

1987 and 택시운전사: A Comparative Review and Historical Analysis

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Introduction

The two movies, 1987 and 택시운전사 deal with the rule of 전두환 from his de-facto rise to power in 1979 by means of a coup d'etat during the rule of 최규하, to his eventual loss during the first in a long time elections in South Korea, thus ending the Fifth Korean Republic. Both movies cover major, connected events: Gwangju Uprising (18.5.1980) and June Struggle (10.6.1987).

택시운전사 Overview

Taking place in 1980, the movie is centered around a real-life taxi driver. His name in the movie is 김만섭. However, in real life, his name was actually 김사복, which the movie references at the end. He is a poor taxi driver, who takes care of his daughter by himself. During his lunch break in the taxi “cafeteria”, he overhears, that one taxi driver is supposed to take a foreigner to 광주 for a total of 10만원. In need of money and ignorant of the political situation he takes the job. After he arrives, he meets a foreign reporter: Jürgen Hinzpeter, also a real person.

Eventually, they enter 광주 under the guise of “business” and, joined by local student protesters and taxi drivers, they witness the monstrosities perpetuated by the ROK military. With the mission of making this situation known to the international public, Hinzpeter videotapes the events that transpired.

They later escape 광주 and after an unsuccessful chase by the Korean secret police, they end up back at 김포 airport. Hinzpeter hides the tapes in a box of cookies and boards the first airplane to Japan, from where the tapes are sent overseas to Germany and thus make the news and make the world realize the events that were transpiring in South Korean.

Although the events before meeting the reporter were fictionalized, the general events happening in the movie in 광주 experienced by Hinzpeter resemble what the real life reported had experienced there.

1987 Overview

The film takes place, as the title cleverly suggests, in 1987. The action centers around a real life event of the death of 박종철, who died during police torture, which sparked the June Democratic struggle event. Most of the movie centers around the current regime's continuous attempts at suppression of the students' death. The movie follows three protagonists: a prosecutor, who pushes back against the cover up, a guard/activist, who engages in resistance movement activities and the commissioner - the person working under 전두환 and the person strategizing the cover up activities. The film eventually ends in uncovering the truth about the fate of 박종철, the death of 이한열 and, finally, the first free elections in ROK in a long time.

Depiction of Historical Events in both movies

The two movies take similar and at the same time slightly differing approaches in presenting the historical context in the movie. 택시운전사 focuses on the perspective of a largely ignorant civilian, who later becomes exposed to the horrors that happened during the Gwangju Uprising. The hero of the story unwillingly participates in the events, later becoming the main **driving** (ha.) force behind the current resistance efforts. On the other hand, 1987 presents its story from the view of multiple protagonists. One of which is similar to the taxi driver, an initially uninterested party (연희), which later, due to experiencing tragic events, becomes involved in the movement. However, the story also contains perspectives of those involved in the events from "upper echelons" of power, showcasing how the current government's attempts at silencing the press and preventing any investigation by the police.

The themes of both movies is **police brutality** perpetrated by a **totalitarian regime**. They showcase, how the military was used to silence any protests and repress the public during the ROK's power struggles in its government. Any protest was met with violence by the police and further persecution by secret police, which tragically echoed the previous Japanese rule and, ironically, current Communist rule in other countries. The events presented in the movies resonated with me personally, as they remind me of the implementation of martial law in 1981 by the Polish puppet government installed by the invading Communist forces. It turns out, that totalitarian regimes act very similarly despite differing ideologies. The main difference is the approach of ruling states to these situations. With South Korea, America was complacent with the current government's efforts to suppress the public population, while USSR actively engaged in forced relocation and murders of Polish citizens by the Communists. It's sad to see, that noble ideas of *patriotism* and *communist eradication*, have been twisted into serving as an excuse for the totalitarian grasp the government has on its citizens.

Conclusion

Both movies depict the events which transpired during the Fifth Republic of Korea under 전두환's rule. Although dramatized, they present similar narratives of public protests being silenced by the riot police and the crimes committed by the totalitarian government against its citizens during Gwangju Uprising and June Struggle.