

Cannes Palm d'Or winner 'Parasite' is a brutal look at social inequality



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- It is a brutal portrait of class hierarchy and how it pushes people to turn to crime

CANNES: The Palm d'Or award at the recent Cannes Film Festival in France went to an Asian title for the second consecutive year.

While Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda’s “Shoplifters” won the honor in 2018, South Korean work “Parasite” by Bong Joon-ho clinched this year’s edition. Both movies touched on a similar theme — dysfunctional people driven to despair by inequality. Men and women come together in “Shoplifters” to form the loosest pretense of a family, in order to steal a living, but “Parasite” features a real family who try to better their lives by worming their way into a super-rich household.

A brutal portrait of class hierarchy and how it pushes people to turn to crime, “Parasite” is Bong’s best work since “Memories of Murder,” “The Host” and “Okja.” But the real beauty of this film is its ability to weave the story through an array of bumbling, almost comical, characters.

Family patriarch, Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho), is brought to tears of laughter by the most mundane of his children’s achievements. “Does Oxford have a course in forgery?” he asks his daughter, Ki-Jung (Park So-dam), as she replicates a degree for her brother, Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik), before guffawing at his own levity.

When Ki-woo gets a chance to coach the daughter of a rich businessman, Park (Lee Sun-kyun), he leaves behind his struggling days of folding pizza boxes, and brings his sister, mother and father into the prosperous household with him. Ki-Jung begins to teach Park’s son, her mother becomes a maid and Ki-taek the chauffeur. The family’s days in a dark and damp apartment with a leaking roof are over. Or, so it appears, until a series of incidents lead to an unexpected climax.

“Parasite” is a polished effort, tightly scripted with scenes seamlessly merging into one another, despite the occasional bit of overacting. The movie might not match “Shoplifters,” but Bong’s effort is South Korea’s most impressive production in quite some time.
