

The Background and Theoretical Origin of Ecofeminism

CHEN Ling^{[a],*}

^[a] School of Commerce and Social Studies, Chongqing University of Science and Technology, Chongqing, China.

* Corresponding author.

Supported by the Cultivation Projects of Chongqing Social Science Plans (2013PYFX17); Research Foundation of Chongqing University of Science & Technology (CK2014B05).

Received 16 February 2014; accepted 23 May 2014
Published online 26 June 2014

Abstract

The article observes the practical and theoretical background of Ecofeminism to explore its origin in the theory of romanticism. The study finds that, as a social movement and social trend of thought, Ecofeminism is a combined product of the women's liberation movement and the ecological protection movement. The two movements are designed to develop a non-anthropocentric worldview and behavior, opposing dualistic cultural traditions of rationalism. There is no doubt that this call of "back to nature" has shown a strong romantic color. As the latest progression in feminist theory, Ecofeminism is an ecology-oriented feminism and its theory is inseparable from the nourishment of romanticism.

Key words: Ecofeminism; Ecological crisis; Radical theory; Romanticism

Chen L. (2014). The Background and Theoretical Origin of Ecofeminism. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(4), 104-108. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/4916>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4916>

INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of industrialization and modernization process, ecological problems have become global problems and key issues which constrain the development of nations. In the internal social ecological

systems, gender division and gender inequality have also become important factors that constrain the development. How to effectively overcome the ecological crisis and solve gender conflicts are theoretical problems as well as practical problems. Before the 1960s, the ecological movement and the women's liberation movement had always been studied as two independent problems until the appearance of the ecofeminism theory, and then ecological issues and women's issues were able to be combined as a whole for research. The term, Ecofeminism or Ecological Feminism, was first proposed in 1974 by the French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in *Feminism or Destruction (Le Feminismeou la mort)*. She called on women to lead ecological revolution and establish new relationships between humanity and nature as well as man and woman. The both movements are designed to develop a non-anthropocentric worldview and behavior, which have a common movement goal. It is Ecofeminism that is a combination of the goal of the two movements (Guan, 1996).

Although Ecofeminism was proposed in the 1970s, it became an important thought and movement in the 1980s. Obviously, as a combined product of ecological movement and women's movement, the development of Ecofeminism is directly affected by feminism and ecologism. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a systematic carding of the origin of Ecofeminism.

1. THE BACKGROUND OF ECOFEMINISM

The generation of Ecofeminism had a close relationship with the international situation at that time. The ecological crisis and environmental pollution brought by economic globalization had caused the world's alert. The threat and the presence of militarism and nationalism have made national relationship increasingly strained. Opposition to the ruling mode of totalitarian states has become a consensus. Ecofeminism emerged in such a context.

1.1 The Practical Background of Ecofeminism

The generation of Ecofeminism is closely related to the ecological crisis caused by modernization and industrial civilization. As the industrialization improves in modern society, people's demand for resources and energy is increasing in social production and life. Meanwhile, the total amount of production and life waste discharged to the nature is also increasing. When the usage of resources and energy and the waste emissions are beyond the ecological capacity of the natural ecosystem, it produces ecological crisis. The outbreak of the ecological crisis is the reflection and expression of the tense and even deteriorating relationship between humanity and nature. We can see that, when the ecology is damaged, humans will also suffer from the crisis. Judging from this sense, the ecological crisis is essentially a crisis of human beings. In modern industrial society, more and more male family members leave the family and go into the industrial field; women, as consumers and producers as well as family caregivers and educators, bear the traditional social roles in the management of natural resources and food security. This social division of labor makes women suffer greater harm in the ecological crisis. This situation is even more pronounced in the third world countries (Fang & Luo, 2009).

On the one hand, as the modernized agriculture destroys soil fertility, it also does great harm to the body and mind of women involved in the production. Women, as nurturers, bear the social function of population reproduction; therefore, poor harvests caused by environmental degradation and residual chemicals will both do great harm to women's body and mind, thereby affecting the normal operation of population production and constraining the normal process of social development. On the other hand, as the modernized large industry improves employment opportunities for women, it also does great harm to the body and mind of women involved in the production. As nurturers, the harm that is caused by industrial pollution and that women receive in industrial production is always bigger and more profound and it directly affects the quantity and quality of population reproduction. As reproductive technology innovations promote the socialization of women and improve the social status of women, they also directly increase the risk of female social deprivation, especially in the third world countries. In these countries, the emergence of reproductive technology has caused a serious imbalance in the sex ratio of birth between boys and girls. Even the girl's right of birth is being deprived.

In short, the modern industrial society has created an imbalanced relationship between humanity and nature. The society is facing a widespread and worldwide ecological crisis. A series of global environmental pollution incidents have happened, which has caused worldwide concern. Anti-pollution environment

movement has come into being. Environmental protection and practice have become an important part of the world economic development. The rise and development of the global environment movement promotes the public to form the awareness of ecology. Thus ecological ideas and theories can be developing. In the process of concerning environmental problems and examining social situation of women, Ecofeminism, as an important theoretical school, has arisen, which advocates reflecting on and solving ecological and environmental problems from a social gender perspective.

1.2 The Theoretical Background of Ecofeminism

As a combined product of ecological movement and women's movement, Ecofeminism not only collects the theoretical essences of feminism, but also absorbs the theoretical perspectives of ecologism. Based on the integration of these theories and multi-dimensional perspective of theories, Ecofeminism is committed to the critique of modern industrial civilization and tries to rebuild the cultural values of the society so as to obtain the liberation of women and nature.

1.2.1 The Feminist Origin of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is growing, which developing in the soil of the feminist theory. "Its formation and development have established not only on ecofeminism works but also on the theoretical outcomes of Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism and Socialist Feminism in the past 15 years" (Plumwood, 2007). Ecofeminism is mainly the derivative of Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism and Socialist Feminism.

Radical Feminism arose in the 1960s and it is the representative thought of the second wave of the feminist movement. Radical Feminism has the most profound impact on Ecofeminism. Radical feminism highlights the superiority of women's reproductive function, focusing on the relationship, caring and loving culture. It is easier for these ideas to be accepted by Ecofeminism. Radical feminism is the feminism theory that first uses the concept of patriarchy to explain female issues and patriarchy has become the most important theoretical analysis tool of Ecofeminism.

Cultural Feminism was born in the late 1970s and is the combination product of Liberal Feminism and Socialism Feminism. Cultural Feminism emphasizes that social gender is constructed by social culture, that is to say, social gender is a creation of the society and symbols. Ecofeminism also considers nature and women are the products of social culture construction. Cultural Feminism is the first theoretical school that concerns about environmental pollution. The political movement that they have launched aims at ending industrial pollution, which has greatly enhanced people's awareness of such issues.

Socialist Feminism started in the 1970s and combines the thoughts of Marxist ideology and Radical Feminism.

Socialist Feminism's biggest impact on Ecofeminism is its economic analysis approach. Ecofeminism has the tendency of focusing on cultural analysis while ignoring economic analysis. Socialist Feminism once proposed harsh criticism on that, which is an important reason that promotes Ecofeminism to pay attention to economic analysis. A typical example is the ecological economic theory of the third world Ecofeminism. From this we can see that, Ecofeminism is the development of feminism in the ecological dimension.

1.2.2 The Radical Ecological Origin of Ecofeminism

Although Ecofeminism is the combined product of ecology and feminism, its theoretical concern focuses on ecological issues. Therefore, Ecofeminism also actively learns from the latest results of ecological theories, mainly from thoughts of radical ecology like Deep Ecology and Social Ecology, etc. However, both Deep Ecology and Social Economy are not fully qualified as a theoretical basis of ecology from the perspective of Ecofeminism; therefore, Ecofeminism tries to provide a theoretical solution for the integration of various "domination-liberation" issues in ecological movements.

Deep Ecology was generated in the 1960s. For Deep Ecology, ecological crisis has its deep philosophical roots; therefore, Deep Ecology seeks a personal and cultural transformation and proposes the use of holism and non-anthropocentric approach. On the abstract philosophical level, Deep Ecology attributes the two basic principles: self-actualization theory and ecosystem egalitarianism (Warren, 1994).

Ecofeminism endorses Deep Ecology's approach to exploring the "deep" reason of ecological crisis; however, Ecofeminism also conducts critique on Deep Ecology. In their view, Deep Ecology only sees the sameness and connection between human beings and other beings, but ignores the differences and their characteristics between the two. In addition, Deep Ecology focuses too much on the abstract dominant worldview, and it has not the reaction and criticism on the worldview of egoism and ignores the specific hierarchy of domination. Plumwood points out that there is no the reaction on the logical structure of possessive egoism in Deep Ecology, and the result to use the logic of egoism is that self-actualization theory dissolves the Other into the ego, denies the uniqueness and independence of the Other, and negates the existence of the hierarchy of dominance.

One of the most obvious differences between Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism is on the population issue. Deep Ecology takes overpopulation as the main root of ecological crisis and considers that ecological crisis is basically a crisis of overpopulation; therefore, to protect the species diversity, natural ecosystems and wilderness, we must curb population growth. Ecofeminism believes that population reduction can be achieved only by further

suppressing male power structure and its technology and controlling women's fertility (Dryzek, 2008).

Social Ecology is an eco-anarchism. It emphasizes the social dimension and believes that the root of all disasters is hierarchy. Hierarchy implies the existence of at least two groups, one of which has the power to dominate the other. Social Ecology concerns about system and practice analysis. It points out that these systems and practices make hierarchy and competition sustainable. Starting from social systems and practices, Social Ecology mainly focuses on two social problems. The first one is about the connection between social domination and natural domination in the hierarchical society. With regard to this problem, Social Ecology expressly denies the connections between the two, but at the same time it points out that the nature's getting rid of human domination relies on the premise of human out of domination. The second one is that Social Ecology allows human guidance of natural evolution because human rationality and human society are products of evolution and humanity itself is the best part in nature with self-consciousness. The evolution of human society occurred in the "second nature"—a cultural rather than biological environment. Therefore, in the government-led society and patriarchal society, the fundamental way to solve domination lies in the elimination of hierarchy and patriarchy to recreate a "natural" society, that is to say, an anarchy with a cultural diversity and local and regional autonomy (Bookchin, 2008).

From the speech spectrum of the "domination-liberation", Ecofeminism not only conducts a critique on Deep Ecology, but also raises criticism on Social Ecology. Ecofeminism points out that Social Ecology has extended domination from human domination on humanity to human domination on nature, which not only ignores human domination on nature, but also ignores differences and characteristics of human domination between non-hierarchical humans. In addition, Social Ecology focuses on the hierarchical form in human society, defends rationalism and western cultural traditions, refuses to recognize the rejection from rationality to otherness, and maintains the hierarchy and competitive mechanisms associated with modern capitalism and national structuralism. Social Ecology has proposed the concept of "first nature" and "second nature", in which the rational "second nature" domination on the irrational "first nature" provides a defense for the rationality of human domination on nature. Plumwood points out that Social Ecology mainly focuses on human liberation strategies, attributes ecological problems to social problems and has no interest in non-human domination; and the result is to support rationalism in western culture, consolidate the hierarchical construction in society, and confirm the dominant position on nature.

Thus, in the debate between Deep Ecology and Social Ecology, Ecofeminism is not only growing up, but also constitutes radical ecology together with them.

2. THE ROMANTIC GENEALOGY OF ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism opposes the dualism cultural traditions of rationalism and its theory is inseparable from the nourishment of romanticism. Romanticism emphasizes the emotional and intuitive level of human knowledge and stresses the organic worldview. Historically, romanticism appeared as an opposition to the mechanistic worldview of rationalism in the Age of Enlightenment, that is, anti-traditional, anti-cultural, anti-objective, and anti-positivism and scientism. Romanticism became a natural philosophy, mythology and irrationalism. Consistent with the tradition of rationalism, although the generation of romanticism was related to the intellectual movement in the late 18th century and 19th century, the origin of romanticism can be tracked back to the Greek era.

The classical romanticism in the Greek era was mainly represented by Stoicism. Stoicism (also known as the Stoics) is the founder of the theory of natural law. They proposed the ethic philosophy of “living within the laws of nature” and emphasized that nature is a unified organic whole in which each part is organically bound together and harmoniously co-exists and therefore it requires everything comply with the laws of the universe. Obviously, the point of view taking nature as an organism is completely different from the modern society’s “human legislation for nature” which emphasizes the concept of human free will. Different from the free will that modern human beings advocate and the “will to power” that Nietzsche advocates, the Stoic free will emphasizes the will harmonious with nature and in line with nature. This natural essentially remains a naturalistic argument and its so-called natural will ultimately lead to the will of God. “All things happen in accordance with the fate. ...The fate is defined as the endless chain of cause and effect that produces everything and the program that make everything and the world progress” (Miao, 1989, p.626). Everything happening in the natural universe is inevitable and the existence of all beings has shown the rationality and wisdom of the natural universe.

In this way, the wisdom of the natural universe itself is transcendental. It is completely beyond the ability and wisdom extent of human beings and becomes a wisdom that human beings can never reach. Therefore, the wisdom of the universe must prevail over the secular humanist and this wisdom of the universe can only be understood as an abstract rationality in the end. The whole “world is a living presence and it is rational, living and intellectual. ...It has soul” (Miao, 1989, p.626). Rationality is intrinsic to nature. In this way, there is space reserved for God and it also buries the foreshadowing of highlighting the humanity’s rationality. Ecofeminism starts from organic theory and emphasizes dual loyalty to the world of the flesh and to the world of “poetry”. This dual loyalty to the world of the flesh and to the world of “poetry” more

or less has limited women to bluntly insist metaphysics and wisdom. She tries to combine life limitations and knowledge transcendence together, that is to say, she is not willing to accept Cartesian philosophy and its formal logic as well as all the doctrines related to rationalism. “The naturalism that she is familiar with is similar to the naturalism that the Stoics or new Platonists believed in the 16th century” (Beauvoir, 1998, p.699).

In the Age of Enlightenment, the romantic view of naturalism held high the banner to criticize rationality. Enlightenment awakened the rational domination of scientism. In opposition to rational lifestyle, romanticism advocated opposing the “totality” of rationality and it was in favor of the difference and the heterogeneity in the sameness. This is mainly represented by Rousseau’s naturalism. Rousseau opposes Robert Filmer’s argument that “human beings are not born free” and proposes “natural rights” and “all men are created equal”. He believes that in the natural state people are born free and equal and it does not exist the so-called inequality. There is no distinction between people from birth, nor the existence of occupying more property or enjoying special rights. Equality is a natural human talent and equal rights are natural to people. Rousseau’s argument of “opposition to gender differences” is accepted by green romanticism. Romantic Ecofeminism refuses the principles of rationalism in Enlightenment and believes that ecological crisis is caused by excessive use of modern science and technology; therefore, they advocate to seek the way to change the way of thinking that human beings know and experience the world, respect the uniqueness and the unique values of women, recognize the difference between men and women, and emphasize cultural diversity.

In postmodern culture where rationalism is criticized, late romanticism’s view of “non-identity” itself contains multicultural characteristics. This trend of thought originates from the socialcritical theory of the Frankfurt School. History has proven that there hides the principle of identity behind rationalism. The principle of identity is a central and class-slavery relationship, containing the final results of all slavery and mandate. Therefore, in the “negative dialectics”, Adorno criticizes rational identity, opposes dualism in which the subject is in opposition to the object, and opposes all the slavish and mandatory things contained in dualism. Benjamin calls this non-central, non-hierarchical and non-slavish relationship as “star cluster”. The significance of “star cluster” lies in the maintenance of non-identity and the heterogeneity and particularity of objects, making objects existing in a relationship system which can intervene between each other without a dominant relationship. All the factors not only get their own independent existence but also exist in the same dialectical conflict. Therefore, in “star cluster”, all hierarchy, oppression and hegemony are nonexistent. This “star cluster” essentially seeks a “non-identical identity”, that is to say, this is a non-identity and

difference based on identity, within that identity and in support of the logic of identity (Adorno, 1993).

Ecofeminism borrows the view of “non-identity” of late romanticism and advocates diversity and difference, that is, the “non-identical identity”; therefore, it is different from not only early feminist theory’s recognition and acceptance of “identity” but also postmodernism’s thorough and radical denial and digestion of “identity”. Ecofeminism affirms the “non-identical identity” in the criticism of “identity” and recreates the practical relationship between humanity and nature as well as between people.

CONCLUSION

As a combined product of ecological movement and women’s movement, Ecofeminism not only collects the theoretical essence of feminism, but also absorbs the theoretical perspectives of ecologism. In addition, it also inherits and develops the previous social and cultural critical theories. Based on the integration of these theories and the multi-dimensional perspective of theories, in the social practice of environmental movement, Ecofeminism often combines environmental problems and women’s problems to solve, proposes to focus on ecological problems from a female point of view, and applies female principles to ecological movement; at the same time, it advocates to develop feminism from ecological principles. Therefore, when inheriting the theory and views of

feminism, Ecofeminism emphasizes to recognize the importance of ecological system protection from a female perspective and develops its vision of feminism theory in the practice of ecological movement. There is no doubt that this call of “back to nature” has shown a strong romantic color.

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