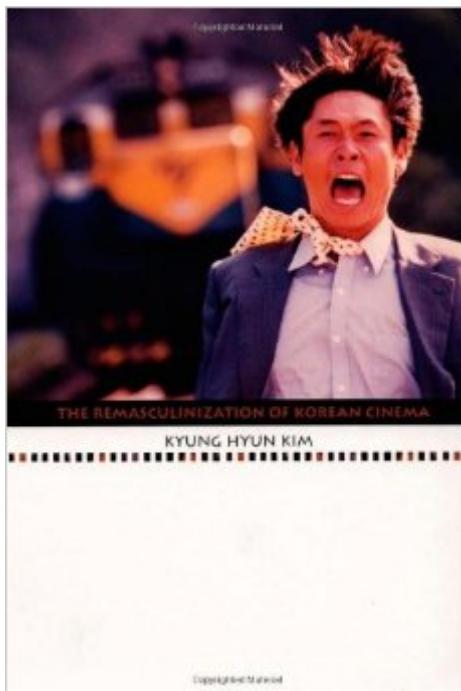


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The Remasculinization Of Korean Cinema (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, And Society)



Synopsis

In one of the first English-language studies of Korean cinema to date, Kyung Hyun Kim shows how the New Korean Cinema of the past quarter century has used the trope of masculinity to mirror the profound sociopolitical changes in the country. Since 1980, South Korea has transformed from an insular, authoritarian culture into a democratic and cosmopolitan society. The transition has fueled anxiety about male identity, and amid this tension, empowerment has been imagined as remasculinization. Kim argues that the brutality and violence ubiquitous in many Korean films is symptomatic of Korea's on-going quest for modernity and a post-authoritarian identity. Kim offers in-depth examinations of more than a dozen of the most representative films produced in Korea since 1980. In the process, he draws on the theories of Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek, Gilles Deleuze, Rey Chow, and Kaja Silverman to follow the historical trajectory of screen representations of Korean men from self-loathing beings who desire to be controlled to subjects who are not only self-sufficient but also capable of destroying others. He discusses a range of movies from art-house films including *To the Starry Island* (1993) and *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996) to higher-grossing, popular films like *Whale Hunting* (1984) and *Shiri* (1999). He considers the work of several Korean auteurs—Park Kwang-su, Jang Sun-woo, and Hong Sang-su. Kim argues that Korean cinema must begin to imagine gender relations that defy the contradictions of sexual repression in order to move beyond such binary struggles as those between the traditional and the modern, or the traumatic and the post-traumatic.

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Customer Reviews

After the testosterone-fueled rebirth of (South) Korean cinema in the '80s and '90s, only in the last few years have serious, critically rigorous books on the subject begun to appear in English in dribs and drabs. Kim Kyung-hyun's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* is the most theoretically sophisticated to appear so far, and is must reading for all crit-theory heads wondering what the hell has been going on in South Korean society in the past few decades--especially on the big screen, which has been dominated by brooding, raging men for quite some time now. Kim's focus is on the works of directors of the New Korean Cinema such as Park Kwang-su, Jang Sun-woo, Hong Sang-soo, Lee Chang-dong and Im Kwon-taek. The book's central argument is that the "master narrative" of the New Korean Cinema as it evolved from the start of the 1980s to the new millennium has been to trace a shift from portrayals of ineffectual males defined by phallic lack and a penchant for masochism to "post-traumatic males" struggling to recuperate a resplendent, emerging subjectivity who are often violent and sadistic. In layman's terms, I guess this means that if you're a Kim Ki-dok protagonist, beating the crap out of your woman is a way of finding or own inner Iron John, or whatever. Overall, I liked this book and found it provocative. It is something of a cliche by now to complain about the misogyny of Korean cinema; it's almost like complaining that the sky is blue. This book offers a close and quite sympathetic examination of WHY so many of these men are misogynistic in the first place, which is a productive, positive approach to a very unproductive, negative problem.

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