



*A Petal (1996), Fork Lane (2017), and A
Taxi Driver (2017): The Cinematic
Portrayal of South Korea's Authoritarianism
through the 1980 Gwangju Uprising*

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Abstract

The 1980 Gwangju Uprising was the cornerstone of a much larger democratisation movement in South Korea, yet it still remains a highly polarising topic between conservatives and liberals among the masses 30 years on, and government investigations into the uprising are still inconclusive. Drawing from the contentious nature of this collectively traumatic historical event, numerous films have been produced to reflect upon, reappraise, and reinterpret what the uprising revealed about the political situation of South Korea in the 1980s, as well as the future of politics there. This paper examines the films *A Petal (1996)*, *Fork Lane (2017)* and *A Taxi annDriver (2017)*, analysing how each of these films coalesce and contrast in their portrayal of South Korea's period of authoritarianism, specifically the belief systems (or lack thereof) that undergirded its authoritarianism, the handling of opposition by the authoritarian regime and finally on the future of authoritarianism in South Korea.

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Introduction to the Gwangju Uprising

In the wake of President Park Chung-hee's assassination in October 1979, and the widespread social and political instability in South Korea, then-Major General Chun Do-hwan led the coup d'état of December Twelfth. Soon, the democratization movements initially suppressed during Park's dictatorship were revived, and citizens participated in anti-martial law demonstrations across the country. This triggered a series of suppressive responses from the authoritarian government, beginning with nation-wide martial law imposed on 17 May 1980. While most protests in the nation were quelled, the situation was dis-similar in Gwangju, whose Gross National Product was only 75% of the national average and whose agriculture accounted for 38% of South Jeolla's output, being far above the 18% national average; along with its economic disenfranchisement came a long history of protests, protests that culminated in the the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. The Gwangju Uprising was thus a popular uprising against Chun Do-hwan's authoritarian rule, which was met with violent repression. Today, the Gwangju Uprising is widely celebrated as a milestone in Korea's road to democracy, and its victims are commemorated via the May 18 Memorial Foundation.

Belief Systems (or Lack Thereof) that Legitimise South Korean Authoritarianism

Beyond the economic inequality that fuelled the Gwangju protests while democracy movements elsewhere in Korea faltered, another reason for Gwangju's political isolation was the nature of belief systems that allowed authoritarianism to go relatively unchallenged in the other parts of South Korea. The belief system sustaining Chun Do-Hwan's regime was not primarily ideology, which refers to an avoidance of fundamentalist principles, but rather "mentality", which was a focus on non-codified ways for rulers to respond to different situations (Linz, 2000). The vagueness of mentality which the authoritarian regime relied upon prevented the population from identifying with the regime and discouraged the formation of clear camps of hardline opposition to the regime. Both resulted in the depoliticisation of the general population and fostered "the tendency toward political apathy of most citizens" (Linz, 2000).

In *A Taxi Driver*, which tells the story of a local taxi driver Mr Kim and his fight to help a foreign journalist, Hinzpeter, to enter Gwangju and document the atrocities of the military, society's political apathy and depoliticisation is displayed through the responses of the Seoul residents to the events in Gwangju. Mr Kim's internal dialogues display his disapproval toward the protests (Figure 1). He even remarks that the protestors do not belong to Korea and should be "shipped off to Saudi Arabia". When he reaches Gwangju and Hinzpeter is picked up by a group of young protestors in a truck, he promises to follow them in his taxi, but instantly turns around in the direction of Seoul. Despite seeing the aftermath of military suppression, he

dismisses the possibility of the military acting so brutally, citing his own involvement in the military years ago. Mr Kim represents the general sentiment of outsiders; sceptical of the military's actions, and lacking real knowledge of the extent of the damage done in Gwangju. The political apathy is so rife that the people of Gwangju turn to a foreigner (Hinzpeter) to support and publicise their cause. Later on, Mr Kim returns to Seoul and eats at a noodle stall where locals are criticising the Gwangju protestors (Figure 2), and newspapers incriminating the protestors have been circulated (Figure 3). Some could be apathetic because they are unaware of the events in Gwangju as a result of the government's control of the press. Others could simply be ignorant, and it is plausible that the government's emphasis on nationalism clouded the judgment of the people, somewhat brainwashing them into subordination.



Figure 1: Mr Kim denying that the military would be so brutal

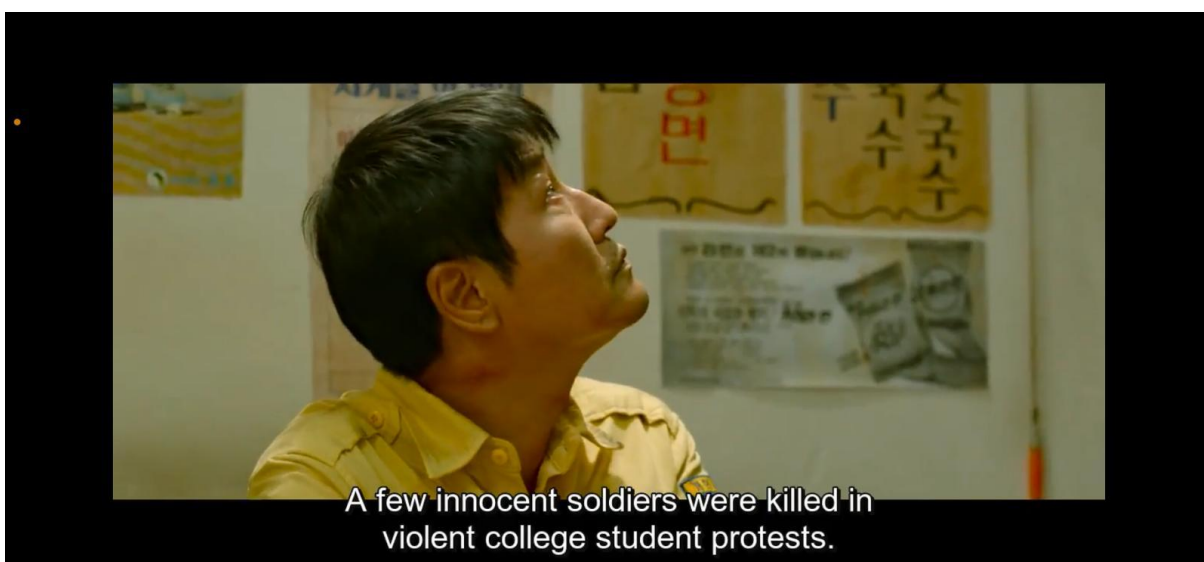


Figure 2: Seoul citizens spreading the false reports from Gwangju



Figure 3: A newspaper article in Seoul

A *Petal* (which tells the story of a girl traumatised by her mother's death at the hands of Gwangju soldiers, and the girl's complex relationship with an older man who simultaneously cares for her and abuses her) also shows the general political apathy displayed by South Koreans. This is highlighted in how the menial labourers are more invested in their personal affairs, calling the news of the Uprising "distracting" and asking for the television channel to be changed to something else (Figure 4). The masses' political apathy is also seen in the marketplace scene, as the girl is mostly ignored by the people who are immersed in buying their own goods (Figure 6). The girl is a symbol of the then infantile South Korean democracy, having no resources to depend upon, evinced by her begging on the streets in an attempt to provide for herself (Figure 5). The scene is a parallel to South Korea's climate in the early 1980s where the populace was more concerned with the primary goal of economic development, rather than the political scene.

In any case, the majority of the public we see in both films are devoid of solidarity for their fellow Koreans in Gwangju, who laid down their lives in pursuit of freedom from authoritarian rule.



Figure 4: Labourers response to the news on Gwangju Uprising during their dinner



Figure 5: The Girl is begging in the marketplace



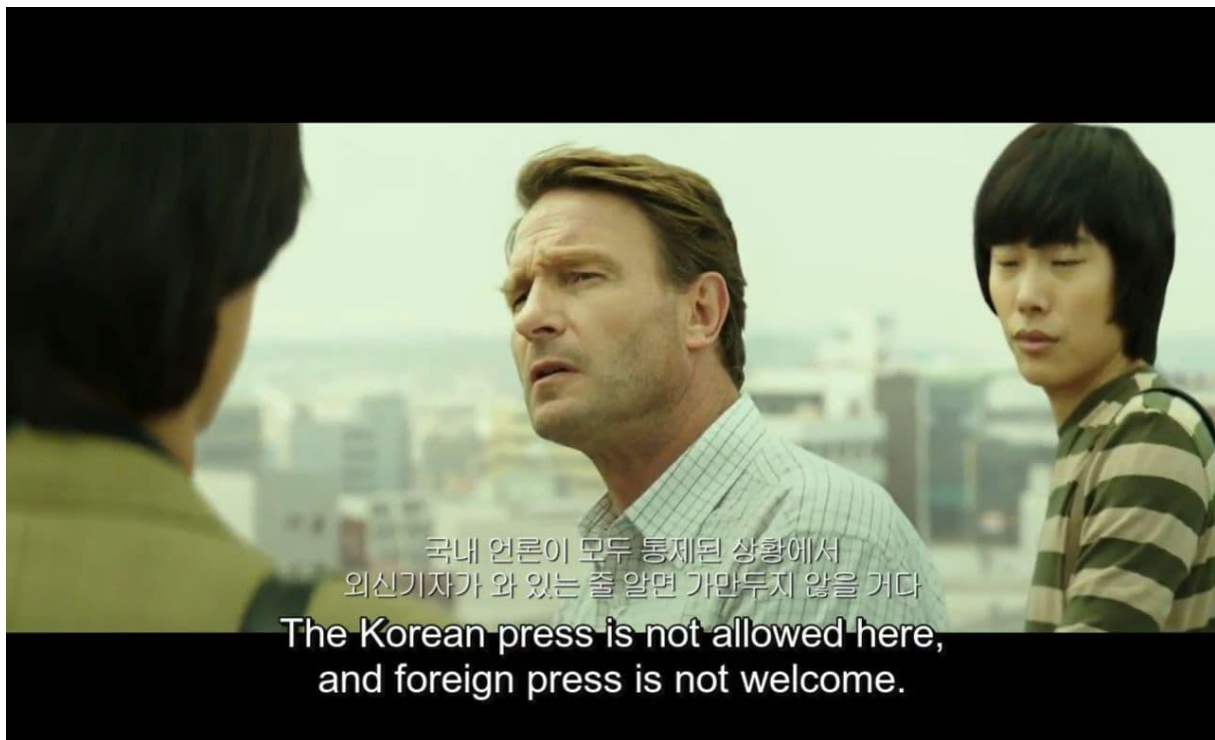
Figure 6: People in the marketplace pay the Girl no attention and continue their own activities

Response of South Korea's Authoritarian Government to Opposition

While depoliticisation of the masses was effective in preventing the democratic movement from gaining momentum in most of Korea, it evidently failed in Gwangju, and as such the South Korean government responded by enforcing authoritarianism in Gwangju via controlling the media and physical violence.

Under South Korea's martial law, the press and media (such as the media and intelligence agencies reporting from South Korea) were heavily censored by the government. Chun Doo-hwan was able to control all intelligence, diplomatic and military communication channels which prevented any information regarding the Gwangju Uprising from garnering international attention (Kwak, 2012), which is reflected in the films we analysed. In *A Taxi Driver*, the higher-ups storm into the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) News Station in Gwangju to stop the production distribution of the newspapers (Figure 8.2) because of the attempts to release news on the Uprising (Figure 8.1). It can also be seen in how the military (Figures 7.1, 7.2) was keeping a special lookout for Hinzepter, Mr Kim and their taxi (Figure 9). The heavy crackdown on the press hence prevented the masses outside of Gwangju from learning about the truth, a scene highlighted in *A Petal*, as the workers debate on the true origins and nature of the Uprising (Figure 10). This reflects how the South Koreans were left to form their own

opinions based on mere word-of-mouth, causing information to be rudimentary and fragmented- a parallel can be seen in how the rumour of the Girl spreads in Seocheon spreads but no one has any detailed information on the rumour itself (Figures 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4). The effectiveness of clamping down on media is conveyed in *A Petal* as the group of friends looking for the Girl is always one step behind following the trail of information (Figures 12.1, 12.2). It depicts the futility of their search for information and the Girl as the media has been stifled so effectively that they are unable to obtain any concrete evidence of the Uprising and its aftermath.





Figures 7.1 & 7.2: The government's clampdown on media



Figure 8.1: The newspapers covering the atrocities of the Gwangju Uprising



Figure 8.2: The higher-ups shutting down the newspaper production



Figure 9: The military's blacklisting and subsequent lookout for Hinzpeter and Mr Kim



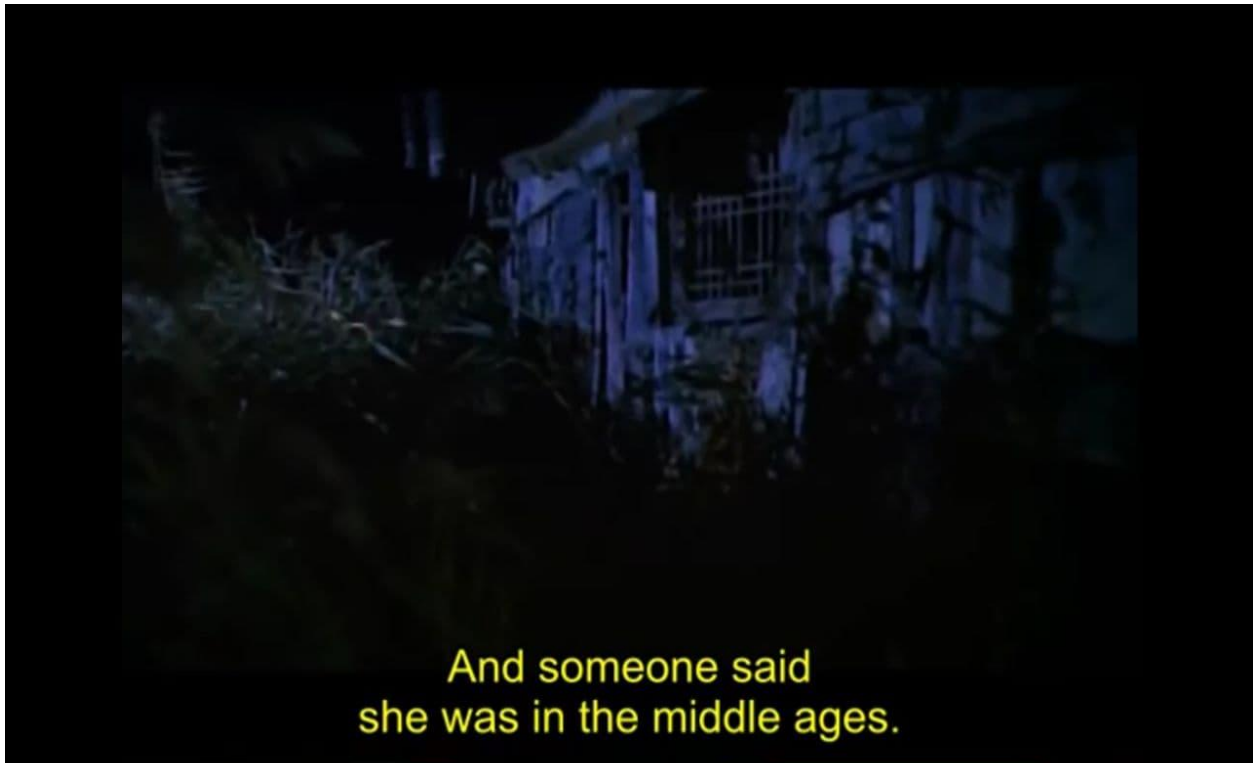
Figure 10: Workers talking about the Uprising, based on their knowledge



A girl lived at an abandoned farm house.



Someone said it was a
young woman from somewhere.



Figures 11.1, 11.2, 11.3 and 11.4: Rumours of the Girl in Seocheon



Figure 12.1: The group arrives in Seocheon after the Girl has left



Sir, don't go.

Figure 12.2: The group arrives at the Man's house after the Girl has left

All three films we explore are also consistent with reports that the soldiers attacked anyone with excessive force. Eyewitness accounts tell us that the military soldiers “hunt[ed] for

humans” - brutally attacking anyone in sight. They would even give chase, as if “hunting” down innocent individuals. *A Taxi Driver* emphasised this: the military did not merely forcefully clear the streets of protestors; they followed them and beat them (Figure 13), and then turned their attention to everyone else in the premises (Stokes & Xiao, 2000).



Figure 13: Soldiers beating a civilian mercilessly

On 21 May, the soldiers’ cruelty escalated and they “opened fire on citizens” (Stokes & Xiao, 2000). As portrayed in the films, the soldiers trampled their victims, and seemed intent on trapping and torturing those who tried to flee- An army officer steps on Mr Kim’s throat, nearly crushing it, and then attempts to suffocate him with his baton (Figure 14)- a [possible metaphor for the way the military silenced the people, violently suppressing the true Gwangju Uprising narrative.



Figure 14: Army officer trying to suffocate Mr Kim

Dramatic close-ups of shots where the soldiers beat up both young (Figure 15.1) and older (Figure 15.2) women display the film's clear stance in condemning the overwhelmingly inhumane response from the government, using women as a lens to the injustice. These shots serve to elicit feelings of disgust and hatred toward the military for torturing those portrayed as helpless and vulnerable. Interestingly, journalist and eyewitness reports suggest that women and young girls were "choice targets" (Stokes & Xiao, 2000). The soldiers would strip them, cut up their clothing, and beat them. This is a notable exclusion from *The Taxi Driver*, but the film conveys its message vividly regardless.



Figure 15.1: Young woman being dragged along the ground by soldiers



Figure 15.2: A soldier beating an elderly lady

Fork Lane follows an ex-Gwangju soldier Kim Gang-il and his search for who was ultimately responsible for ordering the massacre of the Gwangju civilians as well as the rationale behind the cruelty. Kim also interrogates his former military superiors about their rationale for commanding the army so rigidly, and his conversation with one of the retired generals and his son sheds some light on the reasons for such violence. Kim reads aloud a passage from the general's autobiography which lacks regret and remorse and instead attempts to justify his

decisions. The use of force against the people was ingrained in the military, becoming a natural tool of suppression. Hence, an ultranationalist mentality and a culture of militarised masculinity developed, emphasising the need for soldiers to be “manly warriors” who killed without hesitation for their nation.

A Petal chooses to present the use of force more viscerally with unapologetic rawness, reflecting the public’s fresh memory of the horrors of the Gwangju Uprising as of 1996, attempting to reconcile the excruciating pain of those directly affected and the larger public who were, too, invested in the aftermath. Even today, Shin and Hwang (2003) argue, “Gwangju remains “a place where public memories and private histories of May 1980 coexist.” In *A Petal*, we repeatedly see the Girl raped, and her hysterical laughter (Figure 16) further serves to magnify the perverse brutality inflicted upon her, paralleling the suffering of the Gwangju citizens.



Figure 16: The Girl laughs uncontrollably while the Man rapes her

A Petal further condemns the authoritarian government for its violent suppression of the Uprising by pointing out the irony in how such grotesque acts of violence are committed on the people by the very same authority that purports to “protect them”. On one hand, while the rapist buys her clothes (Figure 17.1), and provides for her (Figure 17.2) like a father would for his child, he continually rapes her, adding another uncomfortable dimension to the

complicated, mutually dependent relationship between the two (who represent the state and the populace).



Figure 17.1: The Man buys clothes for the Girl



Figure 17.2: The Man cooks for the Girl

Finally, the paedophilic dolling up of the girl in what is a mockup of an office dinner date (Figure 18) points out the obvious- the dictator's courteous treatment of the abused populace only qualifies as superficial concern, while his larger object is to maintain power and satisfy his perverse needs. Therefore, *A Petal* criticises the hypocritical nature of the government when responding to opposition and its vacillating treatment of the people.



Figure 18: The Man prepares an office-style dinner for the Girl

South Korean Authoritarianism After the Gwangju Uprising

In *A Taxi Driver*, following the thwarting of the soldiers' attempts where they try to hunt Hinzpeter and Mr Kim down in their vehicles but fail (Figure 19), the soldiers cease to be portrayed. The film contends that just as the soldiers fade into obscurity in the narrative, the authoritarianism that they represent has been rolled back. Meanwhile, the film from there on primarily follows Hinzpeter and Mr Kim- both of whom the film has more than solidified as nationalistic and democratic heroes, by presenting the many adversities, both psychological (Figure 20.1) or physical (Figure 20.2) that our protagonists rise above to eventually bring information to the world about the Gwangju Uprising.



Figure 19: The soldier's vehicle is overturned



Figure 20.1: Hinzpeter is demoralised and lies slumped in a corner



Figure 20.2: Mr Kim and Hinzpeter are stopped at a military checkpoint

The continuation of the film with these two characters who have overcome immense odds thereby presents Korea's national narratives as a survivalist story, one where democracy rises and emerges from the ruins of authoritarianism.

Hints of the triumph of democracy are displayed in the scene that comes after Hinzpeter's departure from Korea, where Mr Hinzpeter is in a press conference room. Here, the saturation of the main frame with numerous TV boxes replaying the same footage of the military's brutal suppression of the Gwangju Uprising serves (Figure 21) as an effective visual metaphor to demonstrate that Hinzpeter and Mr Kim's over-exposure of the atrocities of the authoritarian regime to the international community is so successful that the regime no longer has the ability to suppress the spread of information that de-legitimises it.



우리가 직접 목격한 중상자들을 보면 짐작할 수 있다
we can witness the violence done
to protesters in the last two days.

Figure 21: Multiple television boxes in the news conference room

We also see the fruits of Mr Kim and Hinzpeter's efforts being fully rewarded towards the end of the film, which is set in modern day Korea; a democracy. Hinzpeter is invited back to Korea where he receives the Song Gun-ho Press Award, and he gives a speech looking back and commending the Gwangju citizens (Figure 22). Meanwhile, Mr Kim continues working as a taxi driver where the last shot is of modern day Korea with commercial buildings and bustling streets (Figure 23); the obvious suggestion being that this is a more economically and politically fully realised Korea, with no remnants of authoritarianism.



Figure 22: Hinzpeter giving a speech



Figure 23: Mr Kim drives his taxi down modern-day Korea

Yet the future of democracy and the absence of authoritarianism is made not just as a case in the public sphere, but in the private sphere as well. We learn towards the end of the film that

Hinzpeter has not been able to contact Mr Kim because the phone number that Mr Kim he has provided does not exist, and that in fact, “Mr Kim Sa Beok may not even be his real name” (Figure 24). Mr Kim’s selfless refusal to milk his efforts in building a democratic Korea for personal gain, combined with the anonymity that he ultimately takes (even at the end we do not know who the real Mr Kim is) thereby transforms our protagonist into an identitiless role model civic agent who, through commitment to values like articulating the truth, contribute to the vitality of Korea’s democracy. In this way the future of authoritarianism is held at bay at a private level where citizens emulate this heroic model.



Figure 24: Hinzpeter is unable to locate Mr Kim

Meanwhile, *A Petal* does not share the optimism over the death of authoritarianism as a Taxi Driver. At the end of the film, we are offered hints of catharsis when the group searching for the girl finds not the girl, but the man in his dilapidated state, and instead of the hyper-masculine form the man took he is now a broken man, begging for the Girl to return (Figure 25)- a fitting metaphor for the vulnerability and absolute powerlessness that authoritarian strongmen find themselves when the masses (represented by the Girl) abandon them.



Please find her, please.

Figure 25: The Man begs for the girl to be returned to him

Yet any relief the audience finds in witnessing the fall of the antagonist is quickly overshadowed by the fact that the group searching for the Girl cannot find her. The failure of the Girl to be rehabilitated back into the arms of caring adults cast doubts over whether the damaged electorate in South Korea would be truly rehabilitated into a healthy democracy. The film does not suggest the reunification of the Girl with adults as the end of the girl's psychological trauma. Kim (2002) makes an astute observation that "Chang is no different from other directors of the New Korean Cinema...who have dealt with feudal fathers by focusing on their dysfunctions or absences"; the Girl's father is mysteriously absent throughout the film, and the only forms of male presence are quickly emasculated and removed via the presumed murder of her brother by the soldiers. The Girl addressing the Man as "oppa" (*brother*) is thereby an attempt to use this stranger to substitute the lack of a masculine figure in her life, and Chang clearly disapproves of this substitution process by presenting their relationship as abusive and paedophilic, which for Kim (2002) constitutes a grand cautioning "against (a) longing for the reconstitution of nation, home, family, and masculinity as they all point to a distinct and dangerous movement toward fascism".

A Petal also offers no forms of condolence in the private sphere in the way *A Taxi Driver* does via presenting a democratic hero like Mr Kim. In *A Petal*, the commitment to telling the truth that *A Taxi Driver* so valorises reaps no rewards, notably, in the scene where the Girl recalls in full the murder of her mum by the soldiers for the first time. Her psychosis that results in her phantasmagoric visions of incongruous elements (Figure 26.1) is not cured, neither is her

speech restored, but rather she breaks down and collapses on the ground, unmoving (Figure 26.2). Even more disturbing are the personal reactions of the characters in *A Petal to the Girl*, beyond the Gwangju soldiers' murdering of her mother, the man's sexual abuse of her, Kim (2002) notes that the girl is constantly assaulted by other men on the road as well as that the women from the village shun her, and so "everyone must bear the responsibility for the girl's pain". As such, the film contends that authoritarianism is not simply a public political structure, but rather in its indictment of everyone, "this admission that fascism inhabits our unconscious is a truth we cannot easily shake loose" or in Chang's own words, "it's not only about political violence, but it's also the problem of violence within us" (MBC, 2020)



Figure 26.1: The girl experiences grotesque hallucinations



Figure 26.2: The Girl collapses under the weight of her recollection of Gwangju

Similar to *A Petal*, *Fork Lane* rejects *A Taxi Driver's* optimistic narrative of the triumph of democracy over authoritarianism in Korea, instead positing the danger of authoritarian rule still looms, particularly given the ignorance of youth today.

Fork Lane first invites audiences to take a critical lens in viewing Korean youth today, criticising their shocking indifference, and on the other hand, their one-sided, self-righteous stance toward the history of the Uprising and the democratisation movement. The film juxtaposes the keenly aware (though psychologically suffering) retired soldiers of the Uprising against the ignorant present day youth who are conscripted into military service.

In the film, as a fight ensues between a farmer (Figure 27), once a soldier, and a current special forces soldier, the latter's crass, insensitive remarks reveals his ignorance toward the gravity of the rightful duty he ought to hold as a member of the army.



Figure 27: The soldier boasts about his shooting skills while the farmer quietly grows angry

Here, the soldier's lack of awareness about his moral duty to real human lives is amplified against his childish boasting about his ability to kill a wild boar, and his lamenting about the lack of practical application of shooting practice given that "there's no opportunity to kill people".

In addition, *Fork Lane* astutely recognises the current wave of support for victims of the Gwangju Uprising, and sternly warns against the moral superiority that youth today often claim when doing so. As a young man walks past a crippled glove seller (former soldier) at the market, he disparages the latter as a "murderer" and "a... shameless... beggar who's killed brave citizens" (Figure 28), glorifying the *minjung undong*'s democratisation movement and using very charged rhetoric to condemn the former soldier despite his evident lack of comprehensive understanding of the pluralistic narratives and multifaceted impacts of the Uprising.



Figure 28: A young man insults the crippled ex-soldier at a marketplace

The incessant attacks on the former soldier draws audiences to sympathise with him, as he remains defenceless against the accusations which he cannot bring himself to refute.

Ultimately, *Fork Lane* seeks to caution South Korean audiences that the danger of authoritarianism is very real, even decades after democracy has taken root. Authoritarianism's dysfunctions still linger as personal and societal-level failings, haunting the most directly affected by the Uprising which drives them to vice and excessive severity upon others.

This is most evident in the numerous ex-soldiers Kim Gang-il visits. The film is grim in its projections of authoritarianism on them, for even Kim Gang-il breaks down after only visiting a few squadmates (Figure 29), painfully exclaiming that they have "gone crazy", referencing their acute trauma that had driven them to abusing their family, alcoholism, and extramarital affairs (Figures 30.1, 30.2), all of which have a larger adverse impact on the people around them.



Figure 29: Kim Gang-il breaks down in front of his army superior



Figure 30.1: Kim Gang-il's army superior has chosen a path of crime



Figure 30.2: Kim Gang-il's ex-comrade now regularly indulges in vices after work

Conclusion

We looked at three Korean films, *A Petal* (1996), *Fork Lane* (2017) and *A Taxi Driver* (2017), analysing the portrayal of South Korean authoritarianism.

We argue that the nature of authoritarianism demands for the depoliticisation of the masses, which is reflected in widespread social apathy to the Gwangju Uprising in *A Taxi Driver* and *A Petal*.

Unsurprisingly, we discovered that films portrayed authoritarian governments as primarily suppressing press, and utilising coercion to quell dissent. However, certain distinctions have been made, with *A Taxi Driver* arguing that the most vulnerable in society are those who suffer most under authoritarianism, and *Fork Lane* highlighting the problematic construct of militarised masculinity feeding into authoritarian tendencies. *A Petal* most directly seeks to unabashedly warn against becoming used to, or even comfortable with authoritarian regimes, for its inherent nature is perceived to be highly destructive and perverse.

As to portrayals of the future of authoritarianism, we argue that *A Taxi Driver* celebrates the triumph of democracy, both as a public political structure as well as a private mode of being embodied by citizens. The triumphant optimism that permeates *A Taxi Driver* and its highly sympathetic portrayal of the Gwangju Uprising has to be seen in the larger context of its release, 2017, with the hindsight that democracy did indeed triumph over authoritarianism in modern day Korea, as well as government attitudes towards the Uprising shifting from condemnation, to dismissal, and now to the promotion of the uprising as a part of South Korea's national history. The commercial success of *A Taxi Driver* is thereby not a surprise, but rather a reflection of the rehabilitation of the image of the Gwangju citizens from lawless rebels to democratic patriots, and the acceptance of this rehabilitated image into public consciousness.

While *A Petal* is ambivalent about Korea's political situation, it is cautious of the return of authoritarianism and suggests that it lies dormant waiting not in the public but in the private. The more pessimistic attitude of *A Petal* can too be explained by the time of its making, when the government had yet to publicly apologise for the suppression of the Uprising. Indeed, *A Petal* defied societal conventions and norms, being the first ever South Korean film to address the Gwangju Uprising directly, and whose impact was significant, rousing public support which successfully pressured the government into releasing previously classified information about the Uprising. As for *Fork Lane*, the dysfunction that ex-members of the military inhabit and manifest in various ways in their life is a testament to the fact that beneath the shining model of a democracy, lies the trauma and re-enactment of authoritarianism. Hence *Fork Lane (2017)*'s refusal to indulge in the romanticisation of the Gwangju Uprising like in *A Taxi Driver* is an interesting anomaly, and perhaps should be understood as a film that refuses to allow the historical memory of the Gwangju Uprising to be folded within the government's larger narrative of democratic nation-building, and instead a stubborn refusal to whitewash historical trauma and lingering dysfunction from the brutal suppression of the Uprising.

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Annex 1: Synopsis of Films

A Petal (1997)

A Petal (1997) follows the journey and trauma of an unnamed young girl who has experienced the Gwangju Uprising first-hand after the Uprising has occurred. Alone, due to the deaths of her brother and mother at the hands of the military, the Girl wanders around with nowhere to go. A Man rapes her at the very beginning of the movie, assuming it to be a one-time affair- however, the Girl sticks onto him and he soon adopts her under his wing by providing her with food, shelter and clothes. However, despite his “care” for the Girl, he also abuses her verbally, sexually and physically and threatens her to leave him alone several times. In a series of flashbacks, we see the Girl’s past life where she lived happily with her mother and her brother’s friends- her innocence and purity is seen in her childlike bliss when she goes on a picnic with her brother’s friends and performs a song for them. We also see the turning point in the Girl’s Life when she accidentally goes to the Uprising with her mother. While attempting to run away from the military, her mother gets shot down by the military which the Girl sees firsthand, being a major source of trauma. The Girl faints in shock upon seeing her mother dead and is covered with her mother’s blood, causing the soldiers to think she is dead. As such, despite being alive and regaining her consciousness, she is piled onto a truck with all the dead bodies which are then brought to the forests where they are buried without any proper procedure or rituals. Even though it is unclear how exactly the Girl escaped from the forest without getting caught (we see in the form of animations and childish concepts like a monster, presumably the military, chasing her and a knight in shining armour saving her- suggesting that the memory itself is unclear in her heavily traumatised brain and she has chosen to distort the very memory), she arrives in the town of Seocheon and stays in a dilapidated house. However, she lives in a filthy state and is constantly raped by the men in Seocheon, while being ridiculed by the townspeople. She is saved by a rich man, Kim Sang Tae, who sees his previous lover in her and brings her to the hospital. However, she once again escapes from the hospital, and meets the Man and as mentioned in the beginning, lives with him. At the very same time, her brother’s friends are on the lookout for her and go around on a wild goose hunt, trying to look for her. However, their attempts are unsuccessful as they are constantly one step behind- they arrive at Seocheon and meet Kim Sang Tae, only after the girl has arrived. At the end of the movie, the Girl leaves the Man and goes off to another place, which is not revealed, leaving the Man in despair. The brother’s friends finally arrive at the Man’s house but are unable to find where the Girl has left to, highlighting their fruitless journey.

A Petal was one of the first films which highlighted the then-heavily suppressed Gwangju Uprising, shedding light on the national narrative that had been forgotten. It brought the Uprising back into relevance and inspired a series of mass reactions, calling for the opening up

of the archives of the event itself due to the widespread commercial success and appeal of the movie. In an unconventional and emotionally raw format, the movie touches on the uncomfortable and appalling truth of the Uprising which is why we chose to explore this movie in our Paper.

Fork Lane (2017)

Fork Lane (2017), directed by Lee Ju-hyoung, is told through the eyes of a forklift driver, Kim Gang-il, and is set in the 2000s. One day, while excavating dirt from a hole, he discovers human remains lying beneath the soil. Abruptly reminded of his past as a paratrooper deployed to suppress protestors in the Gwangju Uprising, he suddenly finds himself facing the fear-filled memory of killing the very people whose undocumented remains he now finds under his feet.

Kim sets out on a journey of investigation to find the truth behind the reason he and his comrades were sent to Gwangju, and who gave the order. After flipping through his photo book containing his memories of army life, Kim decides to meet up individually with his ex-comrades in an attempt to discover more leads.

In the days and weeks to come, Kim gathers with his old friends and army superiors, and while all are mostly outwardly living unassuming, "normal" lives, he begins to witness the deeply uncomfortable reality that everyone is anything but after living through the trauma and horrors of the Gwangju Uprising. Some succumb to extramarital affairs, others to physical and verbal abuse of their family members or alcoholism, including other personal dysfunctions not elaborated upon here.

Kim begins to realise that all whom he visits have no clear answers to his question, and most once asked are simply unable to face the guilt and trauma that remains within them, and drive him away. In this protracted, frustrating narrative of unresolved memory and unclaimed responsibility, Kim finally understands that the only person who can possibly hold the answer he seeks is the President of South Korea at the time -- Chun Doo Hwan. As a last resort, he drives his forklift to Chun's address, where the latter is under house arrest, and demands a response to the deeds of 20 years ago. In a dramatic fashion, one of Kim's ex-comrades who became a reclusive monk suddenly shows up and shoots himself in the head.

The ultimate futility and emotional exhaustion of Kim's arduous journey leads him back to the place this search began. In the middle of the night, Kim breaks down holding the skull of a man he shot 20 years ago, before collecting the bones and identification documents he finds and secretly digging new graves for them at a cemetery where the Uprising's victims were buried. He revisits the cemetery in the morning, where the groundskeeper solemnly watches the victim's family weep. Kim seems to recognise the groundskeeper from his army days, but the groundskeeper quickly walks away after being questioned, disappearing behind the walls of the cemetery.

Just as the film's ending is unresolved, so is the matter of the Gwangju Uprising in reality. Up till today, no one truly knows -- who should be held responsible for the massacre?

A Taxi Driver (2017)

A Taxi Driver (2017) is set in present day Korea, and primarily follows a South Korean Taxi Driver living in Seoul called Mr Kim, who is our protagonist. At the beginning of the film, Mr Kim drives through a college and upon seeing anti-government protestors, Mr Kim makes a remark over their ungratefulness. He then drives home, where it is revealed he is a single-father to a daughter, whom he has dinner with. The next day, Mr Kim's taxi is damaged when he has to avoid one of the protestors, rousing his frustrations further. During lunch at a cafeteria where other taxi drivers are at, he overhears that a taxi driver has been offered 100,000 *won* simply to drive a Westerner in and out of Gwangju before the curfew time. Eager to earn this money to repair his car as well as to pay debt he incurred due to his deceased wife's previous rounds of hospitalisation, he actively searches out the Western client (Mr Hinzpeter), and pretends to be the pre-arranged taxi driver, successfully getting Hinzpeter into his car and embarking on their journey into Gwangju. When they reach Gwangju's proximity, they encounter an army roadblock, and Mr Kim is adamant on returning back to Seoul, yet Hinzpeter's threat of not being paid in full if they do not enter Gwangju convinces Mr Kim to lie to the soldiers in order to successfully enter Gwangju.

Mr Kim and Hinzpeter subsequently encounter a truck of student protestors in Gwangju, whereby the students welcome Hinzpeter upon the realisation that Hinzpeter is holding a camera and documenting; he is a foreign journalist who has snuck into Gwangju. The students, in particular a Korean student named Jae-sik who is able to speak English invites Mr Kim onto the truck but he refuses, and instead scoots away on his taxi, attempting on leaving back to Seoul. However, he encounters an elderly lady on the road who is highly distressed and she demands that they head immediately to the local hospital in Gwangju in order to locate her son. There, at the hospital, Mr Kim is horrified to see numerous heavily injured people, ranging from the young to the elderly and regardless of gender. He then meets Hinzpeter and after being paid, Mr Kim agrees to continue ferrying Hinzpeter around.

Together with Jae-sik, they leave the hospital and they proceed to the rooftop of a building that allows Hinzpeter to film the Gwangju protests actually happening, as well as the military's response. However, the soldiers' use tear gas on the protestors, and Hinzpeter demands that they go down the building to the ground floor in order to get a closer shot of the protestors. There, they are spotted by Plain-clothed Defense Security Command officers, and they are almost caught, but they escape narrowly. They retire for the night in Jae-sik's home.

During dinner, they hear a loud explosion, and discover via the radio that the local news station has been bombed. The trio head there in order to allow Hinzpeter to film, and the defense security command officers recognise Hinzpeter from earlier in the day, and they pursue the trio.

In the scuffle, Jae-sik is captured, and the officers order Hinzpeter to hand over the roll of film he has and whatever recordings of Gwangju he has, in exchange for them sparing Jae-sik's life. However, Jae-sik cries for Hinzpeter to escape and tell the world what is occurring in Gwangju. Hinzpeter and Mr Kim follow Jae-sik's instructions and escape, from the distance they can hear a loud gunshot, indicating that Jae-sik has been murdered.

Once they escape, they return to Jae-sik's house, and spend the night there. In the morning, Mr Kim, replaces his license plate of a Seoul Taxi with a license plate of a Gwangju Taxi, in order to evade capture. Mr Kim then leaves Hinzpeter behind, and makes his way out of Gwangju, eventually arriving in the nearby town of Suncheon. There, he orders lunch, and overhears news reports as well as local conversations about what is happening in Gwangju, whereby the innocents being killed mercilessly by the military are portrayed as rioters and rouge. Overwhelmed by guilt and his conscience, Mr Kim turns back to Gwangju, only to find Hinzpeter in the hospital, depressed and slumped in a corner at the realisation of the overwhelming number of casualties of the military, as well as Jae-sik's dead body resting there in the hospital.

Mr Kim then reminds Hinzpeter of his promise and responsibility of exposing the atrocities the military government is committing to the rest of the world, and encourages him to press on. Together, Hinzpeter and Mr Kim film the tragic deaths in the hospital, and they later film the military blatantly firing mercilessly onto innocent civilians. After they have gotten enough footage, they attempt to leave Gwangju.

Unfortunately, they encounter a military roadblock on the way out. The soldier inspecting their vehicle discovers a spare Seoul taxi license plate in Mr Kim's taxi, but is sympathetic to Hinzpeter and Mr Kim's cause and he lets them go. However, the higher-ups in the military order the military to hunt down any foreigners and prevent them from leaving Gwangju, resulting in the various military vans chasing after the duo in Mr Kim's taxi. Fortunately, the taxi drivers of Gwangju enter the chase, and by ramming their vehicles with the military vans, they disrupt the plans of the military and allow Mr Kim and Hinzpeter to successfully escape out of Gwangju.

After Hinzpeter departs from Korea at the airport, Hinzpeter and Mr Kim go their separate ways, Mr Kim reunites with his daughter, while Hinzpeter proceeds to share his footage with news corporations and the world. Hinzpeter later tries to reconnect with Mr Kim, only to find out the phone number Mr Kim has provided him is a fake number; in this way Mr Kim refuses any form of recognition.

23 years later, Hinzpeter is invited to Korea to receive an award for his courageous journalism.

Meanwhile, Mr Kim continues to make an honest living by being a hardworking taxi driver in modern day Korea.