CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Many nations in the world, even the most developed ones, have been struggling with the social inequality issue for hundreds of years (United Nations, 2020, p.3). Social inequality becomes a huge problem within many countries since it deals with unequal distributions of resources and opportunities that are surely needed by all people in society (Hiraide, 2013). In other words, certain groups of people will get a bigger chance to gain more power, wealth, income, and wide access to social goods, such as employment, health, and education, while the rest does not. It gives rise to the division in the society, into classes or stratification, for instance. The high class, middle class, and lower class are the social class categories that sound very familiar and common in our society. However, the wide gap between the richest and the poorest has consciously or unconsciously created an unfair system that could harm the inferior ones (United Nations, 2020, p. 4).

The phenomenon of social inequality occurs in many countries, which

includes developed and developing countries around the world (United Nations, 2020, p. 22-23). One of them is South Korea. South Korea is famous for its rapid economic growth, from one of the poorest countries into a developed, high-income country (Nordea, 2020). However, the spectacular economic transformation of South Korea does not make the people free from economic problems; it, on the contrary, creates a large gap between the rich and the poor and leads to extreme poverty in that nation since the employment markets are highly competitive that causes high rates of unemployment and worse income distribution (Chung, n.d.). Meanwhile, the family-owned conglomerates called *chaebol* dominate South Korea by operating many business lines simultaneously (Ahn, 2016). This fact, consequently, provokes the digression of South Korean public sentiment towards social class mobility (Arirang News, 2016).

The social inequality issue is considered a politically sensitive topic. However, many people concern with this issue as they live with it on their daily basis. To talk about the issue with a bit of a "safety net", a film can be used as a visual medium to represent reality and communicate thoughts due to the combination of sound, image, and story as three powerful elements that are able to give context as well as meaning to the film (Cloete, 2017). Owing to the fact that a film narrates stories about day-to-day experiences, it could help the audiences understand societal opinions and even unmask the issues within society (Pautz, 2014). Consequently, film is attractive for people of all ages on account of its stories which they could associate with.

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Film is considered as a language on grounds that it fits the definition of language as a 'medium' that uses signs along with symbols to represent concepts, ideas, and feelings in a particular culture (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Nonetheless, the meaning of a film is not always conveyed explicitly, but sometimes it tends to be implicitly conveyed. To understand both the explicit and implicit meanings of a film, the representation theory may be applied. Representation is "the production of meaning through language" (Hall, 1997, p. 28). In interpreting the meaning produced by a film, I use a semiotics approach as a tool to analyze the signs and symbols.

According to Chandler (2017), Semiotics is the study of signs. In the context of a film, everything that the audiences can see and hear is functioning as a sign because it refers to something which contributes to our understanding of the film (Edgar-Hunt, Marland, & Rawle, 2010, pp. 18-19). The lighting, costumes, settings, dialogues, or anything that occur in the film are signs. As a film is a motion picture, every picture could provide visual signs. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) gives his contribution to the semiotics field through his theory of signs. He classifies the sign (based on its relationship with the object) into three fundamental elements: icon, index, and symbol. A sign which shares similarities and resemblance with its object is an icon, while a sign that has a physical or causal connection with its object is an index. On the other hand, a sign that signifies its object based on the convention, law, or general agreement is a symbol (Atkin, 2010, p. 367).

The film that draws my attention is *Parasite*, directed by Bong Joon-ho, a South Korean writer and director, that is released in 2019. This South Korean film has the genre of black comedy thriller since it brings up a serious or taboo subject matter, which is a social inequality issue in South Korea, that is covered by humor and a few violent acts. The plot is evolved on the members of the poor Kim's family. They have to struggle every day in their tiny and cramped semi-basement flat due to the fact that they are jobless. Because of opportunity and luck, they could infiltrate Park's family by committing fraud in order to be employed in their household. However, everything turns out to be chaotic in the end. Considering that the film provides an extreme contrast between the families' social classes, I believe I can unfold the social inequality issue through the signs and symbols in the film.

By analyzing *Parasite* film using Peirce's theory of signs, I would like to confirm that besides being watched as entertainment, a film can carry a deeper meaning. Therefore, critical thinking should be used to unfold the message in a film. Hopefully, through this analysis, the readers' knowledge about social inequality could be enhanced. I hope it could raise awareness as well as encourage other researchers to conduct a further study on this issue.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

The problems that are going to be answered in this thesis are:

1.   What are the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) found in *Parasite*?

2.   How do the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) in *Parasite* represent the social inequality issue in South Korea?

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1.3   Purpose of the Study

The purposes of conducting this thesis are:

1.   to identify the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) found in *Parasite*;

2.   to find out how the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) in *Parasite* represent the social inequality issue in South Korea.

1.4   Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is Introduction, which is divided into four parts: Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter is Literature Review, which contains the theories that I use and their elaboration along with one previous study. The third chapter is Methods of Research, which is divided into Research Design, Data Collection Technique, Framework for Analysis, and Data Analysis. The fourth chapter contains the discussion on the findings and interpretation of data. The fifth chapter is Conclusion, which contains my personal comments and opinions concerning the findings. At the end of my thesis, there are References and Appendices attached.