Based on the Existential Feminism-Interpretation of Kim Ji Young, Born in '82

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Abstract. Kim Ji-Young, Born in '82 is a classic work that portrays the experiences of the main character Kim Ji-Young. The work has been turned into a film and has raised concerns about the situation of women. This paper provides an in-depth interpretation of Kim Ji-Young, Born in '82, from the perspective of existential feminism and uncovers the existentialist connotations embedded in the work. Through the analysis, this paper finds that the female body and the othering strategy of patriarchal society are the situations that women face when they engage in self-transcendence, and these two situations pose a greater threat and limitation to women's becoming a self-made beings. On the other hand, the strength of women's sense of subjectivity is also an important factor affecting women's self-realization, as evidenced by the different fates of the four women in the novel. The central theme of the novel is to answer the question of how women can achieve self-actualization, to which the novel gives two answers: the affirmation of women's existence by society; and the awakening of women themselves. Through the experiences of the heroine, Kim Ji-young, at different stages of her life, the novel shows the unfair treatment of women in different fields and roles in Korean society.

Keywords: Existential Feminism-Interpretation, Kim Ji Young Born in '82, Female.

1. Introduction

Kim Ji-young, Born in 82, is a novel by South Korean writer Cho Nam-joo, which has been made into a film and for which Cho won the Writer of the Year Award in 2017. Through the description of the process of Kim Ji-young's identity from a girl to a wife, the book reveals the various survival difficulties and mental pressures faced by women in society. In the patriarchal society, Kim Ji-young has been oppressed and in a state of self-doubt; she does not know how to break through these difficulties and can only swallow her pride and suffer silently again and again. In the end, Kim Ji-young was domesticated and became a woman who met the role expectations of women in East Asian society.

The wonderful place of Kim Ji-young, born in 82 is that it does not focus on those heroic female characters, does not praise the greatness of women or criticize the injustice of patriarchal society through grand narration, but shows the sour, sweet and bitter of an ordinary woman in a realistic way. The fact that the story of Kim Ji-young is something that every ordinary woman has experienced at some point in her life, so it can strike a wide chord with readers, undoubtedly adds to the book's appeal.

In general, there are few research on Kim Ji-young, born in 82, in the academic circle. Although the existing researchers have interpreted Kim Ji-young, born in 82, from different perspectives, these interpretations are only scratching the surface, not digging deeply into the deep artistic value of artistic works, and even tend to deviate from the text, and the discussion process is not text-centered. It is a problem of "two skins" centered on a universal social phenomenon. On the other hand, the existing research perspective is relatively simple, and the research content stays on the description of women's survival dilemma without an in-depth analysis of the causes of this dilemma.

Cho Nam-joo narrated the philosophy of existentialism through realistic writing and considered the meaning of women's existence. The description of the novel reflects the author's concern and worry about the above issues, which is also the direction that this article wants to interpret. Therefore, this paper will conduct an in-depth interpretation of the text from the perspective of existential

feminism, discuss and explore the living state and existence value of the women in the novel by using the relevant concepts in Beauvoir's existential philosophy, and interpret the ideological value of the work by analyzing the different fates of the characters, in order to interpret the problems neglected in previous studies.

2. The Body: An Inherent Obstacle to Women's Self-actualisation

In the process of realizing their existence, women cannot ignore the inherent attribute of women, which is an unavoidable obstacle to women's self-actualization. For women, the body is an unchangeable physical fact, it is the way the subject exists in the world, and the subject, through the body, experiences the relationship with the object; it can be said that the body as the situation of women's existence has a certain limitation, it is an important factor affecting women's fate [1]. Under the influence of gendered social constructs, women cannot avoid prejudices due to gender in the workplace. The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 published by the World Economic Forum shows that in the field of economic participation, the gender ratio has regressed to 57.8% from 58.1% in 2018, and the average global female salary is 40% lower than that of men. Women are not only defined as the Other due to biological differences but also as mothers in the process of human reproduction, and are attached with culturally significant identities in the process of civilizational development Expectations [2]. This expectation determines that "mother" is not only a simple name or identity but also a cultural symbol with multiple symbolic meanings [3]. In the novel, women's self-development is always affected by the body, which is an obstacle to women's self-transcendence. Kim Ji-young, in the book, is a better woman in the workplace, and the job she holds is a more interesting job for herself, in which she is able to gain promotion, get a sense of achievement, and can support herself by working hard to earn money. However, all of this changes when she becomes pregnant, and Kim Ji-young is not only affected by her productivity after her pregnancy, but she is also criticized by her co-workers. She tries to take parental leave from the company but seems to have trouble saying so, as neither the company nor her colleagues are happy to see it. In the end, she had to quit her job and take up the role of full-time childcare at home because of the birth and childcare issues. The consultant, Dr. Lee Soo-ryun, has the same experience as Kim Ji-young, a brilliant doctor who was forced to quit her job because of the unstable condition of her fetus. Through these two examples, the novel shows the trouble that the body brings to women. Women's natural ability to bear children becomes an obstacle for women, which makes them have to suspend or give up the chance of self-realization, which is a big blow to women, making them feel angry and helpless.

Although a woman's body is a limitation for them, it does not serve as a basis for gender hierarchy and cannot be used to show that a woman must be a being of the Other [4]. On the contrary, the body can only exist as situated in action and self-choice, the body can only be informed of its value in specific social situations, and the body itself only has the value that the survivor assigns to it [4]. In other words, the extent to which the body influences women's self-realization actually depends on society as a whole since the relationship between procreation and life is regulated by nature in the case of animals, whereas in the case of women, this relationship changes in response to society [4].

The reason why the body is an inherent obstacle for women to achieve transcendence is not only because it indicates certain limitations of women's personal ability biologically but also because women have the ability to reproduce. However, the value and rights of reproduction are not determined by women, resulting in fertility becoming a responsibility that women cannot get rid of. Women who do not give birth or do not give birth will be subjected to certain social pressure. Kim Ji-young's physical condition has concerned the elders after marriage; they hope to hear the good news that Kim Ji-young is pregnant with a child, but on the contrary, they begin to suspect that Kim Ji-young's body may have a problem. The attitude of the elders, Kim Ji-young's husband also did not understand his wife's difficulties; after the pressure of the elders, Zheng Daixian also hoped that his wife could have a child. When Kim Ji-young heard her husband's attitude about having a child was so light, her overwhelming emotion exploded:

"Didn't you tell me not to keep thinking about losing? I will probably lose my youth, my health, my job, my social connections such as colleagues and friends, my life plans, my future dreams, etc., because of having a baby, and that's why I only see what I've lost, but what about you? What will you lose?" [5]

After marriage, both elders and husbands view reproduction as a primary responsibility in a woman's life rather than as a means of choice, and the compulsion to assume motherhood reflects the fact that society still regards women as a means of reproduction at ease rather than as subjects for themselves. Pregnancy and childbirth are women's subservience to the species, Women should be free to choose the right time to give birth, but social customs do not allow this to happen and increase the burden on women: she needs to struggle to balance the contradiction between work and childbirth [6].

It is clear that the author intends to reveal this particular dilemma of women by depicting Kim Ji Young's pregnancy and childbirth after her marriage and to emphasize that women's situation is more difficult than men's. On the other hand, the author also shows the Korean family as an example of a woman who has to struggle to balance work and childbirth. On the other hand, the author also criticizes society's neglect of women's need for self-actualization by demonstrating the Korean family's attitude towards women's childbearing. The Korean society as a whole regards the performance of motherhood as a matter of course rather than a predicament, and instead of respecting and supporting these women who have sacrificed their own careers, they call them "mummy bugs" and consider them to be subordinate to men. They do not respect and support these women who have sacrificed their careers. It can be seen that the body, as female weakness, is further magnified by the patriarchal tradition, but society as a whole does not face up to this dilemma and fails to recognize the adverse effects of this dilemma on women's self-transcendence. Society should have given more support and attention to women's physical weaknesses so that women could be in a similar situation as men, alleviating women's burdens and helping women to achieve self-transcendence, but they have not done so, instead maintaining the mindset of the othering of women and restricting their self-transcendence.

3. Constructed Women: Alienation Strategies in Patriarchal Society

Women not only have to face the limitations of the body but also have to break through all the barriers under the patriarchal civilization, "Women are not born but are formed later in life", women's dependence and intrinsicity are in fact, the product of the patriarchal system, and the women become the Other cannot be separated from the shaping of the women by the patriarchal civilization [6]. The relationship between men and women is the most natural one, characterized by mutuality, where each person is his or her own subject and the Other of others [5]. However, patriarchal societies absolutize the othering status of women through a series of strategies, "the reference that defines and distinguishes women is male, whereas the reference that defines and distinguishes men is not female" [7]. This abolition of mutuality allows women to live in a male-constructed world, and women become an "Absolute Other".

Wollstonecraft, in his book A Feminist Defence, suggests that one of the reasons for women's "weak and unfortunate condition" is the "faulty system of education" [8]. The "education system," in this case, refers to the patriarchal society's training of women. In the process of a woman's growth, the deepest influence on her is the family she lives in, and the family is a bondage that women cannot get rid of. The influence of the family on women is mainly reflected in the three types of families: the family of origin, the married family, and the husband's family, and the novel mainly describes the influence of the family of origin on women. Kim Ji Young lives in an ordinary civil servant's family. Also, in a family that is heavily influenced by patriarchal thinking, Kim Ji Young and her sister Kim Eun Young have been treated differently from their younger brother since they were young, the best things in the house are given to their younger brother in priority, and they themselves can only share the same thing with their older sister, Kim Ji Young occasionally feels aggrieved, but she has no

choice but to get used to it and take the initiative to rationalise this behavior. Kim Eun-young had even blamed her mother for favoring her younger brother, exclaiming, "What youngest, I think it's because he's the son!" Not only that, but Kim Ji Young's mother had an abortion to satisfy her grandmother's desire for her to have a boy, leaving Kim Ji Young with a brother five years younger than herself. In addition, her mother tells Kim Ji Young about her experiences of earning money for her brother's education and now sacrificing her ideals for her family, experiences that make the young Kim Ji Young feel incredulous and a little self-condemned. Confucianism was used as a philosophy of governance during the Joseon Dynasty, creating perceived norms such as male superiority and female inferiority and the way of the three subordinates, in which women were subordinate to men [9]. Moreover, in order to follow Confucianism, the family system of first-born son inheritance was clarified, after which the status of men became higher and higher, and the first-born son had the right to inherit the family's property, while women's rights became weaker and weaker until they lost the right to inherit the property altogether, which brought about the proliferation of patriarchal thinking in the family and extended to the family. Kim Ji-young's family is a traditional East Asian family that treats women as the other, and her family's encounters subconsciously convey the message that women are a dependent beings, that the value of women's existence is to serve men, that men are superior to women, and that men are the primary and women are the secondary.

The behavior of othering is also seen at school. When Kim Ji-young was in primary school, she had a conflict with a male classmate. After dealing with the conflict, the teacher turned around and told Kim that the boy's behavior of bullying her was actually a sign of liking her, which made Kim Ji-young feel puzzled:Bullying me means liking me? Shouldn't you be more gentle and considerate when you like someone? The teacher's words to Kim Ji-young reflect the teachers' and society's inherent understanding of femininity. Passivity as a "feminine" woman's trait has become the consensus of society, so that this trait develops in women from childhood, and this trait has become the destiny that is imposed on women by the teachers and society [6]. Male initiative, boldness and the use of violence are encouraged as his "inherent" characteristics and interests, even if he offends others, but the opposite is true in the case of women, and this way of constructing gender is essentially detrimental to the establishment of women's subjectivity.

The construction of women in patriarchal societies is hidden in social norms, both formal and informal, which subordinate women by treating men and women differently. These social norms, which are unfair to women, are presented several times in the novel, firstly, when Kim Ji-young goes to school, the social norms of the school always give priority to male students, important positions are always held by male students, and the dress code of the school does not take into account the difficulties of women; secondly, Kim Ji-young encounters the process of looking for a job and working in a job, where Kim Ji-young's older sister has a perfect curriculum vitae, but the company thinks that a male student will be the head of the family and that a woman is too smart for her own good. The company refuses to hire her on the grounds that a male student will become the head of the family and that a woman is too smart for the company. In the course of her work, she discovers that almost all managers are men, and there are no female supervisors to be found. When Kim Ji-young enters the workplace, the president of the company doesn't use competence as the main criterion in setting up the planning team, and instead refuses to let Kim Ji-young join the team because she is a woman, and the president is afraid that Kim Ji-young's marriage and child-rearing life will interfere with her work. But in fact, Kim Ji Young was not married and did not have children at that time, does it mean that if a woman is not married or does not have children, her chances of advancement will be reduced? Overall, these events together reflect a stable social structure in which men have more opportunities, men have a higher status than women, men are the rulers and have the power to make rules in their favour, and women are the ruled, and there is no reflection of women's will and aspirations in the social norms, and they can only unconditionally obey the norms set by men.

Finally, the objectification of women is a more commonly used strategy in patriarchy, and the novel describes two main types of objectification, behavioural and discursive. Behavioural objectification is mainly reflected in men's gazing, touching and bullying of women's bodies. When

Kim Ji-young was in high school, she encountered a lot of perverted males on public transport, who often touched women's bodies on buses or subways, either inadvertently or on purpose. The eyes of some older brothers in cram schools, churches, and tutors would occasionally stare at female students' collars and between their shirt buttons. On campus, male teachers sexually harass female students in the name of checking uniform name tags. Some female students who need to work outside the home are also sexually harassed by their bosses or customers in various guises. Discursive objectification occurs in the case of Kim Ji-young, who was denigrated by her senior when she was in college for having a past relationship, and who privately said, "Ugh, forget it, who wants to eat gum that's been chewed?" This statement not only reflects the senior's thinking of objectifying women, but more importantly, the senior does not recognise women's subjectivity and treats women as objects dependent on men, so that once a woman is abandoned by a man, she becomes worthless, while men, on the other hand, are not criticised for failing in their relationships. Another incident occurs at a departmental dinner, where the minister keeps telling Kim Ji-young yellow jokes that have no words, and keeps persuading her to drink, without any consideration for Kim Ji-young's feelings. In addition, in the era of internet terms, new words that degrade women, such as "daejang girl"(refers to stay-at-home mom contemptuously), have appeared on the internet. These two objectifying behaviors reflect the lack of women's dominance and voice, as well as the true reflection of women's status. The basic principle of respecting women is not effectively practiced in society, and women's self-perception is ignored because women's status is not enough for men to realize that they need to be respected and that they are just a tool in the men's side.

Through the meticulous portrayal of Kim Ji-young's personal life, the author depicts a large prison constructed by a patriarchal society, a prison that firmly traps women in the position of the Other. Whether it is the unfair treatment of women in the workplace that suppresses their personal development, or the "coloured glasses" that society places on full-time wives, it is a manifestation of sexism in Korean society [10]. The whole country applies different strategies in the process of socialisation and social interaction so that women's whole life is surrounded by an environment of othering activities. As a result, women are in a state of contradiction, anxiety and uncertainty, because on the one hand, they want to be subjects and pursue their own freedom, but on the other hand, they find that they are not in control of the world, rather they are controlled by the world, and women become a constructed self-existence, an objectified individual. They are like Marx's exploited and oppressed proletarian labourers, not only are they faced with a situation in which it is difficult for them to achieve self-transcendence, but also their value is conferred on them by men, "they must mould themselves according to a man's dream in order to gain value" [5]. At any moment, they may be asked to make sacrifices as if they were a "cost" to men, and then they are discarded, their chances of development completely erased, and they become an alienated beings.

4. Conclusion

The deepest artistic value of the work "Kim Ji-young, Born in 82" is to express the meaning of existentialism through the story of a minor character, and this ideological value is exactly what modern urban women need. Because in the individualized society, the sense of loneliness and anxiety of the individual becomes more and more prominent, and in the face of the absurd world, people begin to think about the meaning of their own existence. This paper examines the limitations imposed on women by their bodies and the reality of women's forced othering under the perspective of existentialism. For women, the suppression and alienation of a patriarchal society is more serious than that of men, and such a social reality becomes a limitation for women to transcend themselves, and their sense of helplessness, meaninglessness, and anxiety become more intense.

The author, standing from the perspective of an ordinary woman, portrays a patriarchal society full of repression for women through popular and detailed life-like descriptions. In this way, the author clearly wants to remind and inspire every woman in the city that although the productivity of the society is developing and Korea is already a developed country, it does not mean that the situation of

women has fundamentally changed, and the othering of women by the society is still pervasive and pervasive. Society should take responsibility for this and should give women a chance to achieve transcendence and elevate their status. Women should also polish their eyes and correctly understand their own situation. At the same time, every woman should not forget her own power. Only when every woman learns to construct her own subjectivity and maintains her own sense of subjectivity can the women's community truly move towards self-activity and emancipation.

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