



EXPLORING MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY IN MODERN FILMS: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

Lloyd Jin¹

¹Princeton Day School

Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world, cinema has become a powerful medium for representing multiculturalism and diversity. Filmmakers from diverse cultural backgrounds use their craft to tell stories that transcend geographic boundaries and resonate with global audiences. The narratives often reflect the complexity of cultural hybridity, the interplay of identity and language, and the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural collaboration. This paper aims to explore how modern films represent these themes, focusing specifically on Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* and Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland*. Through their unique cultural perspectives, both directors offer audiences a lens into societal dynamics while fostering a greater understanding of humanity's shared experiences. This exploration begins with a historical context that outlines the evolution of multicultural representation in cinema.

Keywords

Bong Joon-Ho, Chloe Zhao, Cultural Hybridity, Culture Identity, Diversity, Film, International, Language, Multiculturalism, *Nomadland*, *Parasite*, Storytelling

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

The study of multiculturalism and diversity in modern cinema is of profound importance, as it reflects broader societal dynamics and challenges entrenched cultural paradigms. Films serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium for cultural exchange, fostering empathy and understanding among global audiences. By analyzing works such as Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* and Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland*, this study highlights how filmmakers navigate and portray themes of identity, language, and cultural hybridity. These narratives resonate universally while preserving their unique cultural contexts, offering insights into both individual and collective human experiences. Moreover, understanding the role of diversity in storytelling sheds light on systemic challenges and progress in the film industry, such as the persistence of biases and the rise of inclusive initiatives. This research underscores the transformative power of cinema to influence perceptions, dismantle stereotypes, and encourage collaboration across cultural boundaries. By examining the successes and struggles within this realm, the study provides valuable perspectives on how the global film industry can continue to evolve in a way that promotes equity, authenticity, and innovation.

1.2 Historical Context

The representation of multiculturalism in cinema has evolved significantly since the early days of film. In the 20th century, Hollywood often adhered to stereotypes and exoticized portrayals of non-Western cultures, as seen in films like *The Good Earth* (1937). These depictions were shaped by a Eurocentric lens that marginalized authentic voices. However, postcolonial movements and the rise of global cinema in the mid-20th century challenged these narratives. Directors like Satyajit Ray in India and Akira Kurosawa in Japan brought authentic storytelling to international audiences, paving the way for today's transnational cinema. The current era, characterized by the widespread consumption of global media, has seen films that seamlessly integrate diverse cultural elements, often created by directors who themselves embody cross-cultural identities. This historical trajectory underscores the importance of *Parasite* and *Nomadland* as contemporary milestones in multicultural storytelling.

II. CASE STUDIES

2.1 Multiculturalism and Identity in *Parasite*

Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* is a masterclass in storytelling that examines class conflict through the lens of Korean society while resonating universally. The film's narrative centers on the Kim family, who infiltrate the wealthy Park family's household, exposing deep societal inequalities. While the film is deeply rooted in South Korean culture, its universal themes of economic disparity and human greed transcend cultural boundaries (Kim, 2004). Language plays a critical role in *Parasite*, as it reflects social hierarchies and cultural nuances. For instance, the use of honorifics in Korean underscores the rigid social stratifications within the narrative. Bong's decision to retain these linguistic intricacies in the film's subtitles ensures that global audiences grasp the subtleties of Korean culture (Higbee and Lim, 2010). Moreover, Bong incorporates architectural symbolism—from the semi-basement apartment of the Kims to the Park family's opulent mansion—to highlight economic divides. This visual storytelling, combined with a uniquely Korean yet universally comprehensible narrative, makes *Parasite* a prime example of multicultural cinema.

By framing local issues within a universal context, *Parasite* invites audiences to reflect on systemic inequalities in their societies. Bong's approach to identity and storytelling also reflects his own position as a filmmaker operating on the global stage. His ability to critique South Korean society while engaging international audiences demonstrates the power of transnational cinema to foster cultural understanding (Stam and Shohat, 1994). By framing local issues within a universal context, *Parasite* invites audiences to reflect on systemic inequalities in their own societies. Furthermore, Bong employs dark humor and genre-blending techniques to make his social critique both engaging and universally relatable. His meticulous attention to detail, from visual metaphors to narrative structure, enriches the viewer's understanding of class disparities. By achieving this balance, Bong not only amplifies South Korean voices on a global stage but also showcases the potential of transnational storytelling to unite diverse audiences through shared human experiences.

2.2 Cultural Hybridity in *Nomadland*

In contrast to Bong Joon-ho, Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland* explores themes of identity and resilience through the lens of America's nomadic community. The film follows Fern, a widow navigating life as a modern-day nomad in the American West. Zhao, a Chinese-born filmmaker, brings an outsider's perspective to this quintessentially American story, infusing it with cultural hybridity and a focus on marginalized voices.

Zhao's storytelling is deeply rooted in authenticity. By casting real-life nomads alongside professional actors, she blurs the line between fiction and reality, creating a poignant portrayal of community and survival. The film's visual language—characterized by sweeping landscapes and intimate close-ups—reflects the duality of freedom and isolation experienced by its characters. For instance, sweeping shots of the expansive desert emphasize the vastness and solitude of Fern's journey, while close-ups of her interactions with fellow nomads capture the intimacy and vulnerability of their shared experiences. This approach resonates with global audiences, as it captures universal human emotions while providing insight into a specific cultural milieu (Naficy, 2001).

Language and identity also play crucial roles in *Nomadland*. For instance, Zhao's seamless ability to navigate between her Chinese heritage and her adopted American identity allows her to tell a story that is both personal and universal. Furthermore, her use of silence and naturalistic dialogue underscores the film's themes of introspection and resilience. For example, Fern's quiet moments of reflection while gazing at the vast landscapes capture her internal struggles and the solace she finds in solitude. These scenes, devoid of spoken words, rely on visual storytelling to evoke deep emotional resonance, allowing viewers to connect with the character on a personal level. By presenting America's nomadic community through a compassionate and nuanced lens, Zhao challenges stereotypes and highlights the diversity within American society (Appadurai, 1996).

III. THEMES AND IMPACT

3.1 Language and Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Both *Parasite* and *Nomadland* exemplify the importance of language and cross-cultural collaboration in modern cinema. In *Parasite*, Bong's use of Korean linguistic and cultural elements highlights the richness of his storytelling. Similarly, Zhao's ability to bridge cultural gaps through her unique perspective exemplifies the potential of cross-cultural collaboration to create universally resonant narratives.

Language serves as both a barrier and a bridge in these films. In *Parasite*, the language reflects societal hierarchies, while in *Nomadland*, it becomes a tool for connection and understanding. These directors demonstrate how linguistic and cultural elements can be leveraged to enhance storytelling and foster empathy among audiences. For example, in *Nomadland*, the natural and unembellished conversations between Fern and other nomads showcase the beauty of genuine human connection, often transcending spoken words. Meanwhile, in *Parasite*, the

rigid use of formal and informal speech exposes underlying power dynamics and societal expectations, serving as a mirror of Korea's deeply entrenched class system.

Cross-cultural collaboration is also evident in the production and reception of these films. *Parasite* received widespread acclaim at international film festivals, culminating in its historic win at the Academy Awards. This success highlights the growing appetite for diverse voices in global cinema. Similarly, Zhao's *Nomadland* garnered international recognition, winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Picture.

3.2 *Impact on Global Audiences*

The global impact of *Parasite* and *Nomadland* can be analyzed through their reception and cultural significance. *Parasite* not only broke barriers as the first non-English language film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture but also sparked conversations about class and inequality worldwide. Its universal themes resonated with audiences across cultures, demonstrating the power of storytelling to bridge divides. Additionally, the film's success prompted a broader acceptance of international films in Western markets, challenging long-standing biases against subtitled works. This shift reflects an increasing appreciation for diverse narratives and voices in global cinema.

Similarly, *Nomadland* highlighted the struggles and resilience of America's nomadic community, shedding light on an often-overlooked segment of society. Zhao's nuanced portrayal of her characters' lives invited global audiences to empathize with their experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity. By incorporating real-life stories and perspectives, Zhao created a film that is both authentic and universally relatable. These films have also inspired further discussions on the importance of diversity in mainstream cinema and its ability to influence cultural conversations worldwide. By sparking dialogue and encouraging reflection, they paved the way for future films to explore complex themes and reach even broader audiences.

3.3 *The Influence of Diversity in Filmmaking*

Diversity and representation now have a powerful impact on the industry and audience engagement. Embracing diversity in filmmaking enriches storytelling and challenges long-held industry norms, offering more vibrant cinematic experiences (Stebleva, 2024).

In films like *Black Panther* and *Crazy Rich Asians*, diverse representation contributed to commercial success and cultural resonance. The Sundance Institute's Diversity Initiative and NBCUniversal's talent development programs are examples of active efforts within the industry to foster inclusion behind the camera. These programs address systemic barriers and encourage authentic storytelling from underrepresented voices.

Moreover, there is great importance of authentic representation in breaking stereotypes. Films like *Coco* and *Moana* have demonstrated how cultural specificity can result in universal appeal, proving that audiences are eager for narratives outside their immediate experience. Such examples showcase how diverse stories shape societal attitudes by challenging prejudices and fostering empathy (Stebleva, 2024).

IV. FUTURE OUTLOOK

4.1 *Challenges in Filmmaking*

Despite notable advancements, achieving true equity in filmmaking remains a significant challenge. Systemic biases embedded within the industry often limit opportunities for diverse filmmakers, perpetuating an environment where marginalized voices struggle to gain visibility. As Stebleva observes, the barriers are not solely financial but also structural, with a lack of mentorship, access to networks, and adequate resources for filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Additionally, tokenism remains a pervasive issue, where diversity is superficially addressed without meaningful inclusion in storytelling or leadership roles. These challenges are compounded by global disparities in representation, with many industries outside of Hollywood lagging in their efforts to embrace diversity. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, involving policy changes, institutional accountability, and a commitment to fostering equitable opportunities across all levels of filmmaking.

4.2 *Progress in Representation*

Despite these challenges, the film industry has made meaningful strides in promoting representation and inclusivity. Emerging platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, have democratized access to global audiences, allowing diverse narratives to thrive. Films like *Minari* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* exemplify the growing appetite for culturally specific stories that resonate universally. Moreover, initiatives like the Sundance Institute's Diversity Initiative and programs by NBCUniversal are creating pathways for underrepresented filmmakers to develop their craft and share their perspectives. The increasing prevalence of awards and recognition for non-Western films, including *Parasite* and *Nomadland*, signals a shift toward valuing authenticity and cultural hybridity in storytelling. This progress suggests a promising future, where inclusion becomes a foundational value rather than a marketing strategy. By continuing to build on these successes, the industry can foster a more equitable and innovative cinematic landscape.

V. CONCLUSION

Modern cinema serves as an evolving canvas that reflects and challenges societal norms, and films like *Parasite* and *Nomadland* exemplify the transformative power of storytelling in bridging cultural divides. These works demonstrate how language, identity, and cross-cultural collaboration can create narratives that resonate universally while honoring their cultural origins. By addressing themes such as inequality, resilience, and community, directors like Bong Joon-ho and Chloe Zhao have shown that cinema can transcend boundaries, offering a shared space for audiences to reflect on their own realities. While challenges persist in achieving equity in filmmaking, such as systemic biases and tokenism, progress is evident in the rise of platforms that amplify diverse voices and the global recognition of authentic storytelling. As the industry continues to innovate and adapt, embracing multiculturalism and diversity will remain essential for fostering a more inclusive cinematic landscape. Ultimately, these films remind us that the stories we tell are not only entertainment but also tools for empathy, understanding, and collective growth, ensuring that the world of cinema continues to inspire and connect audiences across cultures.

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