

## REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CLASS IN PARASITE MOVIE

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 2021-01-29

Accepted: 2021-03-21

Published: 2021-03-22

Volume: 5

Issue: 1

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v3i2.107>

### KEYWORDS

*Film, Korean Movie, Parasite Movie, Representation, Social Class.*

### ABSTRACT

Film works can be created from various perspectives and production methods by teams in the film industry. Parasite is a South Korean movie present as a production-based film and it raises a big theme of lifestyle differences between social classes. Parasite Movie portrays a new perspective with an astonishing story and plot-twist in the context of film with the issue of social inequality in the modern era. Various awards were obtained by Parasite films on a national and international scale for its beautiful story. The data is collected from the scenes in the movie which later the data is connected with some theories. This study also aims to find out the literary meaning of the movie Parasite, specifically the representation of social class through some literary research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Film industry has improved since decades ago, from black and white, to full of CGI. Film has become a place to escape from reality for a lot of people around the world. Not many people realize that there are more purposes in making a film. Since long time ago, film is made for several purposes such as for entertainment, documentary, education, or simply to tell a story about something, whether it is true events or fiction. However, film can also be used as a media for film often takes an approach that can be associated with social theory and other sciences in discussion or even criticism of the film. As is said by Pouty, a writer and editor in chief in *OurMovieLife* article, Film is often used as propaganda and encouragement to increase awareness and other interests, for example Hitler used film as propaganda in World War II. Many people from in Germany hated the Jews because of this propaganda. Pouty also adds that Gladiator movie, even though it is a fictional movie, it represents how the political situation back then in the past during Romanian era (Boy, 2017).

Film can change the opinions and views of its audience on the topics discussed in the film, as the main purpose of the cinematic art form to make an impact and send a message. This influence can be positive and negative, depends on the response of the individual audience, so

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that many discussion rooms are built in many platforms and social media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and many more. The film makes people to be more aware on some aspects of life such as the importance of the quality of formal education systems and curricular school activities, criminal activities, war and terrorism, reflecting culture and change, a history that contains facts and realistic or fantastic images of how the world was before technological advances this time. Rilind Elezaj, an experienced Digital Marketing Specialist who is also a writer stated that film connects past generations to the present, perpetuating culture and even changing values. He adds that the film reflects the perception of how we live side by side as human beings, and how it is easy to see what concerns us, our attitudes, and also strengths and weaknesses in the film rather than describing them from our daily interactions (Elezaj, 2019).

The extent of creativity and topics in the film industry and the influence on the audience, Korea also has a modern creative industry and huge influence in film. Starting the first film in 1919 called *Fight for Justice*, film industry in Korea has peaked until late 1990s. Since then, film industry in Korea has grown and become more popular among people. The number of viewers in South Korea in 2018 has reached more than 200 million with over than 50% market share in only around eight years, 483 national theaters and 2,937 screens with 80 percent theater are multiplex theater, and sales volume reaches more than one trillion won. According to So, Republic of Korean films from large domestic and distribution companies, such as Lotte Culture Wick, CJ ENM, Showbox, and NEW are produced annually and have an important role in developing the film industry in Korea, including how the films are introduced to the cinemas (So, 2020).

*Parasite* film is a breakthrough in the Korean film industry today because of its success on an international scale since its premier on May 21, 2019 at the 72nd Cannes Film Festival and got marketed in South Korea on May 30, 2019 by CJ Entertainment. *Parasite / 기생충* (Gisaengchung) is a South Korean film directed, produced, and written by Bong Joon Ho. *Parasite* is about modern-day capitalists and criticism of "Hell Joseon" in the Korean sphere, bringing the story of the urban landscape as a metaphor for the deepening social divide between rich and poor people with unique images and perspectives on social inequality and class



struggle. Hell Joseon is a slogan to satirize a hard life of Korean nowadays. Based on the explanation above, the authors will explain and describe types of social class represented in the movie Parasite. Parasite becomes a Korean film that has positive responses from both Korea and internationally. In the US alone, this film scooped up around \$35 million. In its debut in some cinemas in the US, Parasite received \$376,264 and was still counting after Bong and the gang brought home four Oscars statues. The total profit that the film production received around the world is up around \$165 million. It is far bigger than the original budget which only cost them around \$13 million (Clark, 2020). Parasite collects the total of 33 awards from many awards and categories. Oscar became the most special award for Bong and Korea because Parasite is the first movie from South Korea to win the Academy Awards a.k.a Oscar. This Kimchi country brought home the Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay and Best International Feature Film. Bong is also nominated as the Best Director. With that, Parasite won four categories (IMDb, 2019). What is special from this movie is that Parasite is not only entertaining, but this movie also gives a description about social class in South Korea. The film offends the social gap between the rich and the poor through representation of the characters. This movie is best analyzed because the director himself gives some comments about how social class in South Korea looks like.

## **2. LITERARY REVIEW**

In understanding more about social class in Parasite movie, it is essential to know the meaning of social class. Social class is one's material possession and one's social status or rank in a society (Oakes & Rossi, 2003). According to Michael W. Kraus, Jun Wo Park and Jacinth J.X. Tan in their journal entitled Sign of Social Class: The Experience of Economic Inequality in Everyday Life, they quoted from Michael Hout that there are four categories of social classes which are; lower class, working class, middle class and upper class (Kraus, 2017). In short, someone is considered an upper class in if he or she has position and such as money or any other material possession in a society. On the other hand, someone will be acknowledged as lower class or poor if he or she only has little possession or no position at all in a society. This article will also use a theory of representation. It is used to make the analysis easier and to determine what social classes that are used in this film and what they represent. According to Tyas

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Pramono Aji in his Journal about representation, he quoted from Stuart Hall that representation is a process through language to produce meaning between people or culture and media. To make it clearer he also uses the reflective approach because the meaning can be determined by ideology and experience of people reflected by culture or reality in a society (Aji, 2016). In other words, how people are reflected in the society shows or represents their social status.

The representation of theory means how meaning is produced through language. In representation, Hall also adds that signs can be used to interpret language and meaning. They can convey the meaning of something in a distinctive but also beautiful way. Signs are usually used to symbolize events, objects, and even people. Sign also can be object and events themselves. They can also be used to represent something that is not real or something that is considered imaginary or fantasy that has abstract ideas and which does not really exist in the world. Signs also simplify language so that the target meaning can be delivered narrower. When the signs and symbols are discovered about what it represents, meaning is easily to determine, whether it is thoughts, ideas, or feelings (Hall, 1997).

In the exchange there is the use of language, signs, and images that can represent meaning or purpose of something. In the Oxford English Dictionary representation means the act of presenting someone or something in a particular way (Oxford Dictionary). For instance the symbol cross in Christianity represents the crucifixion and sacrifice of Christ. The cross actually consists of only two wooden boards nailed together in its visuals. However, in the context of Christian beliefs and teachings, the cross symbolizes the broader meaning of the crucifixion of the child of God. Thus, this concept can also be applied to some symbols that may exist in a movie.

This is where the method of representation is present, through the production of meaning and concepts in the mind but conveyed through language so that it connects real objects in events or phenomena with fictional objects in stories. Representation system is all kind of objects, people, phenomena, events, symbols, and stories that correlate with a set of concepts and human interpretations that exist in the mind, so that they can be interpreted as events that occur in the world and in social relationships or social relations. How meaning is formed depends on the system of concepts and images created in our minds that can represent or depict



the world. This allows us to create things both inside and outside of our heads. Apart from real objects, imaginary objects can only be interpreted in the form of feelings captured by the audience, such as the concept of love, life after death, past history such as the suffering of war, fairy tales of mermaids, and others.

In the representation of theory, Hall introduces the process of observing that must be done by humans in seeing, listening, and action because humans always carry out the process of thinking to interpret and infer all information. Through information obtained by humans will create their own concepts and understanding of phenomena and principles that have gone through the process of thinking. Concepts can be described through objects that represent the mental and human mind such as writing, books, paintings, films, real objects, imaginary objects, and other objects. Meaning can exist on the relationship between things in the world with humans, events and things, between what is real and fictional, and conceptual systems that are able to operate as their mental representations. This is like a cycle that will keep repeating between the creator of the concept and the recipient of the object and because the human thought process is different then there will be an update of each concept from the results of meaningful innovation in receiving information. This representation theory will be used in describing the meanings and meanings of the behaviors and scenes highlighted in the film *Parasite*, and will be useful in explaining the implied meaning of symbols and circumstances in the film.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative data. To help the writers with the analysis, the writers will use the representation theories from Hall and some other journals that quoted Hall's statement. Firstly, the data is collected from the movie itself such as: scenes that show how the characters act, dress, and react to things; and intrinsic elements like setting and plot. Some data is also taken from some other sources such as online article and journals. After that, the writers determine the main or major characters to be analyzed. The writers also pay attention to plot and every detail presented in the movie. The writers look for some important details that can help in order to determine the purpose of this article and then write them down. Most of the data in this analysis is taken from the scenes in the movie which later to be connected with the theories.



Other data is taken from the article, journal and online media. Finally, the writers determine some scenes that are correlated with the representation of social class.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Parasite is a South Korean movie with a setting in a modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The film is about two different families with different background and social status. Park family lives happily with His wife, Choi Yeon-gyo and their two kids; a beautiful teenager Da-hye and a little boy Da-song. They also have a housemaid or housekeeper named Gook Moon-gwang and a driver called Park Keun-rok. They are a very rich family with a beautiful big house and luxury cars. In some scenes, the Park's family members often use decent and branded clothes. They look clean and elegant, especially Mrs. Park always look stunning with her make up on. From this explanation, the writers can state that they are from upper class. This can be stated because of their possession and comfortable life represents a good quality of life: thus, the writers include this family in upper class. This statement is also reinforced by Hall's theory that says culture or reality of someone determines one's social status. This also applies with the next family, Kim's family's social status.

The next family is Kim family. Kim lives with his wife, Choong-sook and two children Ki-woo or Kevin and Ki-jung or Jessica. They live in a suburban and dirty neighborhood. The house is very small for four family members. Sometimes, they have to evacuate because of flood. They do not have a car or any expensive and luxury possession. Therefore from Kim's family description, the writers can say that they are poor family. They do not have luxury and expensive possession like Park family. The neighborhoods which often experience flood also indicate that they do not live in a proper and comfortable area. Therefore, the writers consider Kim family as a low or working class social class.







The figures above shows the difference between Park's family's house and Kim's family's House.

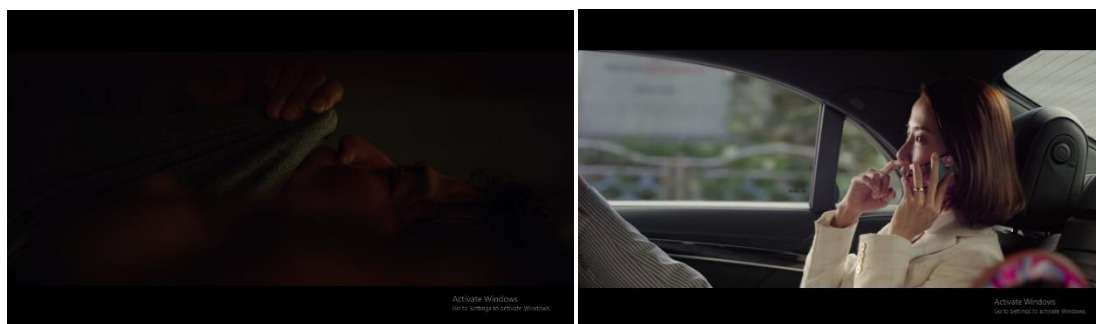
The next example that shows the social gap between two families is about job. Mr. Park is a business man. Considering the big house with luxury cars, this family must have a huge income. They even hire people to do household and to drive the family members where ever they want to go. Park's family later in the movie also hires Ki-woo which later he changes his name to Kevin to be Da-hye's private teacher. Ki-woo fakes his identity that he used to teach English for a lot of students. Later, Kevin sees this as an opportunity for his family to live a better life. Knowing that Da-song is fond of art, Ki-woo introduces Mrs. Park to a great and experienced art teacher, which is actually his sister, Ki-jung. Ki-jung later is hired by Park's family. She also fakes her identity that her name is Jessica and she graduated from foreign university. This happens to Kim too. Jessica sets the former driver up that he sometimes uses the car for having sex. Then Jessica recommends his father, which also has faked his identity to be the new driver for Park's family. After Ki-woo, Ki-jung, and Kim succeed to enter the Park's family, they plan to kick the housekeeper, Moon-gwang from the house and replace her with Kim's wife. By provoking Mrs. Park that Moon-gwang has a contagious disease that can put her children in danger; Mrs. Kim sorrowfully has to fire Moon-gwang and replace her with Kim's recommendation; his wife, which of course has faked her identity. Finally, all the Kim's family has a better life by faking their identity to Park's family.

From the story above, it shows that Park's family is adequate to hire such a lot of people to work for them. Mr. Park being able to pay people to work for them represent that he is a wealthy people and he comes from upper class society. In contrary, Kim's family that has to fake their identity and deceive Park's family to be able to have a job indicates that they have no



relation and social status in upper class society. They have to pretend that each of them, especially Ki-woo and Ki-Jung comes from respected, well-educated, and rich family to be able to work in Park's family. This represent that Kim's family is a low social class family.

The representation of social class can also be identified from small details in the movie that a lot of people may miss when watching it. However, this is also quite significant to determine one's social class. In minute 1:27:15, Mr. Park notices that the house smells like Mr. Kim's body scent. He says to his wife that Mr. Kim smells like old radish. He also tells his wife that Mr. Kim smells like in a subway, and his wife says that it was ages since she took subway.



The figure above shows reaction to how Mr. Kim's body smells

Approaching the end of the movie, Mrs. Kim also realizes in the car that Mr. Kim does smell bad. Mr. Kim bad body scent is noticed by Mrs. Park is because his house just had a flood and they had to evacuate. He did not get to take shower and put on decent clothes. In this scene, Mrs. Park even closes her nose while looking at Mr. Kim because of the smell. From the explanation above, the writer conclude that those who are in upper class usually smell good because they can afford perfume. However, it is quite impossible for a low class society family to afford tertiary material like perfume because for food itself, it is hard to get. This clearly shows social class gap between the two families. It is often perceived that rich people smell good while poor people smell bad.

The last but not least is the representation of an object in the movie. In the very beginning of the movie, Ki-woo is given a quite strange and big stone by his friend who also the same person offering him the job as an English tutor in Park's family. His friend, Min, gives Ki-Woo because they are good friends. This Stones is like a present for Ki-woo to accept Min's offer to become a tutor for Da-hye. Min offers Ki-woo the job because he loves Da-hye and does not





trust other people to handle the job except Ki-woo. After receiving the stone, Ki-woo and the family do not know the value of it. His mother even mumbles and says that food would have been better than the stone. It turns out that the stone has a high value. If sold, it will give them quite much money. In an interview with Vanity Fair in discussing the meaning of the scenes in the film, Bong said the stone given by Ki-woo's friend was an important symbol in the film. The stone comes from the old collector and actually has a high price but was not realized by the poor. The younger generation also did not pay attention to objects and traditions like this. Ki-woo himself has a different view in seeing the stone prize. Bong gives an overview Ki-woo sees this as an inspiration to his life because it is given by his friend who has an economic status and a different world from him (Fair, 2019).

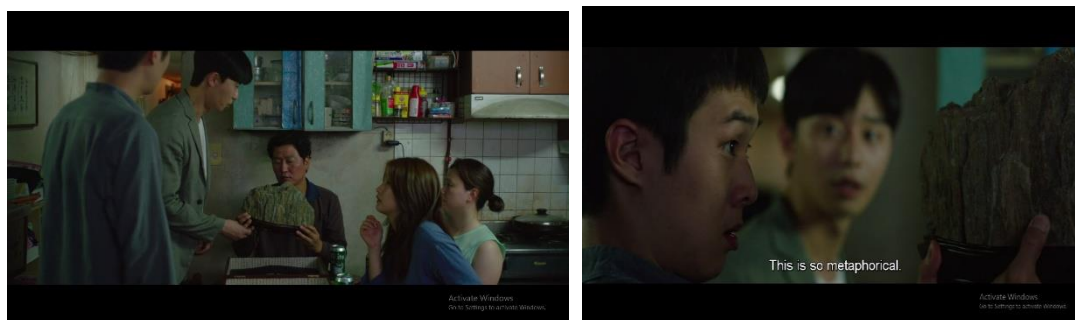


Figure above shows the scholar's stone

It is Kim's family's uneducated background and lack of relations that cause them not to realize how valuable the stone is. This stone is an example that rich people know scholar's stones are valuable things, and not all people, especially poor and uneducated family like Kim's family will acknowledge.

In addition, Bong also provides a description of real life where humans often forget the position and reality of his life when faced with convenience and a favorable moment. Bong said the Parasite movie is about the Invasion and Infiltration of the Kim family who infiltrated the rich family, in this case Bong thinks that invasion is a subtle, mysterious, and tactic process that is very compatible with the meaning of the parasite. The scene that shows this meaning is when the Kim family uses the Park family's house with all the facilities and raw materials available, but Bong quickly replies the reality of their lives when they have to return to the semi-basement



house in a flood situation. It is an ironic reality but it happens in the real world but it is rarely portrayed emotionally, where the news usually only elevates this as a flood disaster news and does not expose the personal side of the affected people and do not have choices in difficult situations due to economic conditions (Chichizola, 2020).

In terms of life, Bong also shows the different ways in the daily necessities of life between rich and poor people, such as the *jappaguri* noodle cooking scene for poor noodles is cheap food and beef is food that is only bought and cooked when there is a big celebration and big money enough to buy it. But Bong shows that rich people are accustomed to mixing all types of food without judging the price of raw food ingredients by combining instant noodles and expensive beef (Han, 2019).

In the ending, Bong gives a scene where Ki-woo still has hope for a prosperous life for his family. Bong gives a vivid description that Ki-woo still has a hope that someday he could have enough money and get to buy the house to help his father trapped in the bunker. From all the scenes and meanings that Bong describes, he aims to provide visuals and emotions about the differences in life, perspectives, and culture of economic status (Jung, 2020).

As stated from the explanation before, Hall clarify that meaning can be found through language and signs. He also adds that when signs are discovered, meaning will be easy to determine. This is the same with the writer findings that explain about the sign such as, Mr. Kim's body scent, Ki-woo's scholar's stone, Mr. Park's and Mr. Kim's house. After finding the signs, the writer can determine the meaning and conclude that Mr. Kim's bad body scent represent that he is from lower class. It is the same with his small and dirty house. Mr. Kim's family's not knowing about the value of the stones is also the sign that they are uneducated who come from suburban society. On the contrary, Mr. Park's enormous house and his luxury possession and elegant lifestyle represent that he comes from upper class society. Without Stuart Hall's theory and deeper analysis, this movie is just a story about a family deceiving and invading another family. However, using Hall's theory gives something more meaningful about how two families from very different social class live their lives.



## 5. CONCLUSION

Parasite is not only a movie to entertain its audience, but this movie also has a deeper meaning that can be analyzed. How the characters act, dress, and react to things lead to the representation of each family's social class. Two different families from different social class can be the trigger to a conflict. Park's luxury and good quality of life represent that they are considered an upper class in a society. On the other side, Kim's family poor quality of life, uneducated and bad manner shown in some scenes indicate that they are considered as a lower class family. These statements are also reinforced by Hall theory that says meaning can be determined by ideology and experience of people reflected by culture or reality in a society. Bong Joon Ho also wants to give a description that there are still people who live poorly and still seen as trash in society. This can be seen from Park's family who often feel disgusted by the presence of Mr. Kim because of how his body smells. In a nutshell, Park's family and their lifestyle represent an upper class social status, while Kim's family's poor life represent lower class social status.

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