The Novels of the 1970s to the 1980s and Feminism*

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1. Introduction

In the end of the 1980s, Korean Literature focused on feminist literary criticism. Introduced to Korea at an extraordinary pace by translated books and domestic scholars, feminist literary criticism, which can be divided into gynocriticism and feminist criticism, brought to Korea the concepts of gender, gender ideology, femininity, and feminism. These concepts became meaningful in the period, supported by resistant spirits popular in Korea. Now, at the end of the 1990s, feminist literary critics have positively accepted foreign theories and tried to apply new interpretations to Korean literature, based on the theories.

The reasons why feminist literary criticism has become popular are as follows: First, feminism and feminist literary criticism interest many people in various fields such as literary movement activists, scholars of foreign literature, and feminists. Second, women's movements could be

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* This essay is a revised version of 조남현, "1970-80년대 소설과 여성 의식", "韓國文學研究" 19집, 동국대학교 한국문학연구소, 1997 (Cho Nam-hyeon, "The Novels of the 1970s to the 1980s and Feminism", Korean Literature Research the 19th Series, Dongguk University Korean Literature Research Institute, 1997)

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linked to other movements accompanied by 'the resistant spirits,'
which were a trend of the 1980s. Third, young women writers have
led the field of Korean novels in the 1990s, both in quantity and
quality, whether or not you view the phenomenon as positive.

Feminist literary criticism does not have a special approach to
literary works which are written by women writers or those that
represent feminism. Although feminist literature depends on the
historical background of each country, practitioners of feminist literary
criticism can be divided into three groups: sociofeminists,
psychofeminists, and semiofeminists. Also, in the U.S., Afro-American
feminist literature is focused on, and Marxism feminist literary
criticism gains more attention in the underdeveloped countries than in
the developed countries. Elaine Showalter divided feminist literature
into three phases according to its unique developing processes: first,
the feminine phase where women writers imitate men writers leading
cultural movements, second, the femininst phase where they advocate
women's value and rights against the value and standards of
dominating culture, and third, the female phase where they focus on
women's inner selves. These developing processes can be found in
Korea as well as in England. In the 1930s when feminist literature
appeared as a trend, femininity or women's movements were ideological
and struggling, connected to anti-colonial and socialist movements.
Also, in Korea, feminist literature was actualized as connected to
anti-colonial movements, anti-dictatorial movements, and labor
movements, while basically being against androcentrism or the
established systems supported by it.

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2. A Profile of Feminism of the 1970s through the 1980s

The beginning of the 1990s is considered as a period when young women writers lead the field of novels. Their works become gynocentric enough to be said that their writing is directly connected to femininity. They usually make women the leading characters regardless of their specific objective of writing. We are often told that the leading characters try to escape the established gender ideology, or fight against it, whether they are described as married or not. Although we could see the gender ideology in commotion in the 1980s, the femininity is revealed more positively in the 1990s than in the 1980s. It is no exaggeration that ‘woman-as-sign’ as well as women as writers controls the field of novels in the first half of the 1990s. Not only the feminism of freedom for the equality of men and women, but also the radical feminism for the superiority of women appears. Many men writers and theorists protect themselves, calling this phenomenon ‘the destruction of the center’ or ‘the rebellion of the surroundings.’ Also, people with the established gender ideology think that the prevalence of femininity and the occurrence of feminism are transient phenomena. But the equality of the sexes should be thought as inevitable. Like other phenomena, the prevalence of feminism is the effect of causes accumulated for a long time.

The 1990s of Korea is described as a period when democratization and industrialization are in harmony. The period from the 1960s to the 1980s is defined as a period of industrialization without democratization, or a period of democratization without industrialization. When it comes to the 1990s, the industrialization strongly changes the society, accelerating globalization as well as urbanization, rationalization and individualization. The industrialization which was promoted in the 1960s and actualized in the 1970s has greatly changed
the social systems, organizations, social classes and generations. Accordingly, the structure of inequality between the sexes has been naturally changed to that of equality.

Especially, in Korea, there were many social changes through the acceleration of the industrialization of the '80s following the '70s. The urbanization accompanied by the industrialization brought the breakdown of the family system and the reorganization of the social structure and classes. With the change of the large family system to the nuclear family system, the generalization of higher education, and economic growth, the relationship between the sexes based on the established femininity and masculinity has come to change. Besides, in the 1990s, with the opening of a truly democratic society, the structure and customs of inequality between sexes came to face their limits. The patriarchal system was shaken, and the divorce rate has been rapidly increased by the expansion of the women's rights.

Some scholars think that the breakdown of the large family system and the generalization of the nuclear family are caused by industrialization. A family under the nuclear family system is a place where 'children are raised according to social rules and value systems' and 'given a secure emotional environment.'

Although this basic point of view of a family seems to work, a confusion of roles between a husband and a wife appears. Especially when women with higher education who insist on the importance of self-accomplishment get married, they come to face the conflict of roles.

The equality between the sexes naturally came about as the industrialization and democratization gave Koreans unprecedented freedom and equality. And through industrialization and democrati-

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zation, at least half of the Korean people now think of themselves as belonging to the middle class.

In the 1980s, there was a sudden increase in the number of people who thought that they belonged to the middle class. In fact, it is not true that the 80 percent of all Koreans belonged to the middle class. The gap between the subjective status and the objective status means that Koreans had difficulty identifying themselves. The Koreans tended to exaggerate their social status because of the rapid economic development.

And most of the people who thought themselves as belonging to the middle class were not mature enough to be citizens yet, even if they managed to break the traditional ways of thinking belonging to the working class. Also, although they were eager to improve their social status, overcoming the persistent poverty, their institutionalized means to reach their goal could not fully internalize the self-regulating ethics and rules. Besides, they did not establish the clear values which would properly regulate their selfish and materialistic desire.3

In the 1980s, the number of people belonging to the middle class of Korea increased, but they were still poor at their class and cultural functions. This phenomenon also applied to feminism during the period. That is, women failed to internalize their own ethics and rules even if it seemed that the equality between the sexes and the improvement of women's rights were established.

Many scholars think that feminism depends on having a middle class basis. The improvement of women's rights, the breakdown of the inequality between the sexes and the success of feminism imply that many women have been included in the middle class.

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3 Im Hae-sup, "The Consciousness of the Middle Class, Its True and False Image", Sindonga, 1983 4, p 80
Although capitalism matured, democratization was not completed in the 1980s. The success of feminism in a society of mature capitalism need the following conditions. First, the gender ideology of masculinity and feminity should not be thought of as fixed. Basically, what is called masculinity and feminity continue to change. Second, the meaning of gender in capitalism is related to the family structure and the division of labor. Third, the border between an economical category and a political category are not exclusive or clear. In the 1990s, these conditions have been fulfilled in Korea. Yet there are still some misunderstandings of feminism and opposition against it.

3. Feminism Reflected in the Novels of the 1970s through the 1980s

Many women writers in the 1970s through the 1980s wrote, recognizing that the structure of inequality between the sexes were breaking down. We can see the reality of a period through novels, although it is not true that novels exists only for reflecting reality. In the short novels written by the important writers of the period such as Pak Wan-seo, Kim Man-ok, Seo Yeong-eun, Yun Jeong-mo, Oh Jeong-hee, Yi Sun, Kang Seok-kyeong, and Kim Hyang-suk, we can see the essence of feminity and the direction of the women's movement. In their works, we can guess the dimension of feminism of the period.

In Excerpt from a Magnolia (Munhaksasang, 1975, 5), Oh Jeong-hee describes a woman artist suffering from the separation from her husband. The woman artist, 'Y', is obsessed with drawing magnolias. In this novel, a magnolia unusually symbolizes the regret of her

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4 Michele Barrett, op cit, p 251
mother, an exorcist, who was abandoned by her husband and died calling forth all the ghosts she knew. 'T' saw a vision of a magnolia in the white light from her ashes. Her mother's dramatic death frightened her father and stepmother. Her mother dramatized the sadness of an abandoned woman by death.

There is a Korean proverb that misfortunes are handed down through the generations. Accordingly, 'T' separates from her husband, leaving her daughter in her husband's home.

I was helplessly separated from my husband. I would have long slumbers of despair, or when I drank, I would sing 'Butterfly! Butterfly!' Let's go to the green mountains,' and cry calling my daughter's name. I knew these things. But I couldn't help it (p. 101)

Oh Jeong-hee tries to concentrate not on Korean women's peculiar attitude of enduring pain without facing a problem positively, but on the women's strength in internalizing great pain or sadness. When 'T' hears that her husband had an affair with another woman, 'T' responds to it in opposition to her own feelings.

As other women did when their husbands had an affair with another woman, I wanted to break her mirror with her chamber pot, tear the blankets into pieces, and pull her hair. But, instead, I waited for him in a dark street corner, every night that he didn't return home. When it rained, I would stand in the street until dawn, spinning my umbrella like a pinwheel. Then, my mother visited me in the early mornings, looking fresh as if she were washed. (pp. 102-103)

The writer seems to describe the heroine as a traditional woman. We can say that the writer holds a positive view of the women of the Yi dynasty. In comparison with the heroine's mother who died showing her regret horribly, the heroine is passive although rational.
‘I’ internalizes the pain from the separation with her husband and her husband’s infidelity. Although ‘I’ firmly refuses her husband’s proposal of reunion, she passively shows her opinion, sacrificing herself. The writer considers femininity as ‘indefinite patience’ and ‘internalization of pain.’ Also, it is alluded that women are better at being patient and internalization than men.

_Slices of Raw Pomfret_ (Hyundaemunhak, 1929, 10) by Yi Sun is the second of an 8-novel series. The heroine’s father-in-law goes bankrupt in his business of fishing boats, so her husband gets a job with the trading company, giving up going to graduate school. And she, an English teacher of a middle school, aggressively earns money by giving private lessons. This novel shows how a family comes to prosper again by the efforts of eight family members. In this process, when the father goes bankrupt, he is criticized by the family members for his incompetence. He is also criticized for his unsuitable labor when the family prospers again. Judging from the fact that the family members criticizes the father, using words such as dignity and pride, not all of them are greed-driven. This novel is based on a father’s incompetence and the downfall of patriarchy. The femininity that the novel’s ‘I’ represents replaces the masculinity of the father-in-law and mother-in-law. ‘I’ is not reluctant in scolding women, usually insisting that “women’s stupidity makes the equality of sexes more difficult than men’s prejudice” and “a woman should do her best to choose a good husband,” regardless of her academic career. ‘I’ accepts the customs of the inequality of sexes without resistance. Although ‘I’ went to college, her dreams were small. ‘I’ wanted to move to a bigger house with a modern kitchen and toilet.

I will buy a big house with a lawn of grass. I will buy a refrigerator and a telephone. I will upgrade my house. Isn’t it my house after all? If it was downgraded of itself, it will be upgraded of itself. What else was there to do? I was full of fight (p 51)
There is reversal in the last part of the novel. The promising husband fails to get a promotion, and instead goes to graduate school as he had hoped in the beginning. When 'I' is worried, the father-in-law and brothers-in-law tell her not to worry because there are many men in the family. Recognizing that "we still have our own strength even after exhaustion," and "how wonderful it is to be not an I but a we? Strength doesn't come down from above but soars from the bottom" (p 64), 'I' is willing to help the family to prosper. 'I' is imbued with the vulgarity of the 1970s when the whole country was excited by the idea that the country must be founded on a successful economy. 'I', a teacher and a newlywed, found her 'I' after the first ordeal and found 'we' after the second ordeal. Therefore, this novel tells us not about the equality of the sexes, but rather the harmony and congruity of the sexes. For the purpose of a prosperous family, there is no room for the issue of gender ideology. 'I' shows vitality, not an exclusive femininity.

Our Children (Munyejungang, 1979, winter), the fourth installment of the series entitled Son, also talks about happiness and ends in praise of the plain and simple life. Shin Jeong-hye, a teacher, whose husband is a deputy manager of a conglomerate, does not have any children, so she becomes interested in increasing her wealth. She buys a big house and rents it out. She always brags of her wealth and husband, which causes her colleagues to dislike her. She belittles the couple that rents her house, who used to be the chef and a waitress of a coffee shop, and have both been divorced before. The couple makes a lot of money running a small restaurant specializing in cold noodles. One day, Jeong-hye hears that her tenants are moving to a good neighborhood like Banpo, and has the following thoughts:
The curiosity and the slight contempt she had about the couple changed into anger just that morning. How dare they have a dream, making and selling cheap cold noodles! Moreover, the quality and quantity of their dream did not differ at all from that of Jeong-hye’s. She became hysterical, even postponing her plans to have a baby (p. 123).

The novel, which thoroughly investigates the snobbery of educated people that less educated people should be less happy, has an interesting ending. When the pregnant tenant says how happy she is, Jeong-hye becomes angry and tells her to move out. In the meantime, Jeong-hye’s husband is not promoted and is transferred to a local branch, frustrating their desire to belong to the upper classes.

*Slices of Raw Pomfret* and *Our Children* insist that money is necessary for happiness and shows that happiness cannot be achieved by people comparing themselves with others. Also, *Our Children* emphasizes that happiness can be achieved by a plain and simple life. In the novel, feminism starts with accepting worldly values such as everyday life, money, and children. The writer is not interested in the inequality of the sexes nor the women’s struggles against men. In her novel, women try to live well with their husband and children, and want to belong to the middle or upper classes instead of the lower classes. The novel shows that feminism is not an important issue in the situations where it is difficult to make ends meet, and where people are very busy making money and successful careers.

In *Mother’s Stake* (*Munhaksasang*, 1979, 11) by Pak Wan-seo, ‘I’ plays a role of an observer, observing and describing her mother’s life in detail, while acting in the important situations in the novel. Her mother is described as a confusing combination of inconsistency, arrogance, and high motivation. Although she is busy making both ends meet by her needlework, she wants to be a modern woman, be treated as an elegant woman, and live downtown in Seoul. Also, like
other Korean mothers, she worships her son. This sort of religion is a kind of gender ideology for Korean mothers. Her mother always tells her to be a modern woman. Her mother would focus on appearance, or concentrate on thought, saying that modern women study so much, know every principle in the world, and can do anything they want to do. Her mother does not allow her daughter to play with needles although she herself earns a living by needlework. Besides, she thinks that her daughter should not make a living by handicraft, singing songs, or good looks. Her view is very advanced in the light of the fact that she lived in the 1950s. In addition, she habitually calls ill-behaved neighbors 'low class people'. It is not because she is really superior to them, but because she feels inferior when she thinks she cannot belong to the middle or high classes. Her preoccupation with 'low class people' comes from a combination of her hardships in playing a role of the father as well as that of the mother in the family with her desire to live well. 'I' is always aware of "a conflict between a very humble appearance and an absurdly high ideal, vulgar vanity in contradiction to decent thought, and the everlasting consciousness of not living in the center of Seoul". So those became her stakes to which she was forever tied down. The femininity of her mother replaces the masculinity of a father. Moreover, the femininity could expand to a desire to be a decent or a strong being.

In Pak Wan-seo's A Sketch (Soseolmunhak, 1983, 9), the narrator critically describes her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law is a figure of gynecocracy completely controlling her son and her husband. She likes flowers to be in full bloom, so she gives nutrients to her five hundred potted plants to keep them in full bloom. But 'I' thinks that such behavior is like giving poison to the plants, because keeping flowers always in full bloom is against nature's cycle. Also, the mother-in-law makes her husband dress "to look like an active old actor or singer.
who is still loved and respected" instead of a retired banker, which is what he is. She is described as aiming for strength, brightness and abundance. The son always does what his mother wants him to do, so he went to a law school and studied for the civil service examination according to his mother's wishes. In this novel, 'T' thinks that women should keep some femininity, because women cannot completely replace masculinity. In the end of the novel, the daughter-in-law starts to be opposed to her mother-in-law's autocracy. Soothing her husband when he is hurt by his mother, she tries to change the relationship between him and his mother. It means that one femininity is against the other. That is, on the one hand, she thinks that femininity should cooperate with masculinity, and on the other hand, her mother-in-law thinks that femininity should control masculinity. In this novel and her novels of the 1990s, Pak Wan-seo insists that real feminism can be completed only after the inconsistency and the irrationality of femininity are eradicated.5

In You, Who Are Far Away (Hangukmunhak, 1983, 5) by Seo Yeong-eun, the heroine Mun-ja is described as an extraordinary person. Although she appears to be below average, she is a really extraordinary person, full of patience. Working for a publishing company for over ten years, she has a difficult time with her colleagues, but she silently endures it "She was never angry with any severe hardships, nor did she regret or avoid them." (p. 21) First, the main setting of the novel is her workplace, the publishing company, but it later changes to her room. Even if both places show her life of misery and sorrow, her extraordinariness can be seen better in the latter setting. She devotedly loves Han-su, who used to be the chief of a mining station, but is now bankrupt from a failed business...

5 Cho Nam-hyeon, "Pak Wan-seo's Novels and the Change of Feminism", *Pens and Literature*, 1996 spring, pp 87-88
venture. Now he depends on her. He is not described as wicked, but he is selfish. At any rate, he brings only agony to her and he functions as a sort of tool to measure how much patience she has. In the meantime, "whenever he hurts her like a merciless knife, she is like an immortal camel that draws everlasting power from within to endure continuously loaded cargos." (p. 22) She gives Han-su anything he demands. They even have a child who is being raised by her relative, but she does not miss the child. She believes that "agonies could be ladders that lead you to heaven," and she tries to learn from the example of Genghis Khan who abandoned his sons for a cause. At last, the writer comes to consecrate Mun-ja into a sort of saint from the woman's point of view: "Because Han-su is dull and selfish, he cannot see a whole room full of golden light, hear the songs of silence, nor even feel with his fingers the fragrance of ripe fruits when he touches her body." (p. 26) Like this, the more Mun-ja is made sacred, the more Han-su is secularized.

In the end of the novel, when she sees him go away with the money that she borrowed from her aunt, she considers Han-su God's light, which is fading to a higher place to give her severer agonies. She loses consciousness after she looks for a cheaper room all day, goes back home, and drinks two bottles of soju. When she recovers her consciousness, she swears, "I'll have my revenge on him by loving him completely, and I'll show him that I can live here with what I've got now." In this, she is horrifying even if she says that she will sacrifice herself.

Seo Yeong-eun thinks that women are patient, sacrificial, and pure. At any rate, she considers that the depth of women's inner world is indefinite. This novel is important in investigating how much a woman can indefinitely endure her hardships. The writer alludes that women's mental stature is higher than men's. She also agrees with the
ideology that masculinity essentially reflects the character of assaulter and femininity, that of victim. Besides, she insists that masculinity is selfish, and femininity is self-sacrificing.

In *A Room in Water* (*Munhaksasang*, 1984, 9) by Kang Seok-kyeong, the heroine Hee-su is described as a typical housewife who just focuses on managing her household. She has “a routine life, making three meals a day, which is her discolored duty or responsibility.” Her husband who works for an advertising company sometimes does not come home at all in order to do unfinished work in a motel, and often goes on business trips. One day, when Soon-ok, her friend, talks about a woman who had an affair because of her workaholic husband, Hee-su makes an unexpected response, saying that “a woman, even a housewife, can be distressed and get lost as a human being, and her infidelity can be considered a way of self-assertion, not just for sensual pleasures” (p. 162). The writer calls our attention to the instinct for escape from a routine life and the temptations for unfaithfulness hidden deeply in the inner mind of a typical woman who lives a faithful life, obeying the traditional gender ideology.

She seemed to think so once in a while. Although Hee-soo knew that she and her husband loved each other, there was an empty space in her mind where whirlwinds would blow. Then she felt like breaking her enclosure. But was she self-assertive enough to have an affair as a way of self-assertion? She was not sure.

Clearly, this drive of self-destruction belongs to human nature rather than the nature of femininity. While Seo Yeong-eun tries to sublimate femininity in her work, Kang Seok-kyeong frankly writes about the world of drive and instinct in femininity.

In *Nothing Special Happening at Home* by Kim Man-ok, the characters include a mother and her son, who is a student who participated in
demonstrations against the government. Her son goes into the army, and his friend asks her for help. She has been criticised by her husband for taking sides with dissident students, but she is not described as knowing well the political causes that the students are demonstrating for, nor does she blindly identifies her destiny with her son’s like other Korean mothers. I think that it is wrong for television and newspapers to regard the students anti-American or pro-Communist, which is the reason why she takes sides with her son and the students. At the end of the novel, her son’s friend, wanted by the police for participating in demonstrations, makes his escape as she wanted in her heart.

There is one more novel that deals with the relationship between a mother and her son, by Yun Jeong-mo, entitled Mother. In this short novel, a widow is proud of her son who studies law in Seoul National University. But he is put in jail for his demonstrations against the government. At first, she is angry with him and does not visit his son although her son’s friend begs her to do so, but she later decides to visit him. Her husband died in the Vietnam War many years ago. At that time, her father-in-law gave his grandson the Thousand-Character Text, and her a seed for a plant. The grandfather wanted his grandson to think about ‘bigger things’ and affirm patriarchy. When the son comes home for the first time during vacation after entering university, he says, “Mom, when I lived with you, I only saw you having a difficult time, but when I went to Seoul, I could see other people having a difficult time too.” (p. 274) In the 1980s through the 1990s, there are many other novels which deal with the relationship between a student political activist and his mother. As shown particularly well through the novel of Yun Jeong-mo, it is certain that the relationship between a mother and her son is beyond doctrines or gender ideology.
Denial (Sujeong, 1984) by Kim Man-ok denies the existence of the heroine's inner world. The heroine Kim Yeong-ja thinks that she is refined in every respect, except for her name. She becomes angry with the writer of the best seller Yeong-ja's Heyday because the title of the novel includes her name. She graduated from a good college and lives in a well-known neighborhood of Gangnam with her husband, a graduate of Seoul National University and a director of a conglomerate. She also has a son and a daughter. Every thing was perfect for her. So, she thought that it was natural for her son to be good at his studies. However, he fails the college entrance examination and she is humiliated for the first time in her life. Her son "didn't want to see such a mom and was sick of her order and harmony" (p. 178). Finally, he drops her favorite plant from the eleventh floor and runs away from home. The writer describes the son's death by a way of Voraus deuthung. One day, the mother feels uneasy to find every metal accessory attached to her clothing or handbags turned blue. While the son was entering the apartment through the window to avoid his mother's eyes when opening the door, he falls to his death. Although this accident seems to be unrealistic, it reveals how much the mother discomfits her son, emphasizing order, harmony, the importance of placing first, and so on. There are many people who think that the quality of their life is improved in the industrialized and economically developed country. The mother is also under a misapprehension that the quality of her life is improved, concentrating on order, harmony, or placing first. She is similar to the mother-in-law in Sketch by Pak Wan-seo. Kim Man-ok describes mothers who we can easily meet in our society, describing one positively in Nothing Happening at Home and the other negatively in Denial.

A Glass Keeper (Foreign Literature, 1986 Summer) by Kim Hyang-suk describes the delicate relationship of women whose husbands hold
different positions in the same company, focusing on the atmosphere of their gatherings. There are no male characters in the novel. The women in the novel do not even have names. Perhaps the writer does not give their names intentionally to emphasize that the women are under the wings of their husbands. Recognizing the importance of home life, the company which their husbands work for decides that the last Saturday of each month is to be 'the day spent at home.' The company measures the employee's abilities not only as a worker but also as a husband and father. So the wives are always careful not to bring trouble to their husbands. Among the wives, the wife of the head of the office is considered the example of a good wife because she is always kind, modest, diligent, and speaks well of others. It is described that "she always tries to be a model wife, adapting herself to the situation where a wife's virtue is considered as her husband's ability." But when alone, she is not the same. The wife of the head of the machine arrangements section is a different type of wife. She does not want to call her husband's boss's wife 'Madam.' She thinks that the wife of the head of the office is just her husband's puppet, saying that "she cannot see reality, hypnotized by the idea that she is a model wife." In addition, the relationship of the wives differ according to their husband's position. The wives are more interested in what the wife of the chief of the factory is saying than in what the wife of the chief of a small section is saying. The employee's housing area becomes a miniature of an industrialized society.

*A Shadow City* by Kim Hyang-suk describes well our society which is materially rich but mentally poor. Hye-sin has lived in the U.S. for six years. When she returns to Korea, she teaches Korean housewives English conversation to pay her daughter's violin lesson fee. Her older sister Hye-jeong does not know what to do with the money that she easily made through real-estate speculation. Other snobbish
women in the novel who are eager to give their children a good education but spend large amounts of money unintelligently are portrayed negatively. The characters, especially women, laugh at one another, are haughty towards each other, and bluff one another. Besides, Hye-sin’s husband Jun-ho says, “I returned from America because I didn’t want to be an outsider there. But here, everybody lives as if participating in a battle.” He also says that the Korean society is completely corrupt.

In a letter to her friend Mrs. Kim in America, Hye-sin writes as follows:

> It is true that Korea is much more changed than I heard while there, and I often feel dizzy and confused when I am here. With a little exaggeration, I feel as if I were in a foreign country where they spoke Korean. I don’t know how to explain, but I feel a chill after I meet the people that I’ve missed. Everybody seems to live in the same way, and unless I live that way, I will be isolated. That’s what I’m worried about (p. 183)

She also points out that Koreans just talks about money and politics whenever they meet one another. The women in the novel are described as competing with one another. They are busy laughing at and despising one another. In a voice recording sent to her friend, she expresses her opinion about the Korean society in the 1980s to the ‘90s as follows:

> They are not interested in the reality they cannot see, nor do they try to find out about it. They are just confined to their own group. They seem to consider themselves young aristocrats of the time. But not only they but also my sister Hye-jeong and Jun-ho make me tired. And so do most of the people I meet. (p. 215)

In the passage above, the unsound women of the time are well
described. In this novel, the writer is good at investigating at the inferiority complex and avarice of Korean mothers who cannot think of anything but their children’s success.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen above, *Excerpt from a Magnolia* by Oh Jeong-hee and *You, Who Are Far Away* by Seo Yeong-eun show that femininity externally obeys masculinity while internally deciding to retaliate. The heroine of *Excerpt from a Magnolia* is obedient and passive like a traditional Korean woman. *You, Who Are Far Away* shows the irony that the more pain and sadness the heroine endures, the more patient and sacrificing she is. While these two heroines are abnormal, the heroines of *Yi Sun* are normal. *Slices of Raw Pomfret* and *Our Children* by Yi Sun insist that femininity should cooperate with masculinity for worldly happiness. In the two novels, the women make efforts with the men to upgrade their social class. *A Sketch* denies the femininity which controls masculinity, and *A Shadow City* also denies the women who are mentally poor, failing to manage material abundance. Therefore, *A Sketch* and *A Shadow City* tend to contain misogyny. So does *Denial*. Meanwhile, the femininity of *A Sketch* is inclined to strength, brightness, and abundance, and that of *Denial* aims at being in first place, order, and cleanliness. Moreover, *A Room in Water* and *A Glass Keeper* imply a conservative idea that femininity, in the end, compensates for masculinity, or stays under the wing of it. Especially, in *A Glass Keeper*, the women are used to help their husbands to get promotion or keep the positions in the company. Besides, in *Nothing Happening at Home* and *Mother*, femininity as mothers tolerates masculinity as sons in an unlimited fashion. These two works reveal
gender ideology beyond feminism, such as the belief in sons.

In conclusion, the short novels by women writers of the 1970s through the 1980s can be divided as follows. Excerpt from a Magnolia by Oh Jeong-hee and You, Who Are Far Away by Seo Yeong-eun where femininity conflicts with masculinity, Slices of Raw Pomfret and Our Children by Yi Sun where femininity cooperates with masculinity for happiness, A Sketch by Pak Wan-seo, Denial by Kim Man-ok, and A Shadow City by Kim Hyang-suk where one femininity denies another femininity, Nothing Happening at Home by Kim Man-ok and Mothers by Yun Jeong-mo where femininity as mothers tolerates masculinity as sons, and A Glass Keeper by Kim Hyang-suk and A Room in Water by Kang Seok-kyeong where femininity compensates for masculinity.