

Devastation and Rebirth: "Atomic Bomb Literature" of Japan from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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Abstract: Themed with the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the "atomic bomb literature" records the miserable scenes when and after the atomic bombs exploded, and reflects the great sufferings to the Japanese people for nuclear weapons. "Atomic bomb literature" is a major branch of Japanese postwar literature and an integral part of environmental ecology. From the perspective of ecofeminism, this paper interprets the classic works of Japan's "atomic bomb literature", specifically analyses the catastrophe suffered by women and nature for atomic bombing, and dissects the hatred of writers for nuclear weapons and military wars, their worries about the protection of ecological environment and the fate of human beings, and more importantly, their concerns about the living conditions of young women and their care for female groups, thus creating a new perspective for the study of Japanese postwar literature and its representative writers.

1. Concept and Significance of "Atomic Bomb Literature"

The "atomic bomb literature" refers to the integral literature that records the tragedy of the explosion in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, tracks and reports the lives of the survivors, and analyses the living conditions of modern people in the context of "nucleus" and the origin of the imagination of writers. So far, Japan's "atomic bomb literature" has roughly gone through three development stages. In the first stage, i.e., the 1940s and 1950s, writers, who personally experienced the atomic bombing, created a large number of documentary works based on their own experience of "being bombed", including *Summer Flowers* (1947) of Tamiki Hara, *City of Corpses* (1948) of Yoko Ota, *Poems of the Atomic Bomb* (1951) of Sankichi Toge, etc., which serve as the original basis for the study of "atomic bomb literature" thereafter. In the second stage, i.e., the 1960s and 1970s, some conscientious writers, who did not experience the bombing, also joined in the creation of "atomic bomb literature", such as *Black Rain* (1965) of Masuji Ibuse, *The Shade of Trees* (1972) of Ineko Sata and *Ritual of Death* (1975) of Kyoko Hayashi, which are no longer limited to reflecting the "atomic bombing" disaster and the war theme, but reflect more profound social and ecological problems. In the third stage, i.e., the 1970s and 1980s, the "atomic bomb literature" became more and more diversified, and people focused on the peaceful use of nuclear energy rather than on atomic bombs and nuclear weapons. The "atomic bomb literature" in this stage is also called "atomic power generation literature", namely the literary form about the atomic power generation, with the works including *Saikai Nuclear Power Station* (1986) of Mitsuharu Inoue, *Ichinenji Temple* (1978) and *Scenery in Cycas revoluta* (1986) of Kenzo Takemoto, etc.

The "atomic bomb literature" and "atomic power generation literature" are collectively called "nuclear literature". This concept was invented by the famous Japanese critic Kazuo Kuroko, who believed that "although the nuclear conditions present different features with the changing times, the theme that the existence of nucleus has threatened the survival of human beings has never changed since August 1945." [1] It is learned that 140,000 people died of atomic bombing and subsequent burns or radiation only in Hiroshima by the end of December 1945. At present (2017), about 200,000 people hold the "Health Manual for Bombed Person" to get free medical care. Therefore, the "atomic bomb literature" has shouldered a heavy social responsibility of warning future generations to use nuclear weapons and nuclear energy prudently since its birth. The descriptions of human purgatory littered with corpses in the early literary works have been warning people of the devastating consequences of nuclear wars, which criticize the disasters to human society caused by militarism, induce people to realize the importance of peace and the fragility and significance of life, advocate human beings to respect life and natural laws, and reflect strong humanistic concern. "Recording history in the form of literature, the atomic bomb literature allow readers to experience the care and thought of authors in addition to making those events fascinating and astonishing. By reading such works, people can perceive the true essence of life or the world. The atomic bomb and devastation, and the death and hope coexist." [2] This is also the significance of continuously studying Japan's "atomic bomb literature" today. With the development of the times, the "atomic bomb literature" has constantly changed and presented some new characteristics, thus our research must keep pace with the times. This paper attempts to interpret the classical works of "atomic bomb literature" of Japan from the perspective of ecofeminism, and to explore the views on ecology and women reflected in these works, so as to provide a new perspective and direction for the study of "atomic bomb literature" of China.

2. Ecological Themes in Early "Atomic Bomb Literature"

In the early 1940s and 1950s, the "atomic bomb literature" mainly focused on the physical and mental sufferings caused by atomic bombing and the despair of survivors after losing their homes.

2.1. Theme of Death

On August 15, 1945, a B-29 bomber of the U.S. Army dropped an atomic bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" over Hiroshima. The atomic bomb exploded 600 meters above the center of Hiroshima, accompanied by a deafening noise and a strong white flash. With huge rising mushroom clouds and roaring fire pillars, Hiroshima was instantly covered by fire, and 100,000 people were dead or injured due to the fire. Meanwhile, the strong light waves produced by the atomic bombing blinded those people who witnessed the explosion, the ultra-high temperature released by the explosion turned their homes to ashes, and many people suffered from "atomic diseases" due to the black rain containing radioactive substances and died in the end... According to statistics, the population of Hiroshima was over 340,000 before the bombing, of which over 88,000 people died on that day, and over 51,000 people were injured and missing. The whole city of Hiroshima was shrouded under a great haze of death.

"Under the dazzling and hot sky was a silver empty world, where there were roads, rivers and bridges," described by Tamiki Hara, the pioneer of the "atomic bomb literature", in *Summer Flowers* about the terrifying scenes at the moment of explosion and afterwards, "red and swollen corpses were everywhere. It must be a new hell built in some ingenious way, where everyone had been erased, and even the facial expression of the corpses had been replaced by something model or mechanical." [3] The metaphor of "hell" incisively and vividly illustrates the scenes of purgatory-like Hiroshima with corpses everywhere after the atomic bombing. Due to the huge radiation and

high temperature generated at the moment of explosion, people nearby were instantly turned to ashes. Even if some people survived by luck, they were mostly burnt out of recognition and suffered unspeakably.

Yoko Ota, another representative writer of the "atomic bomb literature", always "observes everything around in the eyes of both an average person and a writer". [4] "Those people were swollen like dead people, with terribly swollen faces, swollen eyes and red eyelids," recorded by Yoko Ota, a writer who also experienced the explosion, of the tragic scenes that she witnessed during evacuation with extremely sorrow and indignant words in *City of Corpses*, "all of them stretched out their swollen hands like fat crabs, with gray skin drooping under the naked arms." [4] "In *City of Corpses*, Yoko Ota faithfully records the tragedy she personally experienced on August 6, 1945 in Hiroshima, the first city in the world to be baptized by the atomic bomb," highly praised by Kiichi Sasaki for this novel, "from a literary point of view, this work is an record of atomic bombing as great as *Summer Flowers* of Tamiki Hara among the narratives of atomic bomb." [5]

In a word, the writers of early "atomic bomb literature" always faithfully recorded what they saw and heard on the way of evacuation based on their personal experience of explosion, and depicted horrible pictures of that tragic world. Their works are often profoundly themed with death, expressing the hatred and helplessness of writers for war and showing the fragility and insignificance of life.

2.2. Theme of Devastation

In addition to the death of human beings and animals, the atomic bombing destroyed architectures, plants and landscapes completely. It is learned that 48,000 out of 76,000 architectures in Hiroshima were totally destroyed, and 22,000 were seriously damaged after the bombing. People lost not only their lives or relatives but also their homeland they survived on. According to the newspapers at that time, the city center of Hiroshima would be uninhabitable in the next 75 years, and human beings would die soon if they mistakenly ate dead fish and shrimp in the river.

In *Summer Flowers*, Tamiki Hara records the scenes like the end of the world comes: damaged and collapsed houses, messy fallen electric wires, overturned burning cars, broken trees, blazing flames and rolling black smoke, and tornado-wrapped black rain could be seen everywhere... The huge energy generated at the moment of explosion destroyed the nearby architectures in an instant. The houses originally used as shelters became accomplices killing and injuring numerous people. It can be seen how vulnerable human beings are to nuclear weapons! In *From the Ruins*, Tamiki Hara contrasts the quiet rural scenery of the refuge (Yawata Village) with the ruined scenery of Hiroshima after the explosion, which makes it impossible to believe that the two places are under the same blue sky: the shallow streams are crystal clear, the black-winged dragonflies are resting on the rocks by the river, the distant mountains are quietly merged into the golden dusk, and the sunshine on the top of the mountains is glaring. Through the contrast of the two scenes, Tamiki Hara expresses his love for the homeland, his tender affection for the landscapes in the hometown, his hatred for the nuclear war that destroyed his homeland and his expectation for a peaceful society.

"Traditionally, the mainstream western culture views the relationship between human beings and plants, rivers, animals and ecosystems fully from an instrumentalization perspective, and defines the relationship between human beings and other beings in nature based on the relationship between egoists and others," raised by Val Plumwood, the leader of ecofeminism, "human beings stand far away from nature, and nature is only a means to satisfy certain special interests of them." [6] In western tradition, reason is to nature, just as wives are to husbands and slaves are to masters, which exists as the other. Therefore, nature must exist in accordance with rational needs. When reason demands devastation of nature, nature can only obey orders without hesitation. This also explains

the mentality of the U.S. Army when they dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II – the yellow race (referring to the Japanese here) is less noble than the white race, and the local natural ecology shall serve the military strategy of the U.S. and even destroy itself. At bottom, dualism is the root cause of this human catastrophe, and humans and nature are sacrificed for the desire of humans. The themes of death and devastation in the early "atomic bomb literature" are actually ecological themes describing the fate of humans and nature.

3. Feminism in Classical “Atomic Bomb Literature”

As the most lethal weapon at present, the atomic bomb is undoubtedly destructive to humans and the natural environment. Among all the victims, however, young women (i.e., teenage girls) no doubt suffered the greatest harm, who were called “atomic bomb girls”.

After the war, the victims of the atomic bombing suffered both physically and mentally and faced hardships in employment and marriage. Atomic bomb explosion affected the health of teenage girls in two ways, of which one was macroscopic, such as disfigurement and disability caused by burns, and the other was invisible to the naked eyes, such as leukemia, infertility, abortion or fetal malformation caused by radiation. On the other hand, physical deficiencies seriously affected the mental health of those girls, resulting in a series of social problems such as inferiority, autism, depression, misanthropy, suicide, etc.

The well-known anti-nuclear fighter Kenzaburo Oe, who won Nobel Prize in Literature, did not experience the "atomic bombing", but he obtained a lot of reliable information through multiple field visits and investigations and created a large number of excellent works of "atomic bomb literature", including the most representative *Hiroshima Notes*. In this work, Kenzaburo Oe records the real cases of several "atomic bomb girls", for example, “on the statistical table, there is a very young dead among the numerous elderly dead. Last winter, the 18-year-old mother died of acute myeloid leukemia. She was born when the atomic bomb exploded, and she died of leukemia right after giving birth to a baby 18 years later.” [7] Because this teenage girl was exposed to nuclear radiation when she was born, her life only lasted 18 years, which was so tragic and pitiful. In addition, some other girls, who were autistic because of severe facial burns, committed suicide for being ridiculed and excluded by others. "Atomic bomb girls" once had become a synonym of young women who were on the edge of society and encountered many misfortunes.

On the other hand, in order to live like average people, the families of the "atomic bomb girls" tried to cover up their experience of being bombed and to get rid of all the relations between them and nuclear radiation. *Black Rain*, a classic work of "atomic bomb literature", adopts narration interspersed with flashbacks to represent the anxiety and busyness of the hero Shigematsu with the marriage of his niece Yasuko, while recalling the scenes of the atomic bombing by writing diaries. This ingenious conception makes the novel more charming. Although it has been five years since the bombing, people keep silent about it, and no matchmaker has ever proposed marriage to Yasuko. Finally, a matchmaker comes one day, and Shigematsu and Yasuko want to seize the opportunity. In order to disprove that Yasuko is sick with any atomic disease, they actively provide her health certificate and copy the diary on the day of bombing as required. Unexpectedly, however, it turns out that Yasuko was indeed affected by the black rain with radioactive substances on the day of bombing. Worse still, after five years, Yasuko has shown symptoms of atomic disease, and she has to be hospitalized for too much pain. Furthermore, there is a small chance for her to find a husband and her life will be filled with pain and darkness. For the "atomic bomb girls", the basic life with marriage, work and family is too luxurious to pursue.

However, the fate of "atomic bomb girls" is far more tragic. After the reports of Japanese media, the "atomic bomb girls" had been hotly discussed, and all sectors of society showed sympathy on

them, donated and sent condolence letters to them. Meanwhile, some people with evil intentions also noticed their existence. In 1952, the Japanese government unexpectedly arranged several victim girls to visit Class A war criminals in prison. Even if those teenage girls had lost their beautiful appearance and happy lives, they were still used as living teaching materials to educate war criminals. It's not hard to imagine their poor situation and soreness. In fact, for politicians, girls were just tools at their disposal to serve the state apparatus. Ecofeminism believes that the belittlement of women and nature also stems from dualism. In the traditional dualism theory, women are often regarded as the accessory of men and the other in male-dominated society. Therefore, it is also taken for granted that the "atomic bomb girls" unconditionally obeys the state apparatus controlled by men.

4. Conclusion

"We are born of the earth. We know that this land is created by us. Because we know ourselves," Susan Griffin commented on the relationship between women and nature, "we are the nature, we are the nature that understands nature. We are the nature with the perspective of nature, the crying nature, the nature that talks about the nature with nature." [8] Ecofeminism holds that the human's domination of nature is closely related to men's domination of women. Therefore, environmental protection movement must go hand in hand with women's liberation movement.

The "atomic bomb literature" of Japan has developed from the early documentary literature, which mostly records facts and releases emotions, to the later artistic form, which integrates ideological, social and literary features as a whole, showing increasingly profound connotations and clear direction. However, it has never deviated from the dual themes of women and nature. Women are those who have lost their families and homes and have been disfigured or suffered from atomic diseases, while nature is the one that has been turned to ruins and scorched earth by atomic bombs. Both are others that were trampled and destroyed. However, we still have reason to believe that they are also egos full of hope and vitality, who can master their own fate and fight for their independence and proper rights, because "the light shines in our hearts" [8]. As the hero longs for at the end of *Black Rain*, everything will be fine when a rainbow comes on the hill over there.

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