

Reestablishment of Ethical Morality in African American Society

Criticism and Construction of Eco-feminism

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Abstract—Eco-feminism focuses on the patriarchal, dominant, as well as the unified and central relationship between human and nature, human and others, to eliminate the dominance, pressure and unbalance within the category of social gender with the gender characteristics of female, and to push forward human and the world, individual and system to the state of harmony and balance taking this as a breakthrough. This characteristic of eco-feminism corresponds to the criticism and reflection on American black female made by Morrison, who reconstructs the ethical morality for the black race in text world taking advantage of theoretical innovative ability of eco-feminism: realizing the harmony between black female and black male, black female and white society through rewriting of epochal character of black female, and thus to realize the re-balance and re-development of black race.

Keywords—eco-feminism; social ethics; Morrison; black race

I. INTRODUCTION

Eco-feminism regards the physiological difference between male and female as the basis of oppression on female by male governing stratum. The female image characteristics relate to the nature, and both of them are systematically oppressed for a long time. Taking this as a precondition, eco-feminism tries to reconstruct female, and to understand and evaluate the oppressed female (relative to male), body (relative to mind), emotion (relative to reason), and nature (relative to the intelligent world) in paternal system from a new perspective. The ultimate purpose of eco-feminism is to balance the relationship between human and nature, individual and system, female and male, to promote the overall harmonious development of the world. As for Morrison, to pay more attention to black female is to pay more attention to the balance and harmony of black people scattered in America. What Morrison writes and focuses is not the state of certain individual black woman, but the value examination by taking black female and even the American black race as a whole, focusing on the balance of mainstream cultural value system between black female and black male, black female and black race, black female and white people, hoping to realize the epochal character and crossing of black group in America by correcting the uneven environmental relationship, while regarding the united and harmonious development of social relationship as the criticism object is true connotation of social

ethics. In other words, Morrison tries to discuss the problem of social justice like Plato in text world, namely how to organize the human society to meet the principle of justice, but changing the discussion object to the re-positioning of black female and re-construction of black race relationship.

II. MORRISON'S MORAL CONCEPT UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECO-FEMINISM

The social moral principle and norm in Morrison's text world not only directs to the mainstream cultural value system of black female and American white people, having characteristics of the times, but also prevents the govern and oppression on black female by black male, to maintain the stability of black society. The characteristics of Morrison's social moral norm originate from her unique dual life experience. Morrison "was born in a black family near Lorain, Cleveland, Ohio, mid-west America ... (Morrison) can hear the songs about black people sung by adults and stories about black people told by adults since she was a child."¹ Internal spreading is the main mode of black race history transmitting, while these songs and stories spreading from black people enable Morrison to inherit the collective memory, cultural positioning, emotion identification and history of black race, which form a supporting point of life experience for Morrison as a writer. What coexists with Morrison's "black life experience" is the "white life experience". Morrison "studied in Howard University and Cornell University respectively in 1949 and 1955, worked as a teacher in Texas Southern University and State University of New York during 1955 to 1972, worked in Random House in 1964...edited and published *The Black Book* in 1974."² It is such white people life experience enables the cultural identification of Morrison to experience the process from black culture education to western culture identification. Viewing from the above experiences, Morrison serves as a cultural worker all the time, placing himself at the intersection of white people classic culture and the margin culture of American black people

¹ Pang Jingchun, Morrison Wandering between Resolution and Reestablishment --- Self-cognition Research on Morrison and Her Works [J]. *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology*, 2012 (22)

² Pang Jingchun, Study on Contemporary Cultural Identity of Morrison Works [J]. *Mangzhong Literature*, 2013 (10)

ethnic group. It is such intersection enriches Morrison's sensible cognition and life experience towards black female, and promotes Morrison to write, think and criticize.

Specifically, the meaning of Morrison dual experience lies in that she can describe female's subordinate status in black ethnic group and the margin status of black female in white social culture, experiencing the condition of black female being insulted and humiliated more profoundly on the one hand; on the other hand, she can reconstruct the status of black female from two aspects, namely the black people ethnic group and white people culture. Dual experience is the main internal drive of Morrison's female concept, but it also provides Morrison with unique eco-feminism concept. Under the perspective of Morrison's unique eco-feminism, Morrison constructed new moral ethnic system to resist male-chauvinism and recover the harmonious relationship between human and nature.

III. TRACING OF BLACK FEMALE'S MORALITY PROBLEM

Similar to the criticism to female by eco-feminism, in the literature works about black female, the grab of and damage to nature by human and the oppression on individual by system are all reflected in the humiliation suffered by female symbolically. In the view of Morrison, the living condition of black female is immoral: at the bottom of the whole governing system, in addition to the oppression on female by male chauvinism, the more complex problem lies in the compression of white people value system and moral concept suffered by black female, leaving them narrower self-living space. The problem of American black female relates to the collapse of black ethnic group's moral system. The collapse of moral system originates from two aspects, and one is the misery progress of African black people. "At the initial stage of slave trafficking, the black people sold existed as slaves and tools, which was a period of history filling with blood and tear."³ These black people who were sold to Europe and America were far away from their hometown --- Africa, not only suffering slavery in terms of flesh body, in addition, their cultural spirit, religious belief and bribe history and other fundamentals for settling down and getting on with their pursuit were interrupted. And this crisis has immersed in the emotion core of scattered black people ethnic group and individual black people along with the passing of time and great pressure of cruel slavery life, generating the loss of moral support and non-standard internal moral judgment weighing the behaviors. On the other hand, it comes from the oppression and discrimination from the mainstream society of American white people. At the initial stage of the founding of America, American white people trampled on black people's dignity and rights willfully in terms of various aspects including legal status, politics, economics and social life. Even Lincoln (signed the Emancipation Proclamation) held the opinion that "I don't agree, and I have never agreed to realize the social and political equality between black and white races using any method. ... I also point out that physiological difference does

³ Pang Jingchun, *Pursue of Culture Identification --- Analysis of Main Characters in Song of Solomon* [D]. Dalian: Liaoning Normal University, 2011

exist between white and black races, and in my opinion, such difference rejects the two peoples to live together under equal social and political conditions...like others, I support to give the superior status to white people." The discrimination on black people was still not changed fundamentally till mid-and late 20th century. Harrington describes the condition of black people in America society in *The Other America* as below: "American economy, society and mentality all carry with the nature of racialism. Most black people cannot be benefited from such change even all the laws are formulated to provide equal opportunities. Still, there will be a wide, intangible and natural system to cope with colored race."⁴ These two complement each other. American black people break the relation with Africa; along with the time, the scattered American black ethnic group was obscure toward their own moral system, and cannot make proper moral judgment with high degree of cultural confidence when facing the ethnic choices under current history condition; moreover, the mainstream culture of American white people is in strong position, impregnating, immersing and attracting the confused black people, which adds new moral choice to the ethical circumstances of American black people, intensifies black people's puzzlement in moral choice. The problem of black female is generated in such background, and becomes the origin of black female's condition.

IV. MORALITY RECONSTRUCTION UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL ETHICS

Morrison describes the miserable living environment and oppressed circumstances of American black female on the one hand, and in the meantime, she also narrates with emphasis the unique role of black female and the bright and ideal black female, to reconstruct the morality of black female. In Morrison's article, black female is both the redeemer of black male and the independent individual. As the redeemer, black female integrates multiple positive meanings, such as guidance, purification, hope, instruction and redemption, and as an independent individual, black female has the unique status in the world of black people and white people. In a word, black female plays the irreplaceable role towards black male, rebirth of the world of black people as well as the balance coexistence between white people society and black people society.

A. Independent Black Female

Morrison does not want to seclude American black people from the world, so the black female image molded by her actually is the product of the times in black people society. The image of these black females maybe not perfect and satisfactory, but they point out the development direction of black people and show confidence in white people society. These independent black female images molded by Morrison are no longer in the status of humiliation and insulation, but have independent social status in the world of black people and even in the world of white people, forming an important part of the society and living a wonderful life. Jadine in *Tar Baby* is a representative of such females. First of all, Jadine is open.

⁴ Harrington, *The Other America* [M]. Translated by Zheng Feibei, Beijing: China Youth Press, 2012

She grew up on the Knight Island and was influenced by white people culture to a large extent, and she did not rigidly adhere to the limitation of race and skin color with the nurture of cultural values of white people society. "She likes herself and interested in herself in reality. From this sense, she is very modern"⁵, in addition, Jadine differs from most other black females, as she has strong self-consciousness, "sometimes I want to get out from my skin to become one the people inside -- not American nor black people --- just me"⁶. In short, the image of Jadine differs greatly from those traditional cumbersome and fat black maidservants, "(Jadine) has beauty, knows art ... she is also filled with occupational confidence; she thinks herself "capable and experienced with masculinity"⁷. As an independent female, the most outstanding representative of Jadine is the setting of "asphalt rabbit" by Morrison. In the fairy tale, the asphalt rabbit of the farmland owner is to attract black rabbit and it has successfully caught the black rabbit. In the *Tar Baby*, Son is the representative of black people image. He is unwilling to move forward, rejects the civilization of white people, and only likes the small town Eloe. We know that the special cultural experience urges Morrison to think about a question all the time, that is "the selection of black ethnic group's living law and moral value standard is to reject open and rigidly adhere to the original moral value standard or to change and break the fence, open ourselves to the white people society"⁸. Even though Morrison yearns for the traditional black people culture, she will not include American black people into the more closed and marginal state. Therefore, as for the image of Son, his extreme defense is criticized all the time, while Jadine appears as an independent, white asphalt rabbit to attract black Son to make some changes. Undoubtedly, Jadine is successful, and Son falls in love with Jadine deeply. Jadine is the representative of independent females in Morrison's female world.

B. Female of Redemption

These female images are the rebirth and reconstruction of intrinsic social morality standard of the black ethnic group, to coordinate the relationship with black male, stabilize black people's social relationship, and to promote progress and development. Female of redemption takes the characteristics of traditional kindness and affection of black people, to give redemption, purification and guidance to the degenerate or lost black male, humiliated children. These images are not described a lot like Jadine having independent text, but scattered in the novel of Morrison. They are the ordinary image group in Morrison's novel; therefore they have more ordinary and extensive significance. In *The Bluest Eye*, three humble prostitutes of Poland, China and Maginot Line maintain their own unique self-esteem and optimism. They do

⁵ Mao Xinde, *Giant Star of American Black People Literature --- Fiction Creation Theory of Toni Morrison* [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2006.8.

⁶ Wang Shouren, *Gender, Race, Culture --- Fiction Creation of Toni Morrison* [M], Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004.3.

⁷ Wang Shouren, *Gender, Race, Culture --- Fiction Creation of Toni Morrison* [M], Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004.3.

⁸ Pang Jingchun, *Morrison Wandering between Resolution and Reestablishment --- Self-cognition Research on Morrison and Her Works* [J]. *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology*, 2012 (22).

not treat the dirty and ugliness of Pecola with loathing like others, but give her parents warmth, and food to Pecola, "Pecola finds the drug to comfort the spirit trauma temporarily". Female of redemption is reflected in the *Song of Solomon* with most concentration. In this works of Morrison, which is the only one with male as the leading character, female plays an irreplaceable role in both the journey of Milkman in seeking black people's history and Milkman's growth process in changing to a man. The first is Aunt Pilate, whose pronunciation is like "pilot", symbolizing the significance of Pilate toward Milkman: leading and guidance. Pilate keeps the spirit of black people in herself. She is "born with wildness", taking delight in enjoying freedom, being able to communicate with her father's soul, singing "Sugarman has flew away", and she is the representative of her family history. Just because of these, Pilate has the inexplicable attraction toward Milkman, enabling him to go to Pilate's home to enjoy the freedom and relaxation which is absent in his own home. With the influence of Pilate, Milkman has the initial imagination of southern black people. After Pilate told the family history, the gold stealing matter occurs. From the objective perspective, it is Pilate who urges Milkman to go Pennsylvania State in the south. It can be said that there will be no growth of Milkman without the influence and guidance of Pilate. In the south, the important female for Milkman is Circe, who is the purifier of Milkman. Circe is nearly one hundred years old with no teeth left. With gentle and beautiful voice, she tells Milkman the lost name of Macon Dead family, directs Milkman to seek the real treasure. In the process of going up a stream according to the direction of Circe, Milkman took off shoes and socks as well as other things representing the substances of northern white people. Going up a stream simply with the body of a black people also symbolizes the baptism and purification. Although Milkman went to Shalima Town to seek for gold, the purification of Circe had deeply and subtly influences him. Without Circe's purification, Milkman cannot withstand the test in black people's land later. Eva in *Sula* is a breast-feeding mother. In the novel, Eva is abandoned by her husband Boyboy, having three children in need of looking after. But there is only a little money and "five eggs, three beetroots" at home. Eva lives a hard life helplessly, but she still supports the family strongly. At last, she was missing for 18 months, lost a leg but obtained money when she came back Bertmei, and established her own family. Her behavior "reflects the sacrifice spirit of black female as a breast-feeding mother.

V. CONCLUSION

Eco-feminism tries to explain the relation between oppression on female and that on natural environment, hoping to breakdown the male chauvinism, deconstruct the ideology recognizing oppression on female and that on nature, to eventually solve the ecological environmental problem. The theory of eco-feminism becomes theoretical support for Morrison to reconstruct the social ethics of American black people. Based on this, Morrison takes black feminism as the subject to explain social gender category, stress the identification of female gender value, and to try to extend the exploration and construction of moral ethic care of black ethnic group to the choice made when facing this. In the social

ethnic reconstruction, the difference in American black people society development is amended gradually, which has promoted development of American black society and themselves and the core of American mainstream cultural values.

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