

The Asian Family in Literature and Film: Changing Perceptions in a New Age-East Asia (Volume 1)

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Volume 1 of a two-part series, *The Asian family in literature and film: Changing perceptions on a New-Age East Asia* brings together studies on how the family has been (re)imagined over the 20th and 21st centuries in East Asian literature and film. The chapters collected in this volume examine old traditions and new and developing permutations of the family as depicted by writers, filmmakers, screenwriters of television and web dramas, and webtoon creators in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The wide range of topics, genres, critical approaches, periods and contexts covered in this volume demonstrates the complexity and diversity of a region known as ‘East Asia,’ and make it a useful resource for scholars and students of East Asian literature, film, digital media and entertainment, family and society.

The chapters in this volume are grouped according to themes based, firstly, on a sense of time; notions of ‘old’ and ‘new’ configurations of the family in East Asia are indicated by the opening section, ‘Tradition and Traversal’ and the concluding section, ‘Transitions and Trajectories.’ In between these sections, the chapters are organized according to broad themes of patriarchy, gender and sexuality, and the nation, representing some of the major forces that have shaped depictions of families in East Asian creative arts in the past century. The concluding section of this book thus provides a fitting closing by featuring new trajectories in representations of the East Asian family in emerging creative genres.

‘Tradition and Traversal’ provides readers with a selection of studies covering how tradition – specifically, Confucianism – in contemporary Japanese and Korean societies are explored or revised in film and TV dramas’ representations of the family. The influence of Japanese filmmaker Kore-eda Hirokazu’s work is evident here as Hiromi Sasamoto-Collins, Da Seul Lee, and Joshua Fagan’s chapters analyse his films’ depiction of unconventional families. Known for films such as *Dare mo Shiranai (Nobody Knows, 2004)*, *Soshite Chichi ni Naru (Like Father, Like Son, 2013)*, and *Our Little Sister (2016)*, Kore-eda’s work offers alternative family structures that challenge the traditional Japanese family.

The prolific Korean film, TV drama and webtoon industries have in the past two decades produced numerous interpretations of the Korean family and the roles of its individual members, with the potential of disrupting traditional views. However, Sung-Ae Lee in “Past in the Present: Film and TV Drama, Korean Families, and the Palimpsestic Neo-Confucian Family Schema”

makes a compelling argument that Confucian concepts of the family persist in the new millennium through her analysis of 21st-century Korean films and TV dramas. Similarly, in later sections of this book, studies of Korean reality TV shows on marriage (by Eun Bin Ladner-Seok) and of the ageing father in South Korean webtoons (by June Oh) interrogates the seemingly changed attitudes towards these institutions/figures and finds that traditional, patriarchal values remain.

In relation to this, a recurring theme in this collection is interrogating patriarchal familial structures and traditions in East Asia, as various chapters on the work of Chinese filmmakers Zhang Yimou, Ang Lee, and Yang Lina, on Taiwanese picturebooks for children and on the father-daughter dynamics in Japanese fiction show. It attests to the dominance of Confucianism and its localized manifestations in Chinese, Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese societies well into the 21st century. The contributors focusing on this theme provide insightful gendered analyses that call attention to the persistence of Confucian concepts of gender and the family in contemporary East Asia.

Highlights from this volume include Ariel Schudson's study of a mid-century Korean film, *The Body Confession* (1964), a detailed analysis of the film's upending of traditional family structures and values in a country adapting to post-World War II reality through the melodramatic story of a sex worker who hides her true profession to give her daughters a respectable, middle-class life. "Staging the Family, Upstaging the State: Performances of Jia in Zhang Yimou's *To Live*, *Curse of the Golden Flower*, and *Coming Home*" by Valerie Wee and Susan Ang is a clear, well-argued examination of how the renowned Chinese director in his selected films navigates censorship laws on criticism of the state through cinema. Miao Dou's chapter on the phenomenon of the Chinese novel *The Bad Kids* (2014) and its adaptations into a web series and a computer game deserves praise for its immediate relevance by focusing on transmedia narratives and how they enable audiences (as readers, viewers and gamers) to participate in questioning the state's narrative on family values and on 'good children.'

The Asian family in literature and film: Changing perceptions on a New-Age East Asia does commendable work in compiling new scholarship on the family as (re)imagined by many creative minds in a region that is often seen from outside observers as steeped in tradition and authoritarianism. Its coverage demonstrates the East Asian family and traditions in a state of constant change over the past eighty years, redefined, subverted or reaffirmed by social, economic and political factors both local and global. The categories of 'literature' and 'film' in its title, however, does not quite represent the various genres featured, such as reality TV, state TV specials, web series and webtoons adapted from novels as the rise of digital technology expands the horizons of how people make art. In light of this volume, it will be interesting to see how concepts of the family in East Asian creative arts and media will be shaped in the coming decades of this new millennium.