



# “Director’s Illocutionary Act” And Filmic Creation ——Take Joon-ik Lee’s “The Throne” As A Case Study

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**Abstract.** The “Director's illocutionary act” refers to the emotion, purpose, and “intention” conveyed by the film. From the perspective of filmic creation, the auteurs theory emphasizes the director’s dominant position; the movie's motif and theme formed by the “director's illocutionary act”; the “illocutionary act” also is the driving force for the audiences to have different “filmic emotion”. In film criticism, the complete film text (stories narrative methods, audio-visual language design) should be analyzed to reveal the director's “illocutionary act”, namely the film's “connotation”. “The director's illocutionary act” of Joon-ik Lee is to criticize the Korean feudal system, rather than “Confucian etiquette” or personal character, which triggered the audience's reflective emotion and thinking.

**Keywords:** film auteur; director’s ideas; the director's illocutionary act; film aesthetics; film narrative; Joon-ik Lee’s “*The Throne*”.

## 1 Introduction

How can one determine if a film is a masterpiece? Wang Wenbin provided three objective evaluation criteria for this subjective question: whether it accurately represents the fundamental nature of material reality, whether it stimulates the audience to contemplate the spiritual reality, and whether it evokes emotions in the audience at the psychological and spiritual levels (Wang 2018: 103).[1] Wang also highlights the significant position and role of the director in the film, which is connected to the concept that the director is the “auteur” of the film.[1] The “auteur theory” emphasizes the director's authoritative role in the film and posits that the film reflects the director's distinct narrative and aesthetic preferences. In particular, auteur theory asserts that the filmmaker exerts the most significant influence on a film's artistic direction and primary themes (Park and Mohammed 2022:12-16).[2] Regarding this matter, it is worth examining the following research questions: What are the determinants that contribute to the emotional impact of a film, or in other words, why do audiences experience varying degrees of emotion? What variables influence the director's selection of narrative approaches and aesthetic styles?

The fundamental idea to address the topic above is the “illocutionary act”, often referred to as “illocutionary power” or “illocutionary force”, which was introduced by the pragmatic John Austin in 1962. The term “illocutionary act” refers to the emotional

response, such as criticism, reflection, praise, or belittlement, that is conveyed through a specific mode of communication, such as text, image, or video. Typically, the intention of making a promise, giving a warning, or expressing a statement is transmitted to the audience through the use of illocutionary acts (Rismayanti 2021:138-149).[3] Occasionally, a hearer's interpretation of an utterance seems to 'override' the speaker's intention when it comes to the utterance's illocutionary force (McDonald 2022:918-939).[4] The purpose and impact of this chosen mode of communication will be further elaborated in the subsequent section. The director's ability to influence and persuade, known as "illocutionary power," is crucial in evoking emotional responses from the audience. These powers may have interconnected underlying meanings (Sarwa and Bhatti 2023:1401-1416).[5]

The director's imaginative process revolves around the central theme and their unique perspective, but the effectiveness of the theme and argument relies on the strength of the director's persuasive abilities. How does Austen's illocutionary deed relate to the field of film art? The author will address this inquiry by examining pertinent ideas and undertaking a case study of the film "The Throne," helmed by Joon-ik Lee.

## 2 What is the "Director's Illocutionary Act"

As previously said, the director assumes the primary role in the process of film production. The concept of "auteur theory" originated in France during the 1950s. Truffaut suggested that the filmmaker should have complete control over the picture, and he introduced the term "auteur" to refer to the director of the film.

Several researchers have synthesized and derived various theories and concepts. The film's style prominently reflects the director's distinct "personal preference," seen in the narrative approach and aesthetic style (Pugsley 2016: 63-64).[6] Furthermore, the poem exhibits a sophisticated organization and addresses humanistic issues. The filmmaker incorporates diverse historical and cultural components, such as literature, art, education, politics, religion, and morality, into the visible text. Simultaneously, the director implies a particular humanistic inclination with a personal investment in the underlying message. Nevertheless, the concept of a cinema auteur does not offer a resolution to the issue of how filmmakers produce compelling and inspiring works of art. Dancyger (2006: 12-15) introduced the notion of "Director's Ideas" as a solution to this issue.[7] According to this concept, the process of making a film, including its narrative and aesthetic design, should revolve around the director's underlying message, argument, and more information beyond the surface motifs.

Illocutionary acts refer to the intended aim or function of words that speakers have in mind (Sihombing 2021: 1772-1783).[8] Furthermore, Linguist Austin introduced the concept of "speech act" as an illocutionary act, which pertains to the act of conveying the speaker's intention. In other words, speech act refers to the manifestation of all actions and expressions carried out through verbal communication, utilising language as a means of transmitting significance (Izar et al.,2021:148-158).[9] This includes the emotional and purposive aspects of the statement, as well as any criticism, praise, or advice conveyed. In order to gain a deeper comprehension of illocutionary acts, the

author proposes approaching the topic through the lens of semiotics theory, specifically by examining the denotation and connotation meanings associated with an item. "Denotation" refers to the explicit and visible meaning of something, represented by concrete symbols. On the other hand, "connotation" refers to the underlying messages, information, and implicit meaning conveyed by placing the initial layer of "denotation" within a specific domain and context (Tomaselli 2022: 52-54).[10] The denotation of a speaker's direct utterance in the study of textual symbols (text, speech) is referred to as "denotation" (Chiorean 2015: 24-30).[11] According to Wang (2018: 99), textual symbols such as words and language are an integral aspect of the "linguistic object (dialogue, narration, monologue, subtitle, etc.)" in a film.[1] In other words, characters in a film engage in "speech acts" through their language, and some of these dialogue designs involve illocutionary acts within the character's current circumstance. When analyzing the "literal signification" of a film character, Sartre emphasized the importance of the audience having a "semiotic consciousness". He explained that our intention when perceiving signs, like film characters, is directed towards the object they represent, even if that object does not actually exist. The reference to Sartre and Arlette can be found in their work from 2004, namely on pages 45-46.[12] This assertion asserts that "semiotic consciousness" is a form of consciousness that is not intuitive. When examining textual symbols, it is essential to employ the perceptual technique, also known as the intuitive approach, in order to comprehend the denotative content of the text. Next, to envision, connect, and comprehend its connotative significance. According to Wang (2018: 99-101), film is not solely a "linguistic object" but also a "perceptual object".[1] This means that it is both a visual and aural object, referred to as audiovisual language or aesthetic style, and may also be interpreted as a symbol. The perceptual object can alternatively be regarded as a symbol, namely the picture symbol. Therefore, when examining the symbolic significance of the film characters, it is crucial to consider the visual and auditory elements of the narrative.

### **3 The Influence of Joon-ik Lee's Illocutionary Act on Storytelling**

The process of creating a film can be categorized into two main components: narrative design, which focuses on storytelling, and aesthetic style design, which pertains to the visual and artistic elements of the film. When examining a film, it is important to comprehend the director's conceptual framework and illocutionary act through narrative analysis and audio-visual language analysis, respectively. In this case, the film "The Throne" will be thoroughly analyzed and discussed. Lee's narrative and visual designs are a response to his critical illocutionary act, using the deductive reasoning approach as the core methodology.

This film is an adaptation of an actual event that took place during the Joseon Dynasty, and it serves as a prominent example of the Korean "hate" culture. The illocutionary act performed by filmmaker Joon-ik Lee serves as a critique and contemplation of the historical tragedy in question. Yeongjo, portrayed by Song Kang-ho, the 21st king of the Joseon Dynasty (Gong and Park 2021: 425-27), has consistently endeavored to

emulate his predecessors and aspired to groom his son, portrayed by Yoo Ah-in, into a sagacious leader.[13] Consequently, Yeongjo bestowed upon him the title of "Crown Prince". When Sado became embroiled in the political power struggle between the established and emerging parties, their relationship deteriorated irreparably. Yeongjo deprived Sado of his royal rank and confined him in a rice pantry, leading to his demise due to famine over a span of eight days. The film "The Throne" portrays the sorrow and calamity arising from the discord between a father and son within the royal family, particularly within the context of the feudal system in East Asia. The tragedy has two underlying causes: firstly, it can be attributed to Yeongjo's self-centeredness. Furthermore, the impact of the feudal system in East Asia on individuals is another contributing factor. Yeongjo employed "ritual and etiquette" as a means to legitimize his position as king, or his "lawful name," despite the fact that this approach contradicted the Confucian principle of the "rightfulness of the name" of a "Junzi" (a sage).

Prior to delving into the concept of "ritual and etiquette" in traditional East Asian societies, it is imperative to acknowledge the underlying causes for their existence, as articulated by James McRae: The Confucian philosophy views human development through the lens of the "focus field" concept, which highlights that humans are inherently social beings and that society plays a crucial role in shaping their personal beliefs. The source cited is McRae (2013) on page 29. Secondly, Confucius is not preoccupied with a person's identity, but rather, he focuses on how a person can develop and improve themselves in a constantly evolving world by refining their interaction with the universe (McRae 2013: 31).[14] Furthermore, Confucius held the belief that an essential requirement for achieving social harmony and peace was the continuous process of self-improvement, self-transformation, and educational advancement. This process aimed to cultivate individuals with exceptional moral values and virtues, known as "Junzi" (McRae 2013: 31).[14] Confucius regards Junzi as the ultimate standard for individual excellence in self-cultivation. (Lusiana et al.,2022).[15] Nevertheless, throughout the feudal system of monarchy in East Asia, the king or those in positions of power frequently employed political authority to suppress others in order to secure a "legitimate" title for themselves.

Yeongjo, a polarizing ruler of the Joseon dynasty, sought to establish the legitimacy of his kingship and governance within the political context and system of that era. Yeongjo admonished Sado for his inappropriate attire. As their relationship soured, Yeongjo intentionally summoned Sado upon hearing his harsh words and inquired about his well-being. Yeongjo repeatedly cleansed his ears due to Sado's words. Yeongjo opted to pass through the "Jinghua Gate," resulting in Sado being confined to the rice cupboard. Yeongjo's personal habits were characterized by his distinctive etiquette, as the author employs the term "unique" to emphasize the absence of these rituals and etiquette in Confucian principles such as kindness, righteousness, etiquette, wisdom, faith, or filial piety. As the audience observed and understood Yeongjo's personal behaviors, they would naturally link them to Yeongjo's underlying intention, which is primarily focused on the traditional belief of warding off misfortune. Director Joon-ik Lee questioned the practice of labeling personal habits or uncommon behavior as etiquette or rituals, since he believes it is a superstition rather than a system for personal morals and virtue. He argues that these practices have no genuine link. Genuine

etiquette necessitates the proper comportment of oneself, devoid of any form of rudeness or demeaning actions.

The request made by Yeongjo for Sado to serve as a proxy holds significant importance in the evolution of their relationship and the emergence of problems. This storyline is evident on two levels: the divergence in specific policies and the lack of consideration for Yeongjo's "ideas" and "prestige". Yeongjo endeavored to maintain a system of checks and balances and avoid antagonizing the courtiers, whereas Sado implemented reforms without consideration for the ministers' interests. Director Lee effectively employed speech and a fantastic performance to portray the antagonism between the characters. After Yeongjo requested Sado's assistance in resolving the issue of military and personnel power in the presence of the ministers, Yeongjo questioned, "This is your responsibility. Do you believe that I am indifferent because I am unaware?" He further expressed his disappointment, stating, "In just one day, you have undermined my lifelong efforts to establish harmony within the court." Yeongjo emphasized that the role of a king is not to make decisions, but rather to be accountable to his subjects. In response, Sado asked, "Is it fair to promote the idea of dynastic harmony in public, but then prioritize the interests of certain individuals?" By crafting this discourse, the audience may initially perceive Sado as "naive" and lacking comprehension of the dynamics of power on the court. Furthermore, Sado may appear unfamiliar with social interactions, particularly within East Asian society. Nevertheless, despite Sado's attempt to rectify the situation, the discrepancy persists. In his second term as ruler, Yeongjo promptly rejects two of Sado's decisions, expressing his dissatisfaction to the ministers by questioning their actions and expressing concern that Sado is disregarding his authority. Following the scolding, Sado faced a query from the minister. The minister turned towards Yeongjo and said, "What action should I take?" Yeongjo responded, "What purpose does it serve to have you as a representative if you are unable to make such decisions independently and instead rely on me for guidance?" By carefully crafting the plot and dialogue, and by incorporating the initial proxy hearing as a horizontal association, the audience will come to understand that Yeongjo's actions are driven by his desire to establish a legitimate reputation for himself. During Sado's first time as a proxy, he jeopardized the interests of Yeongjo and certain ministries by failing to fulfill his commitments. Consequently, Yeongjo was compelled to assert himself in order to protect his rapport with the ministers, his royal status, and his commitment to upholding pledges. On the second occasion, Sado's behavior was suitable, but it posed a risk to Yeongjo's reputation and authority. Consequently, Yeongjo promptly intervened and admonished Sado, emphasizing his own position as the king to both Sado and the ministers.

Based on the aforementioned examination of the film's text and plot, it can be inferred that Yeongjo's "ritual and etiquette" diverge from Confucianism principles, instead focusing on attaining a position of power within the dynasty - the "rightful name". Undoubtedly, Yeongjo's character and goals were partly responsible for Sado's demise. Director Lee employed conversation design to illustrate Yeongjo's cognizance of the issues with his conduct. However, due to his obligation to govern the entire dynasty and the royal power structure, he compelled himself to undergo transformation. During Yeongjo's visit to the ancestral shrine with Sado, he remarked that whereas regular

people use love to influence their children, the royal family can only view their children as adversaries. Sado would come to understand this once he ascended the throne. As Sado lay dying inside the rice cupboard, Yeongjo wept profusely and lamented, "Had I not held the position of emperor, and had you not been my son, we would not find ourselves in this predicament, would we?" Given his role as a father, it is inconceivable that Yeongjo would not experience profound sorrow upon the demise of his sole surviving offspring. The reason for this outcome can be attributed to Yeongjo's deliberate pursuit of his wants within the framework of this system, resulting in the creation of a self-inflicted tragedy.

#### **4 The Influence of Joon-ik Lee's Illocutionary Act on Aesthetic Style**

In the context of films, the content refers to the narrative, the director's intended message, and the underlying argument. The audiovisual language refers to the distinct aesthetic form that encompasses various components, including color, music, camera methods, and more. From the director's standpoint, the process of making a film or narrating a story involves three distinct levels: the use of dialogue, monologue, and other forms of spoken lines; the performances of the actors; and the application of visual techniques, such as art design (*Mise-en-scene*), and the use of auditory language to convey the story through the moving image. In the film "The Throne", filmmaker Lee enhances his criticism of "language" and "intention" by employing distinctive artistic forms and techniques, including the manipulation of character spatial relationship.

The director assumes responsibility for overseeing not just the actors' performances, the cinematographer's shots, and the lighting and sound, but also the spatial arrangement of the actors within the frame and their positioning, which holds significant importance. The filmmaker often confers special importance or significance upon the individuals positioned in the foreground (those closest to the camera) and in the middle of the frame. In the movie "The Throne", director Joon-ik Lee strategically positions the characters Yeongjo and Sado in the foreground and in the center of the frame. This technique allows the audience to clearly identify and envision their elevated social standing within the feudal royal system of East Asia. In his film "Schindler's List," Spielberg employs a classic technique of character spatial composition. When Schindler is in the same frame as the Jewish accountant and female characters, he dominates a significant portion of the frame, while the others are confined to a smaller space. Through this technique, Spielberg effectively conveys the "social and power relationship" between Schindler and the other characters. Displaying Spielberg's benevolent illocutionary conduct. In the movie "The Throne," director Lee employed a similar technique to convey the unequal status of Yeongjo and Sado within the East Asian feudal kingship system, despite their father-son relationship. This is evident in various scenes: when Sado, as a toddler, is engaged in studying, reading, or attending classes, Yeongjo is given more prominence in the frame, while Sado is positioned in a corner; during the scene where Yeongjo takes Sado to the shrine to honor their ancestors, Yeongjo not only appears in the foreground but also occupies a significant amount of

space, whereas Sado is placed in the background and corner positions; during Sado's proxy hearing, practical considerations necessitate Sado being placed in the foreground with Yeongjo sitting behind him, yet it is still evident that Yeongjo dominates a large portion of the frame. Director Lee aimed to convey the disparity in social and power dynamics between the audience and the characters through the strategic use of framing and spatial design. This was intended to prompt the audience to envision the negative consequences of the feudal kingship system in East Asia. Despite being father and son, the characters' social and power relations are markedly different, leading to a critical attitude towards the system.

## 5 Conclusion

By deducing the theory and analyzing the case study "The Throne," it can be inferred that the director serves as the author of the film and plays a significant role in shaping the film's narrative and characters. In terms of cinematic creation, exceptional movies must integrate the director's illocutionary act and corresponding creative concepts, such as narrative techniques and aesthetic forms. This integration ensures that the film's theme is more comprehensive and distinct from the conventional "Hollywood" production style. Ultimately, the director's illocutionary act serves as the catalyst for evoking emotional responses in the audience. Varying illocutionary acts and innovative concepts elicit distinct levels of emotional response in films. For instance, "Schindler's List" prompts viewers to contemplate the impact of war, while "The Throne" stimulates reflection on the feudal history of East Asia and encourages contemplation of its traditional culture.

The cultural analysis method, narrative analysis method, and aesthetics form analysis method are crucial for studying the director's "illocutionary act," "authorship," and "director's ideas." To begin with, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the director's culture, education, and experience. Subsequently, employing the methodology of interpretation is necessary for analyzing their works.

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