

Women's Role in Jeju Society through the Character of Oh Ae-sun In *When Life Gives You Tangerines*

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Abstrak: *Women's roles in patriarchal societies highlight domestic tasks, caregiving duties, and submission, guiding women to value family needs over their own liberty. This research investigates how women's roles are portrayed and negotiated within modern Korean culture. This study draws on Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism (1949) to examine women's roles in the Netflix series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025), a Korean drama. On Jeju Island, the drama portrays Oh Ae-sun navigating the roles of mother, wife, and worker in a patriarchal tradition-filled society. Through textual analysis, the research targets critical moments that feature patriarchal standards, role tensions, and women's opposition. The work reveals Ae-sun's struggles with mother, wife, and worker roles, all crafted by patriarchal values limiting her to immanence through sacrifice, submission, and endless labor. Ae-sun's figure brings resistance, leadership, and creative expression as she seeks transcendence. Findings indicate that Jeju patriarchal structures limit women's self-determination, yet Ae-sun negotiates her identity within those bounds. The research adds to feminist literary criticism by bringing existential feminism to a modern Korean TV narrative from a locale largely ignored in scholarship.*

INTRODUCTION

Feminist researchers give more weight to television depictions of women's societal roles. Korean dramas carry special influence as key cultural stories. They help form our views on gender roles, family setups, and what people expect from each other. Over in South Korea, with its strong hold on old patriarchal structures, seeing women portrayed as mothers, wives, or workers really sheds light on the ways gender rules are constructed and negotiated in normal daily routines. Set on Jeju Island, the Netflix series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025) proves excellent for analyzing these themes through Oh Ae-sun's experiences, sharply capturing the divide she faces between what society expects and her personal desires.

In the past, Korean films and television shows commonly confined women to limited positions shaped by male-centered ideologies. Directors and drama makers usually kept women leads confined to domestic spaces, showing them mostly as mothers who give everything up or wives who follow orders without question. Those habits weren't just creative picks. They pushed heavy ideas that said women's identities were all about looking after others and handling house chores by nature. Beauvoir (1949/2011) nails it by describing how society slots women as the

"Other," confining their lives in immanent roles that limit opportunities for transcendence. Only after feminist pushes gained steam and cultural outlooks shifted did Korean TV introduce deeper female characters who handled inherited norms and their own ambitions. In this context, visual media play a key role in shaping gender interpretations, going beyond mere depiction of current cultural conditions.

Simone de Beauvoir's idea of immanence offers a way to break down Oh Ae-sun's portrayal, highlighting how women are confined to repetitive and obligatory roles in home and community life (Beauvoir, 1949/2011). According to Beauvoir, society casts women as the "Other," with existences typically restricted to positions by limits on true self-determination. Existential feminism like this gives a strong method to see women's roles as mothers, wives, and workers formed by culture instead of being inborn. Evaluating women characters centers on the opposition between immanence and transcendence while confronting organizational restrictions and individual goals. Beauvoir (1949/2011) adds that women's missing freedom comes from social structures blocking transcendence, not from natural deficits.

Several recent studies have applied Beauvoir's existential feminism to examine women's roles in literary and screen media. Research into women in *With the Fire on High* demonstrates how women struggle between domestic confinement and self-realization (Martinus & Marsih, 2022). Findings indicate that women protagonists often negotiate patriarchal norms as they seek to claim personal power, reflecting Beauvoir's (1949/2011) point about the pull between others' labels and self-definition. A similar analysis of *Cigarette Girl* reveals women protagonists establishing their authority under patriarchal restrictions by combining submission and resistance (Yusuf & Susilo, 2020). One additional piece of research explores patriarchal forces in family settings, pointing out the ways domestic duties form women's sense of self and serve as locations for both domination and compromise (Fernanda et al., 2025).

Jeju's unique cultural makeup brings extra depth when looking at how women fit into society there. A study of the haenyeo practice uncovers the inconsistency between women's financial input and their persistent deference in patriarchal family arrangements (Dronjić, 2021). For generations, these Jeju women have been the main breadwinners from their sea dives; this economic agency does not necessarily translate into social matters or their own lives. That kind of mismatch lines right up with what Beauvoir's (1949/2011) point that women's entry into paid work often occurs inside patriarchal frameworks, leaving them mired in immanent roles regardless. Studies on creative activities reveal paths to transcendence for women seeking power despite restrictive social norms (Aiswari et al., 2025). Studies on emotional pressures and motherhood notions confirm caregiving responsibilities as cultural constructs, not natural ones, with women taking on these standards and now and then achieving personal identity within them (Syahrani, 2025).

Even with growing scholarly literature, major gaps endure. Most existing studies mainly focus on Western literary works or stories located in the city settings of Korea. The distinct realities faced by women within rural areas and specific locales like Jeju society have barely been investigated using existential feminist frameworks. Furthermore, although Korean TV dramas boast immense international success, in-depth scholarly examination of their depictions of women's positions in connection to Beauvoir's notions of immanence and transcendence continues to be quite rare.

In such a setting, *When Life Gives You Tangerines* holds a special spot. The series, located on Jeju Island, depicts a place where women dive into labor for income but still answer to patriarchal family structures. Oh, Ae-sun captures that split right in her character. In episodes 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 16, her experiences as a mother, wife, and worker bear the limits of what society wants and her steady pushes for her own control. The tale of her life comes alive with precise use of

dialogue, motions, shooting angles, and scene layouts. All these elements transmit the pressure from patriarchal traditions while highlighting times of resistance and self-expression. Beauvoir's (1949/2011) approach lets us see those resistance times as efforts by women to take hold of transcendence through forging their own existence, rejecting roles forced on them.

Given the limited studies into portrayals of women's roles in recent Korean dramas set in Jeju, this study aims to fill that gap. It uses Beauvoir's existential feminism to examine Oh Ae-sun's characterization. The study contends that *When Life Gives You Tangerines* shows patriarchal influences enduring in Jeju society as women find ways to navigate and challenge these constraints. This analysis advances feminist literary studies in Korean entertainment and brings a fresh understanding to TV dramas' depictions of women's multifaceted realities in specific cultural settings.

Women's Roles in Korean Dramas and Society

1. Women's roles in Korean television dramas

Television dramas rank high among media forms that influence how people view gender positions in contemporary society. Within South Korea, where old patriarchal ways hold firm, television serves as a central platform for building views of women's identities as mothers, wives, and workers (Choi et al., 2021). Records of women's depictions in Korean media reveal women characters largely limited to home settings, showing them above all as devoted mothers or compliant wives (Lee et al., 2025). These representations cemented conventional gender expectations and influenced how viewers grasped women's functions across generations

2. Women's roles in Jeju society and culture

Jeju Island brings a unique angle to women's positions in society. The haenyeo heritage features women working as sea divers and chief providers, setting Jeju culture apart (Dronjić, 2021). Economic participation does not ensure social freedom or personal authority, since patriarchal family systems endure strongly (Park et al., 2020). The contradiction highlights how women's roles on Jeju stem from combining their labor input with lasting deference to patriarchal norms.

3. Existential feminism and female characterization

Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist framework is frequently used in dissecting women's portrayals across literature and visual media. Beauvoir (1949/2011) describes how society designates women as the "Other," enclosing them in immanent, routine functions within domestic and social settings. Martinus and Marsih (2022) depict women figures wrestling between domestic limits and personal success, while Yusuf and Susilo (2024) point out how main protagonists establish their own agency within patriarchal limits through acceptance and opposition

4. Women's Roles in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*

Zakaria and Kalihta (2025) explore how gender inequality builds up in the series, spotting ways male and female characters receive different handling. Syahrani (2025) looks at power and gender depictions using semiotics, uncovering patriarchal dominance shown in space setups and meaningful visuals. Fadhillah et al. (2025) explore patriarchal culture's portrayal, discovering how it becomes everyday through demands on women to care for others and manage the home as wives. Aiswari et al. (2025) study local identity in the drama, revealing Jeju's sense of place through speech patterns and community habits

METHODS

This research applies a feminist literary criticism to investigate women's roles in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. The feminist literary method supports looking at gender relations, power

structures, and patriarchal expectations that the drama presents. Concentrating on Ae-sun's experiences through episodes 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 16, it explores how women appear positioned as mothers, wives, and workers. Lines from scripts, actions, and significant scenes supply the key info. They reveal how society-built roles direct what women do and what they can achieve, laying bare patriarchy's hold plus how women handle life each day.

This research pulls data from picked-out scenes, screenshots, and dialogues in the Netflix series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025), directed by W.-S. Kim. The material covers sight-based features like lens views, shot lengths, light use, scene composition, actor placement, face reactions, and physical moves. It also includes sound parts such as dialogue and tone of speech. The pieces stand for signs pointing to the way Oh Ae-sun handles being a mother, wife, and worker in the series. The episodes picked, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 16, made the cut because they show big moments of what patriarchy expects, role struggles, and women standing up in Jeju life. Screenshots get pulled to record scene visuals and aid review of depicted gender functions and societal positions.

The research relies on close reading of the text through Simone de Beauvoir's *Existential Feminism* (1949/2011) to study Ae-sun's handling of her place in society and her push for personal power. Scenes get viewed over and over with attention to exchanges, body language, and feelings that build the story's point. Gathering info means watching the series multiple times, noting down key parts with notes and time codes, and picking those that show Ae-sun's encounters with oppression, labor, caregiving, motherhood, and self-determination. Such a method helps reveal the series' picture of women's complicated realities, the pull between old norms and self-direction in Jeju's world.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents a detailed analysis of selected episodes from *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025), highlighting Oh Ae-sun's parts as mother, wife, and worker. Employing Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2011) ideas on immanence and transcendence, it reviews dialogue, gestures, emotional expressions, and character actions to answer the research questions on how her roles are shaped and negotiated within patriarchal society.

Oh Ae-sun's Roles in Jeju Society

The analysis finds Oh Ae-sun taking on three key roles in Jeju society: mother, wife, and worker. They show up not divided or one after another but mixed at once, reflecting the multifaceted existence of women in the community.

1. Mother's Role



Figure 1. (Episode 6, 00:15:07-00:15:16) Maternal guilt as immanence after son's death

Ae-sun captures motherhood in caregiving routines, emotional duties, and self-sacrifice. Episode 6 has her, after her son's death, saying "I should've hugged him," exposing a mother's grief as deeply felt yet formed by social forces (Syahrani, 2025). The quiet grief Ae-sun displays following her son's death demonstrates Jeju society's demand on mothers for moral guilt and emotional labor, requiring them to hide personal grief to meet family needs (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Dronjić, 2021). Through her grief, Ae-sun illuminates patriarchal expectations intensely, assigning mothers moral duty and emotional labor (Dronjić, 2021; Syahrani, 2025). The occasion stresses maternal self-view as more than just personal. Social rules structure it too, setting women to deal with grief, caregiving, and public views in one go (Yusuf & Susilo, 2020).



Figure 2. (Episode 11, 00:27:22-00:28:23) Motherhood as resistance to patriarchy

In Episode 11, Ae-sun takes action to keep her daughter, Geum Myeong, from traditional domestic tasks, her plan to break the cycle of expected gender roles. Her participation, dialogue, and firm bearing show motherly efforts going against cultural limits (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Fernanda et al., 2025). Motherhood turns into a spot for fighting back here, with women aware of working around patriarchal limits to open new paths for kids (Martinus & Marsih, 2022; Park et al., 2020). Ae-sun's portrayal underscores how a mother's impact extends beyond feelings to real change, establishing her as a force for community progress (Kim, 2025).

2. Wife's Role



Figure 3. (Episode 4, 00:01:51-00:01:57) Wife's obedience without existential freedom

Ae-sun fills the wife spot with domestic service, obedience, and emotional support. In Episode 4, her mother-in-law commands her to prostrate before the gods 3000 times, stating, "If the family she married into valued sons, huh, she should be having plenty. How could she try to freeloader off our family?" This scene demonstrates wives' lower standing in society beneath patriarchal control. Her following orders reflect cultural duty, not her individual desire (*Beauvoir, 1949/2011*). This act of submission reflects how patriarchal culture confines women to immanent roles, limiting their existential freedom (*Yusuf & Susilo, 2020*). Even in Jeju's unique cultural context, women's economic contributions do not grant them autonomy from patriarchal family systems (*Dronjić, 2021*). Dramas from Korea, such as this, portray patriarchy as a routine power compelling women to act as compliant domestic figures (*Fadhillah et al., 2025*).



Figure 4. (Episode 16, 00:25:50-00:31:57) Wife's immanence through caregiving

In Episode 16, Ae-sun tends to her sick husband, Gwan-sik, with steady care and focus. Caregiving steps and warm involvement send the message about the wife's position formed by culture, for support and attention (*Beauvoir, 1949/2011*). The part makes women's labor physical and emotional, and patriarchal rules take hold in daily home life (*Choi et al., 2021; Fadhillah et al., 2025*). Ae-sun sticking it out normalizes caregiving duties, her wife's behaviors reflecting community pushes while crafting her sense of self as wife (*Aiswari et al., 2025*).

3. Worker's Role



Figure 5. (Episode 5, 00:02:02-00:02:58) Immanent labor of the pregnant worker

Ae-sun's worker position stands out for constant hard labor. In Episode 5, she peddles wares even during pregnancy. Her ongoing efforts highlight the unending pressure on women to labor ceaselessly. It presents women's labor as routine and essential, framing staying alive as an ongoing task instead of an option (Beauvoir, 1949/2011). Exchanges with shoppers, hard physical labor, and tired looks create meaning as symbols in the context of societal and patriarchal demands (Aiswari et al., 2025). By doing her tasks, Ae-sun highlights the cultural and social making of women's places. It shows endurance as her own determination, mixed with a task imposed on her (Dronjić, 2021; Huda & Kalihta, 2025).



Figure 6. (Episode 6, 00:26:10-00:27:52) Suppression of grief as immanent labor

In Episode 6, Ae-sun sticks to her sales labor right after her child dies, making clear that staying alive comes before grief. Her nonstop labor and calm face carry the point, revealing economic and social forces molding women's duties and feelings (Choi et al., 2021). This scene highlights patriarchal expectations for women to keep up domestic and economic labor right through deep grief, curbing their chance to deal with grief openly (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Yusuf & Susilo, 2020). Ae-sun's persistence echoes the larger cultural tendency in Jeju, conditioning women to contain personal emotion for survival, as displayed in the haenyeo tradition (Dronjić, 2021). Korean dramas like this one present patriarchy as an everyday force that demands women prioritize work over personal grief (Fadhillah et al., 2025; Syahrani, 2025).

Additional Roles: Leadership and Self-Expression



Figure 2. (Episode 7, 00:28:32-00:34:37; 00:35:55-00:37:36) Woman's leadership as transcendence

Episode 7 sees Ae-sun taking the role of the first female village chief, stepping from private life into community command and hinting at a change from home focus to public guidance. Her sure stance, talks with locals, and open respect for her position build the sense, revealing women's public roles, questioning deep patriarchal traditions (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Choi et al., 2021). Her leadership position proves that the core self arises from goals and changing traditional roles that society permits (Lee et al., 2025; Tan & Yu, 2024). Ae-sun's change brings focus to sidelined women claiming authority, showing gender, power, and community acceptance locally (Dronjić, 2021).



Figure 8. (Episode 16, 01:11:06-01:11:52) Poetry as creative transcendence

In Episode 16, Ae-sun writes poetry, staking her personal self and room for creation. The meaning is conveyed through her focused gestures and expressions of concentration, demonstrating how self-expression shapes individual subjectivity (Aiswari et al., 2025). Creative steps and own successes are made by society here, giving women power to shape beyond imposed roles (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Syahrani, 2025). Her poetry commitment reveals self-push power for change, showing how existential freedom is performed through personal and soul labor (Fernanda et al., 2025).

Patriarchal Shaping of Oh Ae-sun's Roles

Ae-sun's roles are shaped by patriarchal values that confine her to immanence while limiting transcendence. Beauvoir (1949/2011) helps explain these roles as women cast as the "Other," limited to cyclical obligatory duties.

1. Immanence in Ae-sun's Roles

Patriarchal concepts build Ae-sun's roles around self-sacrifice, submission, and emotional labor. Episode 6 portrays maternal guilt as a mechanism of immanence, connecting Ae-sun's full sense of self to caregiving results (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Dronjić, 2021). Her submission in Episode 4 to bowing 3000 times at her mother-in-law's instruction represents immanent confinement, locking her into constant, repeating traditional rituals devoid of space for personal goals. Likewise, Episode 16 casts caregiving as an ordinary, acknowledged responsibility under immanence. As a worker, Episode 5 and Episode 6 demonstrate how patriarchal and economic forces combine to shape Ae-sun around endurance and suppression of personal emotion. Like the haenyeo of Jeju who endure physical hardship without expressing personal suffering, Ae-sun's labor during pregnancy and after her child's death reflects how women are confined to immanent roles that prioritize survival over self (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Dronjić, 2021)

2. Transcendence in Ae-sun's Roles

From time to time, Ae-sun overcomes patriarchal barriers through transcendence, stepping away from prescribed duties to claim her own authority. Episode 11 presents Ae-sun safeguarding her daughter against domestic work as transcendence, transforming motherhood into a means for social advancement over ordinary conformity (Kim, 2025; Martinus & Marsih, 2022; Park et al., 2020).

The most significant manifestation of transcendence in Ae-sun's characterization occurs in Episode 7, when she is elected as the first female village chief of her community. Her new duty challenges the conventional split between private domestic life and public governance power. In contrast to her immanent roles as mother and wife, which confine her to nonstop, basic-survival activities, the village chief's job involves strategic decision-making, community leadership, and the exercise of institutional power. Beauvoir (1949/2011) argues that transcendence is achieved through projects that extend beyond mere biological survival; Ae-sun's leadership as village chief constitutes precisely such a project. By assuming this role, she not only challenges the patriarchal assumption that women belong exclusively to the domestic sphere but also creates new possibilities for other women in her community (Dronjić, 2021; Tan & Yu, 2024).

Episode 16 features another key instance of transcendence as Ae-sun writes poetry. The act moves her beyond constant caregiving and work cycles, creating a domain for individual expression and personal being. Beauvoir (1949/2011) explains that women realize existential freedom through creative projects affirming their core identity outside dictated social positions. Poetry stands apart from immanence's nonstop routines, giving Ae-sun space to recognize her inner life, emotions, and creative self independent of mother, wife, or worker roles (Aiswari et al., 2025; Fernanda et al., 2025; Syahrani, 2025). The poetry becomes her grab for existential freedom, proving women can break into transcendence right in the middle of domestic life (Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Ae-sun's breakthroughs to transcendence never happen alone. Gwan-sik, her husband, delivers constant encouragement spanning their Jeju childhood, marriage, and elder years throughout the drama. He rejects traditional patriarchal pressure for women to submit; he values Ae-sun's aspirations and nurtures her quests for leadership and personal creativity. Beauvoir (1949/2011) recognizes that women's transcendence depends on practical and emotional circumstances; Gwan-sik's backing provides exactly those for Ae-sun. His encouragement challenges dominant masculinity patterns, revealing that male partners can facilitate rather than block women's transcendence (Dronjić, 2021; Park et al., 2020). This finding expands Beauvoir's perspective, viewing men mainly as suppressors of women's freedom; Gwan-sik proves that traditional patriarchal structures are open to change through mutual respect and partnership (Huda & Kalihta, 2025).

No evident transcendence appears in the study of Ae-sun's wife's position, which patriarchal demands keep most tightly restricted. Through it all, Ae-sun walks a tightrope between immanence and transcendence, though she rarely breaks free from immanence's daily dominance.

3. Role Conflicts and Negotiations

The analysis spots conflicts in Ae-sun's role overlaps. Episode 6 places Ae-sun's worker role before her maternal one as she picks labor rather than grieving. The struggle spotlights how patriarchal and economic factors oblige women to hide individual grief for the sake of worker duties (Choi et al., 2021). Wife and worker positions often fuse, weaving domestic labor with paid work into draining, recurrent cycles blocking women's access to transcendence (Beauvoir, 1949/2011). Ae-sun responds by segmenting emotions and considering caregiving central to her essence. However, these approaches sidestep confrontation with patriarchal orders; they merely

enable endurance. Like Fernanda et al. (2025), who see domestic functions as sites mixing subjugation and accommodation.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzed Oh Ae-sun's roles in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025) through Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism (1949/2011), which sees women's progress from immanence to transcendence as the peak of existential freedom. Findings indicate Ae-sun is confined to three immanent roles in Jeju society as mother, wife, and worker. Such roles restrict her to a repetitive, duty-focused existence, prioritizing family endurance rather than personal advancement. However, his study's main revelation centers on Ae-sun reaching transcendence across different paths. By safeguarding her daughter from domestic tasks (Episode 11), rising to public leadership as the inaugural woman village chief (Episode 7), and discovering a creative voice through poetry (Episode 16), Ae-sun rejects patriarchal expectations. The moments chart her journey out of immanence into existential autonomy, evidence that women can claim transcendence amid tough traditional patriarchal realities. Notably, her husband Gwan-sik's unwavering support from childhood through old age enables these moments, complicating Beauvoir's framework by showing that male partners can facilitate rather than obstruct women's transcendence.

The wife's role remains the most confined by patriarchal expectations, showing no transcendence, while role conflicts, such as the worker role overriding the mother role (Episode 6), force Ae-sun to suppress grief for economic survival. Despite these constraints, Ae-sun's character ultimately demonstrates that transcendence is possible through resistance, leadership, and creative expression. This research advances feminist analysis of Korean dramas by bringing Beauvoir's lens to rural Jeju settings. Findings confirm women persistently seek transcendence despite intense patriarchal pressures, although these breakthroughs stay rare and depend on personal initiative plus supportive bonds. Ultimately, the research argues that feminist examinations of women's media portrayals should center on transcendence rather than mere oppression records.

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