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# Exploring Bong Joon-ho's Cinematic Universe: A Survey of Low Theory Intersectionality and Auteur Theory

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## Abstract

This survey paper presents a comprehensive analysis of South Korean filmmaker Bong Joon-ho's oeuvre through the lenses of low theory, intersectionality, and auteur theory, focusing on the thematic exploration of failure within his films. By dissecting Bong's narrative techniques and socio-cultural commentaries, the study illuminates how his films critique systemic societal structures, particularly capitalism and class disparity. The analysis reveals Bong's adept use of genre blending and emotional tones, characterized by the strategic deployment of 'Pik-sari', to enhance the narrative complexity and engage audiences with profound socio-political critiques. Films such as 'Parasite', 'Okja', and 'Snowpiercer' serve as case studies for examining the intersectional themes and ethical dilemmas that pervade his work, highlighting the intricate interplay between individual identities and systemic forces. Bong's innovative sound design, integrated from the screenplay stage, underscores the thematic resonance of his narratives, inviting reflection on the socio-economic forces shaping contemporary society. The paper concludes by discussing Bong Joon-ho's contribution to global cinema discourse, emphasizing his role in challenging traditional storytelling norms and fostering a deeper understanding of cultural identity and audience reception. This multifaceted exploration enriches the academic conversation surrounding contemporary cinema and invites further research into the socio-political implications of Bong's films and their pedagogical potential in illustrating complex psychodynamic theories.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose and Significance

This survey dissects the multifaceted cinematic narratives of Bong Joon-ho, focusing on the evolution of class criticism throughout his filmography. By examining the intricate manifestations of class themes and their socio-economic implications, this paper aims to enhance understanding of how Bong critiques and reflects societal structures [1]. Utilizing low theory, intersectionality, and auteur theory, the analysis underscores the thematic depth of his storytelling and the broader cultural significance of his contributions to cinema. The objectives are to illuminate the interplay of narrative elements in Bong Joon-ho's films and to position his work within the discourse of South Korean cinema, thereby enriching the academic conversation surrounding his distinctive auteur style.

### 1.2 Themes of Failure and Narrative Analysis

Bong Joon-ho's films intricately weave themes of failure into their narratives, reflecting socio-political and economic tensions within South Korean society. His portrayal of failure transcends individual shortcomings, serving as a commentary on systemic issues that predispose individuals to such outcomes. Through complex storytelling, Bong explores human experiences, particularly through

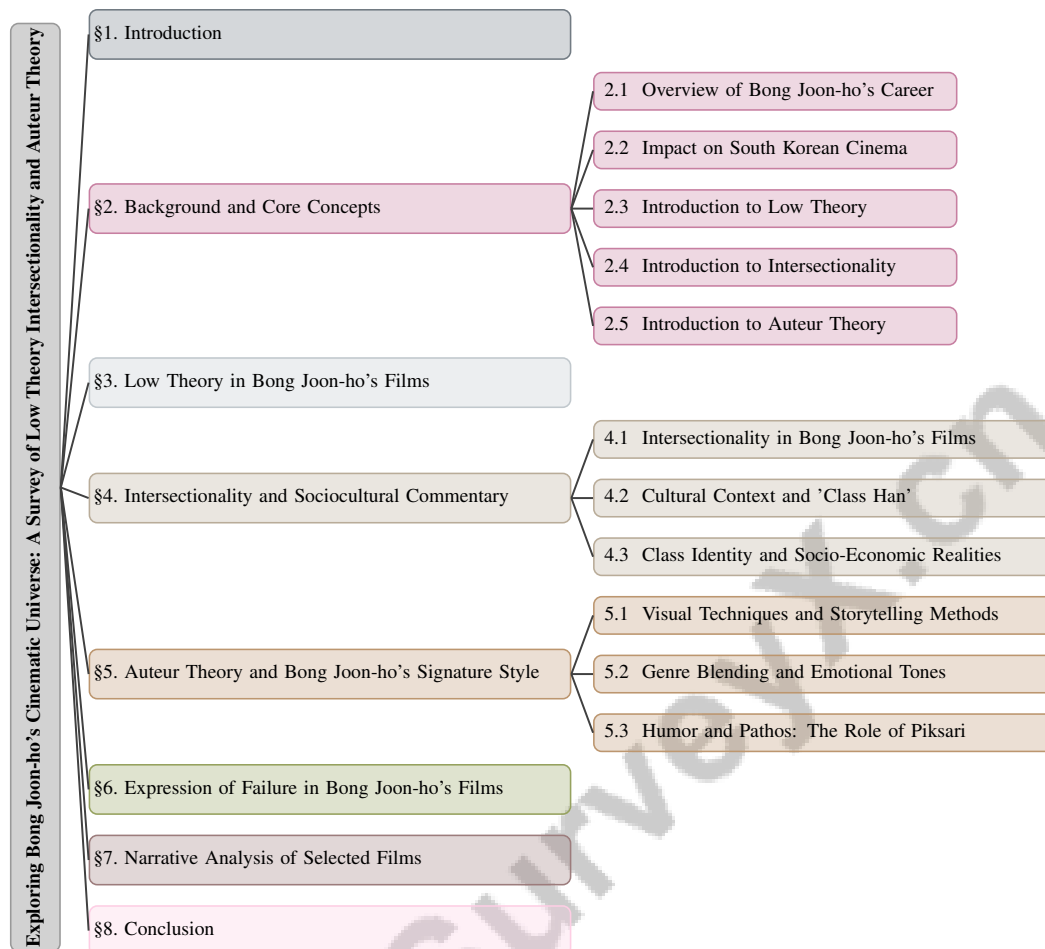


Figure 1: chapter structure

the lens of failure, which challenges societal norms and expectations regarding class disparities and the psychological concept of 'Han,' representing collective struggles. His films, rich in social commentary, utilize metaphorical symbols to reveal harsh realities of class oppression and moral decay, emphasizing universal themes of desire and the stark contrasts of social class [2, 3, 4, 5]. Failure often catalyzes character development and plot progression, while narrative techniques such as irony, dark humor, and moral ambiguity enhance the exploration of failure, inviting audiences to engage with the societal critiques embedded in his works.

### 1.3 Structure of the Survey

The paper is organized to provide a comprehensive analysis of Bong Joon-ho's films through various theoretical lenses. The introduction outlines the purpose and significance of the survey, emphasizing class criticism and failure in Bong's work. The background section delves into Bong Joon-ho's career and his influence on South Korean cinema, introducing core concepts such as low theory, intersectionality, and auteur theory. Subsequent sections explore each theoretical framework: low theory critiques societal norms, intersectionality illuminates diverse social issues, and auteur theory highlights Bong's unique cinematic style. The expression of failure is analyzed through narrative and character development, underscoring its significance in South Korean cinema. The survey concludes with a narrative analysis of selected films, dissecting storytelling techniques and their sociocultural commentaries. Each section builds upon the previous, culminating in a nuanced understanding of Bong Joon-ho's contributions to cinema and their broader implications for global film discourse. The following sections are organized as shown in Figure 1.

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## 2 Background and Core Concepts

### 2.1 Overview of Bong Joon-ho's Career

Bong Joon-ho's career is marked by a distinctive genre-blending style that appeals to both local and global audiences. Starting with 'Barking Dogs Never Bite' in 2000, he has directed seven feature films, culminating in 'Parasite' (2019), which received the Palme d'Or and multiple Academy Awards, including Best Picture [1]. His films critically address social and economic disparities through innovative narrative techniques and sound design. Collaborating with Live Tone, Bong incorporates sound design early in production, enhancing narrative depth and emotional impact [2]. His meticulous attention to visual and auditory elements establishes him as a master storyteller, reflecting South Korean societal complexities while engaging with universal themes. Bong's cinematic voice challenges filmmaking boundaries, contributing significantly to global cinema discourse.

### 2.2 Impact on South Korean Cinema

Bong Joon-ho profoundly influences South Korean cinema by highlighting socio-economic inequality and class struggles, themes central to South Korean society [1]. Films like 'Snowpiercer' address domestic issues while transcending national boundaries, contributing to discussions on transnational cinema and cultural identity. 'Snowpiercer' serves as an allegory for class conflict and environmental crises, visually articulating issues of social class and oppression. Through thematic explorations, Bong elevates South Korean cinema on the global stage, compelling audiences to engage with the social consciousness in his work. His merging of local themes with universal narratives broadens South Korean cinema's appeal, positioning it as a vital contributor to global film discourse.

### 2.3 Introduction to Low Theory

Low theory, as articulated by theorists like Jack Halberstam, counters high theory by embracing accessible forms of knowledge grounded in everyday experiences. In Bong Joon-ho's films, low theory critiques societal norms, particularly within capitalism and class dynamics. His narratives depict character dualities, reflecting complexities of good versus evil in capitalist societies [5]. This is evident in 'Parasite' and 'Snowpiercer', where character actions and socio-political commentaries highlight systemic inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. Bong's innovative sound design, integrated from the screenplay stage, enriches narrative depth and emotional resonance [2]. His collaborative approach allows for intricate soundscapes that complement visual storytelling and reinforce societal critiques. 'Snowpiercer' exemplifies the transnational nature of Bong's work, incorporating global themes and production elements, broadening his critique beyond national boundaries [6]. Through low theory, Bong's films challenge the status quo and engage audiences with socio-economic and cultural discourses shaping contemporary society.

### 2.4 Introduction to Intersectionality

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of social categorizations like race, class, and gender, leading to overlapping discrimination systems. In Bong Joon-ho's films, intersectionality unravels the socio-economic injustices and class conflicts depicted on screen. His narratives, especially in 'Parasite', highlight the stark contrast between the urban poor and affluent elite, with the socioeconomic divide driving the plot [4]. Bong weaves global and nationalist themes to underscore the impact of social stratification, reflecting contemporary South Korean society's realities [7]. The exploration of 'class Han', capturing collective resentment against societal injustices, further emphasizes this theme [3]. By embedding intersectional themes, Bong critiques capitalist structures perpetuating inequality and invites audiences to engage with the cultural implications of these dynamics, as portrayed in films like 'Parasite' [8]. Bong's work offers profound commentary on the intersection of individual identities and systemic forces, challenging viewers to reflect on broader implications within local and global contexts.

### 2.5 Introduction to Auteur Theory

Auteur theory, popularized by critics like François Truffaut and theorists such as Andrew Sarris, posits that a director's personal vision and distinctive style imprint on their films, rendering them

the "author" of the work. Bong Joon-ho's filmography exemplifies auteur theory through consistent thematic exploration and unique stylistic choices. His films blend genres—thriller, drama, and dark comedy—creating engaging and thought-provoking narratives [8]. Bong's meticulous attention to visual and auditory detail, particularly his innovative sound design, reinforces the emotional and thematic depth of his films [2]. This integration of sound and narrative is central to Bong's auteur signature, crafting immersive cinematic experiences resonating with global audiences. Recurring motifs of social inequality and class struggle are explored through complex character dynamics and moral ambiguities [5]. Bong's auteur approach challenges conventional storytelling norms and invites viewers to engage with socio-political commentaries embedded in his work. His cohesive artistic vision across diverse projects solidifies his reputation as a true auteur and highlights his significant influence on global cinema. This is particularly evident in works like 'Snowpiercer', where he seamlessly integrates themes of class struggle and social consciousness—hallmarks of Korean culture—into narratives resonating internationally. By blending realism and surrealism, he explores intricate dynamics of human desires and moral decay, bridging the cultural gap between South Korean cinema and Hollywood [3, 6].

In examining the cinematic oeuvre of Bong Joon-ho, it is essential to understand the intricate interplay of themes and techniques that define his films. A comprehensive analysis reveals a consistent critique of capitalism and class disparity, alongside innovative sound design and a challenge to established norms. Figure 2 illustrates this hierarchical structure, categorizing various narrative techniques, specific film examples, and thematic elements. This figure not only highlights the socio-economic and cultural discourses present in his work but also serves as a visual representation of the complex layers that contribute to his storytelling approach. By integrating these elements, we can better appreciate the depth and nuance of Bong Joon-ho's cinematic contributions.

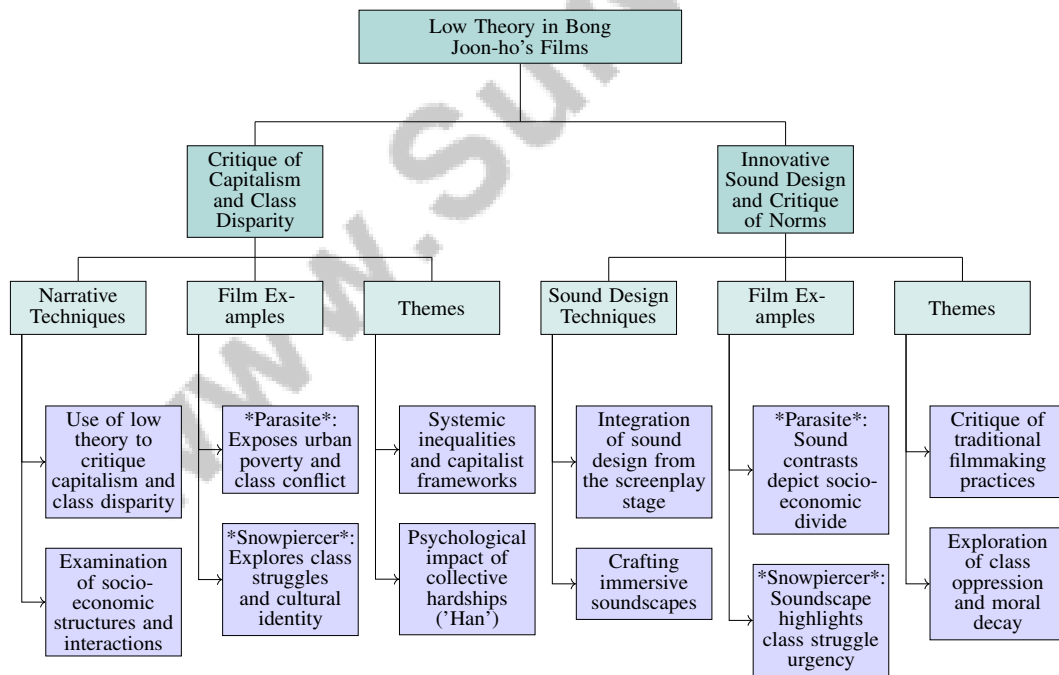


Figure 2: This figure illustrates the hierarchical structure of Bong Joon-ho's films, focusing on the critique of capitalism and class disparity, as well as innovative sound design and critique of norms. It categorizes narrative techniques, film examples, and thematic elements, highlighting the socio-economic and cultural discourses in his work.

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### 3 Low Theory in Bong Joon-ho's Films

#### 3.1 Critique of Capitalism and Class Disparity

Bong Joon-ho's films incisively critique capitalism and class disparity through low theory, highlighting the ethical ramifications of capitalist systems on marginalized groups and the environment [5]. His narratives range from overt to nuanced examinations of class issues, dissecting the socio-economic structures that influence societal interactions [1]. In *\*Parasite\**, the superficiality of South Korea's economic success is scrutinized by exposing urban poverty and class conflict [4]. The visual and narrative juxtaposition of the wealthy Park family against the impoverished Kim family underscores systemic inequalities sustained by capitalist frameworks. Bong also portrays repression as a universal defense mechanism, leading to significant psychological and societal issues if unaddressed [8].

Through low theory, Bong's films engage audiences with socio-economic critiques, encouraging reflection on capitalism's broader implications and class disparity. His cinematic approach not only challenges societal norms but also explores individual agency and systemic forces, particularly regarding class struggles and cultural identity, as illustrated in *\*Snowpiercer\**. By integrating diverse narratives and symbolism, he highlights the psychological impact of collective hardships, or 'Han', on characters within oppressive social structures, prompting audiences to reflect on their realities [2, 3, 6].

#### 3.2 Innovative Sound Design and Critique of Norms

Bong Joon-ho's innovative sound design is pivotal in challenging societal norms and enhancing narrative depth. Collaborating with Live Tone, Bong integrates sound design from the screenplay stage, ensuring a seamless fusion of auditory and visual elements that amplify thematic resonance [2]. This approach critiques traditional filmmaking practices and enriches storytelling by crafting immersive soundscapes that reflect the socio-political undertones of his narratives.

In *\*Parasite\**, sound design accentuates the socio-economic divide, using auditory contrasts to depict disparities between the Park and Kim families. This enhances the film's narrative and critiques the wealth gap in contemporary South Korea. By integrating sound design early, the filmmakers create a rich auditory landscape that underscores themes of urban poverty and privilege, challenging perceptions of South Korea's economic success [2, 4]. The meticulous sonic detail heightens the emotional impact of key scenes, reinforcing critiques of class structures and societal expectations. Similarly, in *\*Snowpiercer\**, the soundscape is intricately woven into the narrative, highlighting the urgency of the class struggle on screen.

Through his innovative sound practices, Bong critiques societal norms and invites audiences to explore the intricate layers of meaning within his films. Influenced by 'Han'—a collective psychological response to historical hardships—his films symbolically address pressing social issues like class oppression and moral decay. By blending realism and surrealism, Bong's films, noted for their rich soundscapes developed with Live Tone, invite viewers to engage with complex themes of human desire, class disparity, and the darker realities underpinning South Korea's economic success [2, 3, 4]. The integration of sound as a narrative device challenges viewers to reconsider the relationship between auditory and visual storytelling, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and cultural discourses in his work.

### 4 Intersectionality and Sociocultural Commentary

Examining intersectionality within cinematic narratives reveals how filmmakers portray complex social identities. Bong Joon-ho's films exemplify these themes, providing nuanced portrayals of class, gender, and cultural identity. The following subsection delves into the manifestation of intersectionality in Bong's work, illustrating how these narratives reflect and critique socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

#### 4.1 Intersectionality in Bong Joon-ho's Films

Bong Joon-ho's films, such as *\*Okja\**, *\*Snowpiercer\**, and *\*Parasite\**, intricately explore intersectional themes, weaving together social, economic, and cultural commentaries. In *\*Okja\**, the critique

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of animal commodification within capitalist systems underscores the moral dilemmas faced in a profit-driven world, highlighting the intersection of environmental and social justice issues [5].

'Snowpiercer' uses its confined train setting to depict stark class dynamics and socio-economic inequalities, merging Hollywood conventions with profound cultural critiques. The train's rigid class hierarchy serves as a microcosm for broader societal structures, illustrating the complexities of class identity in a neoliberal context.

In 'Parasite', Bong illustrates the socio-economic divide using physical spaces to symbolize and critique class stratification's pervasive impact. The film's intricate soundscapes, developed through early involvement in sound design, enhance narrative depth and underscore its intersectional themes [2]. Bong's films not only reflect South Korea's socio-economic landscape but also engage with universal issues, prompting audiences to consider the multifaceted nature of identity and systemic inequality in contemporary society.

## 4.2 Cultural Context and 'Class Han'

Bong Joon-ho's films provide a nuanced exploration of 'Class Han', a cultural concept encapsulating collective resentment against societal injustices in Korean society. This concept is intricately woven into his narratives, reflecting the socio-economic tensions of contemporary South Korean life. In "Parasite," the pronounced socio-economic divide serves as a central catalyst, revealing the darker realities beneath South Korea's economic success. The juxtaposition of the impoverished Kim family and the affluent Park family critiques the illusion of prosperity, particularly affecting the younger generation grappling with despair and disillusionment [4, 8]. The film's portrayal of physical and metaphorical spaces occupied by different classes critiques social mobility and entrenched barriers.

Moreover, Bong's work challenges traditional gender roles, as seen in 'Okja', where female characters like Mija defy patriarchal norms and assert agency against systemic oppression [5]. Mija's rebellion against her grandfather's views and her determination to rescue Okja highlight the intersection of gender and class dynamics, enriching the narrative complexity and inviting audiences to engage with broader cultural issues.

Through the lens of 'Class Han', Bong Joon-ho's films compel audiences to confront the lasting effects of historical traumas and socio-political dynamics on modern identities. His works, characterized by rich social commentary, utilize symbolic representations to critique class disparities and moral decay, revealing the psychological underpinnings of 'Han' culture—a collective emotional response shaped by national hardships. By juxtaposing urban poverty against economic success, particularly in "Parasite" and "Snowpiercer," Bong invites reflection on class stratification and the pervasive influence of desire in shaping societal values. This interplay of realism and surrealism in his storytelling serves as a powerful vehicle for examining the cultural and psychological ramifications of class divisions in contemporary South Korea [2, 3, 7, 4]. His cinematic exploration underscores the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and class dynamics shaping modern Korean society.

## 4.3 Class Identity and Socio-Economic Realities

Bong Joon-ho's films intricately depict class identity and socio-economic realities, critically examining the widening wealth gap and the societal structures perpetuating inequality, despite South Korea's economic successes [4]. His narratives serve as microcosms for broader societal critiques, reflecting entrenched class dynamics and the socio-economic challenges faced by individuals across different strata [8].

In 'Parasite', the contrast between the affluent Park family and the impoverished Kim family highlights systemic barriers hindering social mobility and exacerbating class disparities. The film's portrayal of spaces—such as the luxurious Park residence and the cramped semi-basement apartment of the Kims—serves as a visual metaphor for the socio-economic divide, underscoring the entrenched nature of class stratification. This spatial dichotomy reflects the psychological and emotional burdens imposed on individuals in a society rife with disparities, as illustrated in Bong Joon-ho's works. Notably, "Parasite" explores class struggle and the pervasive influence of 'Han'—collective emotional suffering rooted in historical hardships—demonstrating how these inequities manifest in characters' lived experiences and South Korea's broader cultural landscape [9, 4, 5, 3, 6].

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In "Snowpiercer," Bong Joon-ho constructs a dystopian narrative within a perpetually moving train, where class identity is determined by one's location within the hierarchy. This serves as an allegory for socio-economic disparities in a neoliberal world, illustrating how the ruling elite maintain control over lower classes. The struggle for survival aboard the train critiques broader social stratification and systemic inequalities [3, 4, 6, 7]. The train's hierarchical structure symbolizes capitalist systems perpetuating inequality, highlighting the interplay between individual agency and systemic forces. Through these narratives, Bong Joon-ho invites audiences to engage with the multifaceted nature of class identity and socio-economic realities, challenging reflection on the broader implications of these dynamics in local and global contexts.

## 5 Auteur Theory and Bong Joon-ho's Signature Style

### 5.1 Visual Techniques and Storytelling Methods

Bong Joon-ho's films are distinguished by their innovative visual techniques and storytelling methods, defining his unique cinematic style. His approach often blends genres and emotional tones through 'Piksari', combining humor, pathos, and suspense to enrich narratives and engage audiences on multiple levels [9]. In 'Snowpiercer', Bong uses visual storytelling to critique class struggle and environmental issues, with the train setting symbolizing societal hierarchies. Each car represents a socio-economic class, enhanced by meticulous visual details like lighting contrasts and strategic camera angles emphasizing class oppression [7].

Bong's storytelling often includes non-linear narratives and unexpected plot twists, challenging conventional norms and exploring themes of moral ambiguity and social injustice. His films, rich in social consciousness, use realism and surrealism to explore class disparity and moral decay, symbolizing 'Han'—a collective trauma from Korea's historical hardships. By juxtaposing the lives of affluent and impoverished characters in films like "Parasite" and "Snowpiercer," Bong offers profound commentary on the socio-economic divide in South Korea, critiquing the darker realities beneath its economic growth [2, 3, 7, 4].

### 5.2 Genre Blending and Emotional Tones

Bong Joon-ho's films masterfully blend genres and emotional tones, creating thought-provoking cinematic experiences. His ability to juxtapose humor and pathos challenges traditional narratives and audience expectations [9]. In 'Parasite', Bong combines dark comedy, thriller, and drama to explore class disparity and social injustice. 'Okja' intertwines adventure, satire, and social commentary to address ethical dilemmas in animal rights and corporate exploitation, reflecting Korean 'Han' culture's broader themes of class disparity and moral decay. The film employs symbolism and realism to critique capitalism's oppressive dynamics, exposing human desires' psychological impact [3, 5]. Similarly, 'Snowpiercer' blends science fiction and action to critique societal hierarchies and environmental degradation, using emotional contrasts to enhance narrative impact.

Bong's genre blending is complemented by strategic emotional tones that deepen audience engagement. By juxtaposing contrasting emotions, he enriches narrative complexity and invites exploration of human experience's multifaceted nature. His innovative approach redefines genre conventions while intricately weaving 'Han' into his narratives, addressing complex societal issues like class oppression and moral decay, resonating intellectually and emotionally [2, 3].

### 5.3 Humor and Pathos: The Role of Piksari

Bong Joon-ho's films are renowned for their blend of humor and pathos, encapsulated by 'piksari', which introduces absurdity within serious narratives. This allows Bong to juxtapose comedic elements with dramatic themes, exploring social issues like class disparity and moral decay while reflecting 'Han', shaped by Korea's historical hardships. Through rich symbolism and social consciousness, Bong's films offer profound commentary on the human condition, making 'piksari' pivotal in his storytelling [2, 9, 7, 4, 3].

In 'Parasite', Piksari navigates dark themes of class disparity and social injustice, using absurdity and irony to underscore characters' tragic realities. This strategic humor counterbalances somber elements and amplifies the social critique's emotional impact. In 'Okja', Piksari highlights ethical

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dilemmas in animal rights and corporate exploitation, adding humor and pathos to critique capitalism [9, 4, 1, 5, 3]. The tonal shifts invite reflection on broader implications.

Bong's innovative use of Pksari is evident in 'Snowpiercer', where dark humor intertwines with dystopian settings to critique societal hierarchies and environmental degradation. This humor-pathos juxtaposition enriches narrative depth, engaging audiences with complex socio-political themes. Through Pksari, Bong redefines cinematic conventions, exploring social class themes and 'Han'. His socially conscious works critique class oppression, revealing human desires' complex dynamics and moral decay. By blending realism with surrealism, Bong's films stimulate intellectual engagement and evoke deep emotional resonance, challenging viewers to confront disparities between the privileged and marginalized in contemporary society [2, 3, 4].

## **6 Expression of Failure in Bong Joon-ho's Films**

Bong Joon-ho's films articulate failure through a sophisticated blend of narrative structure and sound design, offering a critical examination of societal shortcomings. This section explores how these elements contribute to a deep critique of social failures, focusing on the interplay between narrative depth and sound design.

### **6.1 Narrative Depth and Sound Design**

Bong Joon-ho's films are distinguished by their narrative complexity, which is amplified by innovative sound design to explore themes of failure. His narratives often spotlight the working class's struggles, highlighting socio-economic injustices with global resonance [1]. This thematic focus is enhanced by Bong's meticulous sound design, creating an immersive cinematic experience.

Incorporating sound design early in the filmmaking process ensures narrative cohesion. By integrating auditory elements during the screenplay phase, Bong seamlessly weaves sound cues into the narrative, heightening emotional and thematic impact [2]. This attention to sonic detail results in soundscapes that complement visual storytelling and reinforce the socio-political critiques within his films.

In 'Parasite', sound design underscores the socio-economic divide through auditory contrasts, vividly illustrating disparities between the wealthy Park family and the destitute Kim family. This approach deepens the narrative's emotional resonance and critiques the South Korean economic miracle by exposing class struggles' harsh realities and moral complexities. Collaborating with Live Tone, Bong's soundscapes highlight the exclusionary nature of neoliberal urban environments, reflecting the widening wealth gap [2, 4, 3]. The nuanced sound enriches narrative depth, prompting audiences to engage with themes of failure and inequality, challenging them to consider systemic failures and socio-economic forces in contemporary society.

### **6.2 Urban Poverty and Moral Compromise in 'Parasite'**

'Parasite' intricately examines urban poverty by contrasting the bleak realities of the impoverished with the illusion of affluence in South Korean society. The film critiques the facade of prosperity, revealing enduring socio-economic disparities beneath perceived economic success [4]. Through the Kim family's survival struggles and moral compromises, it offers commentary on systemic inequalities shaping urban life.

Bong employs narrative techniques to highlight repression's psychological impact, using the Kim family's experiences to reflect societal structures that perpetuate inequality. This exploration not only enriches thematic depth but also provides insights into the human psyche, benefiting psychiatric education [8]. The characters' moral compromises for economic stability mirror broader socio-economic forces, inviting reflection on the ethical complexities in a society marked by stark class divisions.

Through its portrayal of urban poverty and moral compromise, 'Parasite' challenges viewers to engage with the socio-political critiques embedded in the narrative. It encourages reevaluation of societal norms governing contemporary life. The film's exploration of systemic inequality and class disparity underscores structural failures perpetuating social injustice while illustrating individual resilience and agency. This is vividly depicted through Bong Joon-ho's cinematic portrayals of class dynamics and the psychological impact of 'Han' culture in South Korea [3, 6, 4].



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## 7 Narrative Analysis of Selected Films

### 7.1 Dark Humor and Social Critique in 'Parasite'

Bong Joon-ho's 'Parasite' employs dark humor as a lens for social critique, exposing class disparity and societal inequities in contemporary South Korea. The humor not only provides comic relief but also engages audiences with the socio-economic tensions within the narrative [8]. By juxtaposing comedic elements with grim realities, Bong highlights the absurdity and tragedy of socio-economic divides. The film intricately balances levity with social commentary, using irony and satire to critique the illusion of social mobility and entrenched class hierarchies [4]. This is exemplified by the Kim family's infiltration of the affluent Park household, where their cunning and desperation elicit both humor and tragedy, reflecting systemic forces driving individuals to extremes.

Bong's use of dark humor enhances narrative complexity and invites reflection on the ethical and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. This humor underscores socio-political critiques within the story, prompting viewers to reconsider societal norms. Through this innovative narrative approach, 'Parasite' transcends traditional genre boundaries, offering poignant commentary on socio-economic forces shaping modern existence, ultimately encouraging a reevaluation of societal structures perpetuating inequality and injustice [5].

### 7.2 Ethical Dilemmas and Capitalism in 'Okja'

In 'Okja', Bong Joon-ho critiques capitalism by exploring ethical dilemmas arising from the commodification of life and exploitation of natural resources. The narrative centers on Mija and her genetically modified super pig, Okja, central to a corporate scheme aimed at revolutionizing the meat industry. This framework allows Bong to dissect moral complexities of capitalist practices, particularly the tension between profit motives and ethical considerations [5]. The portrayal of the multinational Mirando Corporation serves as a microcosm of corporate capitalism, where ethical boundaries blur in pursuit of economic gain. Through CEO Lucy Mirando, Bong critiques the superficiality of corporate social responsibility, as her attempts to market Okja as a sustainable solution are undermined by inherent exploitation and cruelty [8]. This duality is emphasized by visual and narrative contrasts between Mija and Okja's idyllic rural life and sterile, oppressive corporate environments.

Bong's narrative elements in films like 'Snowpiercer' further illuminate ethical dilemmas within capitalism. By depicting class struggles aboard a train symbolizing societal stratification, he critiques the ruling class's justification of oppression through ideologies such as Malthusianism and 'the Spell of Plato.' His works explore themes of social class, moral decay, and the psychological impact of collective hardships, challenging viewers to reconsider rigid hierarchies and desires driving human behavior [3, 7]. 'Okja' invites reflection on consumer culture and moral compromises underpinning the global economy, advocating for a more conscientious and sustainable approach to economic development.

### 7.3 Cultural Synthesis in 'Snowpiercer'

Bong Joon-ho's 'Snowpiercer' exemplifies cultural synthesis, blending South Korean cinema with Hollywood conventions to deliver potent socio-political commentary. The film's transnational production and casting reflect a fusion of cultural influences, enhancing its global appeal while maintaining a distinct narrative voice [6]. By integrating diverse cultural elements, Bong creates a narrative transcending geographical boundaries, addressing universal themes of class struggle and environmental degradation. The train's confined setting in 'Snowpiercer' serves as a microcosm for global socio-economic hierarchies, with each compartment representing distinct class divisions. This spatial metaphor is enriched by Bong's strategic use of visual and auditory elements, underscoring the oppressive nature of the train's class system and reflecting broader societal structures [7]. The film's portrayal of class conflict and environmental crises resonates worldwide, offering a critical lens for examining contemporary issues of inequality and resource scarcity.

Bong's adept manipulation of genre conventions allows 'Snowpiercer' to function as both an action-packed thriller and a thought-provoking social critique. Its non-linear narrative structure and unexpected plot twists challenge traditional storytelling norms, inviting viewers to engage with complex ethical dilemmas faced by the characters [3]. Through cultural synthesis, 'Snowpiercer' reflects the

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intricacies of global cinematic practices while providing profound commentary on socio-political dynamics shaping modern existence.

## 8 Conclusion

Bong Joon-ho's films, analyzed through the lenses of low theory, intersectionality, and auteur theory, reveal profound socio-political critiques. His use of low theory provides a detailed critique of capitalism and class disparities, most notably in 'Parasite', which examines the harsh realities of socioeconomic inequality and urban poverty in South Korea. The integration of intersectionality adds depth to his narratives, highlighting the complex interplay of social categories and their contribution to systemic injustices, as seen in 'Okja', which raises significant ethical questions regarding consumerism and its global impacts.

Bong's unique cinematic style, characterized by genre fusion and the strategic deployment of 'piksari', enriches the emotional and social dimensions of his films, prompting audiences to reconsider societal norms. His meticulous approach to sound design, which begins at the screenplay stage, underscores the importance of systematic analysis in contemporary, particularly non-Western, cinema. This attention to auditory elements enhances the thematic impact of his narratives, fostering engagement with the socio-economic critiques they present.

The international acclaim of 'Snowpiercer' illustrates Bong's skill in blending genre conventions with universal themes of survival and social justice, serving as a critical example of the evolution of national cinema in a globalized context. This transnational perspective not only boosts the global appeal of South Korean cinema but also positions it as a significant player in global film discourse, challenging conventional storytelling and enriching cultural identity and audience engagement.

Future research could explore how Bong Joon-ho's films inspire real-world conversations on class and economic inequality, alongside emerging trends in South Korean cinema that address these issues. Additionally, the use of film as an educational tool in fields like psychiatry offers a novel approach to illustrating complex psychodynamic concepts, demonstrating the transformative potential of Bong's cinematic work. Through this comprehensive examination, Bong Joon-ho's films contribute significantly to the academic discourse on contemporary cinema, encouraging reflection on the broader socio-political forces that shape modern life.

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