

Research on Ecological Writing of Dongting Lake by Contemporary Yueyang Writers in China: A Case Study of Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming

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Abstract: Contemporary Yueyang writers, represented by Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming, have created multiple literary works on the ecology of Dongting Lake, focusing on the themes of caring for people and nature, and reflecting on ecological destruction. The unique Wu Chu culture and dynamic natural landscape of Dongting Lake enable local writers to have unique creative practices. They often consider the human survival issues brought about by modernization from an aesthetic perspective during the creative process, and attempt to find a harmonious point of coexistence between humans and nature through returning to the original or returning to nature, shaping a spiritual home belonging to humanity itself. The writing of Dongting Lake by contemporary Yueyang writers reflects a concept of ecological equality, which is unique to the spiritual power of the Yue family army in the new literary world, as it helps alleviate the ecological crisis faced by humanity, inspires writers' national consciousness in their creations, and contributes to the healthy development and prosperity of human society.

1. Introduction

As of now, China has entered the historical phase of ecological civilization. The concept of "ecological aesthetics," through increasingly close academic exchanges between China and the West, has influenced a new generation of literary creators and researchers in China. Since the inaugural "Ecological Aesthetics" seminar held in Xi'an in 2001, it has gradually emerged as one of the focal disciplines within literary studies in China, drawing an ever-growing number of participants and intensifying related research. Certain scholars' interpretations and theoretical constructions of ecological aesthetics have also gained recognition and status in international academic circles. Moreover, literary creation began to address ecological crises in the 1980s, leading to the emergence of numerous ecological literary works[1].

In the realm of contemporary ecological literature in China, issues of water pollution and water ecological crises have garnered significant attention from writers. By the 21st century, novels have become the mainstay of ecological literature, with a continuous influx of works focusing on local water resource ecological conditions.

Dongting Lake, as the second-largest lake in China that nourishes the vast Ba Ling region, has

attracted renewed attention and importance in the contemporary literary scene due to its unique cultural and natural resource value. Among the contemporary writers from Yueyang, represented by Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming, multiple novels reflecting on the ecology of Dongting Lake, the relationship between humans and nature, and the contemplation of ecological destruction have been produced, as noted in literary works such as "The Great Lake Message," "The Last Homeland," and "Lian Er Ju." Unfortunately, there are currently no contemporary ecological aesthetics studies available regarding the writing around Dongting Lake, and the ecological literary creations unique to Yueyang also lack systematic organization and research. To better explore and analyze the aesthetic values and ecological significance of the ecological novels created by Yueyang authors such as Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming about Dongting Lake, I will combine the definitions and related theories of ecological aesthetics to analyze the various expressions of the Dongting Lake world as depicted by these authors and the connotations of ecological aesthetics. Simultaneously, I aim to elucidate the modern significance and academic value of the ecological aesthetics of Dongting Lake present in the works of Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming through the lens of the broadly defined spirit of ecological humanism encompassed by ecological aesthetics[2].

The literary works focusing on Dongting Lake by authors such as Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming generally address human survival issues from an aesthetic perspective. They attempt to establish a spiritual home that stands in contrast to the environmental destruction and the "homelessness" of modern society by returning to their native land. On one hand, the unique natural landscape of the lakes and the Hunan-Chu cultural characteristics allows local authors to engage in distinct creative practices, wherein they strive to restore the inherent qualities of their environment and contemplate survival from an aesthetic viewpoint. On the other hand, some of the works express a gentle nostalgia for the increasingly vanished or heavily polluted Dongting Lake under industrial civilization. Rather than merely conquering nature, many authors seek to find a balance between humanity and nature by returning to the roots, thereby shaping a spiritual home that is inherently theirs[3].

2. The dual narratives of nature: vitality and crisis

The novels and essays concerning Dongting Lake are fervent in their depiction of the natural beauty of the region. In the works of Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming, the natural landscapes of Dongting Lake are often presented to readers with vitality, mystery, and vastness, illustrating the poetic aesthetics of the Yunmeng scenery and the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Through the writings of Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming, the primitive landscapes of Dongting Lake from bygone times and memories gradually unfold: countless primal and savage lake district civilizations, divine beings, and wastelands overgrown with various potent wild grasses, all coalesce with the eternal moon and sun, the mountains and lakes shrouded in mist, collectively forming a nature scene that appears somewhat static amidst the rapidly advancing torrent of time[4].

Beneath Dongting Lake's vibrancy, however, the writers also depict the catastrophic floods, destroyed habitats, dwindling animal populations, and the precarious existence of humans within this context. These narratives of disaster reflect the disharmony between humanity and nature, serving as a rational contemplation of the significance of life and existence based on ecological aesthetics, while also questioning anthropocentrism.

In her essay collection "Messages from the Great Lake," Shen Nian dedicates significant attention to the theme of "water" in Dongting Lake. Water is the fundamental component of Dongting Lake, serving as the backdrop for the entire work, fostering the harmonious existence of

the region's biodiversity, and sustaining human benevolence. Originating from water, all beings interacting with it—humans, birds, sika deer, Yangtze river dolphins, among others—inherit the admirable qualities of "water." Under the nurturing essence of water, all life acquires a certain "natural spirit," and Shen Nian's writing captivates readers with astonishing depictions of diverse creatures: the playful river dolphin interacting with fishermen, the reappearing sika deer, the land's choices in cultivation, and the ominous presence of swans inducing nightmares. However, the author's primary goal is not merely to document the natural beauty of the Dongting Lake region, but to illustrate how calamities may strike such a beautiful place rich in "natural spirit," and to explore the potential causal relationship between natural disasters and human actions[5].

Therefore, Shen Nian also described a series of disasters caused by the reclamation of land around the lake, such as the reduction of lake area and the extinction of species resulting from the hunting of wildlife. He contemplated ecological issues and livelihood problems, merging historical reflection with contemporary criticism. In the piece titled "The Black Poplar in the Wild," the disaster of the "black poplar" serves as a metaphor for the inherent rigidity and shortcomings of human nature: as an invasive species, the "black poplar," driven by the greed of the local population, invades and monopolizes the ecological diversity surrounding the lake area, leading to the degradation of water resources. Ultimately, the people suffer the consequences of their actions by cutting down the "wealth tree," culminating in the outcome of the "complete disappearance of black spots on the earth." [1] The article "The Tragedy of the Yangtze River Dolphin" addresses the extinction crisis faced by the dolphin species: the unregulated fishing and illicit trading practices by local communities have gradually pushed the Yangtze River dolphin toward extinction, leading to desperate retaliatory actions against humans. The destruction of nature by humanity ultimately results in repercussions for humanity itself [6].

If we consider Shen Nian's "Messages from the Great Lake," where Dongting Lake is portrayed as a clear water world, then in "Lian'er Ju," it transforms into a hazy and enchanting dream of golden millet. Xiong Yuqun constructs an allegorical representation of the life forms around the village of Lian'er Ju, presenting the inhabitants and the village as a unified whole. The forget-me-not species that grows on the land of Lian'er Ju serves as a medium that leads individuals from the mundane world into this vibrant utopia. Within the village of Lian'er Ju, Dongting Lake is perpetually shrouded in a thin layer of mist, rendering it ethereal and magical: beneath the lake dwell water spirits, the camphor trees possess the ability to commune and prophesy, birds transcend realms, and the relationship between the villagers and the fish of the lake unfolds. The inhabitants have trust and reverence for everything in their aquatic surroundings, living under the protection of natural deities, while all natural entities around Dongting Lake possess a spirit that silently witnesses and predicts the fate of the villagers. This portrayal of Lian'er Ju village serves as "an almost ideal model of humanity's most primitive and authentic state of existence on Earth, existing before the encroachment of ideology, technology, and foreign civilizations." Because of this, any minuscule object not belonging to the ecological sphere of Lian'er Ju that infiltrates the village discreetly disrupts the original balance, leading to a series of cascading effects that thrust the inhabitants into calamity [7].

The transformations experienced by Lianerju are not abrupt but rather subtle and gradual. Consequently, the concept of "disaster" does not manifest clearly but instead arises within the prophecies of outsiders, with the flood accompanying the realization of the prophecy regarding the "camphor tree being struck by lightning." It is precisely due to the fulfillment of this prophecy that the villagers naively trust the remaining predictions, like "the literary star" and "prosperity," expecting them to materialize shortly, while neglecting that all beginnings stem from "disaster." This selective amnesia leads to the belief that "people will eventually erase themselves!" Thus, the inhabitants of Lianerju, during the entire process in which their natural village is gradually replaced

by modern civilization, lose their vigilance. When disaster strikes, they fall into a blind chaos and anxiety without understanding the reasons why.

Furthermore, the surroundings of Lianerju do not offer warnings to the residents of the lake area in the same way that nature depicted by Shen Nian does. By reflecting on the dual narratives, Shen highlights the reciprocal influence between nature and humanity. Therefore, when individuals act against the laws of nature, they will face "punishment" from the natural world. In "Lianerju," there is a greater emphasis on the wholeness of nature and humanity. This wholeness indicates that humans are a part of nature and should respond to it through an understanding of all natural phenomena. At first glance, the dual narrative within the world of Lianerju may not be apparent, as external civilizations slowly infiltrate and alter the village and its people. However, when the unique life forms of Lianerju are affected by external influences, their original state begins to disintegrate. The previously simple and peaceful inhabitants of Lianerju start to adapt to deceit and violence, and the village gradually succumbs to industrialization and modernity[8].

The disaster threatening the residents of Lian'erju is also reflected in Peng Dongming's "Blood-colored Ponds." The flooding of Dongting Lake is a recurring topic for those living in the Dongting Lake area, with relentless land reclamation and dam construction becoming an integral part of their daily existence. This has resulted in continuous dilemmas while simultaneously giving rise to numerous challenges. On one hand, the struggle for survival in nature has forged the resolute spirit of the lake area's inhabitants; on the other hand, the incessant calamities are a backlash against the destruction of the natural environment.

"Blood-colored Ponds" devotes little attention to the portrayal of the serene beauty of nature; rather, it emphasizes "disaster" starting from the very title. The narrative primarily recounts the efforts of a production team engaged in flood prevention and embankment construction in Dongting Lake. Despite its brevity, the novella predominantly focuses on character development. The depiction of Dongting Lake's beauty in "Blood-colored Ponds" largely exists within the realm of imagination and oral tradition, transforming into the residents' longing and hope for a better life. However, the floods render their efforts futile, culminating in countless sacrifices. Dams constructed over months are swept away by torrential rains, cruelly mocking the insignificance of humanity and the caprice of officials. The lake area's inhabitants are on the brink of an uncertain and precarious Spring Festival [9].

"The Last Homestead" narrates the story of villagers' forced relocation following their failed dam construction efforts. Yet, regardless of how or where they migrate, those born in the lake area are engulfed by a profound sense of loneliness and abandonment. Consequently, they begin to yearn for and fabricate an idyllic version of their homeland year after year. However, due to the initial errors in environmental exploitation, the gap between their aspirations for an ideal home and the reality widens, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to "ominous signs over the lake... a disaster will inevitably descend, sooner or later." Compared to the depictions of disaster in the lakeside region by Shen Nian and Xiong Yuqun, Peng Dongming presents himself more as a participant, showcasing the authenticity of disaster with a strong posture, reflecting a clear anti-anthropocentric awareness[10].

The dual narratives regarding nature highlight a reflection on the relationship between humanity and nature. While Shen Nian emphasizes harmonious coexistence with nature and Xiong Yuqun focuses on a holistic perspective, Peng Dongming exhibits a significant tendency to critique anthropocentrism. Ultimately, all narratives serve as a reflection of survival and the spiritual dilemmas of humanity. Natural disasters point to a deeper spiritual crisis faced by humankind, and the act of narrating disaster and seeking livelihoods is an indispensable aspect of the relationship between humanity and ecology. Writers are compelled to confront desire, engage in reflection, and pursue self-redemption. This constitutes a primary characteristic of ecological writings about

Dongting Lake.

3. Rewriting Ecological Relationships: Disenchantment and Re-enchantment

To achieve the goal of rescuing the ecosystem from crisis, it is first essential to explore how to extricate humanity from its own predicament.[2] This implies a reaffirmation of human nature. The reaffirmed human nature should embody characteristics that promote harmony with nature and its protection. This perspective also highlights the significance of analyzing the writings related to Dongting Lake from an ecological aesthetics standpoint. In their depictions of social ecology, Xiong Yuqun and Shen Nian excel in portraying the unique Muyu culture of Hunan and the diverse human natures birthed by the great lake. Shen Nian offers an objective analysis, while Xiong Yuqun infuses a ghostly romanticism, and Peng Dongming subtly embeds critique within documentary narratives. Collectively, they illuminate the dynamics between individuals and their environment, primarily exemplifying the egalitarian view expressed as "harmony nurtures life, coexistence promotes continuity" and the expectation of human nature that asserts, "those aspects of human nature that fundamentally cannot be suppressed deserve the respect and resolute defense of a civilized society."

Shen Nian aims to create a grand lake world infused with divinity, drawing inspiration from "water." In interviews, he frequently discusses the affinity between people and "water" in his works. In "Shen Nian: Tenderly Retaining the Time of Rivers and Lakes," he points out that "The Lake News" reflects the unique ecological environment of Dongting Lake within his aesthetic practice. He notes, "It encapsulates my deep affection and longing for my hometown, as well as my worries and aspirations... When I 'salvage' their life stories, I am, in fact, preserving the time belonging to rivers and lakes, experiencing and learning to endure difficulties, obstacles, and death. I strive to transcend a singular human perspective to articulate my understanding of life, existence, and nature." [3]His insights are further elaborated in "Ecological Literature: Writing Human Destiny Amidst Natural Change – An Interview with Shen Nian and Liu Wenfei," where he states, "Every writer engaged in the craft of natural ecological literature must confront the challenges posed by desire, and must articulate reflections of self-rescue." [4] In his narrative, the streams, forests, grasslands, mountains, and all elements of the earth require the "creation" of a future characterized by sincere trust and reliance within the earthly existence. However, Shen Nian's depiction of the Dongting Lake ecosystem transcends mere aesthetic contemplation of human survival issues; he seeks, through a return to his native land, to establish a spiritual refuge that stands in contrast to a modern society plagued by environmental degradation and human dislocation, thereby simulating an ideal sense of natural humanity. In his portrayal, whether it be the lake water, the milu deer, the Yangtze river dolphin, the migratory birds, or the "natural spirit" of the land where black poplars are cultivated, all serve to awaken humanity. In "The Lake News," the protagonists are categorized into two groups: one embodies the resilience and tolerance of "water" and experiences the redemption of "awakened humanity," while the other is represented by the "unrepentant" who meet an inevitable end [11].

Firstly, I would like to discuss the concept of "humanity being awakened." "Water" nurtures all things, imparting its characteristics to the creatures and plants within the lake, including humanity. In "The Great Lakes Chronicles," Shen Nian candidly addresses death, dedicating much of the latter half of the book to people's "stories of life and death." [5]Those who have passed become a lasting source of pain and reflection for the living, yet the lake people have their own means of redemption. The phrase "A human becomes a flying dragon, and the flying dragon transforms into a fish" [6]refers to the incantation recited by the feng shui master sought by Xu Feilong's wife after his maritime disaster, with his ultimate destination being the "water" that gave him life. Humans are born from water, and after death, they return to it; thus, the death and life philosophy of the lake

people is attained through this "cycle of life." Traditional Chinese culture also venerates cyclical existence, presenting a perspective on reincarnation that alleviates the anxieties of the lakeside inhabitants more than evolutionary theory. It can even be argued that only by returning to the water can the lake people find their place and purpose in life.

Secondly, I would like to address the "unrepentant." Laozi states, "The highest good is like water, which benefits all things without contending, dwelling in places that others disdain, thus it is close to the Tao." He also professes, "Man follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Tao, and the Tao follows naturalness." [7] According to Laozi, humans should ultimately learn from, emulate, and adhere to nature, with the more specific embodiment being to emulate "water." However, human society has challenged "water" for thousands of years, rather than following and respecting it. Thus, "water" imparts tolerance and resilience to those with awakened humanity, while leaving punishment for the unrepentant ecological destroyers. The tragic figures depicted in Shen Nian's works—particularly those with "unique skills," whether outstanding in hunting birds or fishing—find themselves haunted by nightmares and sea disasters as a result of their relationship with the Great Lake. It is challenging to establish a causal relationship between their grim old age and the brutality they exhibited in their youth. In "The Great Lakes Chronicle," Shen Nian utilizes the motif of "water" to weave a subtle thread of causality throughout the narrative, reminding readers of the poignant fate that befalls the characters, ultimately suggesting a deeper significance.

Lian'erju interprets the concept of natural humanity through a fluid narrative structure. As time unfolds, characters are presented like a revolving lantern. In the enchanting realm of Lian'erju, the interplay of real time, political time, and historical time continually shifts, with Xiong Yuqun employing a casual, unrestricted storytelling method to articulate the villagers' intrinsic state of existence: spontaneous and liberated. Furthermore, "Lian'erju" offers a dual perspective on the understanding of natural humanity through its portrayal of supernatural forces. These mystical elements traverse time and space, influencing or determining critical life-and-death decisions, thereby challenging the ideology of "human centrism." Within this context, the spiritually resonant nature in Lian'erju does not serve a didactic role; rather, it exists objectively, creating a holistic experience where both the villagers and the natural environment coexist independently, transcending time. The harmony between humans and nature depends on mutual respect and alignment with these objective realities.

The lake-dwelling inhabitants of Lian'erju are acutely aware of this principle. The indigenous people often find themselves dreaming of the lake or receiving prophecies from the camphor tree, enabling them to empathize with their surroundings. For instance, Wu Yuqing, who can receive messages from spirits, the maternal relatives who kneel by the river to retrieve the frightened soul of "me," and certain villagers who receive guidance after being enchanted by the big locust tree—all reflect the reverence that Lian'erju villagers have for nature and everything around them. This attitude forms an integral part of the ecological fabric of Lian'erju. Even in epochs where verbal and physical expressions are constrained, the residents maintain a yearning for divine connection, utilizing sky lanterns to invoke blessings from the heavens.

In the world of "Lian'erju," the relationship between humans and nature is not one of opposition, nor is it the traditional monologue of subject and object; rather, it embodies a new dialogical relationship where both sides are co-subjects. Humanity's attitude towards nature has shifted from one of conquest to one of engagement and understanding. Both "earthquake panic rumors" and "flood destiny" reflect the individual vitality present in Lian'erju, symbolizing a particular mental state of nature. This spirit is characterized by a profound reverence and respect for the natural world and represents a deep interpretation of the concept of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. "Lian'erju" establishes an imaginative portrayal of ideal human nature within the context of ancient and primitive ecosystems. The relationship between nature and humans in the village of

Lian'erju resonates with Xu Hengjun's definition of ecological beauty: "It is a life resonance and song of joy arising from the interconnection of human and natural life."

The work "Blood-Red Lake" vividly illustrates humanity's helpless struggle against the destructive forces of nature. Yet, behind this struggle lies the fierce spirit of the people in the lake region and their deep yearning for survival. Each year, residents of Dongting Lake are faced with the daunting task of flood prevention and embankment construction, guided by the wisdom gained from past floods: "First drainage, then sewage removal, and finally, inputting dry soil." [8] This hard-earned knowledge instills a natural confidence in the locals regarding levee construction, until heavy rains once again inundate the area, rendering their efforts seem delayed indefinitely. The cold mist and frost envelop the lake district, breeding anxiety that leads to both escape and death, evoking an instinctive fear and helplessness that profoundly resonates within their souls. This stark realization of nature's uncontrollable power is primarily felt by those directly involved in the levee construction. In contrast, the misguided decision-makers command those gripped by fear to resist the punishments meted out by nature. Ultimately, the embankment, which took an entire winter to build, succumbs entirely to a stormy night, underscoring the futility of their struggle.

In this brief article, Peng Dongming does not present an ideal model of his expectations regarding human nature within his dual contemplation of nature and humanity. Instead, he leaves at the end of "Blood-Red Lakes" a sarcastic remark about decision-makers speculating on who "hid it in their pants" [10]. Compared to Shen Nian and Xiong Yuqun, Peng Dongming's re-enchantment of ecology and affirmation of humanity is more painful and remains unfinished. As he mentioned in the postscript of "The Last Homestead," where he recounts the tale of repairing dams, he reflects on being completely unaware of worldly affairs for a decade, feeling as though he has been "cast away" [9]. He continues to grapple with the trauma from ten years ago related to dam repairs, striving to heal from the pain of that time while confronting an unyielding human nature obsessed with nature. Furthermore, his reminiscences of the lost primitive landscapes serve as a re-enchantment of the natural scenery of Dongting Lake, challenging anthropocentrism and advocating for a renewed appreciation and reverence for primitive lifestyles.

In the ecological writings of writers from Yueyang, the relationship between "humanity and the big lake" has long been characterized by a state of "unity in diversity," where each component possesses relative independence and adopts its own mode of existence. Within this ecological framework, the role of "humans" in conquering and controlling nature has been diminished, leading to a retreat of anthropocentric thinking from the narrative. Instead, a causal relationship among "humans, nature, and society" emerges, resulting in a form of "re-enchantment" with the natural world. Writers express confusion regarding human nature and urgently seek resolutions to the pressing issues at hand, collectively turning their attention to the most primal, influential, and locally distinctive elements of their surroundings.

4. Imagining the Spiritual Homeland: Conflict and Integration

The unique witch-culture of Dongting Lake imparts a resilient vitality and romantic spirit to the region, which in turn shapes the fearless, courageous, and tenacious character of its inhabitants. Together with the mystical and romantic landscape of the lake area, they embody an ideal ecological model of coexistence between humans and nature—one that highlights their interdependence. The narrative of spiritual ecology is reflected in a consciousness of returning home and an unyielding life perspective. Shen Nian writes of achieving harmony in the water world through reverence, while Xiong Yuqun advocates a return to history and nature, and Peng Dongming envisions an ideal homeland that navigates through confusion and fantasy.

Shen Nian primarily critiques anthropocentrism, aiming to strip away the beastly aspects of

human nature while preserving the purest elements to achieve a state of ideal coexistence with the natural world. The aforementioned discussion in "Great Lake News" categorizes humanity's salvation into two distinct groups: the salvaged and those who remain obstinately ignorant. The key difference between these groups lies in their reverence for the diverse life of the lake. Those devoid of awe confront the primordial thinking of the lake region with their arrogant modern rationality: they exhibit blind confidence towards invasive species and an insatiable exploitation of the great lake that nurtures them. When self-interest overshadows their respect for their homeland, punishment inevitably follows[12].

The concept of coexistence and integration serves as a common destination for many writers, but for Shen Nian, the unique creation of the "lake people" finds its redemption beginning with the reverence for "water," ultimately culminating in the transformation into "water." In Shen Nian's water world, humans and elk regard each other as equals amid the chaos of floods, while fishermen, fearing the mystical entities of the water, cease the capture of river dolphins. A rescued white crane reciprocates by saving a little girl from humans. This illustrates the melding of humanity and nature, where a harmonious and egalitarian spiritual home is established through a gradual return to reverence. In confronting the unprecedented spiritual upheaval brought by modern technological innovations, Xiong Yuqun grapples with feelings of alienation stemming from being away, alongside confusion and anxiety resulting from the progressive distancing and fading of agrarian culture and native memories. He attempts to outline an ideal primitive landscape from the past and memories, seeking refuge for the soul. Through documenting the history and reality of humanity, he perceives nature as the ideal abode for mankind, treating human history itself as a microcosm of societal development.

In Lan Er Ju Li, besides the indigenous people, there are two other groups: one is purely foreign, and the other consists of intermediaries who either leave or are set to return. Foreigners like Zhan Muqing and Wu Xiaolu find a refuge in Lan Er Ju that is not tolerated by traditional Confucian norms; their "freedom and ease" save these lost souls. Those like "me," who are prophesied foreigners or the blind, face journeys of departure or lifelong searches for a place to settle, grappling with humanity's loss of its life roots. Outside the natural ecosystem of Lan Er Ju, two cultural forces intertwine. The intrusion of light disrupts time, leading the people of Lan Er Ju to blur day and night, neglecting nature's laws. Likewise, the arrival of radios and telephones breaks spatial barriers, fostering communication between Lan Er Ju and the outside world, causing a gradual disconnect from their idealized primitive home. Meanwhile, rumors of earthquakes and the indulgence born from panic signal a natural, carefree state of life in Lan Er Ju. Yet these also reveal that the spiritual calamity of humans is a more significant disaster than earthquakes. In Lan Er Ju, "some say, yet another miracle of the world! Humanity will eventually erase itself!" This prophecy of "cultural loss" mirrors humanity's confusion and anxiety about future survival, reflecting a profoundly lost mental state[13].

In Lianerju, the struggle between two cultures became more pronounced after the Cultural Revolution. For instance, Huang Anshi faced criticism under the scorching sun. Villagers felt pity for him. Some secretly provided him with water. Others looked at his face and saw a good person. They consoled Huang Anshi with quotations while sneaking into the small dark room. The villagers even fought with stage managers like Yang Yingbang just to hear a flower drum opera. They went as far as to tie up the driver and several stage managers. The natural and carefree spirit of Lianerju constantly clashed with the political culture and ideology of the time. The declaration that "stage managers feared the people of Lianerju" and "would take a detour upon seeing them" [10] signified the victory of the villagers. This also reflected the author's hopeful aspirations and the values he wished to establish. However, as I prepare to leave my hometown and look back at Lianerju, a sense of strangeness arises. This feeling signifies the spiritual disorientation stemming from losing a

natural home and experiencing cultural erosion. I am not just traveling far from home; I face the potential departure of my soul and spirit. Additionally, I grapple with the looming reality of Lianerju's genuine modernization within the context of the times.

Lianerju embodies the author's memories and imagination. It serves as a perfect interpretation of "the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, a union of heaven and humanity, and a nurturing ground of infinite vitality." [11] Here, all deceitful actions, external political struggles, and the greed and malice inherent in human nature dissolve. People may be ignorant, but they possess rich spirituality. Nature provides a sanctuary for both healthy and unhealthy individuals, embracing all wandering souls.

Dongming Peng writes few direct passages about a spiritual homeland. His work is filled with conflict. Unlike the first two authors, he seeks ideal worlds within these conflicts and emphasizes reflection. Instead of focusing on constructing a spiritual homeland, he highlights the pain of humanity's inability to harmonize with nature [12].

Peng criticizes the ignorance of decision-makers by showing humanity's struggle against nature's power. He feels deep compassion for the lower classes, who suffer from the long history of flood disasters and loss of homes. Humanity finds itself in long-term fear due to relentless floods. Building levees and reservoirs represents a quest for an imagined homeland, as they attempt to compensate for the shocks of nature for spiritual fulfillment, yet they fail to realize they have strayed far from coexistence with nature. In "The Last Homeland," Peng creates a grotesque figure that absurdly preys on frogs, bird eggs, and large white birds. By the book's end, the homeland remains unreconstructed, and migrants die bizarrely one by one, leaving only the grotesque figure mindlessly skinning frogs. This "grotesque" undoubtedly reflects Peng's ecological views. He warns readers to consider humanity's actions in relation to nature: if "human migration" is "nature's escape," then "the grotesque" signifies humanity's ecological destruction. Thus, all bizarre actions find their explanation. In nature's eyes, those who recklessly destroy the ecosystem are also "grotesque." Peng's depiction of a spiritual homeland serves as a warning. An ideal homeland exists only in fantasy, and only by acknowledging the horrors of human behavior can the possibility of rebuilding a homeland emerge.

Shen Nian, Xiong Yuqun, and Peng Dongming seek to identify a human spiritual ecological home that tolerates conflicts among humanity and nature, people, and culture. This environment provides solace to humans living in close ecological cohabitation. It also allows liberation of one's true nature in nature itself, while offering redemption and freedom in the spiritual homeland constructed around Dongting Lake, ultimately achieving harmony in the spiritual realm.

5. The Value and Significance of Local Writers in Dongting Lake's Ecological Aesthetics

As a component of nature, humans depend on the natural world for existence. The ecological literature emerging around the lake district offers a unique interpretation pertinent to its inhabitants. This literature delves deeply into ecological aesthetics, examining three aspects: the natural environment, ecological relationships, and a sense of spiritual home. It progressively explores these themes. In light of the current ecological crisis, works such as "The Last Home," "Crimson Lakes," and "Great Lake News" critically reflect on the failings of modern urban civilization through the lens of ecological aesthetic criticism. They vehemently denounce humanity's pursuit of economic growth at the expense of environmental destruction. These authors propose their own ecological aesthetic perspective, emphasizing the interdependence and mutual influence between humans and nature. They advocate for a reverence for nature, calling for harmony between humanity and the natural world. Their works embody a view of ecological equality, manifesting in a coexisting and mutually beneficial relationship between humans and nature.

Analyzing the unique Wuchu culture of Dongting Lake from the perspective of ecological aesthetics reveals its distinctive beauty of life and romantic cultural elements. The three authors describe the tales of Wuchu deities to varying degrees, illustrating the influence of Wuchu culture on the people and spirit of the lake area from multiple perspectives. Xiong Yuqun, immersed in the Wuchu cultural spirit of "unity between humans and deities," constructs a literary world interconnecting humanity with nature and the supernatural.[12] Shen Nian emphasizes the spirituality of water, suggesting that all things possess a soul. Meanwhile, Peng Dongming captures the natural divine power alongside the resilient and enterprising spirit of the lake area's inhabitants. Their unique insights on death and life do not exaggerate the terror of death, thereby showcasing the distinctive regional cultural characteristics of Dongting Lake. This also contributes a unique ethnic quality associated with the Hunan region to Chinese literature. The Wuchu culture presented here merits further contemplation regarding the ecological aesthetic value of writing about Dongting Lake. As a regional characteristic, it imparts a singular vitality to ecological writings of Dongting Lake, ingeniously crafting a metaphysical ideal ecological environment. On one hand, it creates a sense of "magical realism," enabling a departure from the illusion that "nature possesses beauty independent of human influence." On the other hand, it relies on the unique aesthetic traits of Hunan culture to avoid merging with contemporary society's tendency toward generalized aesthetics.

In addition, their works serve as a wake-up call to the crisis of modern rationality as well as the natural and spiritual disasters faced by Dongting Lake. Modern rationality provides convenience in daily life, but after reaping its benefits, humanity faces nature's retaliation. In Marxist philosophy, this means viewing issues dialectically and recognizing the absence of absolute truths. The cultural fractures caused by the societal changes driven by the industrial technological revolution have led to a spiritual crisis. The consumption mindset and anthropocentric consciousness have damaged our homelands, resulting in the loss of original ecological habitats. The excesses of modern rationality eventually lead to a loss of humanity and a void in the spiritual realm. A writer from Yueyang confronts the urgent issues of human existence through their ecological writings about Dongting Lake. They offer imaginative possibilities for addressing the shortcomings of modern rationality, providing spiritual solutions to the "void and the land of nothingness" that arise during the development of human society.

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