

2,522 views | May 27, 2019, 07:47pm

Bong Joon Ho's Cannes Win For 'Parasite' Crowns First-Rate Year For Korean Film



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I'm a journalist fascinated by Korean drama and film.



Park So Dam and Choi Woo Sik are scheming siblings in Bong Joon Ho's film 'Parasite.' 

ENTERTAINMENT

2019 has already been a wildly successful year for Korean film. In January the New York Times named Korean actor Yoo Ah In as one of 2018's 12 best actors for his role in Lee Chang Dong's film *Burning*, which also made the Academy Awards shortlist for best foreign film. On May 25 director Bong Joon Ho made cinematic history by winning the Palme d'Or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival for his suspenseful dark comedy *Parasite*.

It was not only a win for the celebrated director of *The Host*, *Memories of Murder*, *Okja* and *Snowpiercer*, but a national achievement, since *Parasite* was the first ever Korean film to win the grand prize at Cannes.

At a press conference after the ceremony, Bong said, "It is the 100th anniversary of cinema in Korea this year. I think that Cannes has given Korean cinema a great gift."

Parasite tells the story of two families, one of which develops a parasitic relationship with the other. One family is wealthy, but occasionally clueless, while the other tries to scheme their way out of their seemingly hopeless poverty. The son of the poor family, played by actor Choi Woo Sik, counterfeits the credentials that enable him to tutor the child of the rich family. He soon schemes a place in the lives of his benefactors for other members of his own family.

Parasites can co-exist peacefully with their hosts, proposes Bong's multi-genre tale, even feed happily off them, performing necessary functions, but they can also completely transform their hosts.

Not only did *Parasite* garner the gold but winning was the result of a unanimous jury decision. Film director Alejandro González Iñárritu, who headed the jury described the film as "a unique experience." When accepting the prize, Bong apologized for not preparing a speech in French because, he said, he did not expect to win.

Part of the film's draw is its first-rate cast, with veteran actor Song Kang Ho playing the father of the poor family and Lee Sun Kyun playing the wealthy father. It's the fourth film that Bong Joon Ho and Song Kang Ho have worked on together as Song appeared in *Memories of Murder*, *The Host* and *Snowpiercer*. Lee recently starred in the TV drama *My Mister*, which won the best TV drama award at Korea's 55th Baeksang Awards.

South Korean film and television have attracted new interest, due partly to the popularity of k-pop, but Bong's socially aware films have consistently enjoyed critical success. After studying sociology and film at the Korean Academy of Film Art, Bong's very first film *Barking Dogs Never Bite* won honors at the 2001 Hong Kong Film Festival. Since then he's taken home dozens of film awards.

Bong first came to Cannes 13 years ago with his environmentally themed horror film, *The Host*, and attended again in 2017 with his action adventure film *Okja*, which originally screened on Netflix.

Neon is handling the U.S. distribution for *Parasite*, which does not yet have a wide release date.

As well as the attention garnered by Bong's win and the critical success of *Burning*, several Korean films have recently been optioned for American remakes, including a Kevin Hart remake for *Extreme Job*, the detective comedy starring Ryu Seung Ryong and Lee Ha Na, and a Sylvester Stallone redo of *The Cop, the Gangster and The Devil*, starring Ma Dong Suk aka Don Lee. *The Cop, The Gangster and The Devil* also had a special midnight screening at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. An upcoming remake of the Korean social horror thriller *Hide and Seek* has already cast Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Jacinda Barrett, Joe Pantoliano and Mustafa Shakir. More adaptations of Korean films are currently in the works.