

## When Tradition Meets Modernity:

# Representation of Women Images in the Crime Movies in China, South Korea, and Japan

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### Abstract

The portrayal of women in crime films provides a distinctive perspective through which we can scrutinize gender roles, societal norms, and cultural narratives within East Asian societies. The Confucian culture, the prevailing ethos in China, Korea, and Japan for millennia, traditionally prescribes women as caregivers for their children and husbands, devoting themselves entirely to familial matters. However, the advent of modernization and the infiltration of Western culture have begun to contest the supremacy of Confucian values. This study analyzes six East Asian crime films and identifies three primary archetypes of female characters: the mother-like wife, the victimized daughter, and the avenging femme fatale. It further contrasts the variations in the representation on female characters across these three nations and delves into the reasons behind these disparities. The findings indicate that Mosaic patterns, marked by an interplay between tradition and modernity, are crucial in shaping and portraying the cultural identities of women in crime movies in these three Asian countries.

### Keywords

Representation of women images, Crime movies, Case study.

### 1. Introduction

Confucianism shaped the gender inequality of China, South Korea, and Japan to a large extent. Confucianism believes that women are subordinate to men and women are morally inferior to men. In *The Great Learning*, written by a Chinese philosopher and student of Confucius, there is a passage that goes:

*In ancient times, our ancestors, when demonstrating their virtues to the nation, would first put their own house in order. In the process of rectifying the state, they would first regulate their own family. In the process of regulating the family, they would first cultivate their character(Zengzi)*

This excerpt is a classic example of Confucian ethics. It reveals that in the governance of family and state, only men held power, while women were relegated to supportive roles. [1] In Confucian ethics, the division of labour between men and women was strict, and this passage from the Confucian classic "*The Great Learning*" illustrates the dependency of women on men in terms of labour division in ancient times. From *The Analects*, there is an excerpt that goes:

*Women and children can be the most challenging to deal with. If one becomes too familiar with them, they may lose their humility. However, if one maintains a humble attitude towards them, they may feel dissatisfied. (Confucius)*

The term "women" is used to describe a specific group of females, the lower-class women or maidservants, who were despised by Confucius, and were slandered akin to morally corrupt thieves. This criticism, while seemingly targeted at lower-class women, is, in fact, a

manifestation of discrimination against all females. In essence, Confucianism views women as inferior to men. As noted by the renowned Chinese scholar Yutang Lin, "Through the distinction of Yang (male) and Yin (female) principles, a fundamental dualistic view was formed in East Asia, which can be traced back to The I Ching, and was later systematized by Confucius. Confucianism, which emerged 5000 years ago, remains the dominant ideology in East Asia to this day. Take The Republic of Korea as an example:

Similarly in traditional Korean society, women have also long been placed in a disadvantaged position. The social structure of Korea, maintained by the monarchy of the royal family, a strong class consciousness, and a patriarchal extended family system, often tends to uphold unequal treatment towards women, isolating them from the power held by men. This isolation primarily stems from the influence of Confucianism. One of the teachings of Confucianism requires women to follow the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues": young girls must obey their fathers, married women must obey their husbands, and elderly women must obey their sons.

South Korea is a nation that has achieved industrialization and economic modernization of most of its production capabilities in the past two decades. Although its production capabilities have largely modernized, it does not mean that its historically ingrained social and political values will be completely replaced. Specifically, culture can be described from two aspects: material and behavioural. In South Korea, while the material culture has modernized and been influenced by the West, the behavioral culture still maintains Confucian traditions and changes slowly. [2] This aspect of behavioral culture is partly reflected in the inequality of women's roles. Modernization and industrialization have provided many Korean women with better educational opportunities. This change has also led to a shift in career choices, with women now having more job opportunities than they did a decade ago.[3] Women with higher education and those from other upper echelons have strived to change the status of women by participating in political activities. In Korea, this has primarily been achieved through legislative procedures, although it was not entirely possible to avoid protest strategies. Women's political activities are increasingly trying to raise issues that were previously considered personal and not suitable for public scrutiny onto the national public policy agenda [4] Now, people are raising issues about women's roles at home and in the workplace in public debates, and policymakers have to make decisions on these issues. More and more women believe that there are greater benefits in changing the traditional placement of public roles, which aligns with the "domestication process of women's roles."

Despite these advancements, as Jong-yi Kim articulated in "Modern Korean Women," "In our society, due to a prolonged process of erroneous socialization, not only men but even women themselves tend to acknowledge the inferiority of women unconsciously." Contemporary women are engaged in work outside the home, yet they do not anticipate men to assist in sharing the responsibilities of home and childcare. This role shift may be attributable to the societal structure, where it is uncommon for men to share household and childcare duties [5]. Women feel burdened as they do not expect men to aid in housework and childcare, but rather, they are expected to accomplish all tasks independently. It is a result of societal expectations imposed on women, presuming that they must flawlessly manage both home and work.

Just as it did in China and Korea, Confucian ethics also had a great impact on society in traditional Japan, including gender and family relations. For instance, according to the Japanese penal law, the wife's absolute obedience to her husband was enforced by the law, and "the wife considers her husband to be heaven"[6]. However, family relations in Japan remained significantly different from both Chinese norms and practices. For example, women had greater freedom to choose marriage residence, and filial piety to serve either parental or in-law households. In modern Japan, social changes such as the influx of Western culture, women's improved educational attainment, participation in the labor market, have greatly changed gender norms and practices.

Movies can present women's modern reality and reflect feminist themes [7]. This study aims to reveal how tradition and modernity intertwine to shape and portray the cultural identities of women in crime movies in these three Asian countries. Specifically, the objectives of this paper include: (1) To understand the representation of women images in the sample films selected, (2) To explore the themes in the sample films, and (3) to interpret the emergence of the themes reflected in the sample films.

## 2. Organization of the Text

### 2.1. The Male Gaze Theory and Its Interpretation of Crime Films

In her seminal paper "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey, drawing on Freudian theory, associates action with masculinity and passivity with femininity. Similarly, she uses Freudian theory to distinguish between identity and (heterosexual) desire, implying that desire and identity are in opposition [8]. From the perspective of traditional narrative cinema, this suggests that we identify with the active protagonist (male actor) and desire the passive object of observation (female actor). However, this places all viewers in the position of a male observing a female, desiring her from a male perspective. This effectively objectifies women, perpetuating a gaze that lingers on female characters, exploiting their physical exposure (or their mistreatment) for entertainment, and encouraging viewers to transpose these experiences from the cinema into reality.

Just as Laura Tanner argues, Readers must enter violent scenes through their imagination, maintaining a certain distance and detachment [9] This distance and detachment may blur the physical dynamics of the violence portrayed, potentially erasing not only the victim's body but also their pain.

In crime and horror films, victims are typically female. The scenes of violence inflicted upon these female victims cater to a certain voyeuristic demand from some viewers. The distance and separation between the film and the audience blur the inherent pain brought about by violence. The suffering of the characters fails to evoke a sense of pain in the audience, yet their tormenting narratives can stimulate the viewers' visual senses, satisfying their curiosity and voyeuristic desires [10]. A fundamental issue in horror and thriller novels is that female characters must either be "strengthened or initially raped to enhance the plot" [11]. This is also the case in crime films. This theory can explain the characterization of female victims in most East Asian crime films.

### 2.2. "Orientalizing" Asians: How western movies depicted female characters in East Asia

In visual media such as films, showcasing gender differences holds significant value. Western media often employs Asian actors with distinct "Asian features"; to a certain extent, this is done to reinforce stereotypical images of Asians, applicable to both male and female roles. For instance, Lucy Liu, with her distinctly Asian facial features, has been able to star in Hollywood blockbusters. Even though Asian actors can portray their ethnicity, they have little to no choice in determining the roles they can play or how their characters are depicted in Hollywood. Anna May Wong, who starred in films like "Shanghai Express" (1932), expressed her frustration at having to play roles that conformed to cheap, cunning Chinese doll or dragon lady stereotypes. However, these were the only roles available to Asian actors at the time, as this was precisely how Hollywood wanted to portray Asians.

Lo explored the dilemma confronted by Chinese (Hong Kong) celebrities in Hollywood: Hong Kong actors in Hollywood productions are compelled to demonstrate that they embody more stereotypical Chinese characteristics than the China's mainland roles they portray [...] The portrayal of Hong Kong actors in Hollywood films conjures up superficial and static racial

depictions rooted in Chinatown [12]. Additionally, Hong Kong is an ideal site where all kinds of binaries can be played out: East-West, capitalism–communism, rich-poor, etc. Geographically, too, Hong Kong, as portrayed in this film, symbolizes the stereotypical binaries of the East as feminine, poor, and narrow in contrast to the West as masculine, rich, and spacious.

One of the most regrettable consequences of Orientalism in Western media is the self-Orientalism pitfall that Asian media succumbs to. Asians also craft this clichéd image to promote their media on the global platform. Internationally recognized Chinese director Zhang Yimou employs themes, settings, and characters that resonate with both Eastern and Western sensibilities. Berry and Farquhar elucidate in their research how Gong Li, a frequent collaborator of Zhang, is crafted into a self-orientalizing figure in his films. Gong Li is not merely a sexual fantasy for men, but rather, she is shaped by a Chinese male director into an exotic fantasy for Western male audiences. Zhang has been criticized for merely imitating female images in Hollywood films, even being accused of virtually selling Gong Li to the West. [...] The interpretation of Gong Li's performance is simply a fusion of Mulvey's theory and Said's Orientalism. [13]

This characterization has various causes and consequences. According to research by Sun et al., "Contrary to the marginalized image of Asian American men, Asian American women are always exaggeratedly portrayed as objects that white men can sexually exploit at any time. The misunderstanding of the sexual characteristics and behaviors of Asian American men and women can be traced back to colonial discourse and U.S. immigration policies" [14]. The association of Asian women with sexuality has its historical roots in Orientalism, but it continues to this day and is common in Hollywood films. From "The World of Suzie Wong" (1960) to "Memoirs of a Geisha" (2005), the sexuality and exploitability of Asian women are recurring themes. So, what are the reasons for this attraction and portrayal? The sexualization of Asian women as sexual objects is not only due to sexual characteristics but also the repeated emphasis on difference. For instance, Disney's "Mulan" (1998) is filled with elements of exoticism.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Sources

The researcher chose six crime movies made from South Korea, China, and Japan to conduct a case study. Analyzing the scenes involving the female characters in each film, including their rivalry with the male characters, their lines, and their expressions, costumes, etc. By practicing their specific characterizations, the researcher was able to summarize and compare the real-life groups that these women corresponded to.

#### 3.2. Sampling Selection

The researcher used a case study as the sole methodology for the research because the researcher wanted to analyze the female characters in these crime films based on their social relationships, camera shots of body exposure (to determine the degree of sexualization), and camera shots of violence associate with them, as well as the logic and consistency of their behaviors, etc. The case study method is a qualitative data collection method that involves observing and investigating a person, a group, or an organization. It reflects a unit within its real-life context.

#### 3.3. Analytical Methods

The study uses purposive sampling. The six films chosen for the study were all released within the last 20 years, so choosing them as the object of analysis has a better timeline. Apart from that, they all have considerable popularity and high box office, which indicates that they have a wider audience, and choosing them as the object of analysis has better generalization. Last but not least, the researcher chose three male-dominated crime movies and three crime movies

with female protagonists, which proved that not only male-dominated crime movies have problems such as stereotyping and sexualizing female characters.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The mother-like wife

#### 4.1.1. Infernal Affairs (Hong Kong)

In this work, the two main female characters seem to serve as interpreters of the male protagonist's fate, merely annotating the protagonist's inner world and enhancing character development.

Chen's identity as a police officer is not confirmed until six months after his death, when his designated psychologist, Dr. Li Xinyi (played by Kelly Chen), finds his file among the personal belongings of the deceased captain. Chen had revealed his secret to Dr. Li, but she thought he was joking. In the final scene of this police drama, Li bids farewell to her patient at Chen's grave: "Hello, Mr. Policeman." The role of the female psychologist as Chen's mental mirror cannot be overlooked. It is through her therapy that Chen begins to question whether he has schizophrenia, and she ultimately restores his lost identity - although, for him, it is too late to return to his original position. [15] In fact, her clinic, the only place where he can sleep peacefully, has become his mental home or sanctuary. Chen's character is maternally gentle and serves as the protagonist's lover in the drama. However, as a psychiatrist, the first rule of professional ethics is not to establish any relationship beyond the "doctor-patient relationship" with patients. In the film, a senior female consultant becomes emotionally entangled with her patient and then continues to "treat" him, which is entirely not consistent with her character. However, this doesn't really matter, as she is merely used as a tool to showcase the hero's soul's pain and depth.

Another female character, Mary (played by Sammi Cheng), also provides a warm domestic haven for her fiancé Lau. Mary is writing a novel in which she creates a man with multiple personalities, seemingly a metaphor for her fiancé's dual identity. However, she fails to complete it, especially after learning about Lau's espionage activities. In the end, when she learns of the crimes committed by her fiancé, she simply goes to buy him breakfast, a role that is entirely in line with the virtuous wife and good mother in East Asian Confucian tradition. So, what is the significance of creating such a character? She merely serves as another reason for the villainous hero to want to change and become a good person. The maternal wife character cannot have her own story; their stories are merely decorations for the male character's life story.

### 4.2. The victimized daughter

"The casual way in which we deal with rape may begin and end with television and movies where we are inundated with images of sexual and domestic violence" [16] The second-wave feminists, in the 1970s, created the term rape culture to conceptualize the extreme expression of sexism in the modern world. It manifested itself in the form of rape. In doing so, feminists were able to show how pervasive rape and rape culture was in the world and how ingrained in every aspect of life it had become. As Susanne Scholz states, "The term 'rape culture' expresses that not only 'sick individuals' commit rape, but society as a whole encourages it" [17]. Rape can be defined as involving the nonconsensual use of a person's sexual organs through penetration with objects or body parts, an "act of sexual intercourse with an individual without her [or their] consent, through force or the threat of force". While rape is applied to victims who are women, and rapists who are men; there are many instances where children and men are also victims of rape. Most East Asian crime films tend to depict violated characters as women, often employing direct camera shots to capture their victimization, thereby subtly inciting a sense of voyeuristic pleasure in the audience. This technique of focusing the camera on the victim inadvertently

positions the audience in the perspective of the abuser. This excessive emphasis on the abuse of female victims essentially serves as a tacit endorsement of the patriarchal system that objectifies women and disregards their suffering. It aims to amplify women's insecurity in society and the society's indifferent acceptance of sexual assaults against women. By exploiting such stereotypes, the crime of rape is no longer perceived as a crime that could be committed against all of society, including men, but specifically against women. Consequently, this could foster a relatively permissive attitude towards rape at the societal level.

#### 4.2.1. Bedevilled (South Korea)

In this movie, the heroine, Kim Bok-nam, lives on an isolated island and is subjected to abuse from the men on that island. Initially, she chooses to submit to the oppression of the patriarchy. However, the fact that her daughter, a 7-year-old toddler, is raped by her husband completely enrages her, causing her to lose control and kill everyone on that island. The movie gives a close-up at this point of her daughter's bunny panties, which were given to her daughter by Kim Bok-nam's husband. Meanwhile, although the movie does not directly depict the rape of the young girl, the camera focuses on the young girl's breasts and her precocious and youthful face as she asks her mother if her father likes women with big breasts. She asks her mother if her father likes women with big breasts and secretly uses her mother's friend's make-up, expecting her father to shower her with this "love for a woman."

Kim Bok-nam's daughter fills the classic role of the protagonist, "the victimized daughter," in a crime movie, and instead of turning the camera on the abuser, Kim Bok-nam's husband, the movie turns it on the raped little girl, depicting her as ignorantly submissive after being sexually violated, even pandering to her father, in order to please him, get more "love" from him, even feel anxious about her tender, undeveloped breasts. The characterization of this character undoubtedly serves to please the male audience. The little girl's sense of lovesick and her desire for her "father" to have intimate physical contact with her, which appears to be a hint of "sexual consent," downplays the criminal nature of the pedophile and the molestation, directing the audience's attention to the little girl's demand to be loved. Some viewers may even wonder if it is the mother's dereliction of duty that led to the girl's "degradation" and "loss of virginity," which is actually a subtle stigmatization of the victimized woman.

#### 4.2.2. Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (South Korea)

The film intertwines two tales of revenge. One is the story of a vengeful father, Dongjin, whose daughter is kidnapped by a deaf kidnapper, Liuyu, and accidentally drowns under his watch. However, the kidnapper, whom Dongjin relentlessly pursues, is also seeking his revenge. Liuyu's revenge is for the preventable death of his chronically ill sister. To raise money for her surgery, Liuyu sold one of his kidneys on the black market for human organs. His sacrifice was rendered futile by the betrayal of the organ trafficker. The two protagonists of the film, Dongjin and Liuyu, both have very compelling reasons to pursue revenge cruelly, that is, the loss of their loved ones. Coincidentally, both characters are set as females who are physically "fragile" and need to rely on their male relatives. Their misfortunes provide the male protagonists with opportunities to avenge in the name of justice and protection of their loved ones, bringing a sense of heroism under patriarchy. [18]

Lévi-Strauss sees revenge as one of the 'fundamental feelings common to the whole mankind such as love, hate.' In other words, revenge as a narrative template has the most empathetic power to the audience in that a desire for vengeance is 'deeply natural to human beings,' as Trudy Govier accounts in *Forgiveness and Revenge* [19]. At large, a revenge plot starts with a world whose justice is tipped over, and the protagonist is usually a victim who is 'putting the world back in balance' by paying back the victimizer [20]. 'The search for equilibrium,' set as the aim of a protagonist in a revenge story, hardly fails to evoke sufficient sympathy towards the avenger in the audience.

### 4.2.3. A Place Called Silence (China's mainland)

In "A Place Called Silence," two storylines intertwine. Zaifu Lin, a school worker, seeks revenge after his daughter is bullied to death by the principal's daughter and her friends. Discovering the truth, he uses his power as a policeman to kill the four bullies responsible for his daughter's torment.

The film graphically depicts the abuse of Lin's daughter through close-up shots. These include scenes of the bullies cutting her hair, forcing her to drink it soaked in water, placing a hairbrush with small knives on her head, and ultimately pushing her out of a window.

The plot centers on Lin's daughter, a 14-year-old with mental retardation attending high school. However, the actress chosen for the role appears to be a mature woman, which contrasts with the character's intended depiction. In the film's conclusion, scenes of her playing the piano, singing, and boating with her father are shown, suggesting a relationship more akin to lovers than a typical father-daughter bond. The character is a typical example of a victimized daughter being over-sexualized in Asian crime movies.

The other story is about a single mother and her daughter. Her daughter is friends with Lim Jae Bok's daughter, and after witnessing the school bully kill Lim Jae Bok's daughter, she tells him about it and becomes the next target of the school bully's bullying. The movie opens with her hair being glued to the wall by the school bullies. Later, as she tries to break away from her mother's controlling nature with the help of Lim Jae Bok, her previous story with her mother is revealed. Her mother's husband domestically abused her from time to time and violated her. One of the movie's close-ups shows her as a young child standing in front of a bathtub with her stepfather's underwear over her head and bleeding from her lower body. This incident was too much for her mother to bear any longer, and together they killed her stepfather.

### 4.3. The avenging "Femme Fatale"

In crime films, the plot where female victims become perpetrators for self-protection or revenge - termed as "post-victim" by Coulthard [21] - intertwines with issues of idealized femininity, heterosexuality, victimhood, sacrificial purity, and maternal devotion. The portrayal of female victims in these films does not challenge the stereotypical image of women as the sacrifices, bearers, and submissives of male violence. Although the female protagonists are depicted as daring to use violence and challenge male authority, they cannot escape male oppression or tragic endings, such as death, imprisonment, or loss of loved ones, regardless of the reasons that led them to commit violent acts. Moreover, the depiction of the process of female victimization is overly detailed and emphasized, while the scenes of women using violence are downplayed through the use of brief shots, greatly reducing the realism.

According to Foucault [22], "Public torture must be spectacular," and "it is an organized ritual to mark the victim and express the power of punishment." In crime films, scenes of female criminals being punished become a spectacle of punishment, depicting the strong authority and judgment held by patriarchy over female crime [23]. From this perspective, female criminals in these crime films appear to be an attempt by the scriptwriters to empower women, challenging their traditional victim status in crime films. However, this form of representation serves to rationalize the stereotype of viewing women as victims rather than perpetrators, thereby reinforcing their subordinate status in the traditional gender hierarchy, as female criminals are ultimately severely punished.

#### 4.3.1. The Stool Pigeon (Hong Kong, China)

The female perpetrator in *The Stool Pigeon*, Dee, engages in criminal activities with her boyfriend, Barbarian, a gang leader who emotionally hurts her, first by cheating and then by abandoning her and forcing her to have an abortion. To get revenge, Dee and her lover Ghost Jnr (who is Barbarian's driver and an undercover police informant) together plot to seize the loot

that Barbarian acquired through a robbery. Despite the trauma that Barbarian caused Dee, once she transgresses by defying his authority, she is placed in extreme danger, with multiple villains hunting her. The physical violence Dee experiences is explicitly portrayed with close-ups of her arm being hacked and bleeding badly, as well as full shots of her entire body being lifted and thrown onto a pile of chairs. By contrast, the scene depicting Dee's acts of violence – such as using a knife to stab her male attacker's torso multiple times – is filmed from a medium side angle that only captures the upper parts of her attacker's body and Dee's crazed facial expressions and arm gestures, but excludes the blade and wound from the frame. Facing her male attacker, Dee is shown as having little chance of resisting due to their physical power imbalance.

She is saved twice: first by her lover, Ghost Jnr, who uses his body to block the villains chasing Dee but gets hacked to death, and then by a male policeman who kills her attacker. In the end, Dee fails to get the loot, loses her lover (Ghost Jnr), and must confess to the police about her crime. Dee's tragic ending indicates that a female insurgent whose aim is to defy male authority is problematic, and she is doomed to be punished. Apart from dramatizing the conflicts in the narrative, placing Dee in danger in this way can also be seen as a way of reaffirming the consequences that follow when a woman transgresses, whether by getting involved in crime or challenging the patriarchal order.

In line with the typical female image of kindness, care, compliance, and self-sacrifice, Dee is portrayed as a good person. Despite her later violent and radical behavior, her unfortunate experiences still evoke sympathy. On the one hand, Dee's misfortune is narrated as a means to strengthen her relationship with Ghost Jnr, expressing the societal mission of men to save women, thereby reinforcing male social power and negating female social power. On the other hand, it also serves to soften Dee's image, giving the impression that her violent side is not innate, thereby weakening her competitive masculine force. In one scene, Ghost Jnr and Dee have dinner at a roadside market, during which Dee tells Ghost Jnr her tragic story. Dee mentions that her mother sold her to a gang leader, whom she attacked and ran away from. Dee is saved by Barbarian, who then becomes Dee's boyfriend. She helped him commit crimes out of love and gratitude, but his deception and abandonment eventually drove her to irrational revenge. In the dinner scene, Ghost Jnr covers her with his jacket when she falls on the table after drinking a whole bottle of beer. The camera captures the sad expression on Dee's face and her closed eyes. This scene shows Dee as a kind, inherently good, and vulnerable woman, making her radical behavior seen as a result of emotional trauma rather than her nature.

As McCaughey (1997) suggests, if male aggression is considered natural, then female radical behavior would pose a threat to society and social order. From this perspective, Dee's rebellion is not only against her outlaw boyfriend, Barbarian, but also against the patriarchal order. [24] Of course, audiences may not like to see society collapse in this way, so female violence needs to be justified. [25] At the same time, such scenes also alleviate the possible fear of male viewers towards Dee. Although Dee is cruel, fights, and seems different from the typical weak woman, the reason she does all this is because men do not love her. It seems that women would do bad things only because they are not given enough love, and once they feel loved and protected, they would become gentle again.

#### **4.3.2. Kokuhaku (Japan)**

This Japanese film portrays a vengeful female teacher whose daughter was murdered by her students, prompting her to seek revenge. The opening scene of the movie shows the teacher standing at the podium, discussing the benefits of drinking milk, while her students laugh and play, showing no respect for her. Here, the film first paints the image of a disempowered individual. After discussing the benefits of milk, the teacher begins to share her own story. She is a single mother with a four-year-old daughter. She divorced her husband because he

contracted HIV after spending some time in Africa. However, upon learning this news, she still decided to give birth to her daughter. The camera focuses on the teacher's facial close-up, her face filled with tender maternal love as she speaks. From the beginning, we know that the teacher loves her daughter deeply, so her brutal revenge after her daughter's murder is justified. On the surface, this female character is ruthless, not conforming to traditional female characteristics, but her motives are very traditional: she stands by her sick husband and fights for her wronged daughter. The film emphasizes this character's motherhood, downplaying her cold-blooded cruelty as a criminal.

In another scene, the female teacher visits the home of the boy who murdered her daughter, intending to inform the boy's mother of the tragic incident. However, the boy's mother, also a single parent, is so blindly devoted to her son that she fails to discern right from wrong. She is a quiet, virtuous woman, reliant on her son due to her husband's absence. When confronted with the female teacher's accusations, she offers no apologies, instead viewing her son as another victim and expressing sympathy for him.

Later, after the female teacher poisons the boy in an act of revenge, he isolates himself at home, refusing to leave. His mother continues to care for him, bringing him food daily and maintaining her compassion for him. The film presents a disparaging portrayal of the traditional mother figure, seemingly highlighting the less innocent aspects of traditional women. However, it actually underscores the pitiful disregard for human decency exhibited by such women, who view their sons as their entire world.

The obstinacy of the boy's mother mirrors that of the female teacher, who is equally determined to avenge her daughter's death. The film's lens captures this, revealing that the women's malice stems from an almost perverse love and protection for their children. It contrasts sharply with the inherent brutality of male criminals typically depicted in other crime films. In a tragic twist, the boy's mother is ultimately killed by her son.

Neroni suggested that violence is one characteristic that defines masculinity in the cultural imagination and thus is one of the main ways of differentiating men and women. Hence, the delineation of the violent woman disrupts this association. Nevertheless, when female violence appears in a film in which it is executed within the symbolic patriarchal realm, a woman's threat is undone. In this way, crime films, which attempt to mitigate social antagonisms, also exploit them.

## 5. Conclusion

In my research, three main types of female characters have emerged in East Asian crime films: the mother-like wife, the victimized daughter, and the avenging "femme fatale." The role of the mother-like wife is usually quite facetious; they are virtuous and gentle, giving the male protagonist the warmth of home while not asking much about her husband's work, so they usually have little to do with the main plot and do not have their independent storyline. The victimized daughters are usually the cause of the male or female protagonist's vengeance; they are sexualized, raped, and inflicted with on-camera violence during the plot to satisfy the audience's voyeuristic desires. The vengeful serpentine woman characters usually have a tragic past of being abandoned by a male character. Underneath their brutal masks are vulnerable hearts; ostensibly, such characters challenge the traditional East Asian image of women but, in fact, still embrace patriarchy. Because the movie does not focus on their direct process of revenge, it instead sets up their endings to be quite tragic. The findings of the present reveal that Mosaic patterns, marked by an interplay between tradition and modernity, are crucial in shaping and portraying the cultural identities of women in crime movies in these three Asian countries.

In the twenty-first century, dramatic social changes have affected traditional gender roles and hierarchies, and this has altered female representations in East Asian movies. However, notably, the female characters analyzed in the present study still suffer from stereotyping, sexualization, and stigmatization. Being aware of this issue is crucial because the ideology expressed in films influences society as a whole. Equal portrayal of female and male characters in films can help convey the idea of gender equality, especially for mainstream film genres such as the action films analyzed in this paper.

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