The Metaphorical Analysis of Color Aesthetics in \textit{Parasite}

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\textbf{Abstract.} There was such a movie at the 92nd Academy Awards. It broke global history and became the first film that won the best film in a non-English language film since the establishment of the Academy Awards. At the same time, it won the Best Director Award, Best Original Screenplay Award and other four awards, whose name is—\textit{Parasite}. It can be said that this film has elevated the status of Korean and Asian films. In addition to the reversal of the script, the unique technique, and the symbol of alienation, the use of the director's color metaphor is also a very important part of the film's exquisiteness. This thesis will analyze and study the director's unique color aesthetic metaphor in \textit{Parasite}, and hope to give inspiration to contemporary domestic film creation.

\section{1. Introduction}

O. Scott once commented on Director Bong Joon ho: "He has a dystopian universe in his heart." From the director's series of representative works \textit{Memories of Murder}, \textit{Mother}, \textit{Parasite} and so on, we can feel that in our superficial and peaceful society, class contradictions, human desires, and material desires are filled with human hearts. Director Bong Joon ho once said in a dialogue interview: "Many people say that the movie \textit{Parasite} is very ordinary, telling stories about the poor and the rich, but I think it's much more than that." After watching this film, some audiences marveled at each ingenious reversal, and some audiences believed that even though the film was a genre, the real social problems it reflected were more profound. In addition to the difference between the rich and the poor, the characters presented in the film, including ourselves, are all "parasites", which can be said that this is a narrative suspense genre that really enhances the audience's sense of substitution. Through the film, the director creates a "sensory sharing" experience for the audience, making the audience feel as if they are in it, and shakes the audiences' souls with the film's color aesthetic structure, the use of lens language, and the cross-ups and downs of the characters.

\section{2. The Color Aesthetics in \textit{Parasite} Shapes the Audience's Immersive Sensory Sharing}

Color is the key to film success or failure. As we all know, the director's grasp and use of color is the prerequisite for whether a film can become a masterpiece. According to the study of color psychology in the field of art, blue is a melancholic color, red represents joy and excitement, yellow symbolizes hope, and green symbolizes natural relaxation. But the reason why color aesthetics has its unique artistic quality in movies is that the director uses color to express metaphorically based on the audience's perception of color, so as to achieve his unique film creation style and immerse the audience in the film, and finally achieve the dual sensory sharing of vision and hearing.

\subsection{2.1. Colors Pave the Way for the Overall Tone and Atmosphere of the Movie}

Among the film types, compared with other types, literary and artistic films are easier to interpret and grasp colors. The literary and artistic films shot by many directors are more expressions and expositions of personal emotions, constructing a colorful world for the audience. As a suspense film, director Bong Joon ho's use of high-level colors in \textit{Parasite} gives the audience a strong psychological hint and contrast, which is the key to the film being separated from the same type of film.
The living environment of the poor class presented in the beginning of the film is dominated by dark green and gray blue, so that the overall tone and background of the film are clearly explained. With the development of the protagonist's movement, the appearance, dress, and environment of the poor family characters are presented in sequence, all of which are mainly dark gray, which pave the way for the overall tone and atmosphere of the film. When Ki Woo first arrives at President Park's villa, the unique use of color in the film is revealed. The director also uses gray and green to shape the villas of the rich, but the brightness and saturation of the colors are greatly improved, using "bright gray" and "bright green" color systems. (Figure 1) It is more prominent that the film only uses two colors, and through the distinction of hue and saturation, the class difference can also be reflected vividly, and the overall tone of the film has also reached a perfect foreshadowing.

2.2. Color Promotes Narrative Plot and Audience Sensory Sharing

In addition to using color to pave the way for the tone and atmosphere of the film's story, the changes in color throughout the film Parasite are also crucial to the development and promotion of the storyline. Judging from the important "wine cabinet" in the follow-up story, the first close-up of the wine cabinet is unified with the light brown furniture in the villa, blending with the family atmosphere. With the promotion of the narrative plot, the wine cabinet is "extremely dangerous". After the basement plot is developed, the director uses light to adjust the color of the wine cabinet to dark red. Because "red" in Western commercial films is a symbol of blood and tension, the audience immediately perceives that "danger is coming". Under careful color control, the audience can get emotional tension without thinking, and the senses can be shared. In the unfolding of the plot of Escape on Rainy Night, the director uses red and black extensively to enhance the tension. (Figure 2)
The climax of the whole play center is the plot of rainy night: The Ki Woo family take advantage of the Park's family to go out in his villa to "indulge and revel", and accidentally discovered the Moon Kwang couple who use the basement to live. Unexpectedly, there is a heavy rain, and President Park's family return home with a series of satirical and funny stories. In addition to the appearance of the plot that promotes the continuous reversal, the director also uses the color of "water" to portray the character classes, which intensifies the span of the two classes. On the one hand, President Park's youngest son, Dah Song, happily enjoys the rain camping. On the other hand, the family run away in the rain. When they return home, they see the submerged semi-basement and dirty toilet sewage.(Figure 3)

![Figure 3. Contrasting colors of "water" elements.](image)

When the conflicts in the early stage are not unfolded, the film mostly uses warm yellow. With the development of the narrative plot, the film usually carries out the story in red, and the three-dimensional use of color integrates the audience's emotional mobilization and sensory sharing. At the same time, the film is mixed with indirect descriptions of "the smell of the poor", which strongly mobilizes the audience's sensory nerves through the foreshadowing of sight, hearing and smell.

### 3. The Metaphor Analysis of Unique Colors in the Movie *Parasite*

Metaphor is the part of the movie *Parasite* that has been studied by the audience, such as: "Strange Stone", "Self-Portrait", "Smell" and so on. In addition, the metaphor of color in the film is also an important part that the director wants to convey to the audience. Among them, the flexible use of "green" is a strong metaphorical signal.

#### 3.1. Analysis of Film Color Metaphor—The "Green" of Contrast

In the film, the director divides green into two color systems, namely dark green and bright green. The poor correspond to the dark green color. In the film, the clothes, rooms, and scenes of the Ki Woo family use dark green color, which instantly conveys a heavy sense of depression to the audience. With the advancement of the film's plot, the color composition of the tunnel and scene in the basement of the villa is also dark green. The director uses this "green" to the extreme, making the audience feel as if they were on the scene to feel the humidity, decay and suffocation. In contrast to the villa scene and outdoor lawn where President Park’s family is in, the director uses a strong bright green color. (Figure 4) This kind of contrast metaphor makes the audience immediately oppose the two classes. Even if the director does not specifically explain it, the audience can feel the same. The audience expresses a strong sense of depression and tension for the dark green colors such as moss and seedlings used in the life scenes of the Ki Woo family. However, the bright green colors used in the life scenes of President Park's family, such as yellow-green and if green, indicate a weak sense of depression.
At the same time, the director uses "light" to continuously adjust the warm and cold tones and saturation of the two greens, and uses bright green to create a sense of prosperity, happiness, and comfort for the rich. The most commendable thing about the use of "green" is the outburst of contradictions on the bright green lawn at the end of the film, which is the director's best interpretation of the metaphor of "green". This lawn witnesses happy laughter, the occurrence of crime, and the so-called "release". When everything is over, it has "blood-stained traces" that cannot disappear.

3.2. The True Inner World of the Protagonist Behind the Metaphor of Color

The metaphor of color in *Parasite* is not limited to the atmosphere of the scene. At the same time, it metaphors the character and class difference of the protagonist through the color of the costume. The clothing of the Ki Woo family shown at the beginning of the film is mostly "gray blue", "dark green", and "black gray", reflecting the embarrassment of life. And Mrs. Park debuts in a white suit, which immediately magnifies the difference between the rich and the poor between the classes. The use of white also symbolizes the pure personality of the lady. The clothes worn by President Park when he appears on the stage are mainly "bright gray" and "light blue", symbolizing the pride of the elite. The audience may not pay much attention to these details when watching the film. The director uses the different brightness and saturation of the same color system to portray the difference between the two classes, which can be said that the film's metaphor for color scheduling is extremely subtle. In the rainy night scene, the costumes worn by the Ki Woo family while enjoying the carnival in the villa are also the "gray blue" and "dark green" of the home, reflecting the family's inferiority, and thus forming a sharp conflict and contrast with the decoration of President Park's villa. The audience will always feel that the poor family is incompatible with the immediate environment, which adds to the level and tension of the drama. In the birthday banquet at the end of the film, the wealthy friends who come temporarily are also dressed in gorgeous and bright costumes. Chung-suk and Ki Jeong, who need to show up in front of the guests, also appear in light-colored clothes for the first time, but in the end blood is soaked in these light-colored clothes, which makes the irony appear particularly dazzling and strong. In Ki Woo's final imagination, he also wears a "bright gray" suit, packaging himself into the so-called "rich class", but all this may always be just a dream. The director endows President Park's family bright colors, and they all get up in the sun. The Ki Woo's family are depicted in dark colors. On that rainy night, the Ki Woo's family, who have lost even the dark semi-basement, lay in the dark blue environment to discuss topics about life and hope. In color psychology, dark blue symbolizes depression and repression. Metaphor through the color environment creates a feeling of helplessness and sadness for the audience, and also pave the way for the emotional explosion of Ki Woo in the subsequent plot to guide the audience's emotions. The film *Parasite* uses various colors such as scenes, light sources, clothing and so on, as metaphors, and excellent use the same color series of warm and cold tones to perfectly present class differences and character personalities. It is a metaphor of color aesthetics worthy of study in films of the same subject.
4. The Enlightenment of Film Color Aesthetics on the Creation of Domestic Contemporary Film

4.1. A Case Study of Domestic Director Color Metaphor

When it comes to "color", domestic films have to say that director Zhang Yimou's unique color style has shown the use of color aesthetics in Chinese history to the world audience. Director Zhang Yimou is good at using color as a metaphor. The use of yellow chrysanthemums in *Curse of the Golden Flower* breaks the impression that yellow symbolizes warmth and hope in traditional films[1]. Instead, he uses yellow metaphors of sadness and resistance to tell the buried past. (Figure 5) In *Raise the red lantern*, the dazzling red lantern forms a huge contrast with the "New Year Red" recognized by Chinese audiences[2]. The director uses the "red" metaphor to show the protagonist's repressed and helpless life to the fullest. Through examples, we can see that Chinese directors have a good grasp of the metaphor of color aesthetics in historical commercial films. The domestic film market has relatively few movies of the same genre of *Parasite*. According to the overall temperament of the film, the author selected Lou Ye's suspenseful genre film *The Shadow Play* for analysis, so as to feel the domestic and foreign directors' metaphorical similarities and differences of color aesthetics of genre films.

![Figure 5. The yellow chrysanthemum (1, 2) in *Curse of the Golden Flower* and the red lantern (3, 4) in *Raise the Red Lantern.*](image)

4.2. The Color Documentary Features of Domestic Genre Films—Taking Lou Ye's *The Shadow Play* as an Example

In 2019, *The Shadow Play* directed by Lou Ye from Mainland China was released and received unanimous praise[3]. This film is considered to be a genre film that Lou Ye still maintains his own style to the greatest extent in a commercial context. The film tells a series of stories caused by a fall in a homicide case, and the plot will not be repeated. As a movie released at the same time as *Parasite*, the two films have the same characteristics of suspense genre in the overall temperament. From the perspective of color aesthetics, we can see from the above analysis that *Parasite* has unique color metaphor features, which is an important part of *The Shadow Play*, and also the lack of characteristics of Chinese suspense films. *The Shadow Play* uses more documentary colors for shooting (Figure 6). The director uses colors with lower saturation and higher gray to create the overall suspenseful atmosphere of the film. Coupled with the unique shooting technique, the film has a strong sense of substitution, making the audience feel like they are in it. This is very different from the use of color in *Parasite* to create a world of the rich and poor, and to give the audience a sense of distance.

![Figure 6. The yellow chrysanthemum (1, 2) in *Curse of the Golden Flower* and the red lantern (3, 4) in *Raise the Red Lantern.*](image)

The audience is immersed in the movie, but the two extreme classes reflected in the movie are still separated from the social class where most moviegoers live. A documentary film like *The Shadow Play* makes the audience feel that this is real life. Even if this is an unexperienced story, the audience is willing to believe that this is an artistic interpretation of a true event that has happened.
In *The Shadow Play*, Director Lou Ye is good at using warm yellow "lights" to create a suspenseful, ambiguous, and liberating atmosphere throughout the film. The fusion of lighting promotes the development of the plot and the three-dimensional character, which is the color adjustment method that Chinese directors are good at controlling in narrative literary films. In comparison, the director in *Parasite* uses natural light and environmental colors to create a stronger atmosphere. This is greatly related to the director's personal preference, degree of mastery, and the different development history of domestic and foreign film types.

5. Conclusion

Looking back at the movie *Parasite*, it is not simply a discussion of the difference between the rich and poor in Korea, but more about the complex human nature and the fate of the times. The film uses exquisite structure, color metaphors, and plot reversal to achieve the perfect unity of artistic value and commercial value. This is the focus that is really difficult to balance in genre films, and it is also the reason why *Parasite* can win four Oscars and the best film at the Cannes Film Festival.

The fifth generation of Chinese directors, such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang and so on, all have an important position in the domestic and foreign film circles. They also have their own uniqueness in controlling the color of the film, presenting Chinese elements and Chinese colors to the world. Their classics, such as *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Lifetimes Living*, *Farewell My Concubine* and so on, have achieved a good box office and word of mouth, but in the Chinese genre film market there will always be a situation where word of mouth does not match the box office\(^4\). However, through the above analysis, in the current Chinese suspense genre films, the metaphor of film color aesthetics is still insufficient. The colors of realist works are mainly documentary, or some directors prefer to use filters to reduce the overall texture of the film. Chinese directors and visual directors should continue to learn and improve how to better use color to build a deep deconstruction and sensory sharing experience that they want to convey to the audience. It is hoped that in the future Chinese film genres can truly achieve the coexistence of artistic value and commercial value, and create a new legend that belongs to Chinese films.

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