

# The Analysis of the Artistic Presentation of “Social Norms” in Ki-Duk Kim's Movies

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**ABSTRACT.** *Ki-duk Kim's movies not only recognize the desire for rationality, but also fully affirm the value of social norms. This dilemma is inevitable in real life. This paper first analyses “social norms”, then explores the manifestation of “social norms” in Ki-duk Kim's movies, then explores the painful presentation of “social norms” in Ki-duk Kim's movies. Finally, it is pointed out that the protagonist's unfreedom in Ki-duk Kim's movies is not due to the suppression of social norms, but to people's internalization of social norms. This article will help audiences better understand Ki-duk Kim's movies and learn to interpret the “law” in movies from different perspectives. This unique creative perspective and technique provides a lot of enlightenment and new creative perspectives for the narrative content and methods of Chinese movies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ki-duk kim, Social norms, Desire*

## 1. Introduction

The release of human desires has always been limited. Human beings' attachment to social norms and their suppressed desires are co-existent and must adhere to certain social norms. Traditional Confucianism holds that “person” has no meaning of “individual”, but only has the meaning of “class”. “Person” is the person in “ceremony” and “ceremony” is the social security of “person”. The “Stoic School” in ancient Greece believed that man should restrain individual desires, obey fate arrangements, and pursue a virtuous life. Ki-duk Kim's films are not only venting on desire, but also suppressing individual desires using social norms. There is a very complex relationship between social norms and desires. Instinctive desires are the expression of human animality, while social norms are the embodiment of human sociality. Human beings are a contradictory complex of two attributes. It is difficult to separate them completely and there are contradictions. Ki-duk Kim's films are keen to show this pair of contradictions to reflect human's non freedom and express his difficult attitude. While recognizing the rationality of desire, he has accepted the restraining effect of internalized social norms and fully affirmed the significance and value of social norms. This choice is the main reason that human beings have to face in real life, and it is also the main cause of pain.

## **2. Overview of Social Norms**

The economist Eric Posner considers social norms as regularities in the equilibrium of the game in Law and Social Norms [1]. From an economic perspective, he believes that there are “good people” and “bad people” in the society. If there are “good people” on both sides, a cooperative game will be formed. But if only the “bad guys” participate in the game, it will produce the “prisoner's dilemma” phenomenon that is not cooperative in economics. Social norms are a balanced behaviour model of cooperation between “good guys” and “good guys.” Social norms approved by the government will become laws. Sociologists point out that social norms are a common phenomenon that human beings recognize and abide by the code of conduct. The criterion here is the “right” content that human beings should abide by. It has moral meaning that those who break the social norms will be punished and isolated in groups. Social norms in modern society are rules and regulations recognized by all members of society. Some social norms may become laws. Social norms are a historical category. With the development of the society, they have different contents in different periods.

Social norms are formed and developed in the long-term social life and communication. They are the consensus of norms and the restriction of unethical behavior, thus forming a strong binding recognized social norms, which is the result of people's mutual coordination. People have been in established social relations since birth, and they have various relationships with society and others. Individuals must comply with various social norms if they want to be recognized by society. The formation of social norms is the process of reaching a certain contract in order to maintain social public order when individuals seek their own satisfaction.

## **3. ”Social Norms” in Ki-Duk Kim’s Films**

### ***3.1 The Form of Social Norms in Ki-Duk Kim’s Films***

Most people who have watched Ki-duk Kim’s films will think that Ki-duk Kim’s films mainly discuss human desires. In fact, his films have always reflected the requirements of social norms, suggesting that human beings exist in social norms. In breath, Ki-duk Kim plays the supervisor behind the prison camera. He can only be seen wearing sunglasses from the reflection of the monitor. This implies the existence of invisible social norms that control people in the real society, and Ki-duk Kim’s Films embodies and implies social norms in different ways.

#### ***3.1.1 Nets and Prisons***

When the net binds man, man has no freedom. The barbed wire in the coastline not only isolates the internal and external relations by delimiting a certain range, but also establishes an internal independent specification (Figure 1). Kang Shangbing and his comrades living in the barbed wire fence are implementing specific regulations to protect the safety of the coastline and prevent the entry of spies.

Ordinary people outside the barbed wire cannot break in without permission, or they will be executed as spies. Barbed wire is an invisible force. It is an irresistible force. It is a norm. It is a world where people want to break through and escape, but they are difficult to remove and cannot escape.



*Fig.1 Barbed Wire in Coastline*

Similar to “net”, prison is a tool to punish criminals and maintain social norms. There is a prison in “the child prostitute”, a prison in “the capital of beasts”, a prison in “the bad boy”, and a prison in “breath”. Prisons are used to sanction those who have deviated from their behavior, depriving them of their personal freedom, and at the same time providing probation education to guide them to return to social norms, and carry the meaning of punishing broken life.

### **3.1.2 Policemen**

Although the police and soldiers in Ki-duk Kim’s film are the executors of social norms, they are all weakened. Their existence is to remind people that there is no absolute freedom in the state of the existence of social norms. Norms will bring certain fears to the main characters. The main characters in “bad boy” are all compromised by the rogue sheriff, “the little monk in “Spring goes, spring returns “conflicts with the arrival of the police after committing a crime,” the police in “drifting desire room” attempts to commit suicide when they arrive “, and so on. There is another dual identity of police in Kim Ki-duk 's films. The girl’s father in “Samaria Girl”has the dual status of policeman and father, and has the dual attributes of norms and morals in society and family, becoming the normative embodiment of the suppression of girls.

### **3.2 The External Manifestation of Social Norms: Punishment**

Although Ki-duk Kim releases desire in the film, he is not a debauchee. He always uses social norms to punish those who excessively pursue desires to present the social life and psychological balance that social norms need to achieve.

### **3.2.1 Masochism**

Self-abuse is one of the ways of self-physical or spiritual punishment. When the parties cannot get rid of the constraints of social norms, they seek to balance themselves by punishing themselves. Freud once believed that human “self-destruction” embodies the “death instinct”, human living conditions have the characteristics of self-actualization and self-torture, and humans have the aggressiveness of maintaining the survival instinct. In “drifting desire room”, the criminal in order to avoid the police, in order to balance the fear and devour the fishhook, the mute girl wants to retain the criminal, but put the fishhook into the body. When Senhua receives guests in bad boy, Henji struggles in the dark room behind the mirror and suffers from mental torture, which is also his self punishment for persecuting his lover. The little monk in “ Spring goes, spring returns “ cut off his hair and wanted to end his life after killing his wife.

### **3.2.2 Death**

Death is the cruelest form of punishment in Ki-duk Kim’s films, which directly deprives those who violate social norms of their right to live. At the end of the bow, the old man chooses to jump to the sea. In the capital of beasts, dancers kill Qinghai and Hongshan in order to punish those who violate social norms. After the killing in “Unknown Recipient”, Chang Gu died in the mud, and “Drifting Room” punishes the dumb girl who killed in order to satisfy her possessiveness. These films show that people who break through social norms can only use blood to wash away the various sins they committed before, and everything can be calm.

### **3.3 The Internal Form of Social Norms: Return**

The social norms in Ki-duk Kim’s films not only have external expressions, they also have internal effects. Internalized norms and morals gradually become people's self-awareness, and human behavior is an activity controlled by that consciousness. In the “Coastline”, Shang Kangbing wanted to return to the barracks because there was a concept they shared in the barbed wire. Shooting intruders will become heroes. Only what they do there is not a crime, but society outside the barbed wire is not recognized, so he can find spiritual identity only when he returns to the barracks. “Beast City” is centered on human desire and friendship. At the beginning, Qinghai and Hongshan were using each other. Such friendship is not reliable. Therefore, Qinghai deceived Hongshan while sharing money. Qinghai sold Hongshan for love, but Hongshan forgave Qinghai and saved his life. Later Qinghai betrayed Hongshan again for love, but this time Qinghai sacrificed his love to save Hongshan, and Hongshan traded the bottom line of not killing people in exchange for what Qinghai wanted. At this time, their friendship reached the highest peak. In order to comply with the norms of “friendship”, the protagonists in the film finally give up their own life pursuit or bottom line. In the movie “ Spring goes, spring returns “, monks living in ascetic monasteries must abide by the rules and regulations, but the little monk left the monastery because of the wanton expansion of libido. Later, I went back to

the temple to carve scriptures, hoping to find a balance in my mind. This process from entering the WTO to coming out of the world is the process of returning to the norms( Figure 2). From leaving home to wandering, to going back home, the woman in “empty room” did not let the cold family collapse, but let her regain love and let her go home. Here, Ki-duk Kim uses the traditional oriental family concept: “it is immoral to demolish ten temples instead of destroying one family”. He believes that it is against the social norms to destroy the family, so he lets the hostess go home and restore the peace on the surface of the family. Learning to drive is the process of learning and obeying traffic rules. In “the Samaritan Girl”, there is a scene where the father teaches his daughter to drive in the yellow line. The yellow line symbolizes that the father is guiding his daughter to return to normal life. As the father of the police, he has become the defender of social morality at this time.



*Fig.2 Go Back to the Temple in “Spring Goes, Spring Returns”*

#### **4. The Painful Presentation of “Social Norms” in the Film**

##### ***4.1 The Painful Contradiction Caused by “Social Norms”***

Human's happiness comes from the satisfaction of instinct, while human's pain comes from the inner dissatisfaction which is realized that instinct can't be realized absolutely. The human instinct for pleasure makes people hope to achieve their own desires without any pain, but social norms always require that people's instinct meet certain requirements, and to achieve balance through individual control will inevitably sacrifice individual desires. And overemphasizing the self realization of desire will inevitably have an impact on the social norms, resulting in greater contradictions. In the realization of social norms and desires, to find a balance point requires one side to compromise, and the internalized social norms cannot compromise. However, Ki-duk Kim made the hero unwilling to give up the desire he had pursued, which produced a contradictory complex of desire that was both suppressed and released. Ki-duk Kim concentrated the pain caused by this contradiction on the main characters, set various scenes to release desires, and at the same time used norms to restrain these desires and carry out external punishment,

leading to internal struggles. The characters want to satisfy their own desires and cannot be free to indulge. The characters' hearts are controlled by the internalized norms, which causes great pain. French director Jean-Luc Godard believes that the general audience goes to the cinema for entertainment, entertainment, to see what they desire, and to free their emotions. Rather than seeing the various painful manifestations in real life, or not experiencing the various freedoms in life, this is probably one of the reasons why Ki-duk Kim's movies are not popular with ordinary audiences.

#### ***4.2 Facing the Dilemma of "Social Norms"***

When people dare not openly violate and despise the rules, they try to hide their behavior. The desires expressed in Ki-duk Kim's films are basically hidden carefully. Once exposed to the broad daylight, the contradiction between desire and social norms will inevitably become a tragedy. It seems that there is always a contradiction between the two, and the main characters in the film have been hovering between the two in pain. They want to satisfy their desires, but they are not willing to bear the consequences of their crimes, so the characters in the film can only make painful choices between social norms and desires, and struggle to move forward. Kim's brilliant point is that his attitude towards the contradiction between desire and social norms is implied at the end of the film. Looking at the end of the film, Kim's attitude is generally irreconcilable.

"The open form prevents the closure of narration and the determination of the following meaning" [2], the director does not need to provide a fixed point of view in the open ending. One way of open ending is the structure of the first and last cycle, the spiral structure without the end point, which embodies the mood of reincarnation and life cycle. The name of the film "spring to spring and back" reflects the first and last echo, and the film starts from the growth of child monks, to the arrival of the next generation of child monks, forming a cycle. This not only embodies a kind of religious reincarnation, but also recognizes the irresistible desire of human instinct. Life is the process of choosing between desire and norm. The contradiction between the two always exists and will not disappear. This kind of reincarnation is also the attitude that the director wants to convey. Time starts with the picture frame of the woman who came out of the hospital, and ends with the picture frame of the woman who came out of the hospital after the second plastic surgery. This kind of reincarnation is the result of fate, which implies that the contradiction between desire and social norms can never be solved. Human beings are always in the dilemma of choosing between social norms and desires.

Another way to open an ending is to suspend the ending, which implies all kinds of uncertainty. Is the mute girl dead or is she leaving with the man? Death is the submission to norms, leaving is the indulgence to desires. Ki-duk Kim believes that both outcomes are possible. At the end of bad boy, Senhua and Henji drive away together. The camera changes from close-up view to long-range view. The car goes farther and farther on the road, and there is no end point. This is not the end, but also the end, which leaves a lot of imagination space for the future of the protagonist. Ki-

duk Kim also hinted at another ending in the film. Senhua saw a woman in red throw herself to the sea to commit suicide, and then picked up a torn photo on the beach. In fact, the woman and the woman who jumped into the sea in the photo were Senhua. In the ending of "Samaria Girl", the director uses dreams to show the father's two choices: to kill the daughter or to guide the daughter back to the formal, which requires the father and the audience to choose. Perhaps because the development of minors is involved, the director tends to choose the latter, but he still offers two possibilities, which also shows his dilemma.

## **5. The Internal Causes of Ki-Duk Kim's Pain on "Social Norms"**

### ***5.1 Depressed "We" Culture in Korean Nation***

Under the pressure of strong external forces, Koreans are used to looking for solutions from the inside, and gradually formed a "we" culture. Therefore, Koreans use "we" instead of "me" when expressing individual emotions and behaviors. "we" culture is a spirit that makes Koreans feel proud and reassured. "I" is an independent manifestation of personal consciousness. The replacement of "I" by "we" leads to the overwhelming of personal consciousness, thus forming "nationalism". Korean people are used to the protection of "community" and try their best to protect it. They constantly suppress themselves, dare not express their individual consciousness, and reject the heterogeneous personality, which leads to the abandonment of individual desire. Although Ki-duk Kim is pitiless in digging out these carefully hidden individual desires, he can't get rid of the "we" culture, leaving aside the desire cognition under the traditional Korean ethics. At the same time, they put the protagonists in the social norms, show "I" in "we" culture, and let them finally give up "I" and return to the traditional "we".

### ***5.2 Ki-Duk Kim's Growth Experience and "Social Norms"***

Since Ki-duk Kim wants to release the repressed desires of mankind, why would he recognize social norms? Since the birth of man, he has been under the influence of established social relations and social norms. Individuals must master the norms and patterns of behavior in these societies. Change is the inner psychological structure that guides one's own behavior, so that it can be recognized and accepted by society and not punished by society. It seems that the norms that have been formed for a long time have penetrated into Ki-duk Kim's bone marrow and evolved into a part of his self-consciousness. He was in a church school before he was 9 years old. He thought that he had been over brainwashed by all kinds of salvation speech and wanted to get rid of this state when he grew up. When he got rid of it, he realized the greatness of the doctrine. Social norms and religious doctrines are the same, people want to get rid of their shackles, but also think it is useful. In order to make a living, he left school and worked everywhere. At the age of 20, he began to be a soldier for five years. The army has its own strict norms. The internalized norms and morality have become Kim's self-consciousness. His behavior is also

under the control of this consciousness. The internalization of social norms is the result of the individual's fear of being punished by the society, and at the same time forms the attachment to such norms.

## 6. Conclusion

Human beings have their own civilization, which is not as obedient to the needs of instinct as animals. The shackles of social norms make human body and mind not free, and can't escape from this situation, which leads to human suffering. Ki-duk Kim's films not only show people's hidden "desire", but also put it on the opposite side of "law". The film presents the content of desire, cruelty and evil. But in fact, Ki-duk Kim did not thoroughly indulge his desires, because he had already recognized the existence of social norms. The protagonist in the film not only wants to fulfill his desires, but also cannot escape or is unwilling to leave the constraints of social norms, he can only linger in the dilemma. This makes the characters sway with the audience, allowing them to enjoy the freedom to indulge their desires, and at the same time making them feel tangled and painful. This kind of negative and self-negative film creation technique explores different perspectives of "social norms" in films, which is worth learning and reference for Chinese film creators.

## 7. Acknowledgements

This paper is the 2017 scientific research project of Nantong University of science and Technology (scientific research 2017013); The philosophy and social sciences research project of Jiangsu University (2019SJA1497). Nantong guiding science and technology program (MSZ18012); Jiangsu University Philosophy and social sciences research project (2019SJA1499). Nantong Institute of technology 2019 "classroom revolution" teaching reform research special project (2019JJG005); Nantong Institute of technology 2017 excellent teaching team construction research project (2017NITJXTD02) results. (Suning Gong is first correspondent author)

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