

CULTURE COURSE

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

How Korean comics moved online, how the industry works, and how to read claims about it

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KOREAN WEBTOONS AND MANHWA

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Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Webtoons? Scope & Sources

A webtoon is a comic built to be read by scrolling on a phone, and the format started in South Korea. That much is easy to say. Almost everything after it, such as who made the first one, how big the market is and why print comics declined, is stated differently in different places. This course reads the medium from open sources, keeps each claim attached to its owner, and uses that to show how the industry works. This first chapter sets the words, the scope and the method.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon, Manhwa and Webtoon (platform), as I read them. I read the Webtoon and Manhwa articles for their format, history, market and terminology sections, and the platform article's opening and early history. I opened no platform sites, company reports or news stories, and every date and figure below is an article's claim. Where the articles disagree, I say so.

A note on tone

Webtoons are a commercial medium, and the sources include company figures, criticism and disputes. This course describes creators and companies through their public work and documented business, reports disputes as reported, and says nothing about anyone's private life.

The Words

Manhwa

The Manhwa article calls *manhwa* (만화) "the general Korean term for comics and print cartoons", adding that "outside Korea, the term usually refers to Korean comics". It says the Korean *manhwa*, the Japanese *manga* and the Chinese *manhua* are cognates, written with the same characters, and that "their histories and influences intertwine". It also says the influx of manga into Korea "had a strong effect on the art and content of many artists' manhwa". That is the article's account, and I did not check it.

Webtoon

The Webtoon article defines webtoons (웹툰) as "a type of episodic digital comics that originated in South Korea usually meant to be read on smartphones". The Manhwa article says the word is a portmanteau of Korean *web* and *cartoon*, and was "first coined on 8 August 2000, by Chollian, one of South Korea's oldest and now discontinued internet service engines". The Webtoon article lists the format's usual traits:

- each episode is "one long, vertical strip" on an "infinite canvas", easy to read on a phone;
- some have music and animation within each chapter;
- unlike most East Asian comics, they are "usually in color", because they are published digitally and not in a magazine.

> **The two articles don't fully agree on what manhwa looks like**
>
> The Manhwa article says "unlike manga, manhwa is typically read in a vertical format", yet later says manhwa "is read in the same direction as English books, horizontally and from left to right" and is "often in color when posted on the internet, but in black & white when in a printed format". Both can be true if the first sentence means webtoons specifically, but the article does not say so. In this course, *manhwa* means Korean comics in general, in print or online, and *webtoon* means the scroll format on the web. That is a working definition for this course, and the sources do not offer it.

Who Was First? A Table of Claims

The articles give several starting points, and which one counts depends on what you mean by "webtoon". The table lists them as the articles give them.

Claim	Where
"South Korea's first webtoon is *Uninhabited Island* (무인도) by Han Hee-jak in 1996."	Webtoon article
"The advent of the webtoon model dates back to 2000, when Lycos Korea... launched the comic Bang section in their portal site." Yahoo! Korea followed two years later with Cartoon Sesang.	Webtoon article

Claim	Where
The word "webtoon" was first coined on 8 August 2000 by Chollian.	Manhwa article
Kang Full "revolutionized the vertical scrolling format in 2003" with *Soonjeong Manhwa* on Media Daum.	Webtoon article
Daum Webtoon was created in 2003; Naver Webtoon was launched in 2004.	Webtoon article
The platform called Webtoon "launched in 2004 by Naver Corporation", but also "was founded in South Korea in 2005 by CEO Junkoo Kim".	Webtoon (platform) article, both statements
Naver's site "started in 1999, but it initially had a muted response as a hidden menu".	Webtoon (platform) article
Official English translations began in July 2014; "prior to 2014, most webtoons were only available in English through unofficial fan translations".	Webtoon article

Taken together, the articles do not name one first webtoon. The 1996 title is a "first" for the scanned or simple web comic, the 2000 claims are about the portal model and the word, 2003 is about the vertical scroll as the article describes it, and 2004 or 2005 is about the platform that later went global. The Webtoon article's three-"generation" outline backs this reading: scanned comics uploaded online, then flash animation, then vertical scroll with preloading, then phones and tablets. The generations run in that order in the article, and it gives no dates for most of them.

Numbers, and Why to Check Them

Figure	Where, and what is odd
"Webtoons make roughly $5.91 billion globally."	Webtoon article. The Webtoon (platform) article repeats $5.91 billion but says "in just the U.S. alone". The two articles give the same number for different places, so at most one is right, and neither gives a year or source I could see.
The market for webtoons and derivatives "is currently valued at	Webtoon article. "Currently" has no date, and the article places this beside global figures that are far larger.

Figure	Where, and what is odd
around KR₩420 billion (US$368 million)".	
"Comics account for a quarter of all book sales in South Korea", with "more than 3 million Korean users paid" and "10 million users read free webtoons".	Webtoon article, attributed to a Bloomberg writer. No year is given.
"Naver's Webtoon service... reaches over 6.2 million daily users" and "180 million monthly active users (MAUs) worldwide" as of September 2023.	Webtoon article. The first has no date, and the second is a different measure (monthly, worldwide), so the two cannot be compared.
"Posting comic content for free caused the $3 billion South Korean book and comic industry to rapidly collapse."	Webtoon (platform) article. A causal claim, with no source in the passage I read. The Manhwa article offers a different cause: that most manhwa went online "due to economic collapse that South Korea had experienced at the end of the millennium".

> **Why this matters for the rest of the course**
>
> Every later chapter gives figures such as readers, revenue or adaptations. They will come with their owner (an article, a company), their year where one is given, and a note when two sources disagree. A bare number in a headline is a claim, and the questions to ask are: whose, measured how, and in what year?

What the Course Covers, and Leaves Out

It covers South Korean comics from print to the web: the print history, the move online, how a webtoon is made and paid for, the genres and well-documented hits, adaptations for screen, the spread overseas, the people who make webtoons, and the rules and disputes around them (Chapters 2 to 9). Chapter 10 turns those threads into a checklist for reading any claim about the medium.

It leaves out Japanese manga and Chinese manhua as subjects, except where the sources use them to explain Korean comics; North Korean comics; reviews that rank titles by quality; plot

summaries beyond what a chapter needs; and any recommendation of where to read unofficially. K-pop, drama and literature have their own courses (K-Pop, K-Drama and Korean Film, Korean Literature), and webtoons appear there only where they connect.

Where to look next

The Webtoon (platform) article names the platform's own site, *Webtoons.com*, and the Webtoon article names other services that carry Korean comics, including Tappytoon, Spottoon, Lezhin Comics, Toomics and TopToon, plus Kakao's offerings. I opened none of these, so this is only a list of names taken from the articles. Before you rely on one, check that its page is the official one, and note that features, prices and catalogues change and are not stable facts.

A Method for the Rest of the Course

1. **Whose claim?** Attach every date and figure to an article or a company.
2. **What does "first" mean?** The first webtoon, the first portal, the first scroll and the first English translation are different questions.
3. **What is measured?** Users, revenue and views are different things, and a "market" can mean Korea or the world.
4. **What caused what?** Be careful with sentences that say one thing "caused" a collapse or a boom.
5. **What is missing?** A gap, such as a number with no year, is a result too.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Define *manhwa* and *webtoon* as the articles give them, name three traits of the webtoon format, and say when and by whom the word "webtoon" was first coined, according to the Manhwa article.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using the table of claims, give three different answers to "who was first?" and say what each one is first at. Then explain why the Webtoon (platform) article's statements about 2004 and 2005 count as an inconsistency.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick two figures from the numbers table and say what you would need to know before using each in your own writing. Then give the two different causes the articles offer for the move of comics online.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Manhwa:** the general Korean term for comics; abroad, usually Korean comics
- **Webtoon:** episodic digital comic, vertical scroll, usually colour, made for phones; the word first coined 8 August 2000 (Chollian), per the Manhwa article
- **Starting points claimed:** 1996 (*Uninhabited Island*), 2000 (Lycos Korea, Yahoo! Korea 2002), 2003 (Daum; Kang Full's scroll), 2004/2005 (Naver Webtoon), July 2014 (official English)
- **Figures to treat with care:** $5.91 billion (global or U.S.?), KR₩420 billion, 6.2 million daily users, 180 million monthly users
- **Check:** every first, every figure and every "caused", in every chapter

Next chapter: Manhwa Before the Web, which covers print comics in Korea: the early history, comic-rental rooms, regulation and the decline that set up the move online.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Manhwa Before the Web

Webtoons did not appear from nothing: Korea had a print comics industry with its own magazines, reading rooms, hit titles, stars and regulators. This chapter sets out what the sources I could read say about it. Those sources are thin on this period, much thinner than on webtoons, and the chapter says plainly where they run out.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Manhwa (its history, webtoon and media sections), Heo (Huh) Young-man, Lee Hyun-se, Dooly the Little Dinosaur, Webtoon, Webtoon (platform) and Manga cafe (its South Korea section). The print history in the Manhwa article is a single paragraph of a few sentences, and I found no separate article on Korean print comics, comic magazines or their censorship. An article on censorship in South Korea that I read has nothing about comics. I read no books, news archives or government records, and every date and claim is an article's.

What this chapter cannot do

The outline promised the history of magazines, comic-rental shops, regulation and the decline of print. The sources give a few facts on each and no detail. The chapter reports those few facts, marks every gap, and does not fill them from memory.

Starting Points

The Manhwa article says that "political cartoon slowly reemerged following the establishment of the Republic of Korea... in 1948", and that "popular artist Kim Yong-hwan started Korea's first comic magazine, *Manhwa Haengjin*, in 1948, but it was quickly shut down because the authorities disapproved of the cover". That is the article's whole account of the first magazine: it gives no reason beyond "the cover", and I could not check it.

For the Korean War, it says manhwa "was used with the aim of boosting the morale of the public", while "there was also doctrine and propaganda on some manhwa leaflets and books". It

names *Hong Gil Dong* as an example. I cannot say what that example refers to, and the article does not explain it.

The 1950s and 1960s

The article says the popularity of comics "rose during the 1950s and 1960s, creating diversity of styles and subject matter", including:

- ***Sunjeong* (or *soonjung*):** romance stories "aimed at young women".
- ***Myeongnyang*:** "happy comics", a humorous genre that became popular "in order to counteract gritty ones".
- ***Manhwabang* (comics rooms):** "cafés and stores that allowed readers to pay a set rate to sit and read comics", which "created a positive atmosphere around the comics".

> **Regulation, as far as the article goes**
>
> "In response to the increasing publication of comics, as well as social and political changes within South Korea, the government began to enforce censorship laws and, by the mid-1960s, created a comics distribution monopoly that further censored manhwa." The article then refers to "times of 'Manhwa Revolution'" when authorities formed commissions "to suppress manhwa fanaticism among childrens and in order to address parents' concerns". It names no law, no commission, no year after the mid-1960s and no case. So the sources support only this: a government that regulated comics, a distribution monopoly by the mid-1960s, and later commissions. They do not support any account of how strict the rules were, which titles were affected or when they ended.

Stars, Newspapers and Hits

The articles on individual artists give a different kind of evidence: careers, with dates.

- **Huh (Heo) Young-man** (born 1947). He debuted in 1974 with *In Search for Home* "through a competition seeking new cartoonists hosted by the Sonyeon Hankook Ilbo (Boy's Korean Times)", and had a "big success" with *Gaksital*. The article says his works were "serialized in local dailies": *Sikgaek* in the Dong-a Ilbo and *Tajja* (also *Tazza*) in Sports Chosun. The Webtoon article adds that *Sikgaek* ran for five years and "sold 540,000 copies in paperback", and that *Tazza* "garnered over 100 million homepage views", which is an

odd measure for a print serial, and the article does not explain it. The spelling of his name differs between articles (Huh or Heo).

- **Lee Hyun-se.** He "debuted in 1978 with *The River Knows*", a Vietnam War story, and his works include *A Daunting Team*. The article calls him "Korea's leading comic ('manhwa') artist", which is the article's judgment and not a measured ranking.
- ***Dooly the Little Dinosaur*.** It was "originally created as a manhwa that was serialized from 1983 to 1993" by Kim Soo-jung, and the franchise expanded into a television series and an animated film. The Manhwa article lists *Dooly* and *Fly! Superboard* as "major hits in the late 1980s and early 90s" among Korean comics' animations, and says such animations are "still relatively rare".

Two features of the print age follow from these entries: newspapers and sports papers were a main place where a comic could find readers, and a hit in one medium could grow into others. Both come from the article texts and are not statements anyone makes in a source about "how the industry worked".

Print Crosses Borders

The Manhwa article says Sanho Kim "was the first manhwa artist that worked in the United States", for publishers including Charlton, Warren, DC and Marvel in the 1960s and 1970s, and cites the journalist Paul Gravett for the claim that "in 1987 Eastern Comics published the first original manhwas in the United States". Both are "firsts" with the article as owner, and the second is attributed to a named journalist. It also says English translations were successful by "targeting the manga and anime community", to the point that the American publisher Tokyopop marketed manhwa as manga. So manhwa abroad was often sold under another medium's name.

Where the Comics Room Went

The Manga cafe article describes manga cafés as a Japanese-originated type of venue where people pay for time to read comics. Its South Korea section describes café chains that add "a cartoon room", naming Nolsoop, Beoltoon and Kongtoon, with hourly fees and a drink discount, and says more are appearing in cinemas. It does not say that these are descendants of the *manhwabang*, and I do not claim it. The Manga cafe article also says Haksan Cultural Centre runs

a "Comic Cakes" café, and Haksan Culture Company appears among Korean manhwa publishers in the Manhwa article. Whether the two are the same body is not stated.

The Decline of Print

Here the sources offer only what Chapter 1 already found. The Webtoon article says "as digital comics have emerged as a popular medium, print publication of comics has decreased" and that webtoon material "has now reached an equal amount as that published offline", but it also says "print publication remains the primary means of comic retail" in the same market section. The platform article claims that free posting "caused the $3 billion South Korean book and comic industry to rapidly collapse", while the Manhwa article blames "economic collapse that South Korea had experienced at the end of the millennium". Neither article gives a year for the print decline, a cause that is sourced here, or figures for magazine circulation. The articles contradict one another about whether print is declining or still primary.

Reading a Claim About Print Manhwa

1. **Is there a date?** "Mid-1960s" and "1948" are dated; "manhwa revolution" is not.
2. **Is there a name?** A law, a commission or a title can be checked; "the authorities" cannot.
3. **Whose "first"?** Treat "first comic magazine" and "first manhwa in America" as claims with owners.
4. **What is a career, and what is an industry?** An artist's dated works show a hit. They do not by themselves show how the industry was run.
5. **What is missing?** Report a gap as a gap.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the three print-era developments the Manhwa article names for the 1950s and 1960s (*sunjeong*, *myeongnyang*, *manhwabang*). Then say what the article gives for the first comic magazine, and what it does not.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

State what the sources support about the regulation of comics, and name three things they do not say. Then give one odd detail in the articles' figures for Huh Young-man's *Tazza*.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Give two print-era hits or artists from the chapter, with dates. Then explain why the articles' account of the decline of print is contradictory, and say what you would need to find to settle it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1948:** *Manhwa Haengjin*, called the first comic magazine, shut down over its cover (Manhwa article)
- **1950s–60s:** *sunjeong* romance, *myeongnyang* humour, *manhwabang* comic rooms; censorship laws and, by the mid-1960s, a distribution monopoly
- **Artists and hits:** Huh Young-man (debut 1974; *Gaksital*, *Sikgaek*, *Tazza*), Lee Hyun-se (debut 1978), *Dooly the Little Dinosaur* (1983–1993)
- **Abroad:** Sanho Kim in the U.S. in the 1960s–70s; first original manhwa in the U.S. in 1987 (Gravett, per the article)
- **Decline:** no year, figure or sourced cause; the articles disagree about whether print still leads
- **Check:** the 1948 story, "Hong Gil Dong" as propaganda, the regulation details, the Tazza "100 million homepage views"

Next chapter: The Move Online, which covers the first portals, the 2000s change, and why free serialisation became the model.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · The Move Online

Chapter 2 ended with print comics and no clear account of their decline. This chapter follows the other half of the story: the web portals that began carrying comics, the competition between them, and the model that made webtoons free to read. Here the sources say much more, but they also contradict each other more, and some passages are loosely written. The chapter reports both.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon (platform), Webtoon, Kakao Webtoon, Kakao Page, Lezhin Comics and Daum (web portal), as I read them. The Webtoon (platform) article's history section is long and in places badly worded or garbled, and I mark those places. I read no company reports, news stories or the BBC report the article mentions, and every date and figure is an article's claim. Creator pay and working conditions come in Chapter 8, and disputes in Chapter 9, so this chapter only notes where they begin.

Portals and "Bait"

The Webtoon (platform) article says webtoons began as "a sub-menu of the gate companies that began with South Korean portal services Daum and Naver". Its explanation of the business is blunt: "portal sites gathered a large online audience by offering digital comics as bait". It says Naver's site "started in 1999, but it initially had a muted response as a hidden menu", and that Naver then "placed webtoons in premium advertising spaces worth 300 million Korean won on its portal surface", which "significantly increased their traffic". The article's conclusion is that "the key to their success in the portal market was digital comics". That is the article's reading of the strategy, and it names no source for the 300 million won or for the traffic claim.

The Main Players

Platform	What the articles say
Lycos Korea, Yahoo! Korea	Lycos Korea launched a comics section in 2000 and Yahoo! Korea followed with Cartoon Sesang two years later (Webtoon article, Chapter 1).
Daum Webtoon	"Originally launched in 2003 by Daum... making it the first official webtoon platform in the world." It operated under Daum until Daum merged with Kakao in 2014, and was relaunched as Kakao Webtoon on 1 August 2021 "in order to expand globally" (Kakao Webtoon article).
Naver Webtoon	Launched in 2004 (Webtoon article). By 2004, "they already had a market share of 80%" (platform article, no source seen). In 2008 it introduced ads on webtoons.
Kakao Page	Launched 9 April 2013 as a digital content marketplace. It "was deemed a failure by mid-2013, but after adding *Legendary Moonlight Sculptor* and several other popular works, the service bounced back." It is "famous in South Korea for its 'free if you wait' system". It began a free webtoon and web fiction service by 21 April 2014 (Kakao Page article).
Lezhin Comics	Launched in June 2013 by the blogger Han Hee-sung; by November 2014 it hosted "over 400 webtoons and cartoons, making it South Korea's largest webtoon publisher as of 2014" (Lezhin article). The platform article says Lezhin introduced a payment form called "Time Delay" in 2013.

Two articles, two "firsts"

Chapter 1 noted Lycos Korea's comics section in 2000. The Kakao Webtoon article calls Daum's 2003 service "the first official webtoon platform in the world". The Daum article is also inconsistent on the company: it says the portal "was founded in 1995", then that the company was "founded in 1994" and "launched the namesake portal in May 1997 making it the first South Korean web portal". Treat "first" in each as the article's phrase, and note the dates and definitions do not line up.

The Free Model, and How It Earned

The articles describe several revenue ideas, in the order they say they came:

1. **Traffic first.** Free comics bring readers to a portal, and the portal earns elsewhere. The platform article says Naver's influx of readers "brought in significant income through search keywords, exceeding the revenue from selling comics". Its figure for the cost per keyword is garbled ("26,000 to 4,000 Korean Won"), so I do not repeat it.
2. **Ads on episodes (2008).** Naver "introduced ads on webtoons, but they did not fairly share the ad revenue with artists", per the article, which does not say who judged it unfair.
3. **Paying for episodes.** The Webtoon article lists models: a limited set of chapters free and the rest charged; or a daily limit on free chapters. Kakao Page's "free if you wait" lets readers see an episode free after a time delay. The platform article says Naver adopted Lezhin's "Time Delay" model in 2013.
4. **Revenue share (2013).** "In 2013, Webtoon launched Page Profit Share (PPS), which offered the artist a share of the advertising revenue for the first time."
5. **Selling rights.** The platform article says Naver "absorbed the electronic publication rights of Korean artists for a small fee", and that international rights were later obtained. Later the business model "expanded to include paid content sales, advertising revenue, and IP business revenue".

Figures that don't add up

The platform article says that when Webtoon launched in 2013 its programmes "generated 23.2 billion won" and that by 2022 they had grown to "2.25 trillion won (USD $1.69 billion), an increase of more than 87 times". Dividing 2.25 trillion by 23.2 billion gives about 97, not 87. It may be that the figures are from different measures, but the article does not say. The same article elsewhere says "the platform was founded in 2005" and launched in 2004, and says a 2013 date for its own "launch".

Piracy

The platform article says "in 2012, Naver did not participate in the legal crackdown on illegal sites that had been pirating their content for eight years", and that the first legal action was against a frame-link piracy site. The wording is unclear, and the claim of "eight years" implies piracy from about 2004. Chapter 7 returns to piracy.

Where the Article Turns to Criticism

The same history section goes on to criticise the system. It says many aspiring creators submitted free comics, that "the influx of free content was guaranteed as long as they were not

part of the 0.1% that received a formal serialization", that freelance creators "could not unite", and that the vertical-scroll method "demand[ed] over 100 cuts, which strained artists' health". It adds that one Kakao Webtoons artist "died at the age of 37 due to overwork" and that "the BBC reported on artists suffering from severe labor and exploitation". I report these as the article's claims. The passage gives no figures or sources I could see, the 0.1% has no source, and the death is unnamed here. I did not read the BBC report. Chapter 8 takes up creators' pay and conditions with whatever sources I can find, and I do not treat this passage as established fact.

Going Global, and a Sign of Change

On 2 July 2014 the Line Webtoon site and app launched worldwide (platform article). Naver chose 42 webtoons, including *Noblesse*, *Tower of God* and *The God of High School*, plus one by an American artist, for English at launch. Its "Canvas" section lets artists self-publish and be paid by page views.

The Kakao Webtoon article gives a later and different picture: it says that since October 2024 Kakao "began to shut down Webtoon services globally due to the decline in popularity and financial difficulties", starting with the Taiwanese, Thai and Indonesian versions in 2025, and that on 22 September 2026 Kakao announced it would "shut down Tapas and merge Kakao Webtoon into KakaoPage by the end of 2026". This is a recent and short statement with no source visible, and I could not check it. If it is right, the market of the 2010s has already changed, and the picture in this course is of a medium still moving.

Reading a Platform Claim

1. **What kind of "first"?** Platform, service, word, format and global launch are different firsts.
2. **Whose number?** A market share, a revenue or a growth multiple needs an owner, a year and a check on the arithmetic.
3. **Promotion or analysis?** The article moves between a history, a business explanation and sharp criticism within a few paragraphs. Notice which register a sentence is in.
4. **Is it current?** Platform news dates quickly.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the "portal as bait" account: what the Webtoon (platform) article says portals gained from comics, and what it does not source. Then name the five platforms in the table and give one fact about each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

List the revenue ideas in the order the articles give them (traffic, ads, paying for episodes, revenue share, rights), with the year where one is given. Then check the arithmetic on the 2013-to-2022 growth claim and say what you find.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Say why this chapter reports the article's criticism of working conditions as "the article's claims", and name two things in that passage that are unsourced or unclear. Then give the later development in the Kakao Webtoon article and one reason to hold it loosely.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Portal strategy:** free comics as "bait" for traffic; Naver's early site 1999, webtoons 2004, an 80% share claim
- **Daum Webtoon:** 2003; relaunched as Kakao Webtoon 1 August 2021
- **Kakao Page:** 9 April 2013; "free if you wait"
- **Lezhin:** June 2013; "Time Delay" payment, copied by Naver
- **Money:** keywords and traffic; ads 2008; PPS revenue share 2013; rights and IP business
- **Global:** Line Webtoon worldwide 2 July 2014

- **Check:** the 87-times claim (about 97 by arithmetic), the 80% share, the 0.1%, the piracy wording, the 2026 Kakao news

Next chapter: How a Webtoon Works, which covers the vertical-scroll format, weekly release, production roles and studios, and how discovery and earnings are described.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · How a Webtoon Works

Chapter 3 followed the platforms. This chapter looks at the thing they host: how a webtoon is shaped, how an episode reaches a reader, how newcomers get noticed and how money reaches a creator. The sources are good on format, contests and the reader-facing payment systems, and thin on the studio side, such as production roles and weekly schedules. The chapter says where it stops.

> **How this chapter was checked**
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> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon (its format, revenue and history sections), Webtoon (platform) (its userbase, coins and contests sections), Webcomic and Kakao Page, as I read them. I found no article on how a webtoon studio or a production team is organised, and I read no interviews, creator guides or contract documents. Creator pay and working conditions as such are Chapter 8's subject. Every figure here is an article's claim.

The Format

The Webtoon article lists the usual traits: each episode is "one long, vertical strip (making use of an infinite canvas rather than multiple pages so that it is easier to read on a smartphone or computer)", some episodes "feature music and animations", and webtoons are "usually in color". Its section on the second "generation" adds that in a scrolling comic "scrolling brings new panels into view", which makes the format "suitable for gradual and continuous representation" and allows "the scroll function to manipulate the perception of time, enabling cinematic expressions and the dramatic use of effects such as fade-ins and fade-outs". The same article says that on phones and tablets, webtoons later added sounds and "interactive motions".

Where the scroll came from

The Webcomic article credits the idea of an "infinite canvas" to Scott McCloud, "an early advocate of webcomics since 1998", and says it "proved highly successful in South-Korean webcomics when JunKoo Kim implemented an infinite scrolling mechanism in the platform Webtoon in 2004". The Webtoon article, as Chapter 1 noted, credits Kang Full with

revolutionising the vertical scroll in 2003 on Media Daum. These are two different claims about who brought the scroll to Korean comics, one naming a person at a portal and the other a platform executive. The articles do not reconcile them, and the two may describe different steps (a long-form comic, and a scrolling mechanism).

How an Episode Reaches a Reader

- **The daily system.** The platform article says Line Webtoon comics "can be discovered through the 'daily system' function", and that at launch "seven to ten webtoons were updated each day". It does not say that each series appears once a week, and I did not find a statement of a weekly release schedule in the articles I read. Weekly release is a common description of webtoons, but I cannot source it here.
- **Free chapters, then payment.** The Webtoon article describes some platforms offering "a limited set of chapters for free" and charging for the rest, others allowing "only a certain number of chapters to be read per day without payment". Chapter 3 gave Kakao Page's "free if you wait".
- **Coins.** The platform article says Webtoon "uses coins as a currency that readers can purchase in the app", which can be used to "access completed series or Fast Pass content, allowing them to read ahead". With the **Daily Pass**, a reader may unlock one episode of a series free each day; it "remains accessible for 14 days", while paying with coins keeps it "for as long as the series is available".

The articles therefore describe a ladder of ways to read: free to wait, free for a day, pay to read ahead, and pay to keep. Which of these a given series has is a platform's choice, and the articles do not say how many series use each.

How Newcomers Are Found

The platform article's contests section is the best-documented part of discovery. All figures are the article's.

When	What the article says
2015	Line launched the "Challenge League", a recurring contest in which amateur artists have the chance to become "official Line webtoon artists" and to win "tens of

When	What the article says
	thousands of US dollars". Over 19,000 joined the first English-language one (February 2015). The first Thai one followed in April 2015.
June 2015	A Science Fiction Comics Contest with a US$30,000 grand prize and "over 800 entrants".
November 2018	The Discover Creator Contest: its winner "received a grand total of US$80,000 and an exclusive contract".
2020	A Short Story Contest with two categories; and **Webtoon GREENLiGHT**, in which readers voted by liking an episode. Each of nine pitched series needed 60,000 likes on its third episode within a week to be "greenlit"; all nine "succeeded" and were released in 2021.

The Canvas self-publishing section (Chapter 3) gives an open door and the contests give a ladder, and the 2020 GREENLiGHT contest shows a platform handing part of the choice to readers' likes. These are all from the English-language side of the platform. The articles I read give no comparable account of how Korean platforms choose their series, apart from the Chapter 3 passage about the "0.1%", which was unsourced.

Who Makes It? The Gap

The outline promised production roles and studios. The articles I read name roles only in passing: a creator or "artist", the platform's "official" artists, a company that "partners with creators" to publish "Originals", and Chapter 3's note that vertical scroll "demand[ed] over 100 cuts". I found no article describing how a studio splits writing, drawing, colouring and assistants, or how many people work on one series. I will not describe those from memory. If you want that, look for interviews or industry reports from the platforms themselves, treating each as a source with its own interest.

Money and Numbers

The Webtoon article says creators "can earn money from ads displayed on their series", and that "the money that the pro and amateur creators receive depends on the number of page views". It

says "until 2019, amateur creators could earn money from the credit that was given by their fans". The platform article's userbase section adds figures:

- "Between 2020 and 2021, Webtoon paid out more than $27 million to its base of more than 120,000 creators who publish in English."
- "In Korea, top creators earn an average of $250,000 per year. The top creator earned around $9 million in 2021."
- "10 million people reading on the platform daily and 35 million people monthly", and, "as of March 2023", "85.6 million monthly active users worldwide" and "12.5 million" in the U.S.

> **Read these as three different questions**
>
> Dividing $27 million by 120,000 creators gives about $225 each, over a period the article gives as 2020 to 2021. The $250,000 figure is for "top creators" in Korea, and $9 million is for one creator in one year. The three numbers answer different questions (a payout across a large pool, an average of the top group, one outlier), so they cannot be set side by side to claim a typical income. Nor do the articles say whether the $27 million is gross payments or what is left after the platform's share. The reader numbers also conflict with Chapter 1: Naver's 180 million monthly users (September 2023) against 85.6 million (March 2023), with no stated reason. Different dates and definitions are the likely explanation, but the articles do not say.

Reading a Claim About How Webtoons Work

1. **Which platform and market?** Korea, the U.S. and a global figure are different facts.
2. **Which creators?** "Top creators", "paid creators" and "creators on the platform" are different groups.
3. **What is paid, and to whom?** Revenue, payouts and a creator's share are not the same number.
4. **Is it a description or a promotion?** A contest prize is both a fact and an advertisement.
5. **What is missing?** A "weekly schedule" or a "studio system" that the articles do not state is a gap, not a fact.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the vertical-scroll format as the Webtoon article does, including how it changes the reading of time. Then give the two different accounts of who brought the scroll to Korean comics, and say why the articles do not need to be in conflict.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe how coins, Fast Pass and the Daily Pass work, as the platform article gives them. Then explain what the 2020 GREENLiGHT contest shows about how a platform chooses its series.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Calculate the average payout implied by $27 million and 120,000 creators, and explain why it cannot be compared directly with $250,000 or $9 million. Then name two things about how webtoons are made that this chapter says it could not source.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Format:** one long vertical strip on an "infinite canvas"; scroll controls pace and time; usually colour; sometimes sound and motion
- **Scroll credit:** Kang Full, 2003 (Webtoon article); JunKoo Kim, 2004 (Webcomic article); the idea of the infinite canvas from Scott McCloud
- **Reading ladder:** free after waiting; free daily (Daily Pass, 14 days); coins for Fast Pass; coins to keep an episode
- **Contests:** Challenge League (2015), sci-fi contest ($30,000), Discover Creator ($80,000, 2018), GREENLiGHT (2020, 60,000 likes in a week)

- **Pay:** ads and page views; fan credit until 2019; $27 million to 120,000 creators (2020–21); top Korean creators $250,000 average
- **Not sourced here:** weekly schedules, studio roles, how Korean platforms pick series

Next chapter: Genres and Hits, which looks at romance, fantasy, action, thriller and slice-of-life webtoons and checks a few widely documented titles against named sources.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Genres and Hits

Chapters 3 and 4 explained the platforms and the format. This chapter turns to what is on them. It takes six titles that Wikipedia documents in some detail, groups them by the kind of story they tell, and reads what the articles claim about their success. The aim is to show how a hit is described and what those descriptions leave out, and no ranking of the titles is intended.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Tower of God, Lookism, True Beauty, Sweet Home, Solo Leveling, and the television series Misaeng: Incomplete Life and Yumi's Cells. I read each article's opening and, for some, its synopsis. For the last two, the articles are about the television series, not the webtoons, so what they say about the webtoons is brief and secondhand. I read no reviews, sales records or creator interviews. Every date, count and description is an article's claim, and I describe plots only at the level of the articles' first paragraphs.

Choosing six

Six titles cannot stand for the whole medium, and they are weighted toward titles that have been translated or adapted, because those are the ones with English articles. A title popular only in Korean may have no coverage in the sources I can read. Treat the chapter as examples of how to read claims, and not as a survey.

Six Titles at a Glance

Title	Kind of story (from the article)	Dates and platform (as the article gives them)
Tower of God (신의 탑), by S.I.U.	Fantasy: a boy enters a mysterious Tower whose floors are passed by increasingly difficult tests.	Naver Webtoon since June 2010; official English translation from July 2014; 20 collected volumes as of January 2026.

Title	Kind of story (from the article)	Dates and platform (as the article gives them)
Lookism (외모지상주의), by Taejun Pak	School and urban drama: a high-school student who can switch between two bodies, one fat and ugly, one fit and handsome.	Published weekly on Naver Webtoon from November 2014.
True Beauty (여신강림), by Yaongyi	Romance and school: a young woman who masters makeup after being bullied for being perceived as ugly.	Naver Webtoon, 2 April 2018 to 28 June 2023.
Sweet Home (스위트 홈), by Kim Carnby and Hwang Young-chan	Horror and survival: residents of an apartment block face a "monsterization" apocalypse.	Naver Webtoon, 140 chapters plus a prologue, 12 October 2017 to 2 July 2020.
Solo Leveling (나 혼자만 레벨업), webtoon by Dubu from the novel by Chugong	Action and game fantasy: a weak "E ranked" hunter is chosen by a mysterious program called "The System".	Novel on KakaoPage from 25 July 2016; webtoon on KakaoPage from 4 March 2018.
Misaeng (미생), webtoon by Yoon Tae-ho	Office life: a former baduk (go) trainee becomes an intern at a trading company (from the TV article).	TV series on tvN, 17 October to 20 December 2014; no webtoon dates in the article I read.
Yumi's Cells (유미의 세포들)	Romance: an office worker's life seen through the cells in her head (from the TV article).	TV series from 2021; no webtoon dates in the article I read.

The table lists seven because the last two are so thinly covered that I count them as a pair of examples, not full cases.

What the Titles Show

Genres overlap

Each article places its title in one kind of story, but the plots cross lines. *Lookism*, the article says, starts as a story about appearance and then "changes from problems of being ugly to showing the dark side of Korean society and then slowly to Hyung Seok fighting crime". *True Beauty*'s

article says its heroine lives "in a society where people are judged based on their physical appearance". Two of the six open on a young person bullied for how they look. I read that as one theme the articles show, and I make no claim that it is typical of the medium.

Weekly rhythm, at last

Chapter 4 could not source a release schedule. The *True Beauty* article gives one: "The comic updates every Wednesday." The *Lookism* article says it "was first published weekly". These are two examples of weekly release, which is not the same as showing it is the rule.

Some hits begin as novels

The *Solo Leveling* article says the story began as "a South Korean fantasy web novel written by Chugong", serialised on KakaoPage from 25 July 2016 and "later published by D&C Media", and that the webtoon, "illustrated by Jang Sung-rak (Dubu)", began on 4 March 2018. So a "webtoon" can be a comic adaptation of a prose web novel, with a different creator drawing it. The Webtoon article's see-also list names "Web novels in South Korea" as a related topic.

Titles run for years, and the labels vary

Tower of God has run since 2010 and still had new volumes in 2026 by the article's count. *Sweet Home* ran for about three years. The *Tower of God* article calls it "a South Korean manhwa released as a webtoon", which fits Chapter 1: the same work is called *manhwa* and *webtoon* in one sentence.

How the Articles Measure Success

Title	Claim	What it measures
True Beauty	"As of January 2022, the official English version... has accumulated 6.6 million subscribers and 825.9 million views." It "was the third most viewed series on Webtoon in 2019."	English-language subscribers and views to a date; a rank for one year.
Sweet Home	"As of January 2021, its official English version garnered 2.4 million subscribers and 15.2 million likes."	English-language subscribers and likes to a different date.

Title	Claim	What it measures
Misaeng (TV)	"The series became a cultural phenomenon and recorded high viewership ratings for a cable network program in Korea."	A judgment, and a rating with no figure.
Yumi's Cells (TV)	"TVING announced that the drama had sold broadcast rights in more than 160 countries."	A claim made by the broadcaster.

Why the numbers cannot be compared

True Beauty's 825.9 million views and *Sweet Home*'s 15.2 million likes cannot be set side by side: one is views and the other is likes, they are measured about a year apart, and both are for the English version only, so they say nothing about Korean readers. Even *True Beauty*'s "third most viewed in 2019" has no list in the article to check it against. The two television claims are a phrase ("cultural phenomenon") and a seller's announcement. Each is a fact about how the title was described, and none is a measure of how many people read it.

What the Articles Don't Settle

- Which of these titles was "the biggest" in any year.
- How many Korean readers each had, because the figures given are for English-language versions.
- Whether the genre labels come from the creators, the platforms, the readers or the article's editors.
- For *Misaeng* and *Yumi's Cells*, anything about the webtoons themselves beyond the fact that they exist.

Reading a Claim About a Hit

1. **What is counted?** Views, likes, subscribers and ratings are different things.
2. **Which version and market?** An English-version count is not a Korean count.
3. **When?** A figure "as of" a date is a snapshot.

4. **Whose phrase?** "Cultural phenomenon" is a description; a rights sale announced by the buyer is a claim by an interested party.
5. **Which medium?** A TV series' ratings tell you about the series and not about the webtoon.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose three titles from the table and give, for each, its kind of story, its platform and its start date as the article gives them. Then say which of the six began as something other than a webtoon.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the success claims for *True Beauty* and *Sweet Home*. Give three reasons the two cannot be compared directly, and say which of the six articles gives a release day.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe how *Lookism*'s story is said to change over time, and explain what the article leaves unsaid about *Misaeng* and *Yumi's Cells* as webtoons. Then write one sentence about a hit of your choice that attaches an owner and a date to every number in it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Tower of God:** fantasy; Naver Webtoon since June 2010; English from July 2014
- **Lookism:** body-swap school drama; weekly from November 2014; story shifts toward society and crime

- **True Beauty:** makeup and romance; 2 April 2018 to 28 June 2023; updates every Wednesday; 6.6 million English subscribers, 825.9 million views (January 2022)
- **Sweet Home:** horror; 2017–2020; 2.4 million English subscribers, 15.2 million likes (January 2021)
- **Solo Leveling:** novel on KakaoPage from July 2016; webtoon from March 2018 (illustrated by Dubu)
- **Misaeng, Yumi's Cells:** office life and romance, known here through TV-series articles
- **Check:** every view, like, rank and "phenomenon" claim; English counts are not Korean counts

Next chapter: From Page to Screen, which covers how webtoons are adapted for television and film and what the sources say about how that changed the industry.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · From Page to Screen

A webtoon can be the start of another work: a drama, a film, a game or a printed book. This chapter follows those paths using the Wikipedia articles that document them, and then looks at the claims that come with them, such as "most watched", "revitalised" and "first". It also notes the traffic in the other direction, because platforms now adapt other media into webtoons too.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon, Webtoon (platform) (its "In media" section), Itaewon Class, All of Us Are Dead, Hellbound and Moving, and from earlier chapters' sources (Tazza, Sweet Home, Misaeng, Yumi's Cells). I read each series article's opening and not its full text. I read no streaming-service data, ratings reports or interviews, and every viewing figure and claim is an article's. For the full story of the drama side, see the course K-Drama and Korean Film, which has its own chapters.

Webtoons Into Screen Works

The Webtoon article calls *Tazza* "one of the earliest examples" of a comic used as source material. Chapter 2 met it as a print-era serial; the article says it became a 2006 film, *Tazza: The High Rollers*, and was "later adapted into two films... and one television series". The more recent adaptations in the table below come from the articles on the series.

Series	What the article says about the source and release
Misaeng: Incomplete Life	A 2014 television series on tvN (17 October to 20 December 2014), "based on the eponymous webtoon series by Yoon Tae-ho". It "became a cultural phenomenon". An earlier film, *Incomplete Life: Prequel*, came in 2013.
Sweet Home	A Netflix series released 18 December 2020, from the webtoon that ran 2017–2020 (Chapter 5).

Series	What the article says about the source and release
Itaewon Class	A 2020 series "based on the webtoon of the same name", aired on JTBC from 31 January to 21 March 2020 and streaming on Netflix. It was "the first series to be produced by the film distribution company Showbox" and won Best Drama Series at the 25th Asian Television Awards.
Yumi's Cells	A 2021 series, with three seasons by 2026, announced as sold to "more than 160 countries" (Chapter 5).
Hellbound	A supernatural thriller series "written and directed by Yeon Sang-ho with Choi Gyu-seok, based on their own webtoon". It premiered at the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival and was released on Netflix on 19 November 2021.
All of Us Are Dead	A zombie series "based on the webtoon... by Joo Dong-geun, which was published on Webtoon between 2009 and 2011". Netflix release on 28 January 2022.
Moving	A 2023 series "written by Kang Full", "based on the eponymous Kakao webtoon by Kang". Released from 9 August to 20 September 2023.

A name seen before

Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 met "Kang Full", credited in the Webtoon article with revolutionising the vertical scroll in 2003. The *Moving* article credits the series to a "Kang Full" who wrote the Kakao webtoon. The articles do not say these are the same person, and they link to no shared biography. They may be, but I cannot tell from these sources.

How the Success Is Described

Series	Claim	Whose, and what is odd
All of Us Are Dead	"Watched over 474.26 million hours in its first 30 days" on Netflix.	Hours viewed, not viewers; the figure's owner is not named in the passage I read.

Series	Claim	Whose, and what is odd
Hellbound	"Became the world's most-watched Netflix series the next day, surpassing *Squid Game*."	A claim about one day and one measure; the article adds that critics said it "followed in the footsteps of *Squid Game*".
Moving	"After seven days of availability, it became the most watched Korean original series on Disney+ globally and Hulu in the United States, based on hours streamed." The article adds that its success "is said to have revitalized" Disney+.	Hours streamed on named services in a named window; "is said to have" marks an unattributed claim.
Itaewon Class	"Won Best Drama Series at the 25th Asian Television Awards."	An award, which is a fact about a judging panel, not about audience size.

Each claim is true in its own terms and uses a different yardstick: hours watched, a day's ranking, a seven-day window, an award. None says how many people read the webtoon, and none shows that the adaptation raised the webtoon's readership. Neither does any of the articles I read give a reader or platform view of whether adaptations changed the industry, so that part of the outline, how adaptation shaped the business, rests on one number only: JunKoo Kim's 2014 statement, as the platform article gives it, that "a total of 189 books, videos, and games based on Naver webtoons have either been produced or are in the process of being made".

The Other Direction

The platform article's "Other media into webtoons" list shows adaptation running the other way too: young-adult novels, Korean web novels such as *The Remarried Empress*, a 2018 film (*On Your Wedding Day*) to be adapted as a webtoon, and webtoons based on TV series such as *Our Beloved Summer* (a prequel about the characters' high-school days) and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*. It also lists webtoons of Western properties, with *Batman: Wayne Family Adventures* (from September 2021) and *Eternals: The 500 Year War* (20 January 2022). The article says nothing about why a platform chooses a given property.

Back to Paper

The same section lists print: *Space Boy* from Dark Horse Books, *Lore Olympus* from Random House Worlds, and imprints such as Ize Press, Rocketship Entertainment and Webtoon Unscrolled. It says three volumes of the *Lore Olympus* print edition "all reach[ed] No. 1 on The New York Times Best Seller list". In Korea, the *Tower of God* and *True Beauty* articles mention print editions by Young Com. So the path from page to screen sometimes loops back to the page.

What the Sources Don't Say

- Why webtoons are adapted so often. Fans and commentators often point to a ready-made story and audience, but no source I read states this, so I leave it as a guess.
- Who owns the rights to an adaptation, and what the creator earns from it. The platform article mentions an "IP business" (Chapter 3) and no more.
- How faithful any adaptation is to its source, or how readers received the change.

Reading a Claim About an Adaptation

1. **What is the yardstick?** Hours, viewers, ratings, rankings and awards are different measures.
2. **What is the window?** "Next day", "seven days" and "30 days" are not comparable.
3. **Who says?** A streaming service, a critic, an article's "is said to".
4. **Is it about the screen or the page?** A hit series does not by itself show anything about the webtoon's readers.
5. **Which direction?** Check whether a work started as a webtoon or became one.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose three series from the table and give, for each, the platform or channel, the date and the source webtoon as the article gives them. Then say which series' creators also wrote the adaptation, according to the articles.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the success claims for *All of Us Are Dead*, *Hellbound* and *Moving*. For each, say what is measured, over what period, and what the claim cannot tell you.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Give two examples of adaptation running into webtoons, and two examples of webtoons going to print. Then say why the chapter does not claim that adaptation "changed the industry".

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Early example:** *Tazza*, 2006 film, from a newspaper serial
- **Screen:** *Misaeng* (2014), *Sweet Home* (2020), *Itaewon Class* (2020), *Yumi's Cells* (2021), *Hellbound* (2021), *All of Us Are Dead* (2022), *Moving* (2023)
- **Claims:** 474.26 million hours in 30 days; "most-watched" on one day; "most watched Korean original" on Disney+ in seven days; "is said to have revitalized" Disney+
- **Industry figure:** 189 books, videos and games from Naver webtoons (JunKoo Kim, 2014)
- **Other direction:** novels, dramas and Western comics turned into webtoons
- **Print:** Dark Horse, Random House Worlds, Ize Press, Webtoon Unscrolled; *Lore Olympus* on the New York Times list
- **Check:** whether the two "Kang Full" entries are one person; every viewing claim

Next chapter: Going Global, which covers overseas platforms and translations, how the format spread to other markets, and the argument about unofficial translations.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Going Global

Chapter 1 said official English translations of webtoons began in July 2014. This chapter follows what happened next: the launches in other countries, the different ways platforms handle translation, the services that closed or merged, and the argument about unofficial translation. The sources report both expansion and retreat, and the chapter keeps both in view.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon (its "Outside of South Korea" sections), Webtoon (platform), Kakao Webtoon, Piccoma and Scanlation. The Scanlation article is mostly about Japanese manga, and I read only the passages that mention Korean comics. I read no market reports, no accounts from translators or fans, and no statements from the platforms, and every date and figure is an article's claim. This chapter does not recommend where to read unofficial translations, and only reports what the articles say about them.

The Platforms Abroad

Where	What the articles say
Global launch	Line Webtoon launched worldwide on 2 July 2014 and "was changed to Webtoon in English" in 2019, with Spanish and French versions (platform article). Naver chose the name Line partly because "the Naver brand is not well known outside of South Korea".
Japan	Naver's service entered the Japanese market in 2016 as XOY; on 18 December 2018 it was closed and its content "migrated... to Line Manga" (platform article). Webtoons in Japan "were slow to catch on... mainly due to the traditional manga industry"; Japanese web manga "are often in black-and-white" (Webtoon article). Kakao's Piccoma carries Daum and KakaoPage webtoons in Japanese.
China, Taiwan	Naver entered China in 2016 as Dongman Manhua (咚漫漫画). The Webtoon article says webtoons and web *manhua* have grown there and that "almost all of the big webtoon portals in China are offered by the big internet companies in the country".

Where	What the articles say
India	Line Webtoon's 2014 launch "was the first go to app that introduced webtoons in India". Kross Komics, founded May 2019 in Seoul, offered 40 translated Korean titles in English, Hindi and Telugu and reported "1.1 million monthly active uses" in July 2021. Kakao Entertainment acquired it in 2020, and the article says it closed in 2023. Kakao continued with Tapas, whose "daily transaction volume exceeded 200 million won" in 2024.
Southeast Asia	Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand "have become big markets", with Naver (as WEBTOON) and Comico offering originals and translations. Some local webtoons (*Eggnoid*, *Teen Mom*) were translated abroad. Vietnam launched Vinatoon, which offers titles from Daum Webtoon.
West	"Many webtoon publishers have had success... with the biggest successes being the United States and other English speaking countries" (Webtoon article); Webtoon had "12.5 million monthly active users" in the U.S. as of March 2023 (platform article, Chapter 4).

Dates that don't line up

The Kross Komics passage says it "launched the first dedicated Indian webtoon portal in 2020", but also that its app was released on 7 December 2019 and that the company was founded in May 2019. It may be that 2020 is a wider launch, but the article does not say. Likewise, "Kakao Entertainment was planning to enter the Indian market after its acquisition of Kross Komics in 2020" sits beside "from Q3 2022, Kakao Entertainment will provide webtoon content", in a text that mixes plans and outcomes without dates.

Advances and Retreats

The same articles that record expansion also record withdrawal:

- Naver closed XOY in Japan in December 2018, two years after launch.
- Kakao's Piccoma launched a French service on 17 March 2021, and announced on 27 May 2024 that it would "cease all its operations" in Europe, with the service ending on 30 September 2024. The Piccoma article's stated reason is "a desire to downsize or shut down unprofitable overseas units".
- Kross Komics closed in 2023.

- The Kakao Webtoon article, as Chapter 3 noted, says that since October 2024 Kakao began shutting down webtoon services globally, and that on 22 September 2026 it announced it would shut down Tapas and merge Kakao Webtoon into KakaoPage.

Taken together, the articles show that "going global" was not a steady rise. Some services were closed within a few years, and an article's reason for a closure ("unprofitable") is the article's wording, with no company statement quoted.

Translation: Three Models

1. **Translate in-house.** "Lezhin Comics, Toomics, Manta, and WEBTOON translate their own titles rather than licensing them out."
2. **License translated works.** "Spottoon and Tappytoon offer translated licensed works from various publishers"; Delitoon "provides French translations of licensed works, mostly Korean titles".
3. **Fan translation inside the platform.** "WEBTOON offers the ability for fan translations to be offered in different languages." This is the only mention in the articles I read of fan translation as something a platform itself provides.

The Webtoon article also notes a fourth practice: **reworking for print**. Where it describes "printoonized comics (a portmanteau of 'print' and 'webtoon')", it says they are "completely restructured to achieve dynamic storytelling akin to the best action manga, moving away from the native vertical scrolling narration". It adds that, "thanks to printoonization, the comic *Solo Leveling* has sold over 900,000 copies of its first six volumes in France". That is a sales claim with no source, period or publisher named, and the causal "thanks to" is the article's.

The platform services also grew new ones. TopToon's TopToonPlus launched in July 2021 and "gained over 200,000 subscribers" in its first month; it was rebranded DayComics in 2023. In 2022, Kakao Entertainment "merged with Radish Media and the aforementioned Tapas to form a single entity", to serve "the US market". There has also been "a rise in the creation of original non-Asian webtoons", through sites that let anyone submit their own work. So webtoons are no longer only Korean works translated: the format has its own foreign-language creators.

Piracy and Unofficial Translation

Chapter 1 recorded that "prior to 2014, most webtoons were only available in English through unofficial fan translations", and Chapter 3 that the platform article says Naver did not join a 2012 crackdown on illegal sites that had copied its content for eight years. The Scanlation article defines *scanlation* as "the fan-made scanning, translation, and editing of comics from one language into another", done "as an amateur work performed by groups and... nearly always done without express permission from the copyright holder". It says the term "is mainly used for Japanese manga, although it also exists for other languages, such as Korean manhwa". On the Korean side it reports:

- In 2020, the artist Haesin Young "threatened legal action against a piracy website".
- In 2021, Lezhin "said that they are working with law firms to bring legal charges against manga piracy sites, after accusations from several manhwa authors, including manhwa artist YD, that scanlation causes authors to lose money and motivation".
- "The Korean government and Interpol initiated a three-year-long cooperative investigation in April" (the passage I read gives no year) aimed at people distributing pirated or illegally translated comics, cartoons and novels.

> **One side of an argument**
>
> The passages I read set out the creators' and publishers' side: lost income and motivation, and legal action. I did not read the fan side or any evidence on how piracy affects sales, and the articles I used do not weigh the two. The facts in this chapter that bear on it are that official English translation did not begin until 2014, and that platforms have since added both paid licensed translation and, on one platform, a way for fans to supply translations inside the system. Whether piracy "loses" money, and how much, is a claim these sources do not measure.

Reading a Claim About Going Global

1. **Launch or still running?** Check whether a service named in an article has since closed or merged.
2. **Whose reason?** "Unprofitable" and "popular" are the article's words.
3. **Which country and which measure?** Downloads, monthly users, subscribers and transaction volumes are different things.
4. **Official or unofficial?** A translation's status changes what a claim about readers means.
5. **What is the other side?** A one-sided account of a dispute is a gap.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose three markets from the table and give, for each, one fact about a Korean platform's entry and one about what is said to have followed. Then name two services that closed or were announced to close, with the dates the articles give.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe the three translation models and the print-reworking practice the articles name, and say what is unsourced about the *Solo Leveling* sales claim.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Define scanlation as the Scanlation article does, give two Korean-side events it reports, and explain why this chapter says the sources present only one side of the piracy argument.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Global launch:** Line Webtoon, 2 July 2014; renamed Webtoon 2019
- **Closures:** XOY (Japan) December 2018; Kross Komics (India) 2023; Piccoma France/Europe 30 September 2024; Kakao Webtoon/Tapas announced changes (September 2026 claim)
- **Models:** translate in-house; license translations; fan translations inside the platform; reworked "printoonized" print editions

- **Claims:** 900,000 copies of the first six *Solo Leveling* volumes in France; 200,000 TopToonPlus subscribers in a month
- **Piracy:** scanlation is fan translation without permission; 2020 and 2021 actions by artists and Lezhin; a Korean–Interpol investigation
- **Check:** the Kross Komics dates, every "unprofitable" reason, the French sales claim, the other side of the piracy argument

Next chapter: Creators and the Industry, which covers who makes webtoons, what the sources say about pay, contracts and working conditions, and how to read claims about "overnight success".

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Creators and the Industry

Earlier chapters described platforms, formats and titles. This chapter asks about the people who make webtoons. The sources are uneven: one creator's career is documented in detail, the money figures come from a platform, and the claims about working conditions are few, loosely sourced and sometimes severe. The chapter reports what is there, marks what is missing, and does not fill the gap.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Kang Full, Lezhin Comics, Webtoon (platform) and Webtoon, as I read them. I searched Wikipedia for articles on webtoon artists' working conditions, creator unions and studio structure and found none, so what I report on those subjects is thin, and the chapter says so. I read no news reports, surveys, contracts or creators' own accounts, and I did not read the BBC report that an earlier chapter's source mentions. Every number is an article's claim.

A note on tone

This chapter concerns people's livelihoods and, in one passage, a death. I report what the articles claim, with their owners, and I draw no conclusions about any person or company. Disputes between creators and a platform are reported in Chapter 9.

One Documented Career: Kang Full

The article on **Kang Full** (Kang Do-yeong, born 1974) is the most detailed account of a webtoon creator I found. It describes him as "one of the first-generation webtoon artists in South Korea" and gives his career in dated steps, which makes a useful test case. The facts below are the article's.

- **Slow start.** He "began his career as a cartoonist in 1997", and "his early work faced limited commercial success. Of the two publishers that showed interest in his series, one went bankrupt during serialization."

- **The move online (2002).** He launched his own website and began a daily comic strip there. The article says his move online "was driven by a lack of interest from traditional publishers and a preference for long form storytelling". By July 2002 the site "averaged 10,000 daily visitors". In late 2002 he signed with Daum, then joined "the newly established Daum Manhwa-sok-sesang, the precursor to Daum Webtoon".
- **Breakthrough (2003–2004).** *Pure Love Comics* ran on Daum from August 2003 to April 2004, "averaged 2 million daily page views and reached a total of 60 million views", became a print book and a 2008 film. In November 2004 he "signed a 10 million yen (approximately 100 million won) publishing deal with Japan's Futabasha, which marked a record for South Korean comic exports at the time".
- **Scale.** By the end of 2008 his "collected works had surpassed 300 million cumulative page views on the Daum platform", and *Every Moment of Your Life* (2010–2011) "reached a total of 150 million views". The article lists film and television adaptations, including *Apartment* (a 2006 film), *The Neighbor* (a 2012 film "drawing 2.4 million viewers") and, from a 2015 webtoon, *Moving*.

> **Two open flags closed**
>
> Chapters 1 and 4 met "Kang Full" as the artist the Webtoon article credits with developing the vertical scroll in 2003 with *Soonjeong Manhwa* on Media Daum, and Chapter 6 met a "Kang Full" credited with writing *Moving*. The Kang Full article answers Chapter 6's question: it says he "gained wider international recognition for the Disney+ original series *Moving* (2023), which he wrote based on his 2015 webtoon", and it describes *Pure Love Comics* (Daum, 2003–2004) as his breakthrough. So by this article the two entries are one person, and the 2003 Daum series is the same period the Webtoon article names. The Kang Full article, in the parts I read, does not mention a vertical-scroll innovation, so it neither confirms nor contradicts the Webtoon article's scroll claim.

What the career does and doesn't show

The article's timeline contradicts the idea of overnight success: a career begun in 1997, five years of limited success, a move to a personal website, and a breakthrough around 2003. It also shows how the money figures work. The big numbers here (60 million, 300 million, 150 million) are page views, and the one payment figure is a single foreign publishing deal. The article gives no income, no contract terms with Daum and no cost of production, so it tells us how popular a creator became and says nothing about how much he earned.

What the Sources Say About Pay

Chapter 4 gave the platform article's figures: $27 million paid to more than 120,000 English-language creators between 2020 and 2021 (about $225 each), "top creators" in Korea earning "an average of $250,000 per year", and one creator earning "around $9 million in 2021". Chapter 3 gave the Webtoon article's models: pay depends on page views, and amateur creators earned from fan "credit" until 2019. The articles I read say nothing more about earnings, so the typical creator's income is not stated anywhere I could find. The three figures answer different questions and cannot be averaged.

Contracts and Conditions: What Is Claimed

Claim	Source in the articles, and what is missing
Naver introduced ads on webtoons in 2008 but "did not fairly share the ad revenue with artists".	Webtoon (platform) article. No figures, and no named judge of "fairly". The article says a revenue share (Page Profit Share) first came in 2013.
Naver "absorbed the electronic publication rights of Korean artists for a small fee", which "allowed them to monopolize works for a long time".	Same article. No contract, fee or year named.
Aspiring creators submitted free comics; only "the 0.1%" received "a formal serialization"; freelance creators "could not unite".	Same article. The 0.1% has no source.
Vertical scroll "demand[ed] over 100 cuts, which strained artists' health"; "Kakao Webtoons' top artist... died at the age of 37 due to overwork"; "the BBC reported on artists suffering from severe labor and exploitation".	Same article. The artist is unnamed, no date or cause is sourced, and I did not read the BBC report. I report the claim and do not treat it as established.
A late-delivery penalty charged "up to 9% of their monthly income" if a manuscript was more than two days late; the Korean Webtoon Authors Association criticised it in	Lezhin Comics article. This is the one concrete contract term with named parties and dates in the articles I read.

Claim	Source in the articles, and what is missing
September 2017, and Lezhin said in November 2017 the penalty would end by 1 February 2018.	
A "forum organized by the culture ministry was held" in January 2018 "to address the issue of abusive practices within the industry".	Lezhin Comics article. A state response is mentioned, but the forum's outcome is not.

What the Sources Don't Say

- How a studio is organised: how many assistants, who writes and who draws, and who pays whom (Chapter 4 also found this gap).
- Typical hours, rates per episode or contract lengths.
- How many creators are in the Korean Webtoon Authors Association, or what unions or collective bargaining exist.
- Whether conditions have changed since 2017 or 2018, beyond the late-penalty change above.
- Any creator's own account, apart from the Kang Full article's quoted remarks about why he moved online.

If you want this subject properly, look for the Korean Webtoon Authors Association's statements, government surveys of webtoon creators, and news reporting, and treat each as a source with its own interest.

Reading a Claim About Creators

1. **Views or income?** A page-view total says how popular a work was, and not what its creator earned.
2. **Top or typical?** "Top creators" and "all creators" are different groups.
3. **Dated and named?** The late penalty has parties and dates; "the 0.1%" has neither.
4. **Overnight?** Check how many years came before the breakthrough.
5. **Whose account?** A platform, an association, a journalist and a creator will each describe the same situation differently.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the Kang Full article, give four dated steps in his career from 1997 to 2004, and say why the article's timeline does not support an "overnight success" story. Then say what the Kang Full article settles about the "Kang Full" entries in Chapters 1, 4 and 6.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why a figure of 300 million cumulative page views tells you nothing about a creator's income. Then list the three pay figures from Chapter 4 and say why they cannot be averaged.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

From the claims table, pick the claim with the most concrete detail and the one with the least, and explain the difference. Then name three things about creators' working lives that the sources do not say.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Kang Full:** career from 1997; personal website 2002; Daum, *Pure Love Comics* 2003–2004 (60 million views); Futabasha deal 2004; 300 million Daum views by end 2008; *Moving* (2015)
- **Pay figures:** $27 million to 120,000 creators (2020–21); $250,000 top-creator average; $9 million for one creator (2021)

- **Concrete contract term:** late penalty up to 9% of monthly income, criticised September 2017, ended by 1 February 2018
- **Loosely sourced:** unfair ad share, rights fees, the 0.1%, over 100 cuts, an artist's death at 37, the BBC report
- **Not covered:** studio structure, hours, rates, associations and unions, creators' own accounts

Next chapter: Rules, Ratings and Controversies, which covers age ratings and regulation and reports disputes as reported, with owners.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Rules, Ratings and Controversies

Comics that anyone can read on a phone raise questions about who may read what, who decides, and what happens when a story, a contract or a drawing causes a row. This chapter covers the rating and regulation framework as far as the sources go, then reports four disputes, each as a set of claims with owners and, where the articles say so, a result. It takes no side on the people involved.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Webtoon, Manhwa, Internet censorship in South Korea, Lezhin Comics, Backstreet Rookie, Finger pinching conspiracy theory and Hyde Jekyll, Me. I read the Lezhin controversy section in full, the Backstreet Rookie and Hyde Jekyll, Me passages that mention webtoons, and only the opening and webtoon-related passage of the finger-pinching article. I read no news reports, court records, commission rulings or statements from the people named, so each dispute is an article's account, not an established fact. Where a dispute has no outcome in the article, I say so.

A note on tone

Disputes involve named companies, creators and ordinary people, and some touch on heated topics. I describe each as the article describes it, attribute every claim, avoid quoting the explicit or insulting parts, and say nothing about anyone's motives. Reading a dispute is not the same as judging it.

Ratings

The Webtoon article says that "in the past, it was divided into two ratings: All (webtoon suitable for all ages) and 18 (No one under 18 is allowed to read this webtoon)". It continues: "From May 2019, the webtoon rating system was implemented. It is said that 10 platforms including Naver and Daum will participate. The ratings are expected to be All, 12 years or older, 15 years or older, 19 years old (18 years old) or older."

The wording is tentative: "it is said", "will participate" and "are expected to be". The article does not say whether the system came into force as described, which platforms joined, or who set it up. It also says "19 (18)" without explaining the two numbers. So the safe summary is that the article reports a move from a two-level to a four-level system around May 2019, and gives no detail I could check.

The Rules Around Online Comics

- **Online versus print.** The Webtoon article says "in the case of South Korea, there are also different censorship laws for materials published online than in print which has led to more comics that are erotic and sexually explicit being produced and published as webtoons". The Manhwa article says webtoons "helped [creators] get around strict South Korean censorship laws". Chapter 2 found that print comics faced censorship laws and a distribution monopoly by the mid-1960s, with no detail after that. So the articles agree that the online route was less restricted than print, and neither names a law.
- **Age-restricted works.** The Internet censorship in South Korea article says that since the 2010s, "regulations have been relaxed" and that sexually explicit works "that were previously illegal have been legally classified as 'harmful media for youth' (청소년유해매체물), primarily in the form of webtoons, subject to mandatory age verification", with limits on what may be depicted. It does not name the law or give a year.
- **The regulator.** The same article says the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) was created in 2008 to replace an earlier committee, and that it may suspend a posting for 30 days "as soon as a complaint is filed". That passage is about internet content generally, and it does not mention webtoons.

The article's tone is critical, and it frames South Korea's rules as strict. I report its description and take no position on whether the rules are too strict or too lax.

Four Disputes, as Reported

1. Lezhin Comics and its creators (2017–2018)

The Lezhin Comics article lists these events and attributes each to a report or a statement:

- **September 2017.** A creator announced on social media, at the end of her contract, that she had been pushed to keep working on her webtoon while ill. The Korean Webtoon

Authors Association issued a statement about Lezhin's late-delivery penalty of up to 9% of monthly income (Chapter 8).

- **November 2017.** Lezhin announced it would end the late penalty by 1 February 2018, with a three-month period to negotiate contracts.
- **December 2017.** An article "reported a blacklist Lezhin had for their artists, which specifically excluded them from advertisements and promotional events". Lezhin denied it.
- **January 2018.** SBS reported "a leaked email to exclude several works from the main page". Lezhin announced it would end its contracts with two authors, EunSong and Michii, who said they learned of it from social media, not from Lezhin; Lezhin "later stated that they would take legal action against EunSong and Michii for the spread of false rumors". A protest was held at Lezhin's office on 11 January, and a forum "organized by the culture ministry" was held late in the month on "abusive practices within the industry".
- **July 2018.** Lezhin's CEO "officially acknowledged and apologized for the allegation that it created a blacklist" and for the confusion after the discontinuation of its web novel platform.

> **What the article leaves unclear**
>
> The July 2018 sentence says the CEO acknowledged and apologised "for the allegation that it created a blacklist". That could mean he acknowledged the blacklist, or only that the allegation had caused harm. The article does not say which, and it does not report what became of the legal action against the two authors, or what the ministry's forum concluded. In an earlier passage, the same company denied the blacklist. The chapter therefore reports a denial in 2017 and an apology in 2018 and cannot say what Lezhin accepted.

2. A warning over an adaptation

The Backstreet Rookie article says the 2020 series is based on the webtoon *She's Too Much for Me* (2016–2017). It reports that the KCSC "issued a warning to the show for airing provocative and inappropriate scenes". The article quotes the commission's note: "in the process of producing an R-rated webtoon into a TV series with a rating of 15 years old and older, the drama production team has shown that it lacks consideration in portraying different genders and produced content that can cause viewers discomfort and aversion". It adds that the KCSC "has received over 7,000 complaints". This is a regulatory warning, not a ban, and the article gives no penalty. It is also a case of the rating gap in practice: a work rated for adults on one

medium turned into a programme with a younger rating on another. The article gives no date for the warning.

3. A hand gesture and a platform's edits

The Finger pinching conspiracy theory article describes an online campaign, first prominent in May 2021, in which people claimed that a hand gesture shown in advertisements and media carried a hidden insult placed by a political group. The article calls this "an antifeminist conspiracy theory" and says it persists "despite contradictory claims and a general lack of evidence"; that is the article's framing, which I report and do not endorse or reject. For webtoons, it says Webtoon "became a subject of constant disputes for the company's policies over the fingers", and that *Return of the Blossoming Blade* and *Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint* "were criticized for censoring the alleged depiction of finger pinching hand gestures", with opponents of the theory calling Naver's actions "inconsistent censorship and misogynic". The article also reports that the dispute led companies to spend "extra resources" altering advertisements to avoid complaints, citing the Chosun Ilbo. I read only that passage and the opening, I did not read the article's treatment of the accusers' side, and the article says nothing about the platform's own reasons for the edits.

4. A plagiarism claim

The Hyde Jekyll, Me article says the author of the webtoon the 2015 series was based on "alleged on his Twitter account that the screenwriter of *Kill Me, Heal Me* plagiarized his work", since both series are about a woman who falls in love with a man with dissociative identity disorder and aired in the same time slot. MBC "denied the plagiarism accusation", and SBS "clarified that Lee's statement was his personal opinion and did not reflect the stance of the whole production team". The article reports no further step.

How to Read a Dispute

1. **Whose claim, and who answered?** For each, name the claimant and the response (a denial, an apology, silence).
2. **Is there an outcome?** Two of the four above have none in the article.
3. **Allegation or finding?** A report of a blacklist is an allegation; a commission's warning is a decision; a claim of plagiarism is an accusation.
4. **Which article's framing?** The finger-pinching article uses strong labels, and the Internet censorship article is critical in tone. Notice where the writer, and not the source, supplies

the label.

5. **What was not read?** An encyclopaedia summary is a start, not the file.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the rating change the Webtoon article reports, with the date and the levels, and explain what is uncertain about it. Then give two things the articles say about online and print rules, and one thing they do not say.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using the Lezhin timeline, separate what is reported as an allegation, what is a company statement and what is an event that happened (a protest, a forum). Then explain why the July 2018 apology is ambiguous.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

For the Backstreet Rookie warning and the plagiarism claim, say who made the claim, who responded and what outcome the article reports. Then write a two-sentence neutral summary of one dispute that attributes every claim.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Ratings:** once All and 18; from May 2019 a system "expected to be" All, 12, 15, 19 (tentative wording)

- **Rules:** online rules reported as lighter than print; adult works classed as "harmful media for youth" with age verification; KCSC created 2008
- **Lezhin (2017–18):** late penalty ended; blacklist allegation denied, then CEO apologised July 2018; two contract terminations; protest 11 January; ministry forum
- **Backstreet Rookie:** KCSC warning over a 15+ drama from an R-rated webtoon; 7,000+ complaints
- **Finger pinching:** disputes over edits in webtoons; the article's framing is a conspiracy theory
- **Plagiarism claim:** Lee Choong-ho's allegation; MBC denied; no further step reported
- **Check:** every outcome, every date not given, and every label the article supplies

Next chapter: Capstone: Reading Claims About Webtoons, which gathers the course's threads (format, platform, money, screen, world) and a checklist for any claim about a webtoon, a hit or the industry.

Korean Webtoons and Manhwa

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Reading Claims About Webtoons

This last chapter adds no new sources. It gathers what Chapters 1 to 9 found into five threads, turns the method into a checklist, and tests the checklist on a sentence of the kind that appears in articles and press releases. The aim is a way of reading, so the next claim you meet about a webtoon, a hit or the industry can be sorted into what is documented, what is claimed and what is missing.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> Every fact below was taken from Chapters 1 to 9 of this course, where it is attributed to the Wikipedia articles I read. I added and re-checked no source for this chapter. That means the flags raised earlier are still open, and the list near the end says which. The course's sources were almost all Wikipedia articles, which are summaries with their own gaps, so this is a course in reading claims and not a reference work on the industry.

Five Threads

1. Format

A webtoon is an episodic digital comic, a long vertical strip on an "infinite canvas", usually in colour, made for phones (Chapters 1 and 4). The sources disagree on who brought the scroll to Korean comics: one credits Kang Full's 2003 long-form work on Daum, another credits an executive's scrolling mechanism in 2004 (Chapter 4), and the Kang Full article does not mention the scroll. The word *webtoon* itself is dated to 8 August 2000 (Chapter 1). **Lesson:** "invented" and "first" mean different things, and the answer depends on whether you mean the word, the comic, the scroll or the platform.

2. Platform

Comics moved online through portals (Lycos Korea 2000, Daum 2003, Naver 2004), then Kakao Page and Lezhin (2013), and went global with Line Webtoon on 2 July 2014 (Chapters 3 and 7). The sources describe the portals using comics as "bait" for traffic. They also record retreat: XOY in Japan closed in 2018, Piccoma Europe ended in 2024, and one article reports Kakao's plans to

shut or merge services (Chapters 3 and 7). **Lesson:** a platform story is a story of launches and closures, and an article's reason for a closure is its own wording.

3. Money

Free chapters, ads (Naver, 2008), "free if you wait", coins and Daily Passes, revenue share (2013), rights and IP business (Chapters 3 and 4). The pay figures are three different questions: $27 million over 120,000 English-language creators (about $225 each), $250,000 for top Korean creators, and $9 million for one creator in one year (Chapter 4). One documented career, Kang Full's, shows years of limited success before a breakthrough, and counts in page views, not income (Chapter 8). **Lesson:** ask what is counted, for whom and over what period before any number is used.

4. Screen

Webtoons have been adapted into films and series since *Tazza* (2006), through *Misaeng*, *Itaewon Class*, *Sweet Home*, *Hellbound*, *All of Us Are Dead* and *Moving*, and adaptation also runs the other way, from novels, dramas and Western comics into webtoons (Chapters 5 and 6). The success claims use different yardsticks: hours watched, a one-day ranking, a seven-day window, an award. **Lesson:** a hit on screen does not by itself tell you about the webtoon's readers.

5. World

Translation models differ (in-house, licensed, fan translation inside a platform), "printoonized" print editions are a further route, and piracy is described by creators and publishers as a loss of income and motivation (Chapter 7). At home, the sources report rating levels, online-versus-print rules and four disputes with outcomes mostly unknown (Chapter 9). **Lesson:** an account of a dispute should say who claimed, who answered, and what, if anything, was decided.

The Checklist

Question	What to look for
1. Who says so?	An owner for every claim: an article, a platform, a creator, a commission. "According to" is cheap to write and worth the habit.

Question	What to look for
2. What kind of "first"?	The word, the comic, the scroll, the portal, the platform, the translation and the global launch are different firsts.
3. What is counted?	Views, likes, subscribers, hours watched, revenue and payouts are different things.
4. Which market, version and year?	Korea, the U.S. and the world; the English version or the original; "as of" a date.
5. Does the arithmetic work?	Check ratios and totals: 23.2 billion to 2.25 trillion won is about 97 times, not "87".
6. Top, typical or one?	An average for top creators and a single outlier do not describe a typical income.
7. Cause or sequence?	"Caused the industry to collapse" and "after the economic crisis" are different claims.
8. Allegation, decision or outcome?	A report of a blacklist, a commission's warning and a company's apology are three kinds of statement.
9. Still true?	Platform news dates quickly: services close, rename and merge.
10. What is missing?	A schedule, a studio structure or a typical income that the sources do not give is a result too.

Trying It: a Press-Release Sentence

"Naver invented the webtoon in 2004, and webtoons now make $5.91 billion a year."

Using only what the course found:

- **Who says?** No owner is given.
- **What kind of "first"?** The articles name 1996 (*Uninhabited Island*), 2000 (Lycos Korea's section and the word), 2003 (Daum) and 2004 (Naver Webtoon, with the platform also "founded in 2005"). 2004 is one of several dates, and "invented" fits none of them cleanly (Chapter 1).

- **What is counted, where, when?** The $5.91 billion appears in one article as global and in another as "in just the U.S. alone", with no year and no "a year" in either (Chapter 1).
- **Still true?** "Now" has no date.
- **A safer version:** "The platform Naver Webtoon launched in 2004, one of several early Korean webtoon services; Wikipedia gives a figure of $5.91 billion for webtoon revenue without a year and describes it as both a global and a U.S. figure."

What Is Still Open

Earlier chapters raised flags that I could not close. Treat them as questions and not findings:

- Which of the 1996, 2000, 2003 and 2004 starts counts as "first", and the Daum "first official webtoon platform in the world" claim (Chapters 1 and 3).
- The $5.91 billion figure (global or U.S.), the 87-times claim (about 97), and the undated user counts (Chapters 1, 3 and 4).
- Almost everything about print manhwa after the mid-1960s: magazines, regulation, the 1990s and the decline (Chapter 2).
- Weekly schedules, studio structure, typical income and conditions (Chapters 4 and 8), and the loosely sourced claims about the 0.1%, the 100 cuts, and an artist's death (Chapter 3).
- The claims for each hit, and the webtoon sides of *Misaeng* and *Yumi's Cells* (Chapters 5 and 6).
- The 2026 Kakao shutdown and merger report, and the reasons given for closures (Chapters 3 and 7).
- The effect of piracy, and the fan side of the argument (Chapter 7).
- The outcome of the Lezhin legal action and the ministry forum, and the ambiguous 2018 apology; the three other disputes' outcomes (Chapter 9).

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose three of the five threads. For each, name one example from the course and the checklist question it teaches.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Apply at least four checklist questions to this sentence and write a safer version using only facts from Chapters 4 and 5: "True Beauty has over 800 million readers and its creator earns $250,000 a year."

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick one title, creator, platform or dispute from the course and write five lines for a reader: what it is, what the sources record, what they only claim, what is still open, and where to look next. Attribute every claim.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Threads:** format, platform, money, screen, world
- **Checklist:** who says so; what kind of first; what is counted; which market, version and year; does the arithmetic work; top, typical or one; cause or sequence; allegation, decision or outcome; still true; what is missing
- **Method:** attribute every claim, hedge what you cannot check, report a gap as a result
- **Still open:** the flags listed above

End of course. Related courses: K-Drama and Korean Film and K-Pop have their own chapters on the screen and music sides of Korean popular culture.