

The Evil of Human Nature Under Class Division—Based on the Metaphorical Interpretations in the Film *Parasite*

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Abstract

As the winner of the 72nd Palme d'Or at Cannes as well as the Best Film of the 92nd Academy Awards, the *Parasite* is a critical realist film directed by Bong Joon-ho from South Korea. Through a variety of simple images, the director has formed a metaphor system of interrelation, mutual restriction and dramatic tension, which makes the film not only have multiple interpretations, but also rich in deep connotation. Based on the analysis of parasite metaphor, odor metaphor and space metaphor in the film, this paper interprets and analyzes Bong Joon-ho's creative intention and shooting techniques.

Keywords: *Parasite*, metaphor, class differentiation

1. Class Metaphors in the Film

1.1 Parasite Metaphor

A parasite in biology is an organism that attaches itself to a host or an odd host and constantly draws nutrients to maintain its survival development or reproduction. The director uses "parasite" as an image and internalizes it as the narrative thread of the film, comparing it to a poor family or a relationship in which the poor cling to the rich to survive throughout the film.

The act of parasitism in the film is not only embodied in the main character's family of four, but also in the former maid, Wen Guang and her husband Wu Qinshi who are the villains of the film. When President Park's family lived in the house four years ago, the former maid Wen Guang hid her husband, who was in debt to a loan shark, in the basement of the house and secretly stole food from the house to feed her husband. When this scheme is ruined by the main character's family, Wen Guang, who has lost both her job and a place to shelter her husband, begging the current maid (Ki-woo's mother) to help her keep the secret, but when she realized that the main character's family is also a parasite like herself, she became angry and threatened each other. These plots show that even within the lower class, there are irreconcilable conflicts. In the film, Ki-woo's mother has a key line that says, "It's not that you are naturally born with wealth and kindness. But it's because you become wealthy first and then you will be kind. Rich people are innocent and have no worries, and children from rich families don't even have wrinkles in their clothes." "Money is like the iron, ironing everything out." The film also mentions more than once that President Park's wife is "simple", however, even such a simple wife knows that when Ki-woo gives his daughter a class for the first time, she asks to check the effect of the class, saying that the hourly salary is increased, but secretly pulls out some money to show her tact and sophistication. When Ki-Woo's father Ki-taek drove Park home for the first time, Park said, "Don't be nervous," and "It's not a trial run." But he deliberately observed whether the coffee in the cup was bumpy when he turned the corner. When he heard that the driver repeatedly asked him if he loved his wife, he complained to her privately that he hated people who overstep their bounds. On the surface, "parasite" is an apt metaphor for Ki-Woo's family, but at a deeper level, the title of the piece reflects the archetype of irreconcilable class conflicts in the society.

The film uses the metaphor of parasites to reveal the grim reality that the class division of society makes it difficult for the underclass to reverse their fate. Like parasites, they are dependent on the wealthy class, but at the same time, they are the individuals exploited by wealthy classes. They try, struggle, to change their fate in vain.

1.2 Odor Metaphor

As an audio-visual art, films are often lacking in the description of smell. However, Bong Joon-ho introduces the description of smell in *Parasite* and uses it to drive the development of the plot, making smell an important metaphor of class in the film.

In the film, the description of the odor first appeared when Park's son Do-Song found that the smell of his servants, drivers, and even Jessica's teacher are very similar, and through the child's keen sense of smell exposed the plot of the protagonist's family parasitic. Kitting then concluded that it was a "basement smell" that could only be freed from such poor living conditions. The description of the smell appears again when President Park and his wife are discussing the smell of driver Kim in the living room, and President Park refers to it with disgust as "the smell that only people who take the subway have", not knowing that Kim who has nowhere to run is actually hiding under the coffee table in the living room. He was suffering from his boss's instructions to him. The last description of the smell appeared after the rainstorm, when President Park celebrated his son's birthday, the president's wife rolled down the car window after purchasing because of the "odor", and in the panic after the outbreak of the case, President Park pinched his nose to get the car keys that were crushed under the body of the perpetrator ... Although the odor is invisible, it has become a knot that father Ki-taek could not ignore and became the last straw that crushed him, triggering him to stab President Park to death. Through the layers of the film, the director repeatedly described the details of the smell, suggesting that the odor is actually the "poor man's smell", showing the insurmountable gap between the classes and also conveying the upper class's deep prejudice and contempt for the lower class.

It can be said that the odor in the *Parasite* is no longer just a sense of smell, but a metaphor for the brand of the lower class, implying a strong class discrimination. The director uses odor to visualize the class conflict, which contains a strong critical power.

1.3 Scene and Space Metaphor

In the performance of scene space, the director cleverly adopts various filming techniques to enhance the diversity and hierarchy of the film. The whole film of *Parasite* revolves around two spaces: one is the high-class mansion of President Park and the other is the semi-basement of the main character's family, the former in the upper city and the latter in the lower city. When Ki-woo first arrives at the mansion, the camera keeps moving upward, walking through the steep uphill road and climbing up one level of stairs after another. However, under the torrential rain, when the protagonist's family returns from the mansion in the upper city to the home in the lower city, the camera keeps moving down with the pace of the family fleeing. After passing downhill street stairs and a runway, they finally reach their rain-soaked home. President Park's son, Do-Song, is playing in a tent in his own yard during the storm, which is a stark contrast to Ki-woo's family's wretched efforts to rescue their home, which is nearly submerged by the rain. With a background in sociology, Bong Joon-ho is clearly familiar with the structure and meaning of urban space, and these shots often move from the bright and transparent to the dark and hidden. From this, we can see that for director Bong Joon-ho, "the underclass" is not only a literary rhetoric, but also refers to a lack of dignity closely related to urban orientation and living environment. In addition, the wife of the driver, who is afraid of revealing her secret to the mistress, kicks the housekeeper down the steps at the entrance of the basement, which indirectly leads to her death. The upward and downward steps and the up-and-down shots reveal the insurmountable class gap between the lower class and the wealthy class in society.

2. Interpretation of the Director's Creative Intention

After watching the film, I can't help but think about one question: Is a parasite really a parasite willingly? The "parasites" in the film were not born to be parasites, and it is not their nature to be dependent on others, but they still became parasites, do they really have the right to choose?

In the film, the driver Kim said, "even just a guard position, there will be 500 college graduates who apply for the job". In fact, this statement has already told people the sin of the situation, that is, this horrible society. Therefore, society is responsible for turning human beings into parasites. In Korean society, the Chaebol economy makes the social wealth concentrated in the hands of a small group of people. The Chaebol and the government collude with each other and can even interfere with politics to control Korea. Although this contradiction is not explicitly pointed out in the film, it can be inferred from the close-ups of the pictures and certificates in President Park's house that he is not just a small and medium-sized businessman, but most likely a member of a large chaebol group. In the film, both driver Kim and housekeeper's husband were running small businesses such as fried chicken stores and pastry stores in their early years and were forced to become a

member of the parasites after closing down and losing their jobs or incurring large debts under the suppression of the big chaebol.

It is also because of such plutocratic economy in Korea that various social privileges for the chaebol families have emerged, including in the field of education. Because of their economic power, the chaebol invested much in education. The people at the bottom of the society do not have such economic power and cannot provide their children with good education. This is why President Park's wife tries to hire a highly educated English teacher for her daughter and find a professional art teacher for her son. Ki-jung, who is at the bottom of the social ladder, has no chance to go to school because she cannot afford to take the college entrance exams, despite her extraordinary talent in art. Ki-woo took four consecutive years of college entrance exams just to get into a major university and change his fate by upgrading his education and entering the upper class of society.

3. Conclusion

Looking back at Bong Joon-ho's works, if "Memories of Murder" embodies the painful memory of the trauma of the times, then "Snow Country Train" is a cautionary fable with anti-utopian overtones, while *Parasite* is more focused on the survival plight of the underclass. As a representative figure of the contemporary Korean film director group, Bong Joon-ho has the ability to face the sensitive reality and analyze society and dig deep into human nature in this regard. It has been a great source of enjoyment for audiences, a warning for those in power, and a constant source of nourishment for younger generations of filmmakers, allowing this narrative strategy to be inherited and developed into a unique aesthetic tradition.

In recent years, Korean films continue to shine in Cannes and other international film festivals, which shows that the traditional Western-centered international film festivals are paying more attention to multiculturalism. As for the judgment of films, political correctness in the western sense is becoming an important criterion for judging film art. In addition, the global debate triggered by *Parasite* fully demonstrates that the social issues presented by East Asian films, represented by South Korean films, are universal and can arouse the resonance of groups of different nationalities and skin colors. In fact, the class problem behind the gap between the rich and the poor has become an important issue in the current film art. It is worth thinking about how to respond to reality with movies.

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