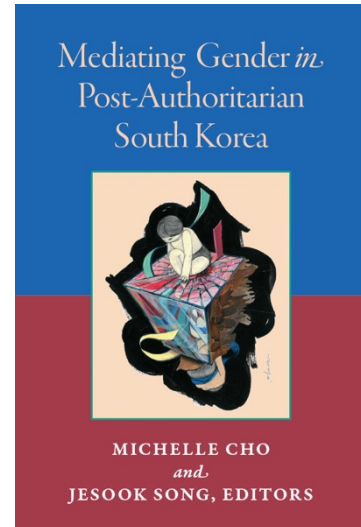


Michelle Cho and Jesook Song (Eds.), **Mediating Gender in Post-Authoritarian South Korea**, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024, 351 pp., \$34.95 (paperback).

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On the night of December 3, 2024, after the former Korean president declared martial law, the people leading the street protests during the impeachment crisis were young women in their 20s and 30s. These women, who took to the streets holding K-pop light sticks, infused the protest culture of the impeachment period with a festive joy, drawing on the same spontaneous passion that had defined K-pop fandom. Korean women in their 20s and 30s are a generation that became conscious during the post-feminism era since the mid-2010s. Having experienced the Gangnam Station murder and the #MeToo movement, they embody the hardship and pain of living as women in Korea. At the same time, they are cultural agents who actively consume popular culture as conscious consumers. Over the past 30 years in Korea, just as active public discourse opposing misogyny has expanded primarily through social media, discourse concerning misogyny itself has been most actively generated and amplified on social media. In the context of dramatically changing gender dynamics and media structures of gender representation, academic analysis and discourse have made insufficient efforts to examine these phenomena.



Michelle Cho and Jesook Song's edited volume, **Mediating Gender in Post-Authoritarian South Korea**, stands as the first comprehensive anthology to dissect the gender discourse that has fervently shaped Korean society over the past 30 years. It delves into the evolving gender dynamics and sensibilities, using popular culture texts as its lens. This timely addition to feminist media studies, gender studies, and Asian studies fills a gap in academic discourse that has often overlooked the intersection of gender politics and media representation, particularly in the East Asian context. The volume, curated by Cho and Song, features 12 essays that explore mediated gender through the theoretical frames of gender as "platform" (p. 3) and "mediation" (p. 5), and their interaction with popular culture texts. While the essays primarily focus on South Korean popular culture and literary texts, the contributors' critical lens extends beyond national or ethnic boundaries, advancing translocal gender politics.

The volume's plural voices, encompassing academic, journalistic, and activist perspectives, provide comprehensive and intentional gateways to the field of feminist studies. Throughout the book, Cho and Song use popular media and public discourse of gender to emphasize entangled gender aspects of social issues in contemporary South Korea. This offers readers a chance to engage with polemical social agendas and discourses. The contributors started preparing this volume between 2016 and 2019, through three workshops and an additional virtual workshop in 2020. As part of the Perspectives on Contemporary Korea series at the University of Michigan Press, this volume offers an essential perspective on gender discourses surrounding media representation.

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The book serves as a refreshed entry point to readers of both critical media studies and gender studies, whether they are trained scholars or new to the fields. Critical media studies scholars can gain insights from this volume, as it introduces a new method for feminist and mediated, as well as remediated, gender perspectives. The authors use the term “platform” broadly to refer not only to digital networking contexts but also to public discourses and spaces where gender works as a crucial prism. Gender studies scholars can acquire cross-disciplinary methods from this volume, as the contributors cover literary and film textual analysis, reception studies, thematic analysis of television drama, comics, hashtags, and discourse analysis.

Throughout its chapters, the volume introduces a broad range of mediated gender concepts and their theoretical implications from cinema studies, literary studies, media studies, communication studies, anthropology, and cultural studies. Cross-disciplinary conversations inevitably create a platform for both public discourse and for academics to reflect on past and contemporary gender dynamics. The book features three main parts that, collectively, disentangle how gender discourse and representation are central to the sociopolitical and aesthetic mediation processes in South Korea. Drawing on Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams’ view on culture as mediation, authors theorize (re)mediation as repurposing existing media to more closely represent the real (p. 14). Following media and gender studies scholar Ani Maitra’s view of identity as a “multiply mediated process” (p. 6), the authors propose analyzing gender as a “mediating assemblage” (p. 6) and as multiple mediating processes through various forms of representations. By defining gender as mediation, the volume positions the gender discourse as the most consumed product in post-authoritarian South Korea, where gender is remediated through different media forms and intensifies its representational and signifying roles through a hypermediation process in the popular consumer economy.

The first section, “Historicization of Media,” comprises four chapters. While the four chapters deal with different media genres, including cinema, post-it notes, online hashtags, and comics, these mediated gender discourses collectively constitute historical moments over the last decades. Chapter 1 focuses on the historical transformation of cinematic representations of gender relations from the 1990s to the 2020s. Feminist activist and scholar Hee-jeong Sohn maps a historical topography of gender intervention, examining the relationships between post-feminism in the 1990s and 2000s and the #MeToo movement of the mid-2010s to the 2020s. She proposes the post-#MeToo period as a “feminist reboot” of South Korea’s post-feminism. Feminist scholar HyeYoung Cho’s take on “intermedial feminism” (p. 56) in chapter 2, which analyzes the interplay between digital (social media) and analog (post-it notes) modes of feminist resistance surrounding the Gangnam Station incident, effectively illustrates the book’s overarching theme of mediated and remediated gender discourses.

An overarching theoretical conception of the second part is “hypermediation” (p. 124), which involves refashioning existing media through media consumerism and consumption. The four chapters in this part examine how gender dynamics are refashioned in various media, including podcasts, novels, TV dramas, and social media. As Song and Cho acknowledge in the Introduction, popular feminism and gender activism evolve around digital platforms and produce mediated and remediated gender representations. The central conception of hypermediation in the second part resonates with frequently circulated concepts—“convergence” or “transmedia”—that refer to media forms’ remediating previous ones or referencing related

ones. For instance, Bohyeong Kim's chapter 5 exemplifies gendered consumerism through the gender dynamics of comedy skits and their audience, podcasts, and the circulation of contested conceptions of female consumers. In chapter 7, author Youngmin Choe observes the iconic figure of Confucian patriarchy, *Saimdang*, as a mediated figure, represented through various media, including paintings, writings, and photographs. At the same time, *Saimdang* herself mediates art forms and media texts, as seen in the TV drama *Saimdang: Memoirs of Colors* (p. 172).

The final part, "Pop Remediation," expands the book's focus on mediation and remediation of gender by illustrating diverse gender identities, relations, and practices in popular media, including TV series, reality shows, digital message boards, and webtoon-adapted cinema. In chapter 9, Hyun Gyung Kim triangulates temporalities with nonnormative gender representations in the popular TV program *Reply 1997* (p. 242). A feminist media scholar, Sunyoung Yang, analyzes instances of gender-bending mediation in the period drama series *Painter of the Wind* (p. 267) and its reception in chapter 11. The last chapter author, film scholar Moonim Baek, investigates inter-male intimacy in *The Merciless* (p. 294) and examines how bromance films offer a BL (Boys Love) fan fiction database open to remediation. The four essays in the final part illustrate a growing trend in feminist media studies that examines diverse gender forms, including non-normative gender identities and queer qualities in popular media texts.

Overall, the book presents a compelling compilation of diverse scholarly voices and styles on mediated, remediated, and hypermediated gender. The volume makes a significant scholarly contribution to several academic fields, including feminist media studies, gender studies, critical cultural studies, and transnational Asian studies. The two editors, Michelle Cho and Jesook Song, knit the twelve essays together in a cohesive manner through the key theoretical conception of "mediated gender." This volume invites deeper theoretical conversation and case studies for what feminist media studies can achieve.