather than a direct consequence of physical violence. Visually, the character's hurried movements and worried expressions convey a sense of instability, while the dialogue highlights the urgency and confusion surrounding the situation. This representation portrays suffering as a response to the collapse of normalcy, in which an individual is forced to confront the unknown. As an analytical category, the suffering in this scene aligns with Astrid Erll's (2011) concept of selection, where specific emotional moments are highlighted to depict rebellion as an experience that induces psychological distress (Erll, 2011).



Figure 7. A civilian pleads for their life while trembling in fear during a threatening encounter (Ep. 12, 00:02:03–00:02:30).

In this screen capture, suffering is depicted through expressions of fear and vulnerability as the character pleads, “Don’t kill me. Let me live.” Their trembling body and desperate-sounding dialogue emphasize a loss of control and an immediate threat to survival, thereby portraying suffering as a deeply felt physical experience. Unlike the previous scene, which focused on anxiety and uncertainty, this scene intensifies the individual’s suffering by placing the character in direct conflict with danger. Visually and narratively, the scene emphasizes the devastation of civilian life under military oppression, amplifying the emotional impact of the uprising. Within Astrid Erll’s (2011) framework, this representation contributes to transmission, as its emotional intensity allows the audience to indirectly experience fear, embedding suffering into cultural memory as an affective and shared experience (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

The portrayal of the Gwangju Uprising in the drama *Youth of May* (2021) is constructed through three interrelated categories of analysis: violence, loss, and suffering. The category of violence is the most dominant, as it appears most frequently and is depicted as the most severe across the selected data. This indicates that violence emerges as the dominant representational category in the selected data, positioning it as the primary framework used to represent the Gwangju Uprising particularly in highlighting the state’s systematic repression through physical attacks, lethal force, and mass violence.

Meanwhile, loss and suffering serve as complementary dimensions that frame this violence as a personal, emotionally traumatic experience; loss highlights both immediate deaths and their long-term impacts, while suffering reflects psychological responses such as fear, anxiety, and vulnerability. Thus, these categories construct a layered representation in which the Gwangju Uprising is portrayed not merely as a routine political conflict, but as a multidimensional human tragedy. Within Astrid Erll’s (2011) framework, this pattern illustrates a process of selection in which representations of violence are dominated, highlighted, and reinforced by emotional dimensions, thereby enabling the drama to construct a consistent and emotionally charged cultural memory of the tragedy (Erll, 2011).

Transformation of Historical Memory and Cultural Memory Formation

The previous section examined how the Gwangju Uprising is represented in *Youth of May* through violence, loss, and suffering. To investigate how these representations contribute to cultural memory formation, this study compares two corpora constructed by the researcher. Corpus A consists of historical, journalistic, commemorative, and documentary sources discussing the Gwangju Uprising. Corpus B consists of data collected from all twelve episodes of *Youth of May* (2021), including dialogues, subtitles, and narrative elements related to the uprising. The labels “Corpus A” and “Corpus B” are used as analytical categories developed by the researcher to distinguish between historical narratives and dramatic representations (Erll & Rigney, 2009). By comparing these two corpora, this study identifies how historical memory is transformed when re-presented through television drama.

Public Narratives of the Gwangju Uprising

The public narratives that constitute the documentary, commemorative, and journalistic record of the Gwangju Uprising share a remarkably coherent organizing logic: they frame the events of May 18–27, 1980, as a confrontation between state violence and democratic aspiration. Across the corpus, the uprising is consistently represented as a pivotal moment in South Korea’s democratization, transforming what was once suppressed under authoritarian rule into a nationally recognized symbol of democratic resistance (UNESCO, n.d.; Library of Congress, n.d.). Consequently, the dominant narrative is organized around collective agency, democratic values, and the continuing pursuit of historical truth (UNESCO, n.d.; Library of Congress, n.d.).

The factual contours of the uprising are presented with notable consistency. The Korea Herald describes the Gwangju Democratization Movement as beginning when tens of thousands of students and citizens protested against the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan, while the subsequent military crackdown resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries and arrests (Korea Herald, 2016). Similarly, the UNESCO Memory of the World documentation records that paratroopers “brutally and randomly assaulted men and women, old and young,” resulting in widespread casualties and human rights violations (UNESCO, n.d.). These representations do more than document violence; they establish a moral framework in which civilians are positioned as victims of authoritarian repression and the military regime as the perpetrator of injustice. The event is therefore remembered not simply as a political conflict but as a democratic struggle against state violence.

The emphasis on historical accountability is also reinforced by reports on newly declassified CIA documents. As reported by Korea JoongAng Daily, the release of these records renewed public discussions concerning international awareness of the military crackdown and strengthened ongoing efforts to clarify responsibility for the violence (Korea JoongAng Daily, 2017). Such reports further demonstrate how the memory of Gwangju remains connected to the pursuit of historical truth and accountability.

The actors who populate this public memory are likewise represented through their collective political roles. Citizens, student protesters, victims, survivors, and bereaved families function as the principal protagonists, while military authorities and the authoritarian state serve as antagonistic forces. The Library of Congress notes that citizens formed a militia to resist the military’s indiscriminate killing of civilians, highlighting not only suffering but also organized resistance (Library of Congress, n.d.). Public narratives therefore construct the people of Gwangju as active democratic agents whose significance lies in their collective action rather than in individual stories (Kim & Jeon, 2024). Their experiences are remembered as representative of a broader struggle between democratic aspirations and authoritarian power.

The value framework governing these narratives further reinforces this collective orientation. Democracy, human rights, justice, and historical truth emerge as the dominant principles through which the uprising is interpreted. Gi-Wook Shin describes Gwangju as “a symbol of the struggle for freedom and human rights throughout Korea’s democratization,” positioning the event as a foundational moment in South Korea’s democratic trajectory (Shin, 2016). Likewise, ongoing investigations conducted by the May 18 Democratization Movement Truth Commission demonstrate that the uprising remains an active site of historical reckoning rather than a closed chapter of history (Shorrock, 2023). Public memory therefore links remembrance with accountability, emphasizing the necessity of uncovering facts, identifying responsibility, and preserving evidence of past violence.

This democratic interpretation is also reflected in commemorative media coverage. Marking the 40th anniversary of the uprising, Korea JoongAng Daily described the May 18 Democratization Movement as a continuing symbol of South Korea’s democratic development, reinforcing its enduring significance within public memory (Korea JoongAng Daily, 2020).

The affective tone of this corpus is predominantly solemn, commemorative, reflective, and resilient. Memorial ceremonies, truth-seeking initiatives, and public commemorations transform grief into a collective civic practice. The Korea Herald reports the statement of bereaved family representative Kim Young-hoon that “the agony and grief of 40 years ago have not gotten better,” illustrating how personal loss becomes intertwined with broader demands for justice and recognition (Korea Herald, 2016). Public emotions are consistently directed toward remembrance, accountability, and democratic vigilance rather than personal catharsis. Even narratives of suffering are frequently accompanied by reflections on democratic achievement and collective perseverance, reinforcing the idea that the sacrifices of Gwangju contributed to the democratic future of South Korea.

The UNESCO documentation further illustrates this resilient dimension of public memory. Despite military repression, citizens continued to maintain daily life, organized community activities, and preserved social order throughout the uprising (UNESCO, n.d.). The account notes that people cleaned the city, operated businesses, and maintained civic cooperation despite the absence of formal administration. Such representations reinforce the image of Gwangju as a democratic community in action, demonstrating civic responsibility and collective solidarity under extraordinary circumstances.

Arirang News’ coverage of the 43rd anniversary of the May 18 Democratization Movement further reinforces the commemorative orientation of public memory. The report emphasizes what President Yoon described as the “May spirit,” which stems from Gwangju’s “sacrifice and dedication to establishing democracy” and “must be carried on.” By framing remembrance as the continuation of democratic values across generations, the report presents the uprising not only as a historical tragedy but also as an enduring source of civic and democratic identity. Such representations reinforce the public narrative that Gwangju should be remembered as a symbol of sacrifice, democracy, and collective remembrance (Arirang News, 2023).

What remains largely absent from this corpus, however, are the intimate dimensions of human experience. Romantic relationships, family dynamics, everyday routines, personal emotional journeys, and the experiences of hospital workers receive comparatively little attention. Individual lives are primarily discussed insofar as they contribute to the larger narrative of democratization and collective resistance. As a result, personal and interpersonal experiences remain subordinated to broader political concerns. This silence reflects the broader purpose of public memory, which prioritizes civic meaning, historical accountability, and collective identity over emotional intimacy.

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Taken together, the sources construct a memory script that frames the Gwangju Uprising primarily as a collective political tragedy and a significant milestone in South Korea's democratization process. The dominant focus is placed on political events, collective actors, democratic values, and historical commemoration, while personal and interpersonal experiences receive comparatively limited attention. Consequently, the memory script represented in Corpus A emphasizes the political and collective dimensions of the uprising rather than the intimate experiences of ordinary individuals.

Gwangju Uprising Remembered through *Youth of May*

Unlike the public narratives represented in Corpus A, *Youth of May* reconstructs the Gwangju Uprising through the everyday experiences of ordinary individuals. While historical, journalistic, and commemorative accounts primarily emphasize collective resistance, democratization, and historical accountability, the drama shifts attention toward personal relationships, family life, and individual experiences of violence. Through this change in narrative perspective, historical events are introduced gradually through the lives of characters whose everyday routines are ultimately transformed by the uprising.

The drama consistently positions fictional civilians, students, medical workers, and family members as the primary mediators of historical experience. Rather than presenting political leaders or historical figures, *Youth of May* invites audiences to encounter the uprising through characters such as Hwang Hee-tae and Kim Myung-hee, whose personal experiences function as representative perspectives on broader historical events. Through these characters, collective historical experiences are translated into intimate and emotionally accessible narratives.

As the story progresses, political violence becomes increasingly visible. Military repression, violent arrests, civilian casualties, and humanitarian crises gradually intrude into the characters' everyday lives. Nevertheless, political conflict is rarely presented through direct ideological discussion. Instead, it is experienced through its consequences for personal relationships, family life, medical care, and individual survival. Consequently, the uprising is framed less as a political event to be explained and more as a lived experience to be felt.

The emotional dimension of the narrative intensifies throughout the drama. Experiences of love, fear, grief, anxiety, trauma, and loss become increasingly central as violence escalates. The drama repeatedly emphasizes the emotional consequences of political repression, transforming historical violence into personal suffering that audiences can emotionally identify with. Through this process, the uprising is remembered not only as a historical tragedy but also as a deeply personal experience.

The narrative ultimately culminates in mourning, remembrance, and enduring trauma. Rather than resolving the consequences of the uprising, the drama highlights its long-term emotional impact on survivors and families. The final episodes emphasize loss, memory, and the persistence of emotional wounds, reinforcing the idea that the effects of the uprising continue long after the violence itself has ended. Overall, the memory script constructed in *Youth of May* is characterized by personal storytelling, emotional engagement, character-centered representation, and remembrance. Rather than prioritizing political institutions or historical actors, the drama reconstructs the Gwangju Uprising through ordinary individuals whose lives are transformed by violence, loss, and suffering. Consequently, the uprising is represented not only as a political tragedy but also as an intimate and emotionally meaningful human experience.

Patterns of Memory Transformation

A comparison between Corpus A and B reveals a significant shift in narrative focus. The historical accounts in Corpus A depict the Gwangju Uprising as a democratic movement marked by military repression, political conflict, and civilian resistance. The event itself occupies a central position in this historical narrative (UNESCO, n.d.). In contrast, *Youth of May* reconstructs the uprising through a plot centered on romance, family relationships, life in the hospital, and the daily experiences of ordinary citizens. Although the historical event remains important, it functions primarily as a backdrop against which personal stories unfold. This shift indicates that the drama shifts the focus from political events to individual experiences, thereby making the historical tragedy more accessible to contemporary audiences through familiar narrative conventions (Erll, 2011; Erll & Rigney, 2009).

Another important transformation can be observed in the representation of historical actors. Corpus A emphasizes collective actors such as students, civilians, victims, military authorities, and government institutions. These groups are presented as the primary participants in the uprising and are discussed largely within the context of collective action and political conflict. In contrast, *Youth of May* introduces fictional characters who function as character proxies or witness-substitutes through whom audiences encounter the historical event. Characters such as Hwang Hee-tae, Kim Myung-hee, medical workers, and family members personalize historical experiences that were originally represented through broader social groups. Consequently, collective historical actors are transformed into individualized characters whose personal experiences become the primary vehicle for remembering the uprising (Erll, 2009).

The comparison also reveals differences in the values emphasized by each corpus. Historical sources consistently highlight democracy, human rights, and reconciliation as the central values associated with the Gwangju Uprising. These values position the event within broader political and historical narratives concerning South Korea's democratization process. By contrast, *Youth of May* frames these values through personal experiences, moral choices, sacrifice, survival, and interpersonal relationships. Political issues remain present throughout the narrative; however, they are frequently conveyed through the consequences experienced by individual characters rather than through direct political discourse. As a result, political values become embedded within emotionally engaging personal narratives.

A further distinction can be observed in the emotional presentation of the uprising. Historical accounts generally adopt a solemn, heroic, and mournful tone that reflects the significance of the event within national history. While these emotional dimensions are present, they are often expressed through historical interpretation and collective remembrance. In contrast, *Youth of May* intensifies emotional engagement through audiovisual storytelling techniques, including emotional dialogue, close-up shots, dramatic music, and scenes of personal loss. Fear, grief, anxiety, separation, and vulnerability are repeatedly foregrounded throughout the narrative. Through these strategies, collective historical suffering is transformed into intimate emotional experiences that encourage stronger audience identification with the characters and the historical event (Erll, 2011).

The final comparison concerns aspects that receive limited attention within each corpus. Historical narratives tend to devote greater attention to political developments, military operations, and collective resistance, while personal relationships, everyday experiences, and individual emotional struggles often remain secondary. *Youth of May* addresses these silences by placing such experiences at the center of the narrative. The drama highlights family relationships, romantic attachment, personal sacrifice, and emotional suffering, thereby expanding dimensions that are less visible in historical documentation. Furthermore, while historical accounts frequently conclude by emphasizing political significance and democratic achievement, the drama guides audiences

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toward mourning, remembrance, and emotional reflection. Consequently, the memory of the Gwangju Uprising is reconstructed not only as a political event but also as a deeply personal human experience.

The differences identified between Corpus A and Corpus B are not random alterations but recurring narrative strategies through which historical memory is adapted for dramatic storytelling. These strategies reveal how the drama selectively reconstructs the Gwangju Uprising for contemporary audiences. These transformations emerge consistently across the drama's twelve episodes, suggesting that the reconstruction of historical memory is not incidental but reflects a systematic process of narrative mediation. Within Astrid Erll's (2011) framework of remediation, such transformations are understood as inherent to the process by which historical memory migrates across different media forms, with each medium reinterpreting the past according to its own narrative conventions and audience expectations. As a result, four dominant transformation patterns can be identified: emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization (Erll, 2009; Erll & Rigney, 2009).

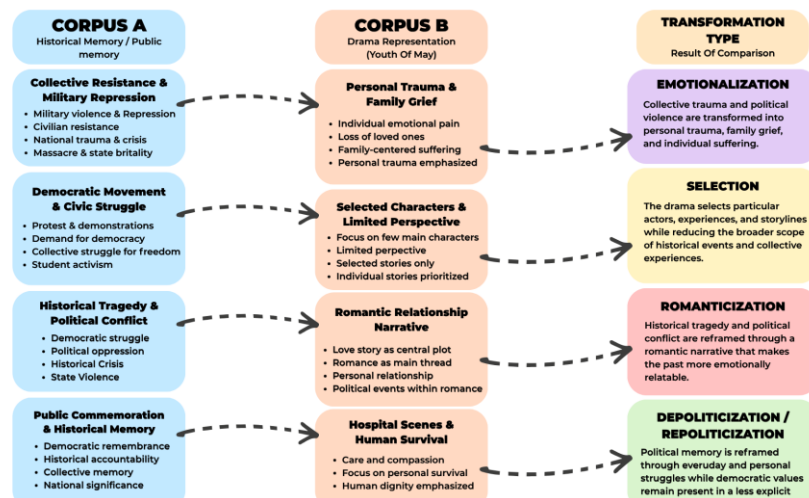


Figure 8. Transformation Mapping of Historical Memory in Youth of May

Figure 8 illustrates how public memory of the Gwangju Uprising represented in Corpus A is reconstructed in *Youth of May* as Corpus B. The comparison reveals four dominant transformation patterns: emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization. While public narratives emphasize democratization, military repression, collective resistance, and historical remembrance, the drama reinterprets these experiences through personal trauma, family grief, romantic relationships, hospital life, and everyday survival. Rather than reproducing historical memory in its original form, *Youth of May* selectively reconstructs the uprising through emotionally engaging and character-centered storytelling (Erll, 2011).

One of the most visible transformations is emotionalization. Historical accounts generally present the uprising through descriptions of military repression, political conflict, and collective resistance. In *Youth of May*, however, these historical events are frequently reframed through emotional experiences such as grief, fear, anxiety, and personal loss. Rather than emphasizing political chronology, the drama foregrounds the emotional consequences experienced by individual characters and their families. Through this process, collective suffering is transformed into intimate emotional experiences that encourage emotional engagement with the historical event (Erll, 2011).

The second transformation pattern is romanticization. Historical sources primarily focus on political events, democratic resistance, and state violence. In contrast, *Youth of May* lacks the romantic relationship between Hwang Hee-tae and Kim Myung-hee at the center of the narrative. The Gwangju Uprising functions not only as a historical backdrop but also as a force that shapes and ultimately disrupts their relationship. By integrating romance into the representation of historical tragedy, the drama reconstructs historical memory through a narrative structure that is more familiar and emotionally accessible within popular television conventions (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

The third transformation pattern is selection. Historical sources provide a broad account of the uprising, including political developments, military operations, social movements, and historical consequences. The drama selectively focuses on particular experiences and perspectives while excluding many other aspects of the event. Specific incidents, emotional moments, and individual experiences are highlighted, whereas broader political complexities receive less attention. Through this selective process, certain memories become more visible and emotionally significant within the narrative (Erll, 2009).

The final transformation pattern is depoliticization and repoliticization. In Corpus A, the Gwangju Uprising is predominantly represented through public narratives that emphasize democratization, military repression, collective resistance, historical accountability, and national remembrance. Political actors, institutions, and collective movements occupy the center of these representations. In *Youth of May*, however, these political concerns are relocated into everyday spaces such as hospitals, family environments, and interpersonal relationships. Political conflict is no longer experienced primarily through demonstrations, political organizations, or public discourse, but through its consequences for ordinary individuals struggling to survive amid violence and uncertainty.

At the same time, the drama does not completely remove political meaning from the narrative. Rather, democratic values are reintroduced through personal experiences of care, sacrifice, solidarity, grief, and human dignity. The audience encounters political violence not through abstract political discussions but through the emotional and material consequences it produces in the lives of ordinary citizens. Consequently, political memory is simultaneously depoliticized through personalization and repoliticized through the continued presence of democratic values embedded within everyday experiences (Erll & Rigney, 2009). Through this process, the drama reconstructs the Gwangju Uprising as both a personal tragedy and a politically meaningful historical event.

As a whole, these transformation patterns demonstrate a process of remediation. Historical experiences of political violence and collective resistance are translated into narratives that foreground individual perspectives, emotional identification, and intimate human experiences. Through this process, the drama creates a new mode of remembering the Gwangju Uprising that remains connected to its historical significance while making it more accessible to contemporary audiences (Erll, 2011; Erll & Rigney, 2009).

These findings indicate that the dominant concept in *Youth of May* is remediation. According to Erll (2011), remediation refers to a process in which cultural memory is reconstructed and represented through different media. In this case, the drama re-presents the historical memory of the Gwangju Uprising by transforming the collective historical experience into an intimate, character-centered narrative that is emotionally engaging. Rather than reproducing history as a factual record, *Youth of May* portrays the tragedy through personal relationships, emotional suffering, and individual experiences, thereby reconstructing the historical memory of the Gwangju Uprising within a character-centered dramatic narrative (Erll, 2009).

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Through emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization, the drama reconstructs historical memory into a character-centered and emotionally oriented narrative. Rather than presenting the Gwangju Uprising solely as a historical event, *Youth of May* reinterprets historical experiences through stories of family relationships, romantic attachment, grief, and individual suffering. Therefore, the drama contributes to the formation of cultural memory by re-mediating the historical memory of the Gwangju Uprising through popular media. This finding demonstrates how television drama can function as a medium through which historical memory is reconstructed and represented within contemporary cultural contexts (Erll, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines how the Gwangju Uprising is portrayed in the drama series *Youth of May* (2021) and how that portrayal contributes to the formation of cultural memory. The findings of this study indicate that the drama series depicts the uprising primarily through the categories of violence, loss, and suffering. Among these categories, violence frequently emerges as the most dominant portrayal, highlighting military repression, physical attacks, and the use of lethal force against civilians. Meanwhile, loss and suffering serve as complementary dimensions that emphasize the emotional and psychological consequences of the tragedy, portraying the Gwangju Uprising as a multidimensional human experience rather than merely a political event.

In addition, a comparison between historical narratives and dramatic representations identifies four dominant transformation patterns: emotionalization, romanticization, selection, and depoliticization/repoliticization. These transformations demonstrate a process of remediation in which public memory of the Gwangju Uprising is reconstructed through television drama. Rather than reproducing historical narratives in their original form, *Youth of May* reinterprets collective experiences of democratization, military repression, and historical remembrance through stories of personal trauma, romantic relationships, family grief, and everyday survival. Consequently, the drama contributes to the formation of cultural memory by transforming public historical narratives into emotionally accessible and character-centered representations that resonate with contemporary audiences.

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