



## Mother Madeo

Directed by: Bong Joon Ho

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Production Company: Barunson Co.

Presented by: CJ Entertainment, Ltd. Barunson Co.

Co-presented by: Benex Movie Expert Fund,  
Company K Partners Contents Investment Fund,  
Green Non-life Insurance Co. Ltd., MVP Capital  
Culture Investment Fund, SOVIK Venture Capital  
Co. Ltd., CJ Venture Investment, Hanwha No.1  
Entertainment Investment Fund, Geumbo  
Development Co. Ltd., Michigan Venture Capital  
Co. Ltd.

Executive Producer: Miky Lee

Co-executive Producers: Katharine Kim,

Moon Yang-kwon

Co-associate Executive Producers: Bob Suh,  
Kim Hak-beom, Nam Ki-moon, Bak Hyun-tae,  
Shin Kang-young, Park Tae-joon,  
Chung Won-suk, Cho Il-hyung

Associate Executive Producer: Joon H. Choi

Produced by: Moon Yang-kwon

Producers: Seo Woo-sik, Park Tae-joon

Investment Executive: Sean Lee

Co-investment Executive: Lee Younjoo

Screenplay by: Park Eun-kyo, Bong Joon Ho

Story by: Bong Joon Ho

Director of Photography: Hong Kyung-pyo

Visual Effects Supervisor (AZworks):

Yi Zeon-hyoung

Edited by: Moon Sae-kyoung

Production Designer: Ryu Seong-hee

Costume Designer: Choi Se-yeon

Hair & Make-up by: Hwang Hyun-kyu

Music by: Lee Byeong-woo

Sound Supervisor: Choi Tae-young

[Sound] Recording by: Lee Byung-ha

Cast:

Kim Hye-ja (mother)

Won Bin (Yoon Do-joon)

Jin Goo (Jin-tae)

Yoon Jae-moon (Je-mun)

Jun Mi-sun (Mi-sun)

Song Sae-beauk (detective)

Kim Byoung-soon (chief)

Chun Woo-hee (Mina)

Kim Gin-goo

Yum Ou-hyung

Lee Young-suck (ragman)

Moon Hee-ra (Moon Ah-jung)

Lee Mi-do

Jung Young-ki

Ko Kyu-phill

South Korea 2009©

129 mins

Digital

## Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

# Mother

## Bong Joon Ho on 'Mother'

*What was it about mothers and the maternal instinct that you wanted to explore in this film?*

I always try to look for another side to that which we always praise or worship something for – 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 that I took.

I've heard that Italian mothers are very protective of their sons – that's why there are so many mama's boys in Italy! I think Korean mothers are quite similar in this respect. As Korean mothers get older, their sons are expected in some way to take the place of their lovers. So if the son dates a woman or marries her, a strange love triangle forms between the two women and the man. More than half of all Korean TV dramas deal with this theme: parents being against marriage, the troubles between the mother and her daughter-in-law.

*Do-joon, the son in Mother, is a complex character – it's difficult to tell whether he really is innocent.*

At first we brush him off as a simple fool, but as the film progresses it's obvious that there's more to him. He's like a figure enveloped in fog. We want to open up his head and see his thoughts. What does or doesn't he know? Which of his actions were intended and which were not? I wanted to keep that ambiguous. In the film's climax there's a sequence related to the crime. We view his face through the dirty window of the abandoned house. It's hard to make out his expression – it's almost as though his eyes and nose have been smudged out. There are a few chilling shots like that. Those sort of visual images describe his character: smudged, erased, unable to be made out.

More importantly, this film is shot mainly from the mother's perspective and shows the son as she views him. She is very attached to him and loves him dearly, but even she cannot understand him. That's where the sadness or the spookiness of the film lies. It's related to the overall theme, too. The mother tries to control and rule her son, but is never really able to know who he is.

*Did you incorporate anything of your relationship with your own mother into the film?*

No. I don't sleep in the same bed as my mother and she's never got blood on her hands! My mother saw the film in May last year. Over the last year, we've never discussed it. I guess we both feel that it's better to not talk about it.

*Kim Hye-ja, the actress who plays the mother, is well known in Korea for playing the role of a mother in films and TV dramas. Did you want to overturn the image people have of her?*

That's right. There are so many other sides to her – I wondered why she kept playing similar roles and I thought she probably wanted a change too. I've thought that way since childhood when I used to watch her on television. I saw she had a dark and slightly crazy side, and I felt attracted to that. She didn't show that side of herself often, but I remember a drama she was in called *Yeo (Female)*. Unlike regular television dramas, it was quite dark and there was a

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## Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

### **Memories of Murder** Salineui-chueok

Mon 31 Mar 20:30; Tue 8 Apr 20:30;  
Sun 20 Apr 18:10

### **Barking Dogs Never Bite** Peullandaseuui-gae

Tue 1 Apr 18:15; Sat 19 Apr 20:30 (+ **Incoherence**  
Jirimyulnyeol)

### **Parasite** Gisaengchung

Thu 3 Apr 20:30; Tue 22 Apr 20:30;  
Tue 29 Apr 18:05 (Black & White Version)

### **The Host** Gwaemul

Sat 5 Apr 18:00; Thu 24 Apr 20:30 (+ intro by  
translator and film critic Darcy Paquet)

### **Mother** Madeo

Wed 9 Apr 20:30;  
Sat 26 Apr 14:10 (Black & White Version)

### **Snowpiercer** Seolguk-yeolcha

Fri 11 Apr 18:05; Sat 26 Apr 20:35

### **Okja** Ok-ja

Sat 12 Apr 14:50; Fri 25 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by  
production designer Lee Ha-jun)

### **The Creative Collaborations of Bong Joon Ho**

Thu 24 Apr 18:10

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sequence where she had a fit. I felt moved by that and I remember thinking that only Kim Hye-ja would be able to pull off such an act. I remember seeing her when she appeared on a talk show – she had an odd, sort of out-of-this-world way of speaking. I was impressed by that, and that's the side of her I focused on. This film had to be made with Kim Hye-ja.

*In Memories of Murder you explored the repressive mood of Korea in the 1980s. With Mother, did you wish to make any comment on life in present-day Korea?*

If you had to be strict about it, *Mother* is set in the present – the characters use the latest cellphones, and they're important props in the film. However, the past is all mixed up into it. There are motifs from the 1970s, 80s and 90s – the clothes the characters wear, the atmosphere of the neighbourhood or the look of Mother's home. I think that's the reality in many provincial areas in Korea, so it was my intention to make it ambiguous when the film is set. This is the case with the location too. You can't really tell if it's set in the north or south, in Jeolla or Gyeongsang province. I wanted to break away from territorial boundaries.

In the case of *Memories of Murder*, setting it in the 1980s was important. The theme and the film's concerns about why the serial killer couldn't be caught and why the detectives were so unskilled are all linked into the greater darkness of the 80s era itself. In the case of *Mother*, the central focus was on what happened between the mother and son, and what the role of the mother figure is, so I wanted to make the period setting ambiguous.

*Were there any films or directors that were particular influences on Mother?*

I did an interview in the US recently, and one journalist asked me if I had seen Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*. It does have some similarities, but I only watched it recently on DVD, so it wasn't an influence during filming. I did watch Hitchcock's *Psycho* during pre-production. Of course, Anthony Perkins' mother is at home dead and stuffed, but I remember thinking if that mother had been alive, her relationship with her son would've been similar to the relationship in *Mother*.

Interview by James Bell (with thanks to Bryan Jo and Tony Rayns), *Sight and Sound*,  
September 2010