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# Alienating the Maternal Instinct in Bong Joon-ho's *Mother*

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**Abstract:** Bong Joon-ho's critically acclaimed film, *Mother*, explores and complicates the idealized motherhood with its portrayal of a deeply troubled and violent mother. The heroine, the "mother," is an herbalist in a provincial town whose life revolves around protecting her mentally challenged adult son. When he is charged with a murder that she believes he has not committed, she takes matters into her own hands, trying everything in her meager power to clear his name. For this film, Bong makes a bold statement in that he wishes to "explore the dark side of motherhood." Casting Kim Hye-ja, an actress beloved by Koreans for her "motherly" roles, is the first step in de-familiarizing the familiar image of devoted Korean mother; however, the film achieves the goal by pushing the limits of such "motherly devotion," setting up a situation that begs her to break boundaries. This paper argues that the film succeeds in complicating the maternal instinct by surprising the viewer, whose force to surprise lies in the film's clever contextualizing: the ways of alienating the subject is deeply rooted in the Korean context, which makes the surprise even more dramatic and effective in destroying the idealized motherhood.

**Keywords:** Bong Joon-ho, *Mother*, Motherhood Ideology, Sexuality, Violence

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## 1. Introduction

*Mother* (2009), directed by Bong Joon-ho, is a thriller that is deeply disconcerting for its portrayal of a non-conventional motherhood. A critically acclaimed film, *Mother* brought several prestigious awards to the leading actress, Kim Hye-ja, including the L.A. Critics Award. The simple fact that Kim, a famous Korean actress who is known and beloved by Korean viewers for her roles as a self-sacrificial and silent mother, was cast in this controversial role as a violent, hysterical mother was enough for some to raise eyebrows. Ironically, it was for this role, which is possibly the most uncharacteristic of all her previous roles, that Kim finally made an impression on the international film scene.

The eponymous heroine, Hye-ja, makes a living by running an herbal medicine shop in a provincial Korean town. A single mother, her life is devoted to taking care of her adult son Do-joon, who is hinted to be mentally challenged. When a promiscuous high school girl named A-jeong is found murdered in the town, the police immediately pins Do-jun as the perpetrator based on weak evidence. Hye-ja, entirely convinced of her son's innocence, embarks on a mission of catching the real murderer, bulldozing her way

through unfavorable climate dictated by the patriarchal Korean society to get the information she thinks she needs. Finally, when, in a cruel twist of the story she finds out from a garbage collector that her son had indeed killed A-jeong, Hye-ja instantly and savagely murders him out of sheer passion of the moment.

It is not difficult to discern that the movie is meant to comment on the occasionally extreme qualities of the maternal instinct. Director and screenwriter Bong Joon-ho, who has previously gained international attention through *Memories of Murder* (2003) and *The Host* (2006), has said that through *Mother*, he wished to explore the "dark side of maternal instinct," saying:

I always try to look for another side to that which we always praise or worship something for [sic] – like seeing the dark side of the moon. We tend to regard the maternal instinct as being wondrous, holy and noble. But there must be another, darker side to it. That's the sort of twisted approach I took. [1]

Therefore, according to Bong, a Korean male director, *Mother* was seen as a chance to push an agenda: the film set out to destroy the myth of maternal instinct. The first step of de-familiarization was established through casting, by selecting an actress who is practically synonymous with

motherhood in Korea (The Korean media is fond of making references to Kim as “Kungmin Ömma,” or “every Korean’s mother”). Certainly, this is only one of many strategies employed to achieve the effect. This paper is interested in how *Mother* undermines the myth of maternal instinct by testing its limits in the Korean context. In particular, it will focus on how the concept of protection is explored and complicated through two central themes, sexuality and violence.

## 2. Motherhood Ideology in Korean Context

“Motherhood ideology” ascribes that a woman’s place is within a family, and that having and raising children comprise a fundamental part of the identity of a woman. A central part of the discourse is the natural-ness of the so-called maternal instinct. It states that women possess innately nurturing, protective and calming qualities regardless of whether she has had children. [2] [3] Such traits may extend beyond her own children, including men and even older people. In the normative-patriarchal climate, maternal instinct is considered as not only natural, but also essential; which means that women without maternal instinct are considered abnormal. [4] However, it is relatively accepted today that such ideology is a historical and cultural product of promoting and reinforcing patriarchal values, rather than an innately endowed instinct. [5]

In Korean society, the discourse of maternal instinct still remains relevant. Chöng Hūichin points out that every female over certain age is automatically assumed to be a mother, despite its non-realistic, non-gratuitous nature. Further, she notes that the idea of motherhood itself revolves around the relationship between a mother and her son, never a mother and daughter, suggesting that its roots are deeply tied to women’s role in patriarchy as a carrier and protector of the family. The image of self-sacrificing, self-effacing mother caring for the entire family has a long history, despite the influence of modern ideologies such as women’s rights, individual freedom and equality. In particular, the tough, unyielding image of a mother willing to run through fire for her children – and yet always tender towards her children – has dominated the Korean consciousness following Korean War, shaping the discourse of “ideal Korean mother (*hankukchöck ömönisang*).” [7]

Today, they also persist in modern Korea’s pop culture and literary scene. The singer-group g.o.d’s popular song, “Dear Mother,” released in 1999 (two years after the “Asian Economic Crisis, known as “IMF crisis” in Korea), nostalgically reminisces about a presumably deceased mother who refused eat her own food in order to feed her child. *Ch’injöngömma*, a bestseller, play, and finally film, by Ko Hye-jung, drew crowds of sympathetic female audiences ever since it was released. *Ömmarül Put’ak’ae*, an internationally acclaimed novel by Shin Kyung-sook, is a story of belated regrets of a family after the mother is lost on the street. When

it comes to depicting motherhood, a “tear-jerker” is a tried-and-true formula. But it should also be noted that the sacrifices women make for children cannot be institutionalized without the consent of women. In this regard, the long history of “wise mother and good wife,” needs to be contextualized under the particular Korean climate. Under the conservative neo-Confucian climate, the women were confined to the domestic spaces, meaning that the success of her children equaled success of her own life and redeemed her life. Under such climate, a son was given special meaning, as opposed to a daughter.

In *Mother*, the particularity of the Korean situation complicates the circumstances of Hye-ja. As the social success of her child is precluded from the beginning, her function as a source of wisdom is reduced. On the other hand, her tenderness and caring nature is exaggerated as that befitting the mother of a “special needs” child. What this means is that the public will make greater allowances for Hye-ja, as they will be more sympathetic towards this particular mother. One article interviewing the audience’s reaction to *Mother* stated that other mothers said “they would do the same.” [8] Perhaps those mothers recognize that despite the association with care and comfort, motherhood itself is rarely peaceful. In fact, they may be reassuring to the children in the nest, but they are profoundly egotistical and even aggressive towards those outside of the nest, like an herbivore protecting her young against prey by performing outrageous feats.

Where is the moment located where acceptable maternal instinct becomes horrifying and monstrous? Does the context and climate of Korea affect it in any way? These are some of the questions *Mother* exposes. Despite many articles on *Mother* focusing on the female representation, motherhood, and parenthood, a study that focuses on the significance of the Korean context specifically is lacking. This paper will attempt to fill that void by analyzing some of the critical moments in the film.

## 3. Mechanics of Sympathy

Despite the violence and cunning manipulation of this strange mother character, the audience is still led to emphasize with Hye-ja and Do-joon until the climactic moment when Hye-ja crosses the line beyond publicly accessible pathos by committing a murder. Indeed, in order for this film’s agenda to work – defamiliarizing maternal instinct – it is first necessary for the viewers to accept the mother instinct as noble, holy, and above all, justified. This way, when the excuses they make for the mother are toppled at the climax, the surprise and horror would be dramatized to the highest effect. This *structural* necessity, however, does not mean that the characterization of this mother needs to be completely normative. Rather, as a prelude to the climactic event, the film is peppered with elements that would make the audience shift a little in their seats, but not enough to be turned off because they see what is coming. In other words, there needs to be something of a foreboding of tragedy, a creeping monstrous undertone which creeps up on the

audience and catches them by surprise.

So how does Bong achieve the subtle balance? Of foremost importance, Do-joon's hinted mental challenges allow the audience to make extra concessions where otherwise they would not. The film plots the audience to develop empathy with Hye-ja based on the simple self-directed question, "but what mother would not do such a thing for her son, when the son in question is believed to be mentally challenged/sexually frustrated/wrongfully convicted?" Put another way, Bong takes for granted the societal sympathies mothers in Korean society are automatically given, then tests the limits of those sympathies by insidiously inserting anomalies in the equation, each time a little more extreme than the previous one, until the equation becomes too absurd and thus unbearable. From this viewpoint, *Mother* can be read as an experiment on just how far the audience would yield until the familiar starts to look strange. The familiar, however, is culturally dependent: some aspects of the mother-son relationship that may be perceived as acceptable by Korean audience may look immediately out of place with an international audience.

This paper is interested in how motherhood is defamiliarized in *Mother*; especially focusing on how the film plays around with norms of propriety in South Korean context. Under the aegis of protection, a universally accepted "maternal right" – which, as this paper will argue, is accentuated in this particular situation – two aspects become prominent. The first concerns the considerable liberty Hye-ja takes in regards to her grown-up son's sexuality, the reason being relegated to her son's presumed disability. Notably, the latent sexuality of Do-joon forms a contrast with Hye-ja's lack of visible sexuality, which is also related to her son's protection in Korea. Secondly, the apparent egoism involved in protecting her child is taken to extremes, practically rebelling against the idealized motherhood ideology, which one critic calls "primal fight-for-her-cub reflexes." [9] Undergirding all these representations, of course, is the unresolved mother-and-son relationship, attributed to Do-joon's limited mental capacity; her cub is already hurt, and thus needs extra mothering.

#### 4. Sexuality of the Sexually Un(der) Represented

Bong has stated in an interview, "It will be interesting to look at the film through the lens of sex – a dichotomy between who is having sex and who is not." [10] From this perspective, Hye-ja, a single mother and possibly a widow, is excluded from any societally acceptable sexual activity, while Do-joon is overlooked by society as a sexual invalid. The rest of this film is charged with dark sexuality, although none of the sexual acts or innuendos depicted is within the marital boundary. The only sex scene in the film is between Do-joon's friend Jin-tae and the bar hostess's daughter, Min-ah, an unmarried couple; Min-ah's mother probably sells sex, or at the very least sexual appeal; the murdered girl, A-jeong,

sells sex to make a living for herself and her grandmother; the schoolchildren Hye-ja interrogates about A-jeong shamelessly talk in sexual slang, despite their age. Such depictions are doubtlessly sarcastic commentaries on the duplicity of Korean notions of propriety, which is starkly contrasted with the invisible sexuality of this single mother and slow-witted son.

Because of such dual standards, this picture of the sexually excluded and included constituents of the town does not make the audience uncomfortable. Non-marital sex, buying sex, and precocious kids are firmly within familiar boundaries of normalcy. It is only when the Hye-ja and Do-joon, the supposedly non-sexual entities, become sexually active or show signs of sexual awareness that the audience shift in their chairs. For example, one particularly intriguing scene is Hye-ja's encounter with Jin-tae after she accuses him of killing A-jeong. When she returns home empty-handed, she discovers Jin-tae playing computer games. Jin-tae's attitude, talking down to her as if she is his inferior, and his hyper-masculinized depiction of appearing topless in this scene, has prompted Cho Sŏnchŏng to declare that it is suggestive of their sexual relations in the past, possibly of Hye-ja's buying sex from Jin-tae [11] Hye-ja speaks degradingly of Jin-tae's morals to Do-joon on at least two separate occasions, which also seems to back up the possibility of sexual relationship.

In this scene, Jin-tae openly asks for "alimony" (*wijaryo*), although the purpose of it is unclear as in many other ambiguities in the film (see fig. 1). But the clear implication is that she is buying silence from him, whether for past sexual encounter or current false accusation. If indeed she has bought sexuality from him, it is something that needs to be silenced at all costs, because her sexuality is something simply disallowed for her. If she has not, she Regardless of the veracity of sexual undertones, the image of Hye-ja kneeling before a hyper-masculinized male visually highlights his sexuality and her relative helplessness before it.



Fig. 1. Buying silence.

What is clear is that the sexual undertones make the viewers uncomfortable. It is not simply that mothers and younger semi-nude male do not go together in Korean consciousness, but the implication that having overt sexuality can become a source of power over someone: and this realization is something "does not look right."

But why does she need to maintain a sexually castrated exterior? Bong has mentioned this strange asexuality of mothers in an interview, saying, "In Korean society, isn't

mother an antonym of sex?" [12] The reigning asexual image of the mother is intensified in case of a widow, as any sex for her becomes something dark and illicit. Add a mentally challenged son to the situation, and her chance of remarriage decreases even further, eliminating the chances of acceptable sexuality. Under the Korean patriarchal system, while any act done for the sake of her children is acceptable, any act committed in service of her sexuality becomes unacceptable. Regarding the asexuality of mothers, Chŏng notes, "patriarchy, family, nation, race, depends upon controlling, using, and enlisting female sexuality" [13]. These societal requisites are what compel Hye-ja to buy silence and an asexual exterior rather than break through them: it is not just about herself but going against the system, which is potentially dangerous as it undermines her place in society.

In the same vein, Do-joon is castrated by society, not because he cannot perform biologically as a man, but because he cannot perform socially as a father. He is belittled by his friend Jin-tae and the bar hostess whenever he mentions sex, and his sleeping with his mother is an open secret in the town due to his loud mouth. Foreign film critics were quick to comment on the undertones of incestuous relationship, [14] [15] but the relationship may look somewhat different in Korean context. Many of the evidences put forward as their possible incestuous relationship can be attributed to simple mother-son relationship, which, in Korean society, is far more complicated in the West. Take, for example, the scene in which Hye-ja follows her son out into the street to give him medicine. As the audience watches Hye-ja put the bowl of medicine up to reach her much taller son's mouth as he urinates against a wall, the picture does not seem all that strange save for the fact that he is an adult son. Indeed, it suggests devotion of a mother towards her son, and elicits empathy from Korean viewers, save for the fact that she takes a look at her son's genitals (see fig. 2)



*Fig. 2. Hye-ja feeds medicine to Do-joon.*

But even this strange perversion is somewhat mitigated by the fact that Do-joon is not entirely the norm; her behavior

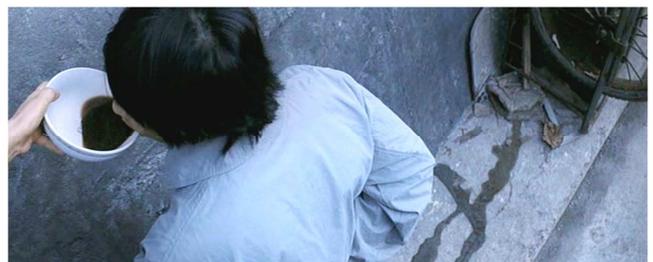
can still be accepted as belonging in the realm of motherly concern especially since she takes care of the aftermath when he runs away, hiding her son's "crime" by placing debris on the spot her son urinated. At this moment, the viewers are relieved, and this little crime and her subsequent covering-up is totally acceptable, making the viewers hardly aware that it is a foreboding to a larger crime later in the film.

Put in context, however, mothers are also culturally allowed greater liberties with their son's bodies more than fathers with daughters. In Korea, mothers can take sons to public baths until they are five years old. As children, Korean males are familiar with phallic jokes making references to castration with bad behavior. Touching children's genitals, especially male genitals, are still commonly accepted in Korean society as parental liberty, or even general playfulness from adult relatives, although it is becoming less and less accepted as normal behavior. Therefore, it is the appeal of prolonged infancy in Do-joon that makes such sexual perversions somewhat acceptable; for instance, just prior to the urinating scene, the relationship of mother and son as an overgrown infant is suggested where Hye-ja picks chicken meat to put in Do-joon's bowl (see fig. 3).



*Fig. 3. Hye-ja puts food on Do-joon's bowl.*

But Do-joon's sexuality signals danger, just as Hye-ja's sexuality is a threat to patriarchal order if exposed, and Hye-ja is arguably in the best position to comprehend this. Perhaps this is why, in the urinating scene, the Korean audience is able to read concern rather than sexual interest; her son's sexual vigor is a source of worry. The film also makes abundant references to Do-joon's sexual self-awareness. In the scene where Hye-ja feeds medicine to Do-joon, the camera sustains its focus on the stream of Do-joon's urine, flowing on the ground like a growing creature, suggesting Do-joon's virility (see fig. 4). The simultaneous consumption and elimination seem to hint, again, at his childishness, while the long trail of urine, alluding to sexual vigor, seems wasteful, unable to find an outlet.



*Fig. 4. Simultaneous consumption and elimination.*

But on a more literal level, Do-joon is practically obsessed with sex, while others regard his interest with mild disgust, such as the hostess at a local bar. To his mother, however, his sexuality is not a joke, but a source of dread:

Hye-ja: [...] It's even good for virility.

Do-joon: Virility? Really?

Hye-ja: Where would you use virility, son?

Do-joon: Girls.

Hye-ja: What girl? Are you seeing anyone?

Do-joon: Of course. And I'll sleep with her.

Hye-ja: Don't you dare. Who is it?

Do-joon: I'll sleep... with girls.

If Hye-ja's asexuality is dictated by society, Do-joon's sexuality is ignored, if not discouraged; not only is it inconvenient for everyone if Do-joon is sexually active, but it is also rebelling against the very structure of patriarchal society; and not having a sexual self means having to endure the taunts of those who have it. With such in mind, does Hye-ja discourage Do-joon's sexuality because she is sexually invested in him, or is controlling or manipulative? Or is it simply out of motherly concern and protective instincts, knowing that his sexuality will make everyone uncomfortable – including the viewers?

Perhaps nowhere is the social danger of their sexual representation more acutely felt than in the neighborhood joke of their sleeping together. Here again, cultural context allows children to sleep with their parents until roughly the age of entering school, and in the case of Do-joon, who is regarded as something of an infant by Hye-ja, it is perhaps nothing extraordinary. Yet, the fact seems to be perceived by the neighborhood as a mild case of curiosity, a joke that just might be real, hence more interesting. The phrase "sleeping with" of course has double meaning, and the narrative is careful not to push into the question too far, eliminating the possible interrogation internally. For example, when a delinquent juvenile Jin-tae threatens to gain information passes snide remarks about the mother and son, Jin-tae shuts him up for the viewers by taking out his tooth. Even the narrative is complicit in keeping their sexuality under the table; and the possible unveiling of monstrosity, an overstepping of boundaries, is prolonged for the viewer. This kind of "preemptive courtesy" can also be observed in the scene where detectives are questioning Do-joon. When a "new" detective takes interest at the mention of his sleeping with his mother, another detective, who is more sympathetic with his family, gently deflects the question for Do-joon:

Do-joon: I slept! At home! With mom!

Detective 1: That's simple enough.

Detective 2: Wait, you really sleep with your mother?

Detective 1: Well. You don't have to answer that.

Because Do-joon is mentally challenged, it makes the situation somewhat acceptable; yet, because probing the question at length is uncomfortable, the narrative takes care of that problem by shutting up about the mother and son's sexuality. Again, the suspicion of incest dismisses the interpretive lens granted by Korean society, as an extension

of infancy.

Seen from this light, the audience is left to feel comfortable as long as the underrepresented does not come up for air. As long as Do-joon remains an innocent child, and Hye-ja a caring, worried mother, the picture remains unstirred. But when the film reveals moments when repressed sexuality is strongly hinted, sexual hierarchy becomes uncomfortable for the viewers. To the audience, widows and invalids' lack of sexual activity does not stir emotions of discomfort. Rather, it is the moment of that they do which make the audience nervous. In *Mother*, too, when a handicapped tries to act upon his sexuality, it is promptly rejected by society; as Jong-pal from the monastery is punished for committing a sexual act (and letting people know about it). As the public do not normally consider the sexual repression as societal violence, simply witnessing the fact that it can be is difficult for the audience to see. By seeing Hye-ja's encounters with sexuality, the generally accepted perversions or Korean mother-son relationship is gradually made to look unsettling, until, gradually, they become grotesque.

## 5. Extreme Egoism

When considering that maternal instincts are often depicted as nurturing and kind, it is perhaps shocking that they come to violent ends in this film. Yet, among the things tolerated in the name of the mother is a particular kind of violence represented by "my-child-not-my-child" dichotomy. This observation goes directly against the sympathy and care that extends towards others as forwarded by motherhood ideology. Such only goes when it does not concern my child's best interests. When put to test, such "maternal instincts" goes only so far.

True to form, Hye-ja in this film is often brutal towards others although she is overprotective of her son. If anything, her son's uniqueness has only hardened her against exterior factors. She uses other people towards own end, is manipulative, and would literally do anything for Do-joon. She curses Jin-tae but elicits help from him. In this bulldozer-fashion, she is the picture of strong mother character driven by the role of mother given to her. Hye-ja's character, however, is more nuanced than just the exterior of blind love, and the film actually plants several clues to her possible violence.

Narratively, Hye-ja is partly responsible for the violence and crime of Do-joon, as it is she who indoctrinated Do-joon to retaliate whenever someone disparages him, to "hit back twice as severely." True to her word, she takes it into her hands to punish the person who testifies against her son. But again, she is a mother of a mentally challenged son, and in a culture where the handicapped are still one of the most discriminated constituents of the society, her teachings are emotionally understandable if not morally commendable. From this viewpoint, Hye-ja's maternal instincts are indirectly responsible for Do-joon's murder, as he is just lashing back at A-jeong who calls him a retard. Ultimately,

maternal instinct is exclusive, extending only towards the ones immediately connected to you; and when my child is pitted against another, peace is precluded; and thus, mothering instincts cannot be extended to others. But how far would you go?

A crucial moment of defamiliarization also occurs when the audience learns that Hye-ja has tried to kill Do-joon in the past. It is also the moment when the other face of love – hate – is revealed, which is too much for the viewers or even Hye-ja herself to imagine. The extenuating circumstances are in plain view to Korean viewers: a widow with no husband and meager means of living, left with a child who is hindering her chances of remarriage. Yet, the truth about motherhood – that it is perhaps made of equal parts love and hate, and not only on the part of the mother but on the part of the child as well, as Do-joon clearly despises his mother at this moment – is enough to dismantle the idealized mother, and take away some of the justifications of Hye-ja's relentless pursuits in the film. Perhaps she is trying to make up to him for her past deviances.

While it is difficult to give definite answers to any of these questions due to the many ambiguities, at least the film is explicit about the limits of motherhood. When Hye-ja, violently murdering the garbage collector, screams hysterically: “No, you scumbag, you, piece of trash worse than the dirt under my son's toenails!” spattering blood all over her face while smashing the man's skull with an ax, it is clear the verdict, at least on this point, is clearly damning (see fig. 5). It also signals a violent end to the idealized motherhood.



Fig. 5. *Insanity or Motherhood?*

This scene perhaps shows the egoism of motherhood at its worst: unbelieving truth, believing of her son's absolute goodness, willing to even murder for her son's benefit. Violence is also something, perhaps the only thing, she can take into her own hands in the absence of other accessible powers.

The film comes to an unexpected ending when the police takes in another suspect instead of Do-joon. When Hye-ja cries at the pseudo-perpetrator, another mentally challenged person like her son, she cries, “What about your parents... Don't you have a mother?” (see fig. 6). In her mind, her actions are justified, inevitable; and had Jong-pal had a mother, she would have done the same. And Hye-ja, in the name of the mother, will sacrifice another innocent person if she needs to.



Fig. 6. *You don't have a mother?*

This scene is also notable in that Hye-ja, safely removed from danger of her own son, is now able to function as a “universal mother” dictated by motherhood ideology. She is now able to sympathize, to feel guilt. Even the monster has a face, and this makes her violent actions even more justifiable as they were inevitable.

So much of the murder is disconcerting precisely because of the justifiability: until the moment of murder, her reason was impeccable, her logic was understandable, if her methods were questionable. Under her circumstances, with her resources, with her “motherly” conviction, she was doing everything she could – everything she should. And that, often justified and glorified, is the question: how far is too far?

## 6. Conclusion

In an age where motherhood ideology itself is being criticized, regarding both its biological and social bases, the depiction of this traditionally devoted mother driven to extremes succeeds in taking the fuzzy boundaries of motherhood by the cusp and thrashing it around. By the end of the film, the order of Hye-ja and Do-joon's life has not changed; they still live in uber-patriarchal society where their frustrations are still frustrated and Hye-ja's maternal instincts are looked upon by society with something of benign ignorance. The friendly police officer's reluctance to incarcerate Do-joon, which is probably responsible for producing an innocent victim by the end, is perhaps representative of the cold-hearted yet considerable allowance the society affords for this peculiar mother-son pair. By the end of the film, as tough as life is for the underrepresented, it is clearly much better to have a mother than not have one: therefore, while the film succeeds in alienating the maternal instinct from the viewers, it also succeeds in ultimately reenacting it. The film exposes familiar themes to viewers then takes it beyond the tipping point. The uncanny feeling they experience is due to recognizing themselves, or someone they can sympathize with, in *Mother*: the “stretching” of the everyday horror, and the lingering question, would anyone have done it differently in the same situation?

In the end, the mother in this film is not an appropriator of allowances given her, but a victim of motherhood ideology. Do-joon's seeming knowledge of his mother's crime, hinted at the end, suggests itself as something of metaphorical self-punishment for her maternal instincts. Her son, her meaning of life in this society, is ultimately the judge of her actions:

and this is perhaps as close to the film gets regarding the “verdict.”

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