

The Fixed Nomads: The Global Panopticon and its Destruction in *Snowpiercer*

Shin Yujin

Ewha Womans University, South Korea

Abstract

Snowpiercer (2016), Bong Joon-ho's first English-language film, portrays the risky side of transnationalism. What Bong brings to this film is the presumed biases and uncritical characteristics that are often laden in the habituated use of vocabularies by scholars of transnational cultures, such as displacement, disjuncture, and decentering. The migrants who seem to contribute to the formation of multiple discourses against Western globalization are actually moving inside the claustrophobic space dictated by the West. The train embodies two senses of spatial enclosure that are intertwined: 1) the circulatory, as the train runs in a constant loop, only capable of following the path prepared by Wilford; 2) the claustrophobic, as the tail-section people are detained in a small section of the train under the caste system. By configuring space both inside and outside the train as structurally bounded, Bong delineates a group of people in paradoxical modes of existence, that is, fixed nomads. Furthermore, in his movie, resistance from the multiethnic group can be easily transformed into another homogenous power. As an easy solution, Bong destroys the civilization that gave birth to all sorts of narratives and attempts to provide an apolitical vision by presenting a black Adam and Asian Eve to restart the civilization. The impractical ending and the sudden disappearance of the whites gives a lingering suspicion, turning the utopian space into another site for dystopian surveillance of the West. Yet a tinge of hope nevertheless remains outside the film where Bong himself becomes a parasite, not a tail.

봉준호의 설국열차(2016)는 초국가주의의 위험한 측면을 조명한다. 최근 학계에서 활발히 논의되고 있는 초국가주의는 국가 경계를 초월하는 움직임으로써 다문화 사회 및 국가를 전제로 한다. 그러나 봉준호는 탈영토적인 이 움직임마저 미국을 비롯한 서방국가가 구성한 폐쇄적 공간 안에서 이뤄지는 것임을 제시한다. 아포칼립스의 생존자들을 태우고 있는 열차는 끊임없이 이동하지만 생존자들은 윌포드라는 열차의 주인 아래에 고정되어 있는 '고착적 유목민'들이다. 따라서 다민족으로 이루어진 꼬리칸의 저항은 윌포드의 '허락한 저항'으로 전락한다. 봉준호는 미국이 만든 거대한 설계에서 벗어나기 위해 열차를 파괴하며 유토피아적인 비전을 제공함으로써 초국가주의의 문제점을 손쉽게 해결하는 듯 하지만 이 또한 미국의 제작자들이 허락한 디스토피아와 다를 바가 없음을 암시한다. 그러나 영화제작 과정에서 봉준호는 스스로를 수동적인 꼬리가 아닌, 미국과 서양의 자본의 영양분을 빨아드리는 자립적인 기생충으로 성질을 변화시키며 희망을 제시한다.

Key words

transnationalism, diaspora, nomad, panopticon, Bong Joon-ho, *Snowpiercer*

Introduction

South Korean cinema witnessed a remarkable transformation in the late 1980s when Korean society entered a democratic era after decades of military rule. Finally unchained from the strict government censorship and regulation of film production policies, the Korean film industry celebrated its worldwide commercial success at the turn of the twenty-first century. The new generation of filmmakers explored and expanded the subject matter, scale, and genre of filmmaking. Now a renowned global auteur, Bong Joon-ho, one of the new generation of South Korean filmmakers, has continuously explored the relationship between local and global thematics through his bold narrative, production, and distribution strategies. His second film, *Memories of Murder* (2003), mediates Korean content based on a real-life murder incident in a rural town of South Korea in the 1980s with American cinematic forms appropriating mainstream American police-procedural television shows such as *Miami Vice* (1984-1990), *Law & Order* (1990-2010), and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000- 2015).¹ His next film *The Host* (2006) assumes a more transnational hue in production quality and *métier*. The maquette of the monster was created at New Zealand's WETA Workshop, special effects were carried out by The Orphanage F/X company in San Francisco, and the film's first investment deal was supplied by Japanese investor Happinet Corp.²

Yet, it is through *Snowpiercer*, released in 2013, that Bong makes a more blatant remark on the discourse of transnationalism and transnational cinema. Based on the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* (1982) by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, *Snowpiercer* is a post-apocalyptic science-fiction action movie. The movie is co-produced with Barrandov Studios in the Czech Republic, participated by a multinational crew along with Hollywood stars Chris Evans, John Hurt, Ed Harris, and Tilda Swinton, and recorded mostly in English. The film involved resources and talent across the globe, showing Korean cinema's full-scale involvement in the transnational cinematic market. Bong's starring of Korean actors in major roles would help to foreground issues of race, which were largely dismissed in the original comic book's all-white characters. At the outset, the movie narrates its background: seventy-nine countries' use of an artificial cooling system called CW-7 by 2014 caused a drastic drop of the global temperature.

Facing a disastrous new ice age, the remnants of humanity—"the precious few"—across the globe managed to board the *Snowpiercer*, a self-sustaining locomotive endlessly circumnavigating the planet. The main story, happening in 2031, meticulously visualizes the train's features accommodating a rigorous caste system in which white elites residing in the extravagant front sections rule the "scums" inhabiting in the overly crowded tail cars in squalid and brutal conditions. Though exemplifying a transnational trope, the train in the movie by no means participates in the disturbance of territorial sovereignty, the disintegration of the monolithic

order, or the decline of the Western ideological norm that transnationalism discourse and transnational scholars presume. Rather, in the eyes of an East-Asian director, the United States' multicultural discourses do not innocently support racial hybridity, the freedom of migration, or transnational heterogeneity, but reinforce the panopticon and surveillance regimes of the U.S. Likewise, in France where the original source text is set and South Korea where Bong hails from, both countries, like the United States struggle with institutional racism and stalled multicultural discourses manifest in their media and societies at large. Nevertheless, Bong is poignant about transnationalism serving as a beacon to dominant over subordinate cultures where *Snowpiercer* shows a formation of a Western apparatus that works aboard a dystopian train. Here the practice of a global panopticon is narrated for Korean and international audiences as it goes over and beyond the nation by disguising itself as the epitome of a neoliberal, multicultural state. It is this moving panopticon that Bong attempts to destroy and thereby raise awareness of its danger to his audience.

Defining Transnationalism and Virtualizing the Fixed Nomad

In academia today, transnationalism as a critical term seems to be everywhere. Due to the term's proliferation and ubiquitous usage in fields ranging from sociology to media studies, transnationalism has been, citing Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, an "empty, floating signifier" lacking any lucid definition.³ However, one key consent of transnationalism is that it is processual and fluid. In this section, I will argue how the director represents border-crossing movements of people, objects, capital, information, or ideas as central phenomena of transnationalism, whose emphasis on mobility inversely solidifies the stable and fixed hegemonic concept of the West.

The main difficulty of defining transnationalism is primarily because this concept is often interchangeably used with various other terms, especially "globalization."⁴ One of its key differences from globalization is that, as Niranjan Casinader remarks, it was born out of the discourse of globalization, and this belatedness makes transnationalism "[a] modern substantiation or descendant of contemporary globalization."⁵ Thus, transnationalism sheds new light on phenomena that made globalization in the mid-twentieth century possible but were not thought as such until the rise of the concept in the late twentieth century; specifically, urbanization and technological innovations in transportation and communication that fast connect people, places, and institutions across the globe. If globalization is the direct outcome of such global material and technological changes, transnationalism is more of a theoretical standpoint that criticizes deterministic and technology-driven understandings of globalization. Basch et. al argue that while globalizing processes assume a center-periphery relation in which

the regions and people belonging to the periphery are subordinated to the hegemonic system of the center, transnationalism is a phenomenon that forges and sustains multi-stranded social relations by immigrants who move across borders of nation-states.⁶ In a similar vein, Gurarmizo and Smith assert that transnationalism reflects on the decentralized loci of power whereas globalization predicts a central force from which the capital flows to the peripheries.⁷

In short, globalization presupposes a dualistic, unidirectional paradigm of power presumably having North America and Western Europe as the reinforcer of globalization as hegemonic, centrifugal processes, while transnationalism presumes a countermovement that disrupts such ideas of hegemonic and uniform centers. The prefix “trans-” is what most appropriately captures the key concepts of transnationalism; it persistently focuses on movements, activities involving migration and transit, and complex dimensions of mobility, which have the potential to build multiplicity against homogeneity. However, what Bong contests are the presumed biases and uncritical characteristics that are often laden in the habituated use of vocabularies by scholars of transnational cultures, such as displacement, disjuncture, and decentering. Refuting the “decline of the national sovereignty,”⁸ Bong’s train puts the cross-border movement and displacement under the apparatus and industry of the U.S., making hybridity *part of*—not separate from—the centralized power and the cultural hegemony of Hollywood and the media conglomerates and internet companies that now own these movie studios. That is, the diasporic movement that has the power to disrupt the unilateral power of the West is a meticulously controlled disjuncture *allowed* by the West.⁹

To return to the analogy of the train, dubbed Snowpiercer, exemplifies the running of transnationalism in society, symbolically understood here as a paradoxically claustrophobic movement. The very concept of a circumnavigating train, with all that is left of humanity encased within a single space, reflects a “transnational extreme,” according to Schulze.¹⁰ However, I argue that seeing these aspects only within a transnational lens overlooks the globalization process that the train embodies because the train is anything but disruptive. The train exemplifies an epitome of a caste system, having a white magnate on top of the pyramid of power, white people residing in the front section—a few exceptions are reserved for the depiction of the working class—and other multi-ethnic people in the tail. The tail-section passengers are deprived of any freedom to move across the stratified borders of the train. While in a constant state of migration, the passengers are ironically fixed under the established system of Wilford, the founder of the transportation company Wilford Industries. The train embodies two senses of spatial enclosure that are intertwined: 1) the circulatory, as the train runs in a constant loop, only capable of following the path prepared by Wilford; 2) the claustrophobic, as the tail-section people are detained in a small section of the train under the caste system. By configuring space both inside and outside the

train as structurally bounded, Bong delineates a group of people in a paradoxical mode of existence, that is, fixed nomads, a filmic device that I believe best captures his understanding of transnationalism.¹¹ This means that transnational movement does not disrupt any notion of one central locus of power but is instead carried out within the enclosed space of western neoliberalism. In this sense, Bong parallelizes his understanding of transnationalism with Guarmizo and Smith's concept of "transnationalism from above," which is similar to globalization as a macroscopic process governed and supervised by economic and political elites.¹² Bong depicts macro-level structures and processes that "*swamp* the cultural networks of more local units."¹³

Neither the movement of the train nor the revolution carried out by the tail-section passengers is diasporic, because, while diaspora is presumed to de-territorialize the sovereign state or disintegrate any fixed identity,¹⁴ the movements associated with *Snowpiercer* fail to scatter the central power. Inversely, the seemingly disruptive movement re-solidifies it. Curtis Everett (Chris Evans), a member of the tail section passengers, leads a revolutionary multi-ethnic group in order to shift the preconfigured route of the train and topple the rigid, Stalin-like arrangement of social class. Curtis wants to move beyond the borders and ultimately overthrow the sclerotic sovereignty of the train. However, he and his rebel party are just other groups whose rebellious power is integral to the caste system. Just as Wilson rigidly pigeonholes people in the train, Curtis deploys Wilson's logic to proceed further up the train. When Curtis releases the Korean security expert, Namgoong Minsu (Song Kang-ho) from the prison box, necessary to proceed further up the train by opening its fortified electronic accessed doors, his ultimate reaction to Minsu's lethargy is another forceful compartmentalization. Moving to use his drug habit as leverage, Curtis gives him a threatening ultimatum: "I'm gonna make this real simple for you. You help us, you get your drug. If not, we put you back where we found you. What'll it be, asshole?"¹⁵ His rhetoric reminds that of the utilitarian attitude of the front section elites who bring passengers from other sections of the train to play the violin for them or to fill in the role of executed members of the train. The only way for tail passengers to cross the stratifying border is when the elites *need* them; once they fail to meet their needs, they are readily disposed to prison. If Namgoong fails to unlock the doors or refuses to help Curtis, Curtis will put him back in his prison box. In this vein, Curtis is no different from the elite he condemns.

The closer Curtis approaches the head section, not only is he physically getting closer to Wilson but also ideologically *becoming* Wilson. It is thereby not surprising that Wilford appoints Curtis, ironically starred by Chris Evans the archetypal American hero, as his successor. When Curtis is kneeling inside the engine overwhelmed by a sense of awe, Wilford whispers to him, "I am old. You must have the engine. Keep her humming."¹⁶ As if succeeding a throne from a father to a son,

Wilford and Curtis share the linearity of the train. As Seung-hoon Jeong nicely puts, in a figurative sense, “the train is like the Ouroboros serpent, its head biting its tail, its linear body forming a circle,” because “the first and the last cars ... meet each other as in a feedback loop with the front fed by the back.”¹⁷ Wilford was waiting for Curtis to reach the engine, and the latter’s revolution was by no means accidental but advertently orchestrated by Wilson and the spiritual leader of the tail section, Gilliam (John Hurt), to maintain the homeostasis of the train. In this, the population of the tail section has to be minutely controlled by a series of purges in order to manage scarce resources and limited space. Subsequently, when Yona, Namgoon’s daughter (Ko Ah-sung) reaches out her hand to Curtis for a match to fuse the bomb, she is condemnably pushed away from the sacred engine by Curtis whose torso is presented in a low-angle shot to render a sense of supremacy to the potential leader of the train (Figure 1). Though Curtis originally tried to incite a group of displaced people to overthrow Wilford, his attempt is futilely incorporated into the train’s normative system. Again here, the initially disruptive movement is relegated to an innocuous gesture under or even a necessary part of the self-reproductive program of the train, which exemplifies the liberal capitalism of the West.¹⁸



Figure 1. Curtis pushes Yona from the sacred engine

“Balance. You see, this aquarium is a closed ecological system. And um, the number of individual units must be very closely, precisely controlled. In order to maintain the proper sustainable balance.”¹⁹ Minister Mason (Tilda Swinton) says this when Curtis and his followers proceed up the elite section for the first time and encounter the luxurious aquarium at the sushi bar. The tail-section passengers are no more or less than the fish inside the “closed ecological” tank Curtis and his people see. The fish make curves and turns in the water, take a journey through space making bubbles (noises) along the path, and swerve off the beaten path as if to investigate the unknown world. And yet, all this happens in the enclosed tank that is closely watched by its creators. The “very closely, precisely controlled” system recalls Foucault’s panopticon, and I would like to draw on this concept to argue that the

movie depicts a kind of global panopticon of the West; Wilford “controls and reduces the individual to a manipulable and relatively inert commodity.”²⁰ Under the global panopticon, Curtis and the tail-section passengers are fixed nomads, just like the continuously swerving fish inside the enclosed space.

Another major issue is the discourse of transnationalism. The movie deals with the discourse by foregrounding the language barrier, as English in the movie’s setting is the only “comprehensible” language. Bong extends his criticism to theories of transnationalism whose critical authority is largely the product of their scholars’ privileged positions within Anglophone academies. In other words, Bong throws a similar question posed by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim: can transnational studies, films, and discourses be truly transnational if it only speaks in English?²¹ Bong’s film depicts the exclusion of non-white voices that can be heard only through the English language from the mouth of Anglo-Americans. For instance, in the scene of the encounter between Namgoong and his American/British cohorts, Namgoong cannot be understood without an electronic translator. Another good example is Grey, Gilliam’s Latin American bodyguard, who is literally mute; he is loyal to the words of his white master and, communicates with the passengers (or with the global audience?) by pointing to English words on his tattoos such as “die” or “surrender.”

By having English-speaking white characters assume the central subjects of speech and non-white wordless subordinates, the movie’s configuration touches on the critical practice of transnationalism in which the West speaks of and for the third world in English. It also represents the dilemma of the non-whites who either remain unheard in their mother tongue or secure a marginal position by giving up their language and taking recourse to English. Thus recalling Gayatri Spivak’s concept of representation,²² the film problematizes how, historically, white’s narratives have represented non-white’s interests. Similarly in the film, Curtis as a competent leader speaks for and leads his tail-section passengers while most of his followers remain wordless or incomprehensible behind their white leader. Before proceeding up to the elite section of the train, Curtis and his followers pose before the artist who paints the momentous scene of rebellion. Here, Curtis takes the center of the stage, while Namgoong, Yona, and the only African American woman, Tanya (Octavia Spencer), are brushed to the side of the frame. Visually and epistemologically, the voice of the non-white tail passengers could be hardly heard for they stand as the tail of the tail; they are doubly tailed by the tail leader of the tail section.

The Dystopic Garden of Eve

Now, to turn our attention to some broader questions: is there no way to escape the global panopticon? Is transnationalism a titular force whose putatively disintegrative and heterogeneous force is generously granted by the enveloping apparatus of the West? Does a counterforce, be it postcolonial, decolonial, local, or subaltern as an actor in our planetary arena only perpetuates the global or transnational system of capitalism? If so, what are we supposed to do to contest these real and mediatized processes, forces, and conditions? My contention thus far has been that Curtis failed to overthrow much less subvert the powers governing the train. Another option is given for an external or exogenous sponsored (possible) revolutionary or exodus by Namgoong. He learns from his Inuit wife, one of the seven rebels who ventured out onto the snow, that the world outside of the train is thawing. Hence, his initial plan was to exit the train and construct a new social life outside the stifled ecosystem of the train, which undoubtedly signals to him the surveillance of the self-reproductive system or the knowledge production of Anglophone academies to Bong. Taking it a step further, this fourth world option, a radical indigeneity also seems possible, as the coda at the end of the film suggests. Seung-hoon Jeong puts it another way, equally intriguing, describing Namgoong's initiative as an alternative globalization or nomadic transnationalism, destroying the world system. Jeong writes: "Namgoong tries what Walter Benjamin suggests as a true revolution that is not to stay on the rails of progress for the capitalist or communist utopia, which turned out to be dystopian, but rather to pull the emergency break and exit the train. But ... nature as the final utopia is almost dystopian since the human race is nearly extinct."²³ Indeed, Bong seems to obliterate any form of power and makes an entirely whole new vision within Mother Nature. Nature welcomes the last two children of humanity—Yona and Timmy, the orphaned black child who was used by Wilford for labor inside the engine—to the world of obscurity. As Jeong intuitively pinpoints, it is an intended obscurity of the movie, whether they have set their feet on a utopia or dystopia.

The film's final images, following the fatal crash of the train, present us with Yona walking out of the train into the crispy snow (Figure 2). She is the first human to contact the outside world since the train operated. Holding hands with each other, the two survivors from the train crash become the new Adam and Eve in the new Garden of Eden, a utopian-like site free from being mandated or coerced by any power. Bong imagines a utopia in which the problem confronting the humanity—the surveilling panopticon—is seemingly removed; the sacred engine is overturned behind the children, the untrodden snow is wide open before them to step on, and the appearance of a polar bear indicates that the ice, which led mankind to disaster, is now melting to sustain new life.



Figure 2. Yona and Tim step out from the Snowpiercer and make their first contact with the outside world

The interculturalism that Bong introduces through his Garden of Eden is one of Exodus: disembarking from the hell train and eventually creating a new civilization at the end of the Anthropocene, two children of color are a “frail sign of earthly regeneration.”²⁴ Bong ends his film by rejecting modern systems of oppression—neoliberalism, surveillance technicity, industrialization, and the circuitous flows of economic exploitation, social stratification, and racial/ethnic segregation continuing in the age of globalization—and brings us back to a prehistorical world where a New Genesis begins. In this seemingly apolitical world, the place for Whites to stand is absent, which might indicate a racial flip rather than the post-racial vision of the East Asian director. Still, Timmy and Yona restart Genesis, actively through their survival rewrite the Bible, and re-present the portrait of Adam and Eve historically represented as white as a minoritarian now majoritarian bi-racial order. By presenting the new Adam and Eve as an interracial couple and the futurity of humanity, I believe that Bong is critically addressing the real-world racial issue which is locked into notions of single ethnicity and accommodations between majority and minorities.²⁵ Here, Bong is promoting a form of diversity rooted in a strong sense of whole community.

However, the flip side is the uneasy realization that the utopic myth generates its own dystopia with unfailing regularity. Hannah Ardent argued this most urgently, pointing out many twentieth-century intellectuals who were resolute in their “denunciation of the totalitarian impulse, which they understood to be a sine qua non of utopian aspirations.”²⁶ The utopia impulse in science fiction has been seen with ambivalent eyes because it can so readily transform into a dystopia by idealizing totalitarian forms of spatialization whose structure is best exemplified by the cultural logic of *Snowpiercer*. In this vein, Bong’s utopia becomes a predesigned world with the generous permission of the American film industry. In other words, his intercultural Garden of Eden turns into a dystopia: “a closely watched, monitored, administered, and daily managed world” by transnational distributors and producers whose first language is English.²⁷ It is sobering to point out that the sacred engine stopped its operation when Curtis rescued Timmy from the Engine’s enslavement of this child. While Wilson creates the apparatus, it is Curtis who halts it. The establishment, consolidation, and destruction of the panopticon are all executed under the hands of White American men. Thus, Curtis’s destruction of the

system needs to be given an eye of suspicion, for it may not necessarily indicate a permanent disappearance of the global panopticon; rather, it might be an act of temporary benevolence. The powerful force of white supremacy can rebound anytime. Its disappearance seems impossible at all—it is always there lurking in the shadows.

A Tail? A Parasite!

Although my most of the argument is imbued with a deep pessimism, I believe this very pessimism is what Bong tries to convey through this SF film. Science-fiction, though seemingly unrealistic, generally takes part of our existing reality to an unimaginable extremity with an aim to prod the audience to confront real-world issues and predicaments. Bong says SF films are not only characterized by the spectacular action scenes of “laser guns” but “simplify and thus dramatize how we live ... [They] portray the grim reality with special effects intended to highlight certain ... features of the very reality.”²⁸ *Snowpiercer* induces us to see the global panopticon lurking in the shadow and perceive subtle issues involved in its modifications to transnationalism.

It is no wonder, in this sense, that the film was “penalized” by the American distribution company. Film critic Ty Burr explains that Bong was punished for being “too visionary.” *Snowpiercer* was released “in 100 or so art houses and out-of-the-way multiplexes” instead of “playing 600 to 1,000 screens [in the US],” because Bong refused to edit his film the way Weinstein Co., one of the most influential distribution companies in North America, wanted.²⁹ Burr continues, “[i]t seems downright punitive as if Weinstein were saying that no one could see [the movie].” Indeed, it is too dangerous for American-centric audiences in the U.S. to watch the “visionary” *Snowpiercer*, because, firstly, the film betrays how America has been titularly foregrounding the discourse of disruption and heterogeneity under the global panopticon; secondly, the film critically addresses the “technological hubris” of American capitalism that catalyzes Anthropocene³⁰; and lastly, American-centric audiences in the United States would take years to catch up with Korean-transnational blockbuster’s impressive vision for humanity provided in the ending. Bong’s recentering of global flows in opposition to American globalization, releases a more intellectually and culturally challenging and stimulating film to the global public.³¹

However, Bong refuses to stay silent or remain as a tail section passenger. Bong finds a new way to make himself visible to the public through the VOD service. The limited release of the film arguably allowed it to flourish in VOD format—it was, at the time, the biggest ever simultaneous VOD/theatrical release in the US film industry, the #1 film on iTunes the week of its release, and earned over \$3.8 million in its

first two weeks on VOD while pulling in over \$3.9 million in theaters the past five weeks.³² Bong's preference for VOD platforms was patent during his interview in 2017. He said, "Although I do admit the distribution process is important, as a director freedom of creation and editing rights are the most important aspects of making a film."³³ And this is the reason why he chose Netflix as his new launching pad to release his next film *Okja* (2017) and to dramatize *Snowpiercer*. He said he felt "lucky" to work with Netflix because Netflix offered Bong \$50 million and total creative freedom when producing *Okja*.³⁴ What I would like to say here is that Bong does not remain as a mere tail attached to the elite section. Rather, he changes the nature of the tail into something else—a *parasitical agent* that selects the most appropriate host to feed on. The section tail section has no self-control. It is inseparable and thus attached to the main body where it receives chemical and electrical signals from the center base (the brain). On the other hand, this kind of parasite is a distinct agent that harbors within or upon the host for nutrients. Like a parasite, Bong refuses to rely on a single distributor; he searches for the best means and options provided by the US to secure his vision and remain profitable at the box office. Though swerving inside the delimited space of the neoliberal and capitalistic frame, from which Weinstein and Netflix operate, the parasitic Bong grows its size by nourishing the host. While the tail is bereft of self-development, the parasite has the potential to even outgrow the host. Here, I would like to address the irony that Bong's latest film *Parasite* (2019) gave him the honor of top prize: the Palme d'Or in that same year at Cannes Films Festival and Best Picture awards at the Oscars 2020, thus becoming the first-non-English language film to take home the award. Bong is by no means like Namgoong Minsu, the tail of the tail that is barely comprehensible or incomprehensible in the Anglophone community; he is a prominent parasite but one still dependent on a larger system for intellectual and creative nourishment and, of course, recognition.

Conclusion

Snowpiercer portrays the risky side of transnationalism. Bong understands transnationalism as under globalizing process in which heterogeneity becomes an innocuous disruption under the global panopticon. The migrants who may seem to contribute to the formation of multiple discourses against homogenization are actually moving inside the claustrophobic space dictated by the Western apparatus. The passengers in the tail section, thereby, become fixed nomads. In this futile situation, the director provides not a single narrative or power as the answer. He undermines all by destroying the civilization that bore the narratives and attempts to provide an apolitical vision instead by presenting a black Adam and an Asian Eve as the last human to restart the civilization. Yet, the easy ending and

the sudden disappearance of the whites give a lingering suspicion, turning the utopian space into another site for dystopian surveillance under the West. The hope is found outside the film, where Bong's deployment of North American institutions makes himself a parasite—not a tail—that has the potential to outgrow the host.

Notes

1. Joshua Schulze, "The Sacred Engine and the Rice Paddy: Globalization, Genre, and the Local Space in the Films of Bong Joon-ho," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 47, no.1 (2019): 22.

2. Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema Breaking the Waves*, (New York: Wallflower, 2009), 107.

3. Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies," *Transnational Cinemas*, 1, no.1 (2010): 10.

4. Here, I only bring globalization to distinguish the difference between transnationalism, because my paper largely deals with the subtlety between globalization and transnationalism. Chris Berry devotes a section to distinguish internationalism and transnationalism. To briefly put, like globalization, which has a central force that mediates the world paradigm, internationalism also presupposes a "nation-state [that] is understood to have complete sovereignty over the territory that it rules, and the world order is organized as transactions of various kinds between and regulated by these states." Internationalism presumes the continuing existence of nations; whereas transnationalism assumes that nations are in a malleable state that can transform into something else. Internationalism is most commonly used in business and economic studies, which focuses on the exchange of national economies—or between corporations, organizations, and associations—through trade. The exchange or trade is done by two or more nationally separated companies in two or more territorially-bounded nation-states. Diaspora has been used interchangeably with transnationalism, also. Thomas Faist asserts while diaspora studies have focused on its "relevance for religious communities, nationhood and also social practices such as entrepreneurship," transnational studies put emphasis on its "mobility and networks." For further reading, refer to Chris Berry, "What is Transnational Cinema? Thinking From the Chinese Situation," *Transnational Cinemas*, 1, no.2 (2010), 119-21 and Thomas Faist, "Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?" in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories, and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 17.

5. Niranjana Casinader, *Transnationalism, Education and Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.

6. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1994), 8.

7. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, *Transnationalism From Below* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 94.

8. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization*. (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1996), 31.

9. Also, the Korean perspective might not be so different from the West, because *Snowpiercer* has equally participated and heavily relied upon the neo-liberal, capitalistic market of the West to gross millions of dollars for the production and distribution of the movie and its many adaptations of genres. Through the Korean film industry's diversity to we see glocalised genres from the "western" to "science fiction" to "zombie films." Cho, Michelle, "Genre, Translation, and Transnational Cinema: Kim Jee-woon's

The Good, the Bad, the Weird.” *Cinema Journal*, 54, no. 3 (2015): 44–68. Wagner, Keith B. “Train to Busan: Glocalization, Korean Zombies, and a Man-Made Neoliberal Disaster,” *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, ed. Sangjoon Lee (The University of Michigan Press, 2019), 515-532.

10. Schulze, “The Sacred Engine,” 27.

11. I refrain from using “diaspora” or “migrants,” but rather use “nomad,” because while diaspora and migrants are usually associated with the concept of homeland—bound in the imagery of origin and destination—nomad lacks such origin or destination. It is in constant flux and motion, meandering between spaces bereft of any sedentary settlement.

12. Smith and Guarnizo, *Transnationalism*, 67. Standing in contradiction to the homogenizing force of transnationalism from above, “transnationalism from below” focuses on the “decentering “local” resistances of the informal economy, ethnic nationalism, and grassroots activism. These developments are sometimes viewed in celebratory terms. For some they bring market rationality and liberalism to a disorderly world ‘from above.’ ... Cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities, border-crossing by marginal ‘others,’ and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs are depicted as conscious and successful efforts by ordinary people to escape control and domination ‘from above’ by capital and the state.” Smith and Guarnizo, *Transnationalism*, 1-5.

13. A.D. Smith, “Towards a Global Culture?” in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation, and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 174.

14. Schulze, “The Sacred Engine,” 22.

15. *Snowpiercer*, directed by Joon-ho Bong (Anchor Bay, 2013), 1:33:10. <https://watcha.com/watch/mO02n15?mappingSource=basic>.

16. *Snowpiercer*, dir. Bong, 1:47:50.

17. Seung-hoon Jeong, “The Post-Historical Catastrophe of a Biopolitical Ecosystem,” in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, ed. Seung-hoon Jeong (University of Michigan Press, 2019), 493.

18. Audre Lorde, an African-American feminist, once famously said, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Her famous speech was to criticize the white feminist academia, which excluded the voices of those whose difference was essential to the project of overturning patriarchy. In other words, she attempted to bring up an ethical principle that would overthrow the biased academia: We cannot disrupt our oppression using the logic that justifies our oppression. Her quote dovetails well with the logic with which Curtis and his revolutionary group use to subvert the train’s caste system. Their adoption of Wilson’s logic will never be able to dismantle “the master’s house”—Wilson and the sacred engine.

19. *Snowpiercer*, dir. Bong, 1:05:20.

20. Stephen Gill, “The Global Panopticon? The Neoliberal State, Economic Life, and Democratic Surveillance.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 20, no. 1(1995): 2.

21. Higbee and Lim, “Concepts of Transnational Cinema,” 18.

22. According to Spivak, *Vertretung* (proxy) refers to the political project of one speaking on behalf of his/her constituency, whereas *darstellung* (portraiture) refers to the social, aesthetic, and philosophical re-presentation of another group. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Macmillan, 1988), 276.

23. Jeong, "The Post-Historical Catastrophe," 496.
24. Rob Wilson, "Snowpiercer as Anthropoetics: Killer Capitalism, the Anthropocene, Korean Global Film," *Boundary 2*, 46, no. 3 (2019): 211. Rob Wilson draws out the issues of capitalist body and the dire conditions of the Anthropocene from Bong's *Snowpiercer*. "It is the hugely consequential geo-planetary *collapse* of climatic equilibrium and species loss ... that can rightly be named ... the Anthropocene. This Anthropocene, as a near bad future we all face as precarious citizens fueled by a carbon-driven capitalist system hurtling toward the year 2031, becomes Bong's planetary setting and the ecological problem he tries to imagine beyond in a trans-species gesture of hope that closes the film" (205).
25. Ted Cante, *Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*, (Palgrave, 2012), 141. Eric Chek Wai Lau, "The Ownership of Cultural Hybrids," in *Interculturalism: Exploring Critical Issues*, ed. Diane Powell and Fiona Sze (Oxford: The InterDisciplinary Press, 2004).
26. Philippe Couton and José Julián López, "Movement as Utopia," *History of the Human Sciences* 22, no. 4, (2009): 94.
27. Couton and López, "Movement as Utopia, 110.
28. Ye Dam Yi, "Locating Transnational Film between Korean Cinema and American Cinema: A Case Study of *SnowPiercer* (2014)," *Plaridel* 14, no. 1 (January-June 2017): 19.
29. Weinstein was not happy with Bong's 126-minute running and demanded to cut out twenty minutes of the film before release. Child, Ben. 2013. "Snowpiercer Director Reportedly Furious about Weinstein English-Version Cuts." *Guardian*, October 8, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/08/snowpiercer-director-english-cuts-bong-joon-ho>.
30. Rob Wilson, "Snowpiercer as Anthropoetics," 202.
31. I would like to thank my reviewer for giving me an insightful comment regarding global consciousness of American-centric audiences.
32. Min-Kyoung Jeong, "Netflix Ttaemun-e Yeonghwagwan-i Manghanda? Bong Joon-ho 'Gongjonhal Geot' ("Will Netflix Drive the Movie Theater Out? Bong Joon-ho Says 'They will Co-exist'")." *Media Today*, 15 May 2017, <http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=136861>.
33. There was a slight contention about the choice of format. While Bong preferred to shoot the film in 35mm, Netflix wanted all their original movies be shot and archived in 4K. Nam Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), 18.

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