

# PRECARIOUS SUBJECTIVITIES AND NEOLIBERAL RECONSTRUCTION OF MODERN FAMILY

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## Abstract

*Parasite* (Bong Joonho, 2019) attracted global viewers by addressing the intensifying class stratification and Neo-liberal reconstruction of global economy in the contemporary world. *Parasite* uniquely features class issues and social criticism instead of depicting typical class struggles between the rich and the poor. *Parasite* addresses the class structure in transition and highlights the precarious class on the margin. By personalizing class relations into family relations, *Parasite* features the changing family system along with the breakup of the conventional family. *Parasite* picks up the very point of this social change and the transformation of family types.

**Keywords:** *Parasite*, Precarious subjectivities, The family system, Psychoanalysis, Asian films, Political economy.

The film *Parasite* (Bong, 2019) has attracted global attention awarded four Oscars in 2020. Many viewers as well as film critics see the universal themes that the film addressed such as increasing economic stratification and class struggles as the points of global success (Liu, 2020; Dianlya, 2020; Anker, 2020). Yet, the film displayed ambivalent visual symbols and eccentric characters. In this regard, some critics see the film as conservative because it is not rebellious enough (Brody 2019; Kim 2020). However, *Parasite* features the transition of the social system and a new vision of social relations rather than addressing the mere criticism of inequality between the rich and the poor, and recurrent social relations in capitalism.

*Parasite* addresses social changes reflected in the family system and presents an alternative social system and family type. The film presents irony of the nuclear family, which has played the ideological and psychological roles of supporting the modern social system (Todd 1989; Gittins 1993). *Parasite* visualizes paradox of modern family in a form of mystery by portraying ironic characters in the film such as "a ghost" living in a basement, hysteric bourgeoisie and a fraud family. Although these characters appear to be eccentric being disconnected from the class structure, they illustrate the struggles of people in the existing mode of production (Zaretsky, 1986; Cooper, 2017). Moonkwang and her husband, represents the downside of modern family which has been hidden and suppressed under the modern mode of production.

The film *Parasite* steps forward to portraying an alternative family type to modern nuclear family, which is created by the changing social system and globalization. The film narrates about distinctive families, Kim and Park, contradict each other in every aspect. Park family shows the typical nuclear family: capable and patriarchal father, feminine and hysterical wife, and protected and vulnerable children. Kim family represents an alternative type by showing an exactly opposite picture to nuclear family: incapable and unplanned father, uncaring and

tough mother, and desiring and shrewd children. The film elucidates irony and struggles of these two-family types which symbolically represent the social transition in the contemporary world.

This paper focuses on examining the transition of social system in Neo-liberal world and see how idiosyncratic characters of the film *Parasite* represent influences of social changes on personal lives and individual psychology. One of the distinctive features of Neo-liberal economy is restructuring the working class. Social mobility and job security are no longer expected by the people at the bottom when precarious and gig labors drastically increase (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2014; Ettlinger, 2007). South Korea is one of the countries that have the high number of precarious workers in the world (OECD, 2022). Currently, South Korea is ranked on the top in terms of the rate of precarious work, and the seventh in the rate of self-employment among over 100 OECD countries.<sup>1</sup> Growing number of precarious workers and the transition of employment in Korea was originated from Neo-liberal restructuring of its economy during the Asian crisis in 1997 which has affected Korean economy throughout until now. It is not only economy and employment but also family relations and psychology of individuals that are affected by Neo-liberal restructuring. High rates of unemployment and precarious employment have led to breaking up families and affecting individual psychology (Cho, 2009; Ham, 2002; Kapur & Wagner, 2011). The film *Parasite* features the transition of family and pathological psychologies of vulnerable people in the Neo-liberal society. In this sense, the theme of *Parasite* is different from previous films of Bong which consistently feature rebellious underdogs while adhering to family values. It is not the main point of *Parasite*, on the contrary, to highlight class struggles between the rich and the poor and regain family values. *Parasite* visions a new type of family and individual psychology in the context of growing precarious labor in the Neo-liberal world.

1 See OECD (2022) Economics Department Working Papers, No. 67 <http://www.economy21.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=1010229>

## Modern family and Neo-liberal reconstruction

*Parasite* pictures a poor family dwelling in a semi-basement and a rich family residing in a luxury home uptown. The stories mostly happen in these two homes. While the film visually illustrates the contrast between the two families and symbolizes social stratification, *Parasite* uniquely portrays class issues in the film narrative.

From the perspective of Marxist political economy, the role of family has been an integral part of social reproduction as argued by leftists such as Marx and Engels in their famous book, *Origin of the Family Private Property, and the State* (1884), which presented how family has been formed depending on class relations from the beginning of primitive society to capitalism. Even though the family has been developed as a small but effective unit of social reproduction for thousands of years, the nuclear family is unique in the sense that it appears to be distanced from the mode of production. In pre-modern society, family lives are mingled with working lives such as farming and manufacturing in the family unit. In the modern era, on the contrary, the nuclear family intends to segregate from the mode of production and perpetuates separation and boundaries.

It is not only Marxists, but also right-wing structural functionalists such as Smelsen & Halfner (1978) and Hartman (1990) who also present the social necessity of creating a nuclear family disconnected from the local community of premodern society. Both left- and right-wing sociologists concur with the point that the nuclear family is formed by the need of flexible labor power to facilitate capitalist development. The nuclear family both becomes a basic social unit of capitalist reproduction and develops emotional bonds in the late modernization period of the nineteenth century to mitigate class struggles (Zaretsky, 1983). During this period, the family became romanticized and sacred, and the ideology of family centrism and unbreakable family values was legitimized.

The nuclear family has been formed by disconnecting from local communities and the material basis during the period of modernization and urbanization. The nuclear family has created a sublime image by ideologizing and romanticizing family relations in the process of modernization (Giddens 1992; Kim 2013). In this sense, the modern family is a salient example of what Zizek (1989) calls “the sublime object of ideology.” Zizek (1970) explains how a fantasy of cultural products and media contributes to maintaining capitalism in the contemporary world and supporting ideology.

The ideology of the nuclear family hides the fact that family is an economic unit and offspring of social necessity. The nuclear family appears to be a sacred realm that cannot depend on material interests and mutant social values. Suburban areas in American movies are symbols of the enclosure of the nuclear family. Threats on the boundary and territorial enclosure of the middle-class nuclear family are frequently illustrated in these movies which usually end with being protected as the sacred realm.

Neurotic psychology and anxiety in the nuclear family are common themes in modernist literature and Hollywood films. Even in a golden age of American society in the 1950s, neurotic symptoms of the nuclear family were portrayed in Hollywood films such as *Bigger than Life* (Ray, 1956), which addresses anxiety and the claustrophobic enclosure of the suburban middle class. Threats and horrors happening in a peaceful suburban middle-class neighborhood are consistently portrayed in American cinema onwards including the films of Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, and directors in the contemporary Hollywood horror genre. Lunatic criminals or zombies and ghosts threaten the sublime boundary of the nuclear family in these films (Maden, 2017; Hanike, 2019). Fantasies are created as a form of metaphysical and sublime horror such as ghosts and lunatics that threaten sacred places of middle-class families. Poor and marginal subjects are presented as horror in these films.

The mode of production in the modern period established not only capitalist production system in the workplaces, but also affected identity of individuals and their personal lives (Cooper, 2017; Gandal, 2007). The family system is an integral part of the modern mode of production, and the nuclear family supports the reproduction of capitalism. Nuclear family is an important basis of forming modern subjectivity which is constituted by meta-narratives including religions, nation-state, and other ideological aspects (Lyotard, 1984; James, 1999). The ideal type of nuclear family is certainly an important part of the meta-narratives of modernity.

*Parasite* visually discloses the irony of the nuclear family in describing Park's household. The dual structure of the house

of Park's family with bourgeois culture upstairs and hidden gothic space in the deep basement reflects the social construction of the nuclear family. Tears and toils of the capitalist mode of production exist right underneath the sacred space of the nuclear family. The hidden reality of the modern system derives anxiety and neurosis in the modern society.

The hysteric character of a fragile feminine protagonist demonstrates the dual nature of the modern family system. Despite being rich and naïve, she shows neurotic anxiety's stumbling legs while caring for her children and collapses down to sleep in a strange posture under the bright sunshine in the garden. Another example of this female protagonist's neurotic reaction is that she hysterically bursts into tears



Fig. 1 A ghost in the Park's house in the film Parasite (Bong Junho 2019).

when she talks about her son's trauma. Her son bumped into the husband of the maid, Geunse who secretly hide underneath the house. He is identified with a ghost by Park's family as Figure 1. Geunse represents the suppressed side of the nuclear family. Upper middle-class families appear to be independent from tears, toils, and materiality by suppressing and hiding the material base of the underclass. The dual structure of architecture and characters living upstairs and downstairs in the film reflects the construction of the modern nuclear family that hides and suppresses the reality of the mode of production.

In the dark space of the house, Geunse is sucking milk, eating bananas like a baby, and obsessed with Morse code, which he learned in a Boy Scout camp. He hits his head to send messages using Morse code to the master of the house, speaking out "respect". The hidden side of residence in the basement represents instinctual unconsciousness and wild nativity as the opposite side of social order and enlightened rationality. In the climax of the film, the hidden cohabitant ends up climbing up from the basement and discloses the suppressed nature of the nuclear family under the sunshine. The scene naturally converges with violence and destruction. The bloody climax reveals the hidden nature of the capitalist mode of production.

*Parasite's* male protagonist, Park, shares the effort to delineate the boundary. The master of the house, successful CEO of an IT company Dongik Park, attempts to protect his dreamy home by suppressing the other side of reality and delineating the boundary. He is so obsessed with the boundary that he does not allow air flows to cross the border, being sensitive even to odors that freely cross the border and are hard to control.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the obsessive protection of the parents, Park's children appear to be vulnerable and easily become victims.



Fig. 2 Watchful eyes of Park's daughter in the film *Parasite* (Bong Junho 2019).

*Parasite* pictures the watchful eyes of the daughter and the sensitive son. The film shows close-ups of the big eyes of the daughter hiding behind the wall and observing strangers as Figure 2 illustrates.

The film also presents a naughty boy who sniffs around people. In spite of their alertness and sensibility, the daughter is sexually seduced by her private tutor, Kiwoo, who is a fake university student. The film suggests that she was also victimized by the former tutor (a friend of Kiwoo) who wanted to use her to step up to a higher social status. Additionally, the film shows that the son is instantly tamed by the fake art teacher (a sister of Kiwoo).

2 The director Bong summarizes the concept of this film as a film about odor in an interview on TV (JTBC 2019). [http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news\\_id=NB11829691](http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news_id=NB11829691)

While Park and Moonkwang families illustrate irony of nuclear family and hidden mode of production, however, Kim's family illustrates a distinctive feature from typical underclass and class struggles. The film does not demonstrate brutal emotion and confrontation between Kim and Park families. The fraud project of Kim's family against Park family and even the murder scenes at the climax do not necessarily show intense struggles between the two economic classes. In contrast to grotesque residents hidden in the basement, Kim family living in the semi-basement is described as someone alienated from the real world. The description of Kim family is far from conventional depiction of poor people.

Some critics point out that *Parasite* describes the brutal reality of poor people who are deprived of education and employment opportunities however talent and diligent they are (Liu 2020; Dargis 2020). The critics point out that clever and artistic children in Kim family could not enter in the good universities, and diligent parents are constantly jobless. However, the film describes Kijeong, the daughter of Kim, as having "good skill of handcraft" instead of artistic talent, Kiwoo, the son, as shrewd instead of intelligent. In fact, the film does not emphasize unfair opportunities for poor people, and the members of Kim family look far from victims of social inequality.

Indeed, films have not always portrayed poor people as victims and rich people as exploiters. Even silent films described working class people as active agents instead of victims as illustrated *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927). It is often viewed "class-exploitation" that describes poor as victims and rich as vice in mainstream movies (Gandal, 2007; Farahbakhsh & Ebrahimi, 2021). The film *the Triangle of Sadness* (2022), for example, features the revolt against the triangle of class hierarchy and rebellion of the lower class. It is same to Bong's previous films that consistently describe rebellious underdogs and vigorous class struggles as shown in his films including *Host*, *Mother and Okja* (Schulze, 2018; Lee & Manicasteri, 2018; Ugwu, 2020; Noh, 2020). These films feature rebellious underclass who

fight against social inequality and end up restoring family (community) values.

However, *Parasite* takes another step to look at the transition of social relations and the family system instead of portraying conventional class struggles. While personalizing class issues into family relations, *Parasite* addresses the changing social system along with the breakup of the conventional family. *Parasite* picks up the very point of this social change and the transformation of family types. The relationship among members of Kim family contradicts the ideology of the nuclear family in all ways. They do not appear to fight against the system to restore morality and love of family relations.

In *Parasite*, Kim family presents an alternative form of family far from a nuclear family. Although Park family tries hard to maintain an enclosure and protect the boundary of their family through what Park's wife called "the belt of trust," the boundary of protection and closure is easily breakable by the absurd plan of a swindling family. Kim family derides the hypocrisy and futility of this enclosure and dreams of a nuclear family, which is no longer functioning in the contemporary world.

A major part of the film develops the story of fraud family that deceives Park family. The four members of Kim family are hired one by one by the deceived master of the house as a tutor, art teacher, driver, and housemaid. Compared to the meticulous plan to deceive Park and his wife, however, Kim's family does not seem to cause much harm to Park family even though they cleverly expelled the previous workers using dirty underwear and pizza sauce. It looks as though the most delinquent behavior that Kim family makes at this rich home might be occupying the living room and consuming liquor and food and playing in the garden while Park family is out camping. Even when Kim family has a party in the living room, they sit on the floors and accidentally eat dog food, which shows no intention of emulating the upper class.



The eccentric characters and their behaviors in *Parasite* represent changing values and the social system. The narratives of *Parasite* demonstrate fundamental changes of the family system. In reality, the conventional nuclear family has been broken up, and diverse patterns of family are replacing it in the Neo-liberal world. The family system goes into turmoil, and family values encounter challenges due to a new social necessity. The conventional nuclear family starts breaking up and transforming into a new pattern according to social changes and Neo-liberal reconstruction of economy. As a result, family crisis and individualization join the most frequently cited keywords in sociology as well as mundane conversation and media representation (Beck & Beck, 2002; Chang & Song, 2010).

In South Korea (Korea hereafter), Asian economic crisis in 1997 became a threshold of restructuring its economy and breaking up family and ways of life. The legend of economic development that Korea had achieved in the previous generation broke up during the Asian economic crisis, and Korea was about to the point of announcing the national moratorium in 1998. Korea borrowed foreign currency from IMF (International Monetary Fund) to resolve economic disasters at that time. The Neo-liberal reconstruction of the Korean economy has started on the demand of IMF in the due course. While adjusting to IMF demands, business sectors have adopted the flexible employment system, and precarious workers have increased since then. Precarious employment currently takes up to the 2/3 of the total employment in Korea (KDI, 2021).

Moreover, many middle-aged people who had hard time to find new jobs after layoffs during the economic crisis became self-employed and opened up small business. The number of opening small business is about 500,000 a year whereas the number of closing business is 40,000 every year (Kim 2015)<sup>3</sup>.

This means that the majority of the self-employed are bankrupt when they close the business. Consequently, the size of household debt has been enormously increased, which was doubled from 1997 to 2012 (KDI 2013).

The number of self-employments in Korea has grown as the result of increasing number of unemployment during the series of economic crisis in 1998, the Asian economic crisis, and in 2008, the global financial crisis. Compared to self-employment in the US and Western Europe which has increased by new economic drives such as IT and high-tech industries in post-industrial societies, growing number of self-employments in Korea is mainly due to the high unemployment rate during the economic crisis (Bergstron & Storrie, 2003; Choi & Lee, 2005; Kalleberg, 2011). The unemployed, particularly middle-aged people, generally open up small business for the purpose of family supports and survival. Even foreign media such as Wall Street Journal pays attention to the unique pattern of self-employment in Korea by calling "chicken bubbles" because many self-employed open up fried chicken places that are easy to manage by one person or a couple.<sup>4</sup> Again, the 80% of them close the business in a year according to the KDI statistics and became unemployed again.

During the Asian economic crisis, the Korean government was required to follow IMF's guidelines in order to borrow foreign currencies. IMF required the strict restructuring plan, and the Korean government was no longer able to pursue the previous development model. Korean government previously drove rapid economic development through the state economic plans before the Asian crisis. Rapid economic development was possible due to hard work and their high savings of the people. The Korean government pushed to mantle big business (chaebol) and invest large capital on heavy industries relying on labor power and high savings of the people. During the economic crisis, however, IMF required the strict

3 See also the news report about a more recent situation. <https://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20200610500176>

4 Wall Street Journal. (2013, September 14) Restaurant Boom Bodes ill for Korea Economy. *Wall Street Journal*.

capital adequacy ratio of business sectors which means restricting the debt rate of companies. As a result, the corporate debt decreased from 424% in 1997 to 105% in 2006. Business sectors no longer invested large capital in heavy industries but had to lay off employees or contract precarious employment. Household debt doubled during the time (Lee 2020). As such, the IMF restructuring plan of Korean economy resulted in restricting business investment and increasing debts of individual households.

Additionally, IMF restructuring plan of Korean economy affected the social welfare system in Korea. It is often called privatization of Keynesianism (Crouch, 2011; Pierson, 1994; Peng, 2004), which means that welfare policies were reduced, and people were pushed to find a way of survival by their own personal efforts. In the process, household debts again increased. People maintained their purchasing power by borrowing money from financial institutions because of restrictive employment of business sectors and reduction of welfare policy.

Korea turned to Neo-liberal economy by following IMF restructuring plans during the economic crisis. It was quite transparent that the global pressure in the form of specific requirements of IMF affected Korean economy. As the result of privatization and restructuring of the Korean economy, household debts have drastically increased, and the rate of precarious work has become drastically growing (Streck, 2014; Yun, 2011). Precarious employment and household debt are still the two main obstacles of the Korean economy which cause frequent social conflicts in Korean society.

In the course of Neo-liberal reconstruction of economy, people in the middle class have been driven to the position of have-nots, and families have broken up. The conventional type of nuclear family now becomes a minority in Korea, while

divorced, mixed, and never-marrying households increase (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Comaroff, 2014). The 2022 Korean census demonstrates that the one-person household is becoming the majority of the population, occupying 35% of the total population, whereas a three-person or above household has decreased to 20%.<sup>5</sup> Statistics illustrates that 35-40% of young people in their 30 to 40 stay single and the primary reason is responded as the economic situations of them.<sup>6</sup> Family crises and the break-up of the family are popular themes in media as well as research projects in Korea (Kim 2013; Ham 2002; Cho 2009). Alternative families to the typical nuclear family are widely discussed and presented in the society and media as well as academic fields.

*Parasite* presents a new way of showing breakup families and an alternative family type that are brought up by Neo-liberal economy. The film looks more into internal relations of family and social psychology rather than describing any particular forms of alternative family. In the film, both Kim and Moonkwang families have been the typical self-employed and now fall into underdogs after bankrupt. When Kim and Moonkwang families bumped into each other in the basement, they found one thing common that both were bankrupt from the business of trading Taiwan cakes. It is a typical case of self-employment that middle aged people open up a small business-like selling Taiwan cakes by borrowing money from banks after losing jobs during the economic crisis. They were supposedly middle-class households before (as they were able to borrow money from banks and run a small business) but became underdogs in the course of series of economic crises and Neo-liberal reconstruction. Although two families now become precarious subjects' parasite on a rich household, they demonstrate two distinctive attitudes; one seeks an alternative family type; the other adheres to nostalgia of nuclear family.

5 See the website for more information. [https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT\\_1JC1517&checkFlag=N](https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1JC1517&checkFlag=N)

6 See the website for more information. <https://kostat.go.kr/ansk/>

## Precarious subjectivities and changing family systems

*Parasite* demonstrates eccentric characters and psychic tendencies of Kim and Moonkwang families. As Deleuze (1988) and Baudrillard (1983) call social psychology of late capitalism or post-modernism as schizophrenia, psychic tendencies are often described as psychological pathology in the contemporary world. More specifically, Dufour (2008) identifies psychic symptoms with precarious subjectivity while arguing that Neo-liberal economy affects psychology of individuals. Growing precarious employment in Neo-liberal economy cause not only economic difficulties but also psychological pathology of individuals. Precarious workers tend to have ambivalent attitudes and sudden mood swings. While having attitudes of docility and interiority as a way of adjusting to flexible work demands, precarious workers suddenly turn to show extreme anxiety and paranoia (Mole 2010).

Psychotic tendencies are prevalent to precarious subjectivities in the post-modern and Neo-liberal society as opposed to neurotic psychology in the typical modern society (Lacan 1977; Dufour 2008; Ridgeway et al. 2020). As meta-narratives are disintegrated in the post-modern society, people are confused with the multi-referential points of any symbols (Lyotard 1984). Although tradition, religions and ideologies together functioned as multi-referential symbols in the modern society, people no longer refer to those symbols and beliefs in the radically changing society. As the majority of people lose their solid jobs and are pushed to adjust to new environments as precarious workers or recurrent unemployed, they no longer retain old faith in traditions and ideologies. It is called precarious subjectivities that describe psychology of precarious workers such as floating mind and acritical consciousness (Ettinger 2007; Butler 2004). Precarious subjectivities no longer rely on moral standards and traditional values in modern society.

*Parasite* describes precarious subjectivities by highlighting the floating mind of Kim family. The behavior and dialogues

of Kim family contradict to tradition and moral standards of family relations. The father, Kitaek, reacts to his son, Kiwoo, with, "Oh, you have a life plan, I am proud of you" when Kiwoo fakes a university certificate. The scene suggests that the father does not play any parental role in educating his children and teaching general morality. Children in the Kim family also do not show moral consciousness and critical mind by saying "I don't think it's criminal, Dad. I will go to this university next year anyway." Eccentric characters of Kim family demonstrate psychotic and acritical minds of precarious subjectivities. They do not share any referential points of morality and how to behave among family members.

In the film, Kim family discloses the economic context of precarious subjectivities and shows alternative family relations to nuclear family. Family connections and conversations among members of the Kim family look similar to business relations. They often engage in domestic labor together such as assembling pizza boxes and planning to scam others for profits as Figure 3 illustrates. Family conversations are largely limited to money matters and making a profit. There is little space for caring and emotional attachment in the Kim family. Although four members of the Kim family are tightly collaborating among themselves to exploit others, they do not show much emotional attachment or family values anywhere in the film. They illustrate a kind of family entrepreneurship except what they plan for is criminal collusion.

Despite meticulous fraud plans, members of Kim family demonstrate accomplishment of their tasks quite well. They are amazingly skillful and clever not only in deceiving others but also in conducting their work duties as Park's employees. The father, Kitaek, demonstrates superb driving skills, and the mother immediately manages the housework like a professional. The son and daughter are also good at private teaching and in training Park's children even though they are not qualified, and all their certificates are fake. These skills and flexibility of Kim's family illustrate docile attitudes and multiple work experiences that precarious workers accumulate in the course of their life struggles.



Fig. 3 Kim's family assembling pizza boxes in the film Parasite (Bong Junho 2019).

Moonkwang family, on the other hand, demonstrates a different attitude from Kim family. Although Kim and Moonkwang families share similar experiences as fallen middle class and precarious subjects, they have distinctive ideas of family relations. When Moonkwang discovers the secret party of Kim family at the living room of Park's house while Park family was out camping, she mocks Kim. Moonkwang explains how she and her husband usually enjoy occupying the house as if they were the master of the house having tea in lavish porcelain and dancing waltz like high-class bourgeoisie.

The contradictory behaviors of the two precarious families, Kim and Moonkwang, parasite on the rich household

demonstrate their different attitudes toward the existing social system. Moonkwang and her partner show nostalgia toward the past. It is often called 'Post-Fordist affect' that precarious workers wish to return back to the hey days when they had a job security and firm beliefs such as American dream and social mobility (Isin, 2004; Lambert, 2019). Moonkwang and her husband emulated the bourgeois lifestyle while having precarious psychology of nostalgia and grief. Kim family, on the contrary, do not show any wish for social mobility nor emulate any tastes of the high-class.

Park and Moonkwang families are the two sides of the same coin of the nuclear family like a decalcomanie<sup>7</sup>. The

7 Decalcomanie was the first thought of the title before director Bong made the title of the film, Parasite.

material prosperity and neurotic anxiety of a nuclear family are connected to the material basis of capitalism that the two families represent. Moonkwang family is the hidden and suppressed side of nuclear family. It is suppressed under the name of irrationality, ghosts, and pathology.

Kim family, on the other hand, suggests an alternative family and changing the mode of production in the Neo-liberal world. Kim family derides romantic and sublime ideology of the nuclear family. Neither of family members of Kim follow values and ideology of modern family, nor do they wish for bourgeois lifestyles. Kim family discloses family as the social unit of production similar to the profit-seeking entrepreneur in the neoliberal world.

The birthday party scene at the climax of *Parasite* highlights the contrast between family types which are changing in the Neo-liberal world. While wearing Indian masks and hiding behind trees for the surprise party, Kitaek, the father of the Kim family, speaks to Dong Ik, "Do you have to do this much for family?... Guess no other way, eh, since you love your wife." Dongik is angered by hearing this comment and becomes aggressive, which ends up inviting tragedy for his family. Dongik believes that Kitaek is crossing the boundary that supports an untouchable border of the nuclear family.<sup>8</sup> Kitaek's dialogue reveals the secret of the nuclear family, which has become a sacred realm through its romanticized and fantasized value. Dongik tries hard to protect the boundary by using his body to block any crosser and makes an exaggerated body posture against the odor of an invader, Geunse. On seeing this gesture, Kitaek unexpectedly picks up the knife and murders Park.

Although Kitaek's murder is often interpreted as a rebellion by the underdog by many critics (Kiang, 2019; Dargis, 2020; Noh, 2020), the film does not show any emotion of Kitaek, outrage or humiliation, when he murders Park. Also, his behavior

after the climax does not concur with any of the rebellious underclass. Kitaek immediately sneaks in the basement and adjusts to the new environment by maintaining a stable life as he always does as a precarious subject. The murder scene in the film happens abruptly and swiftly, as if Kitaek had completed his duty with the last mockery against the master of nuclear family who has been deceived and manipulated by Kim family throughout the film.

Kim's son, Kiwoo also shows an ambivalent attitude. He appears to be the most ambitious and desiring person among his family members who break through unemployment and manages the project to invade the rich family. Although he often speaks about his dream for social mobility and his plan to marry to the girl in the rich family, he reacts ambivalently at the birthday party scene. While watching the busy preparation for the bourgeois party through the window upstairs, he distances himself from it, neglecting his attention to his secret lover. Then he abruptly returns to the basement and instigates the brutal battle against Moonkwang and her husband.

This battle scene creates a visual contrast between the bourgeois party upstairs and the bloody battle of the underdogs downstairs. Yet Kiwoo's action is so inconsistent and abrupt that little motivation is presented why he initiates the battle with these people in the basement. If Kiwoo's motivation were derived from fear of disclosing his secret, he could easily coax Moonkwang as he usually does. Even when Moonkwang tries to coax him into keeping her secret by saying, "Let's help each other between poor neighbors," Kim family rejects her proposition. Instead, Kiwoo's mother responds "No, we are not your poor neighbors." She clearly means that the two families are not in the same group even though they are both precarious class and parasites on Park's family. Then Chungsook kicks Moonkwang down to the stairs of the basement, and later Kiwoo smashes Geunse's head using his stone. As a result of

8 Kitaek's family has already invaded the private space by watching the most private sexual life of Dongik hiding underneath the table the earlier night.

Kiwoo's attack, Geunse is derived to invade the bourgeois party and to expose the hidden side of a modern bourgeois family.

The climax culminates with the contrast between the precarious subjectivity and exalting bourgeois culture. Handel's aria "Mio Caro Bene" from *Rodelinda* performed in the garden party demonstrates enjoyment of bourgeois culture by Park family and their high-class friends. This baroque opera presents the dual meaning similar to destiny of the deprived and pinnacle of modernism. The aria is, on one hand, based on the story of Queen Rodelinda who was deprived of her nation and husband and then seduced by the invader. Rodelinda finally overcomes all the difficulties and temptations and meets with her son and husband in a happy ending. The aria of this happy moment in Act III celebrates her sacrifice and love for family. This opera is representing an ideology of modern family by illustrating one of a few cases in music history that celebrate romantic love between a married couple and the monogamy of a modern family as opposed to the usual tales of forbidden love and dark romanticism that most other operas develop. The musical choice of the film elucidates ideology of modernism and modern family. The consequent sequence of the film describes heavy rain destroying luxuries of the bourgeois party. The film visually describes the irony of modern family and the destiny of modern ideology in this climax scenes.

Another symbol that signifies a double meaning in *Parasite* is Native American artifacts. Two fathers in the film wear Native American masks at the birthday party of Dasong, who is obsessed with Native American culture such as tents, masks, and arrows. These properties signify American invasions and the destiny of the deprived. Native American artifacts also signal the unexpected slash and wild cruelty in the murder scene of the film at the climax. The film instantly presents Native American artifacts without describing the context and the grounds of invasion and deprivation much. The film adopts compressed symbols such as the mask and music to depict social problems and to signal the destiny of characters. Da Capo opera aria and Native artifacts employed in the film

evidently symbolize invasion and deprivation. These symbols also insinuate nostalgia and grief of precarious subjectivities for the past that are still retaining in the Neo-liberal world.

### Concluding remarks

*Parasite* is often compared to other Asian films that address family issues such as Hirokazu Koreeda's films *Shoplifter* and *Broker* which are also awarded at Cannes film festival in 2018 and 2022. Like these films, *Parasite* features family problems and a criminal family. However, director Bong chases a quite different theme in *Parasite* from Koreeda who emphasizes human connections and emotional attachments. Koreeda and other Asian film makers pursue restoration of family relations and emotional bonds among people beyond the birth family. The alternative family types beyond the birth family that these Asian films picture is to regain humanistic connection and emotional supports among family members.

By contrast, *Parasite* addresses the reality of a breakup of a family and social changes in the Neo-liberal world. This film does not show any ways of regaining emotional bonds and support of family. There is no moment of reconciliation and regaining emotional bonds in and between families throughout the film. In this sense, *Parasite* pursues a distinctive theme from Bong's previous films which address family issues and seek reconciliations of family relations one way or another. *Parasite* uniquely features an alternative type of family which is integrated into a new mode of production or Neo-liberal economy. Precarious subjectivities in the film do not concur with any intention of restoring emotional attachments and moral bonds among family members.

*Parasite* reflects the social reality of working class in the Neo-liberal world. Unlike other Western countries, Neo-liberalism has been established under global pressure in Korea since the Asian economic crisis. It was not based on governmental policies such as Reaganomics or Thatcherism in the US and UK, but on the requirements of IMF which initiated

Neo-liberal economy in Korea. As a consequence of Neo-liberal restructuring of Korean economy, precarious work became drastically increased, and the middle class collapsed. The number of Korean precarious workers is one of the highest in the world, and temporary workers and self-employment currently occupy the major employment pattern in Korea.

Kim and Moonkwang families in the film *Parasite* demonstrate precarious subjectivities born out of the Neo-liberal economy. They show floating minds and sudden swings of temper when the firm basis of their beliefs and life standards has been shaken in changing societies. Park family, on the other hand, represents modern subjectivities while being obsessed with protecting the sacred realm of nuclear family. The film demonstrates that preexisting family relations are easily breakable in the Neo-liberal world however hard they are obsessed with maintaining the boundaries of nuclear family. *Parasite* challenges the fantasy of nuclear family which is believed to be romantic and sacred realms. The film illustrates that it is intruded by the fraud family and uninvited residents in the basement who are suffering from brutal reality as precarious subjectivities.

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