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Bodies that Remember: The Maternal Archive in East Asian Feminist Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the East Asian maternal body as a politicised archive through which gendered expectations, reproductive labour, and filial duty are inscribed and transmitted across generations. Through comparative readings of Mieko Kawakami's Breasts and Eggs and Kyung-sook Shin's Please Look After Mom, the paper argues that the maternal figures' struggles do not arise from personal inadequacy but from the structural demands of Confucian morality, kinship obligation, and patriarchal reproductive norms. It argues that depictions of "bad motherhood" in these texts operate as traumatic testimony, recording the irreconcilable demands of Confucian obligation and neoliberal consumer culture. The theoretical framework combines feminist embodiment studies, Foucault's concept of biopower, and Asian anthropology. Susan Bordo's theory of the disciplined female body provides the foundation for analysing how maternal bodies internalise aesthetic norms and reproductive expectations. At the same time, Ann Cvetkovich's work on embodied archives informs the paper's understanding of motherhood as both an emotional and physical repository of cultural memory. Through Makiko's perpetually renovated body and Park So-nyo's absence, the novels are treated as alternative historiographies that document what the state's clinical archives omit. These symptoms serve as the "somatic debris" that holds the emotional history of invisible labour. A somatic reading of the text, along with heteroglossic linguistic analysis, is used to interpret the shifting

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narrations of the primary texts and to illustrate how competing social scripts fragment the maternal subject.

Keywords: Bipower, Confucianism, Archive of Feelings, Somatic reading

FULL RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

When Mieko Kawakami's novella Breasts and Eggs was published in 2008, it provoked public condemnation from Tokyo's then governor, Shintaro Ishihara, who dismissed the work as "unpleasant and intolerable" (Kageyama, 2008). The reaction was indicative of the erosion of the aesthetic normativity imposed on women in Japan. It exposed the biological and emotional reality of working-class womanhood in a society that prefers femininity to remain decorative, silent, and optimised for use. The novella went on to win the Akutagawa Prize and later became one of the most widely translated works of contemporary Japanese feminist fiction. While intentionally subversive and provocative, the book's refusal to sanitise the maternal body helped it secure a lasting place in Japanese canonical female-centric narratives, which remain limited. Kawakami's work has therefore been read heavily as a critique of the cultural and economic mechanisms that control the female body and fix gender roles under neoliberalism (Buriticá Alzate, 2020) and as an example of écriture féminine that gives marginalised voices space through fragmentary life stories (Košinaga, 2025).

A similar refusal structures Kyung-sook Shin's Please Look After Mom (2011), a novel that achieved mass readership across South Korea and beyond. Where Kawakami foregrounds visibility, Shin stages the maternal dissonance through disappearance. Her maternal figure does not age on the page through surgical intervention or aesthetic anxiety. However, it vanishes entirely, leaving behind only the shock of her absence and the belated recognition of how thoroughly her body had been consumed by domestic labour. As the protagonist Makiko observes in Breasts and Eggs, "People like pretty things... Prettiness means value." (Kawakami, 2020, p. 40) This stark admission defines the biopolitical currency of the modern woman, for whom beauty is not a vanity but a social currency and a site of policing that determines her right to social visibility. The review has been the same: Shin's novel has been read as a story of educational and maternal striving rather than a portrait of traditional Korean

culture or universal motherhood sentimentalism (Abelmann et al., 2012). It has also been used to examine what it takes to be considered a "good mother" and the limits of the sociocultural ideal of the perfect mother (Sanchez, 2022).

Current discourse within maternal studies primarily rests on intersectionality and marks motherhood as a non-essentialist category that refuses any fixed connotations of maternal subjectivity (Kawash, 2011). These academic discussions carry significant weight in establishing cultural parameters that govern the regulation and management of these bodies. This study posits that the maternal body in East Asian fiction functions as a broken ledger recording the irreconcilable debts of Confucian tradition and the extractive demands of neoliberal capitalism. Drawing on two seminal novels of the modern feminist zeitgeist, Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* and Shin's *Please Look After Mom*, I argue that the depicted failures of motherhood are, in fact, a traumatic testimony. These texts map the transition of the female body from a useful machine of the state to a fragmented archive of feeling (Cvetkovich, 2003), ultimately revealing that the modern maternal identity is predicated on the systematic erasure of the self. These unconventional maternal bodies are read through "the affective turn", a body of scholarship that challenges the interpretation of emotions as merely individual feelings and instead situates them as historically contingent and socially produced.

To do that, this paper applies Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of biopower and Susan Bordo's coercive, aesthetic ideal to analyse the external and internal policing of the female form. (Bordo, 2002) These Western poststructuralist tools are placed in conversation with Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee's work on gender and Confucius, which localises these pressures within the specific East Asian context of the Confucian debt. (Rosenlee, 2012) The primary texts provide two distinct but convergent modes of maternal underperformance. In Shin's "*Please Look After Mom*," we encounter the traditional sacrificial mother whose physical disappearance serves as a critique of the "Three Obediences"[1]. Conversely, Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* offers a contemporary exploration of beautification culture and reproductive technology, in which the mother's body is a site of perpetual renovation and commodification, subject to pervasive social expectations, and women engage in continuous self-presentation labour. This paper utilises a comparative literary approach to examine how these

[1] The Three Obediences (*sancong*) are the Confucian rule that a woman should obey her father before marriage, her husband in marriage, and her son in widowhood, so she is never an autonomous authority in her own right.

novels are treated here as alternative historiographies that document what the state's clinical archives omit.

Material and Methods

This paper applies Michel Foucault's (1978) conceptualisation of biopower and Susan Bordo's (2003) theory of the standardised ideal to analyse the external and internal policing of the female form. These Western poststructuralist tools are placed in conversation with Rosenlee's (2012) account of the architecture of obedience under Confucian principles. To synthesise the biological and the emotional, I read their bodies as sites of somatic surveillance, where the hegemonic structure of compulsory good motherhood is inscribed. Cvetkovich (2003) argues in An Archive of Feelings that trauma and everyday emotional life leave traces that official archives miss. Read alongside her work, these novels magnify the nature of a mother's inner life, which is recoverable only through scattered, affective remains. The primary texts provide two distinct but convergent modes of maternal "underperformance." In Shin's (2011) "Please Look After Mom," we encounter the "traditional" sacrificial mother whose physical disappearance serves as a critique of the "Three Obediences". Conversely, Kawakami's (2020) Breasts and Eggs offers a contemporary exploration of "Beauty Up" culture and reproductive technology, where the mother's body is a site of perpetual renovation and commodification (Buriticá Alzate, 2020).

This paper utilises a comparative literary analysis grounded in feminist archival theory (Cvetkovich, 2003). The novels are treated here as alternative historiographies that document what the state's clinical archives omit. The methodology involves a somatic reading of the text. Somatic reading is a process of identifying physical symptoms, such as chronic headaches, surgical scars, or chapped hands, not merely as plot devices, but as "affective knowledge companions." These symptoms serve as the "somatic debris" that holds the emotional history of invisible labour. Furthermore, I apply a heteroglossic linguistic analysis (Bakhtin, 1981) to the shifting narrations of the primary texts to illustrate how competing social scripts fragment the maternal subject.

The Administration of Bodies: Foucault and Biopower

Michel Foucault's (1978) formulation of biopower offers a critical framework for understanding why motherhood in these texts is repeatedly framed as a problem of administration rather than experience. Biopower operates not through the spectacular violence of sovereign power but through the regulation, optimisation, and management of life, directing attention toward bodies as sites of productivity,

reproduction, and control. Its central concern is not the individual subject as such, but the population as an aggregate, whose health, fertility, and efficiency must be monitored and maintained (Foucault, 1978).

Unlike sovereign power, which had the right to "take life or let live," biopower is a productive force that seeks the "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 136, 140). This management reaches its peak in anatomo-politics, a technology of power centred on the body as a machine. Foucault (1978) describes this mechanism as:

> ...the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterised the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body. (p. 139)

Foucault captures this logic when he writes that "the body is directly involved in a political field" and that power relations "invest it, mark it, train it, and force it to carry out tasks" (Foucault, 1977, p. 25). Within this framework, the maternal body becomes a crucial site of intervention. It is expected to produce children, stabilise the household, absorb emotional labour, and do so without visible complaint or deterioration. The success of this system depends not on overt coercion but on the normalisation of sacrifice as feminine virtue.

In Breasts and Eggs, this biopolitical logic becomes explicit through the politicisation of reproduction itself (Kawakami, 2020). The "eggs" of Kawakami's title do not function merely as biological markers of fertility or personal desire. However, they are transformed into assets whose value is defined in relation to demographic anxiety and state interest. What might otherwise remain private bodily matter is reframed as a potential reserve, a reproductive resource that must be monitored, preserved, and ideally deployed in accordance with normative expectations surrounding marriage, productivity, and social legitimacy. Medicalisation emerges as the primary mechanism through which this transformation is enacted, converting reproductive capacity into an object of surveillance and institutional authority. As Jana Sawicki argues in her analysis of reproductive technologies,

> Far from simply liberating women from biological constraint, new reproductive technologies operate as an extension of disciplinary power, producing norms of reproductive fitness and responsibility that women must negotiate under the watchful authority of medical expertise. (1991)

This extension of disciplinary power is particularly pronounced in East Asian contexts, where a persistent demographic crisis frames declining birth rates as an existential threat to national stability (van Buuren, 2024). Within this climate, the female womb ceases to be conceived as an individual site of embodied experience and becomes a matter of public concern, demographic calculation, and national security instead. When Natsu, the narrator of Breasts and Eggs, contemplates artificial insemination as a single woman, her deliberation is not represented as a private ethical question or an expression of reproductive autonomy but as a fraught negotiation with an entire apparatus of social legitimacy (Kawakami, 2020). Her desire for a child exists in direct tension with the state's preference for married, heteronormative, and economically productive reproduction, a preference that quietly but forcefully structures which forms of life are encouraged to come into being.

In this context, Natsu's eggs are no longer imagined as belonging solely to her. They are framed as potential units of the future workforce, biological matter whose value is realised only if mobilised according to established scripts of kinship and productivity. Her hesitation to deploy them within these scripts is therefore not neutral. However, it is implicitly coded as a malfunction within the biopolitical system, a delay that interrupts the smooth administration of population. This is why Natsu's reproductive uncertainty is repeatedly framed in terms of insufficiency, lateness, or risk rather than autonomy or choice. Her body appears to underperform, not because it fails biologically, but because it resists immediate integration into the state's reproductive timetable.

A similar logic governs the maternal figure in Kyung-Sook Shin's Please Look After Mom, where the mother's physical disappearance is retrospectively interpreted as a failure to continue functioning as domestic infrastructure (Shin, 2011). Long after her absence, her value is measured almost exclusively through the labour she once performed, as the family realises how completely their daily lives depended upon her invisible work. Her exhaustion is never recognised as such until it culminates in erasure. In both cases, the maternal body is judged according to its capacity to fulfil predefined roles, and deviation from these roles is registered not as resistance or critique but as deficiency.

By failing or refusing to perform the expected functions of the maternal body, these women disrupt what can be understood as the biopolitical ledger, a metaphorical accounting system through which the state measures the utility of its subjects. Within this ledger, motherhood is credited only insofar as it produces measurable outcomes, whether children, domestic stability, or aesthetic compliance.

When these outcomes falter, the maternal subject is marked as anomalous, an entry that no longer balances. As Julie Wallbank (2001) observes, the non-traditional maternal figure occupies a contradictory position within the Foucauldian family, functioning simultaneously as a site of potential resistance and as a focal point for intensified regulation. The state responds to this disruption through what might be described as a politics of regret, in which women are encouraged to experience their divergence from maternal norms as personal biological failure rather than as evidence of structural contradiction embedded within the organisation of social life itself.

Internalised Surveillance

Inside regimes of socially constructed motherhood, the mothering individual loses their personhood and their hold over their own bodies. One way to do that is the rampant and forced aestheticisation and beautification of their body parts, especially in the East Asian context, for the heterosexist gaze. While Foucault's analysis foregrounds the external administration of bodies by institutions and state apparatuses, Susan Bordo shifts attention to the internalisation of these disciplinary pressures, particularly as they are lived and experienced by women. Bordo argues that the modern female body is shaped by a long history of aesthetic regulation that has intensified under conditions of mass media and digital visual culture, producing what she describes as a standardised gaze through which bodies are rendered culturally intelligible. As Bordo writes, the body is not a neutral medium but a culturally inscribed surface. For women, it functions as a primary site where power, identity, and self-worth are negotiated (Bordo, 2003). Within this regime, the body must conform to recognisable aesthetic codes to secure social visibility and legitimacy, and failure to do so results in marginalisation and in exorbitant moral scrutiny. Self-worth becomes inseparable from the successful management of physical appearance, binding subjectivity to surface discipline in ways that are both pervasive and deeply internalised (Bordo, 2003).

This process produces an internalised gaze through which women learn to monitor, judge, and correct their own bodies in anticipation of external evaluation (Bordo, 2003; Foucault, 1977). Surveillance no longer needs to be imposed from above, because it has already been absorbed into consciousness itself. Under these conditions, womanhood is subjected to continuous disciplinary labour, oscillating between the demand to treat the body as an aesthetic project to be perfected and the expectation that it functions as a useful machine to be exhausted in the service of others. Bordo (2003) describes this internalisation as particularly insidious, noting that the most powerful forms of social control are those that make us feel that the

discipline we impose on ourselves is freely chosen. In Japan and South Korea, this internalisation is intensified by obedience (Rosenlee, 2012). A production of cultural formation extends external appearance as a reflection of internal discipline and moral character. A woman who appears tired, unkempt, or visibly aged is not simply perceived as physically deteriorating but as failing to exercise the self-control required of a productive social subject. Fatigue becomes a moral defect, and visible signs of labour are read as evidence of personal inadequacy rather than as symptoms of structural exploitation.

Psychological research from South Korea supports the severity of this burden, with evidence that body dissatisfaction plays a mediating role in women's depression and lowered self-esteem (You & Shin, 2016). In Breasts and Eggs, Makiko's obsession with her breasts offers a precise somatic manifestation of Bordo's (2003) theory (Kawakami, 2020). Her self-loathing moves beyond an individual pathology and emerges as the embodied effect of a cultural system that equates feminine value with youthful, pre-maternal appearance (Buriticá Alzate, 2020). Makiko experiences biological ageing as a violation of aesthetic order, something closer to a transgression than a natural change. Her language reveals the depth of this internalisation. She speaks of her body in terms of usefulness, obsolescence, and waste, reproducing the logic of the market in her most intimate self-assessments (Kawakami, 2020, p. 14). The standardised gaze has become so deeply embedded that she no longer requires an external authority to condemn her body. She performs this judgement herself, with a severity that exceeds any explicit social sanction, demonstrating how biopower achieves its most efficient form when it no longer needs to be spoken aloud (Foucault, 1978).

This discipline is heavily ideological and is reinforced by a modern aesthetic policy that functions as a tool of social policing. As Thusi (2019) calls it, beauty is a form of social currency that functions as a site of policing and regulation (p. 1339). In the neoliberal landscape of East Asia, this policing manifests as "aesthetic labour" (Witz et al., 2003), where looking "right" is a requirement of the workforce. For women in the service or hostess industries, such as Makiko, the body is the primary tool of labour, and any deviation from the "marketable" standard threatens their economic survival. The material consequences of this internal policing are reflected in the biopolitical data of East Asia, where cosmetic death, or the erasure of the natural self in favour of a commodified standard, is a systemic reality. In Breasts and Eggs, this aesthetic labour is depicted as a form of somatic debt. Makiko's desire for breast enhancement is masked as a pursuit of pleasure, shielding a desperate attempt to

settle a debt with a society that has capitalised her youthful body through manual labour and motherhood (Buriticá Alzate, 2020). She views her ageing breasts as a corporeal transgression that must be balanced through surgical intervention. The pain of the procedure is a ritual of re-entry into this "intelligible" social order. This commodification of the surface serves to hide the biological archive underneath; by "fixing" the surface, the state and the market can ignore the exhaustion of the maternal machine (Cvetkovich, 2003).

The transition from the useful machine to a commodified surface highlights a deeper institutionalisation of the female form. In both novels, the maternal body is treated as a piece of national infrastructure. In Please Look After Mom, the mother's disappearance is only noticed when the "service" she provides, like the cooking, the cleaning, and the emotional labour, comes to a halt (Shin, 2011). She has been so thoroughly institutionalised as a functional unit of the family that her subjective self has entirely vanished long before her physical body does. This is the ultimate "anatomo-politics" of the home: the body is optimised for its capabilities (motherhood) and docility (sacrifice) until it is literally spent (Foucault, 1978).

However, as this study argues, the "Bad Mother" is the one who allows the fracture to show. By refusing to perform the "docile" role or by attempting to reclaim the body for personal aesthetic pleasure rather than national utility, these women disrupt the biopolitical order. They force a somatic reading of the text, where the scar, the headache, and the vanished body act as testimonies to the "extortion of forces" that Foucault (1978) described. Ultimately, the maternal identity in these contexts is currently dysfunctional under the weight of these irreconcilable demands. A woman cannot be both a "useful machine" of the state and a "commodified project" of the market without suffering a somatic breakdown. The "Bad Mother" is simply the most authentic record we have of this impossible tension, a witness to the fact that the ledger can no longer be balanced.

"Beauty Up" Culture

The national hyperfixation on "fixing" or beautifying a woman's ageing body, as well as a strong inclination to reverse the natural trajectory of a woman's exterior, is intensified in the East Asian context. The evolution of aesthetic standards in Japan illustrates a shift toward what Magnúsdóttir (2015) describes as a transition in which the movement from traditional to modern beauty standards reflects a bigger change in social hierarchy and control. In the contemporary setting of Breasts and Eggs, Makiko's obsession with her breasts is a visceral instance of this tension (Kawakami,

2020). Her body is no longer a lived subjectivity but a cultural disruption caught in what Miller (2006) calls "Beauty Up" culture. In this environment, the body is a site of perpetual renovation, driven by a market that commodifies feminine insecurity and mandates a constant state of self-improvement. A regional preference for a specific, standardised femininity exacerbates Makiko's self-loathing. The preference for feminine facial beauty in Japan and Korea is rooted in a desire for youthfulness and docility. This preference is not accidental; it is a calculated social requirement that rewards women for appearing "untouched" by the very labours they are expected to perform.

Furthermore, cosmetic enhancements often utilise a "whiteness discourse" (Ashikari, 2005) that functions as a tool for racial and social othering. This forces women like Makiko to navigate a post-colonial hierarchy of beauty that values westernised features over their own natural forms. As Petchesky (1987) suggests, the intervention of medical technology further extracts agency from the woman, turning her reproductive and aesthetic parts into objects of external management. The woman becomes a spectator to her own transformation, watching a corporate ideal replace her biological self.

In Breasts and Eggs, Kawakami provides the visceral, somatic evidence for Bordo's (2003) theories, showing how the standardised ideal is translated into a painful, internal dialogue. Makiko's language reflects a body that has been devalued by the labour of motherhood and the passage of time. She describes her own anatomy not as a living part of herself but as a failing object. She says that they are like something that has been used up and thrown away (Kawakami, 2020, p. 13). She states that just looking at them makes her want to die (Kawakami, 2020, p. 17).

Makiko's role as a hostess in a snack bar forces her into a state of permanent aesthetic labour (Witz et al., 2003), a condition deeply embedded within Japan's night-time service economy. Snack bars occupy an ambiguous position within Japanese labour culture. They are framed as sites of light entertainment and emotional comfort. However, they rely heavily on feminised affective labour, where women are expected to perform attentiveness, flirtation, and visual appeal as part of the service itself. Within this economy, the hostess's body is a supplementary to labour and constitutes its core instrument. Youthfulness, sexualised femininity, and emotional availability are monetised, while ageing or visible fatigue threatens economic disposability.

Makiko's body thus becomes a project of perpetual renovation, where even the most intimate parts of her anatomy are evaluated through the lens of

marketability. In this neoliberal arrangement, the body's surface functions as the primary asset, while exhaustion strives to remain structurally invisible. Natsu, the narrator, observes the relentless nature of this performance, noting that Makiko was constantly checking herself in reflective surfaces, windows, spoons, and the screen of her phone (Kawakami, 2020). While misread as vanity, this is an act of self-vigilance. Such constant self-monitoring exemplifies the disciplined subject under aesthetic capitalism (Foucault, 1977), where survival depends on the continuous verification that the body has not yet slipped out of value. For Makiko, her appearance is a defensive wall against the social erasure that threatens "underperforming" women in a hyper-capitalist Japan. If she fails to look the part, she ceases to exist in the economic sense. The tragedy lies in the violent attempt to force the useful body, the one that has nursed a child and survived poverty, to match the intelligible body of the airbrushed ideal. This creates a state of somatic cognitive dissonance where the woman must hate the parts of herself that have been most productive. Makiko's daughter, Midoriko, recognises this violence in her diary. She highlights the cosmetic death of her mother's authenticity by asking why her mother hates the parts of her that made her daughter (Kawakami, 2020). She observes that it is as if her mother wants to erase the fact that she is a mother so she can go back to being a thing that people want to look at (Kawakami, 2020). Midoriko's perspective is crucial here because she sees the surgery as a structural erasure. She understands that her mother is trying to "un-write" the history of her own motherhood to remain legible in a market that has no room for the maternal.

Biological Archives: The Physiological Cost of Obedience

The maternal body therefore operates as a living archive (Cvetkovich, 2003), recording the cumulative weight of cultural, economic, and familial demands. These archives preserve both narratives of labour, surveillance, and obedience and the embodied traces of trauma and scarcity. The social architecture of obedience (Rosenlee, 2012) has visceral and biological manifestations that extend beyond metaphor into measurable physiological effects. In human populations, reduced maternal investment is associated with accelerated reproductive maturation, often reflected in an earlier age at menarche and compromised somatic growth, indicating a biological pivot towards reproductive readiness in contexts of perceived scarcity (Belsky et al., 1991).

Within this framework, Natsu's anxiety over her "failing" eggs in *Breasts and Eggs* cannot be reduced to social pressure alone (Kawakami, 2020). Her bodily urgency reflects a life history trajectory shaped by generational depletion, where female vitality

is rapidly expended in the service of survival. Similarly, in *Please Look After Mom*, the husband's belated realisation that he treated his wife like a piece of furniture exposes how maternal exhaustion becomes naturalised until disappearance is the only remaining articulation of subjectivity (Shin, 2011). If the mother's body is the broken ledger, then the surrounding characters, Natsu, the writer-protagonist, and Midoriko, the silent daughter, function as the archivists who attempt to decode it. In *Breasts and Eggs*, Midoriko's refusal to speak is a somatic strike that mirrors her mother's surgical obsession (Kawakami, 2020). Her diary serves as a counter-archive (Cvetkovich, 2003) that records the standardised gaze from a position of forced observation. She notes with devastating clarity that her mother's desire to "Beauty Up" (Miller, 2006) is a desire to erase the evidence of Midoriko's own existence: "Why does she hate the parts of her that made me?" (Kawakami, 2020). This question identifies the central paradox of East Asian motherhood: the very biological acts that create life are the same acts that disqualify the woman from social value in a neoliberal market (Buriticá Alzate, 2020). Natsu, on the other hand, represents the archivist of the future. The archive she builds through her writing is an attempt to make sense of the "somatic debris" left behind by her sister. By documenting Makiko's surgery in such visceral, clinical detail (Kawakami, 2020), Natsu transforms a private medical procedure into a public indictment of a society that treats feminine ageing as a form of bankruptcy.

The psychological breakdown of the mothers in these texts constitutes a clinical archive of systemic neglect. Cvetkovich (2012) redefines depression not as a private chemical imbalance but as a "public feeling", a social symptom of biopolitical pressure (Foucault, 1978). In *Please Look After Mom*, Park So-nyo's hwabyung (fire disease) is an affective manifestation of this pressure (Choi, 2015). This "fire" is the somatic accumulation of repressed resentment, and it is an indigenous Korean syndrome. This encapsulates the friction between the self and pressure of obedience (Rosenlee, 2012). Her husband later admits to this systemic extraction, confessing that he treated her unsavoury until there was nothing left but a shell (Shin, 2011). This shell is the result of the biopolitical order: a body entirely liquidated by the demands of the social order (Foucault, 1978).

The fragmentation of the maternal body is not limited to appearance but extends across physiological, linguistic, and affective registers. In *Breasts and Eggs*, Makiko's speech is often interrupted by the clinic's technical jargon; she speaks in terms of "millilitres" and "cc's", particularly in English translations that adopt the clinical language of the state to describe her own desire (Kawakami, 2020). This is what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia, the presence of multiple, competing "languages"

within a single subject. Makiko is attempting to speak through the language of the market to solve a problem created by the language of Confucian tradition. Similarly, in *Please Look After Mom*, the mother's voice is almost absent, replaced by the "you" and "she" of her children's memories (Shin, 2011). She is a subject spoken about but rarely a subject who speaks. This linguistic erasure mirrors the somatic erasure of her physical vanishing. When she does speak, it is often in the language of domestic necessity, revealing a mind that has been entirely colonised by the performance of the useful machine of the home. By analysing these shifting narrations, we see that the maternal body also constitutes broken dialogue. The mother cannot speak of her trauma because the only languages available to her have no vocabulary for her suffering.

Conclusion

Although these narratives emerge from distinct geopolitical contexts, the underlying ethos remains consistent. The act of mothering operates as an ideological envelope through which capitalist society displays its coherence, exerts its authority, and secures the reproduction of its labour force (Dow, 2016). Makiko's surgery and Park So-nyo's disappearance are therefore not passive collapses. They are active, if tragic, attempts to reclaim the body from a system that recognises it only as counternarratives to an impenetrable social order. As we move toward a synthesis of these narratives, Puar's (2007) theory of "assemblages" suggests that the maternal body is a moving target of different power flows. This explains why Makiko feels she must navigate the "modern consumer" lens of Western aesthetics while simultaneously upholding the "filial daughter" lens of Eastern kinship (Ikels, 2004). She is trapped in a multidimensional squeeze where the neoliberal market and the Confucian home demand different, yet equally extractive, performances of femininity. Puar's (2007) theory shows that the "Bad Mother" is not a failure of character but a subject whose assemblage has become misaligned. When Makiko prioritises her breasts over her usefulness as a provider, or when Park So-nyo physically vanishes, they are disrupting the smooth flow of the state's machinery (Foucault, 1978). The "Bad Mother" emerges when the useful machine finally breaks down, refusing to be the invisible oil in the gears of the national economy. The "bad mother" in these texts describes the art of living as a practice honed through training rather than an abstract state to be achieved. According to de Certeau's (1984) account of tactics, they are situated, resourceful practices through which those without power carve out a sphere of autonomy within the very constraints imposed on them. Understood this way, the "Bad Mother" is not failing to embody an ideal; she stands for survival and

improvisation within a system that was never built to accommodate her. This reframing legitimises the fractured maternal body as the most relevant record of East Asian womanhood in the twenty-first century.

Read together, Breasts and Eggs and Please Look After Mom stage two dialectical responses to the same biopolitical demand that extends to motherhood (Foucault, 1978). Kawakami's (2020) Makiko is hypervisible in the way her body is constantly measured, priced, and improved in the language of the clinic and the market. Shin's (2011) Park So-nyo, on the other hand, is absent. Her body is recovered only after it has disappeared, through the belated testimony of the family it served. However, both texts render maternal "failure" as evidence rather than deficiency. Makiko's fixation on her breasts and So-nyo's disappearance record the cost of holding together two incompatible obligations: the sacrificial, obedient femininity of Confucian domestic ethics (Rosenlee, 2012) and the self-optimising femininity of neoliberal beauty culture (Miller, 2006).

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