



Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

Parasite

Parasite (Gisaengchung)

Directed by: Bong Joon Ho
©: CJ E&M Corporation, BarunsOn A&E
Production Company: BarunsOn E&A
Presented: CJ Entertainment
Executive Producer: Miky Lee
Co-executive Producer: Heo Min-heoi
Produced by: Kwak Sin-ae, Moon Yang-kwon
Co-producer: Jang Young-hwan
Unit Production Manager: Park Min-chul
Production Supervisor: Kim Kyoung-taek
Financing Executive: Im Myung-kyoon
1st Assistant Director: Kim Seong-sik
Script Supervisor: Han Jin-won
Screenplay by: Bong Joon Ho, Han Jin-won
Story by: Bong Joon Ho
Director of Photography: Hong Kyung-pyo
Underwater Cinematography: Kim Jun-hee
Steadicam Operators: Kim Dong-joo, Kim Hyun-woo
Digital Imaging Technician: Jeong Ki-yong
Gaffer: Kim Chang-ho
Still/Poster Photographer: Lee Jae-hyeok
Visual Effects Supervisors: Hong Jeong-ho, Kang Jong-ik, Jung Sung-jin, Chanjin Chris Kim, Katrina Kim
Visual Effects Department: Blaad China, W2Studios, Magnon Studios, Studio Ubuntu
Special Effects: Jung Do-ahn, Park Kyung-soo, Demolition
Edited by: Yang Jin-mo
Production Designer: Lee Ha-jun
Art Director: Mo So-ra, Lim Se-jin
Set Designers: Yu Ki-eun, Yoon Mee-kyoung, Jo So-ye, Seo Hyo-won, Jeon Ji-hyeon
Set Decorators: Cho Won-woo, Han Ga-ram, Cho Hee
Furniture Designer: Bahk Jong-sun
Property Master: Jun Jai-wook, Oh You-jin
Construction Managers: Noh Seung-guk, Song Suk-ki
Costume Designer: Choi Se-yeon
Costume Supervisor: Kang Dong-yul
Make-up & Hair Designer: Kim Seo-young
Make-up & Hair Artists: Park Kyoung-lan, Kim Si-on, Jang Tae-yi
Special Make-up: Kwak Tae-yong, Hwang Hyo-kyun
Key Special Make-up Artist: Lee Hee-eun
Music by/[Music] Composed by: Jung Jae-il
'Glass of Soju' [end credits song] Lyrics by: Bong Joon Ho
Orchestra: The I.S.T.
Piano/Guitars/Musical Saw: Jung Jae-il
'A Glass of Soju' Performed by: Choi Woo-shik
Conductor: Jung Jae-il, Márton Tóth
Orchestrators: Jung Jae-il, Norbert Elek, Balint Sapszon
[Music] Arranged by: Jung Jae-il
[Music] Computer Programming: Jung Jae-il
[Music] Mixing: Kim Byung-keuk
Sound Designer: Kang Hae-young
Sound Supervisor: Choi Tae-young
Production Sound Mixer: Eun Hee-soo
Boom Operator: Lee Si-hoon
Re-recording Mixer: Choi Tae-young
Sound Editors: Ye Eun-ji, Lee Jae-young, Koo Dong-hyeon, Koh Eun-ha
Dialogue Editor: Park Min-ji, Yang Hye-jin
Sound Effects Designer: Kang Hae-young
ADR Supervisor: Kim Byung-in
ADR Recordist: Lee Jeong-wook
Foley Recordist: Choi Jae-yoon

At Cannes in 2018, Lee Chang-dong held up a magnifying glass to Korean society and unveiled his critique on the one per cent vs the 99 per cent in *Burning*. Now it's Bong Joon Ho's turn. Of course have-nots have always been his heroes, whether they're a snack-shop-dwelling family battling a giant amphibious mutant (in *The Host*) or a teenager and her grandfather raising a super pig in the mountains (*Okja*). *Parasite* is possibly even more explicit and angry a socio-political critique than *Snowpiercer*, which saw its prole insurgents upsetting the rigid class ecosystem on a train in a futuristic ice age. But its scale is far smaller. Ever the sui generis genre-switcher, Bong this time has his class struggle play out in a con-family comedy. And it's a riot.

Meet Ki-taek (Bong's patron saint of slackers, Song Kang-ho) and his family: existing on the bottom rung of the gig economy, they are nothing but industrious, folding pizza boxes for peanuts, freeloading off any wifi signal they can while also trying to stop drunk passersby from urinating by their cramped basement home. 'Wait,' says father Ki-taek as they rush to close the window at the sight of fumigators advancing down the street. 'Free extermination.'

When his son Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) gets a gig posing as a university-educated English tutor for the teenage daughter of a fancy family, they hit the jackpot. Soon, in a fiendishly orchestrated caper, more and more of the clan join the rich family's entourage. As always with Bong's films, the devil is in the detail, of which no spoilers here, except to say that it's a wicked ride. In this servant/master home-invasion potboiler, exactly who is leeching off whom is never clear.

All of this very naturally plays out as a satire of the whims and extravagances of the remote and cloistered wealthy. Mr Park (Lee Sun-kyun) is a cordial businessman with an icy edge who expects his chauffeur's smooth turns not to upset his coffee. Mrs Park (Cho Yo-jeong) is a helicopter mum, particularly indulgent of her pampered little son. Both sets of parents simply want the best for their offspring. But only the Parks can buy it.

Compared to the young Park children receiving extra tutoring, Ki-woo and his crafty sister Ki-Jung (Park So-dam) can't afford further study. 'I just printed out the document early,' Ki-woo says of his forged degree certificate. That he still yearns to go to university is illustrative of the mindset of the entire utopia-seeking family, chasing dead-end dreams even as Bong makes it clear that prospects are far from rosy for graduates.

There's a lot of talk of vigour. Two adages often trotted out in life and more trite movies are both skewered. First, that hard honest work will reap rewards. Second, that money can't buy you happiness. Bong doesn't show it as a direct ticket to bliss, but security and material comfort certainly have their advantages. 'She's rich but still nice,' says Ki-taek of Mrs Park. 'She's nice because she's rich,' his wife Chung-sook (Chang Hye-jin) acutely replies as she shoves away one of the Parks's small pooches.

The visual design of *Parasite* delights in contrasts. The filthy basement strewn with clutter and rubbish is the opposite of the Parks's lavish concrete-and-glass Modernist pad, pristine and minimalist right down to the delectable back-lit possessions on display. Who wouldn't want to live this life, the film taunts.

As the home invasion progresses, the laughs darken until they're downright squirmy. Increasingly sinister scenes usher in a shift in tone but don't upturn the film, due to the realness of the characters and how Bong keeps burrowing further into their minds. Just when everything teeters on full-out deranged, he decides to hold up a mirror to Ki-taek's family and show them just how they are seen by the Parks, and by implication, most of society.

Foley Recordist: Kim Min-ji
Stunt Co-ordinator: Yoo Sang-sub

Cast:

Song Kang-ho (*Kim Ki-taek*)
Lee Sun-kyun (*Dong-ik*)
Cho Yeo-jeong (*Yeon-kyo*)
Choi Woo-shik (*Ki-woo*)
Park So-dam (*Ki-jung*)
Lee Jung-eun (*Moon-gwang*)
Chang Hye-jin (*Chung-sook*)
Park Myung-hoon (*Geun-se*)
Jung Ziso (*Da-hye*)
Jung Hyeon-jun (*driver Yoon*)
Jeong Esuh (*CEO of Pizza Place*)
Jo Jae-myong (*brother of Pizza Place CEO*)
Jung Ik-han (*neighbour*)
Kim Gyu-baek (*drunk person 1*)
Mwang In-kyung (*internet cafe staff*)
Ahn Seong-bong (*street fighting person 1*)
Kim Jin-hyung (*street fighting person 2*)
Yoon Young-woo (*Mercedes-Benz dealer*)
Park Jae-wook (*VR expert*)
Kang Hyun-gyu (*employee of Dong-ik company 1*)
Seo Hee-young (*employee of Dong-ik company 2*)
Lee Dong-yong (*drunk person 2*)
An Jin-sang (*shelter's public servant*)
Jeong A-reum (*refugee woman*)
Kim Jung-woo (*party man 1*)
Kim Ge-on (*party man 2*)
Lee Ju-hyung (*party man 3*)
Jung Jae-hoon (*party man 4*)
Yang Sun-young (*party woman 1*)
Lee Lu-a (*party woman 2*)
Riccardo Ferraresso (*Italian chef*)
Lee Sang-kyung (*party woman 3*)
Choi Jeong-hyun (*chef's assistant*)
Lee Ji-hye (*soprano*)
Ko Kwan-jae (*doctor*)
Kim Bo-ryoung (*cellist*)
Lee Si-hoon (*detective*)
Seo Pok-hyun, Shim Su-mi, Yoon Hye-ri
(*JTBC news reporters*)
Beak Dong-hyun (*following detective*)
Jang Ji-woo (*nurse*)
Andreas Fronk (*German father*)
Anna Elisabeth Rihlmann (*German mother*)
Melinda Macdonald (*German daughter*)
Sean Thomas (*German son*)
Rosie Peralta (*housekeeper*)
Lee Eun-hee (*real estate agent 1*)
Kim Se-in (*real estate agent 2*)
Han Mi-ja (*supermarket owner*)
Ju Su-ji (*hair designer*)
Shin Seung-min (*Namgoong, architect*)
Gam Ja (*Joonney*)
Mangchi (*Berry*)
Mungchi (*Poopoo*)
Park Seo-jun (*Min*)
Kwak Sin-ae (*voice of judge*)
Siegmond Mark (*voice, German couple*)
Maurer Katrin (*voice, German couple*)
South Korea 2019©
132 mins
Digital 4K

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Duped into playing the game of guessing which of the two families are the dirtiest rotten scoundrels, we only later realise that it's capitalism that's the true parasite. What's quite unexpected, beyond the deliciously twisting finale, is the tender musing on familial love that emerges and the sorrowful all-too-late realisation that you can't buy home.

Isabel Stevens, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 25 May 2019

Bong Joon Ho might have already been the most internationally beloved Korean New Waver, but *Parasite*, an acid-tongued satire in classic Bongian style, appears to be the one Bong movie that jazzes all the people all the time. It has gone through the roof. Maybe the closest we have today to a social-issue attack dog in the Sam Fuller mode, Bong is also a gripping mainstream storyteller, and his best films, of which *Parasite* is one, depict the tense lines of force in Korean society in often uproarious ways that anyone anywhere can feel in their guts. Certainly, the extreme socio-economic portraits Bong has laid out here – grungy and resourceful low-rung scramblers versus brittle nouveau riche narcissists – represents a paradigmatic reality practically any Earth-dweller can recognise.

Having gone global already on a scale no other Korean auteur has dared (by way of the polyglot casts and funding sources for 2013's *Snowpiercer* and 2017's *Okja*), Bong has finally hit the jackpot by sticking close to the homegrown class-combat arena of his earlier films, and perhaps it's not just ardent fans of *Memories of Murder* (2003) and *Mother* (2009) who are relieved to see him abandon heavy-handed CGI parables and get back to the pathological nitty-gritty.

Parasite's impact has been swift and praise near-unanimous. With a worldwide box office already deep into nine-figure American-dollar territory by November, it seems to be a launch of hilarious nastiness so expertly crafted that barriers of imported-film popularity collapse at its feet. The movie's precision-cut gearwork – smacking as much of Wile E. Coyote narratives as of Hitchcock and the Coens – may be its most powerful intoxicant, surprising yet inevitable, cascading satisfyingly toward disaster like a Rube Goldberg machine that eventually sets the house on fire.

At the same time, it may be that Bong's signature cynicism, and his spiked electrocardiogram style of narrative (pathos, meet comedy; comedy, meet savage violence) may be a jigsaw piece to fit our 2019 puzzle moment, when we're rarely sure whether to bray or gasp or weep at daily reports of what our fellow Homo sapiens are doing to each other, and to our social contract. From Brexit to Trumpitania to Turkey and Hong Kong and the Philippines, etc, the frayed power cables of class are setting fires, and the poor-on-rich-on-poor blood circus that *Parasite* rolls out for us may scan widely as both emblematic and prophetic – expressing the little-left-to-lose stress of now, and our suppressed dread of whatever could be coming next.

By itself, *Parasite* is a perverse kind of crowd-pleaser, although its neatly sewn-up plot high jinks make for easier swallowing than the haunting ways in which his earlier films defiantly remained open-ended. But by hitting so many buttons so beautifully, and by vacuuming up audiences without the imported benefit of ripped-headline subject matter or feel-good candy coating, Bong may have made it safe again for daring transnational distribution. *Parasite* may be the grown-up gateway drug millennial and Gen X moviegoers of every language have been waiting for – a step forward for which Park Chan-wook and Lee Changdong, for two, should be thankful. In the process, Bong may have finally fashioned himself, and his taste for empathetic mayhem, into a world brand for the ages.

Michael Atkinson, *Sight and Sound*, January 2020