

# *The Contemporary Chinese Ecological Feminist Theory and Art in Globalization Process*

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**Abstract:** This article tries to analyze the development process of eco-feminism in China and the West from different perspectives. In the first chapter, researcher will briefly introduce the core ideas of eco-feminist theory and answer what eco-feminism really is and its current state of development. In the second chapter, researcher will explain and discuss the different development trends and development outcomes of ecofeminism in China and the West in different social and cultural contexts, and answer the major similarities and differences between the Chinese and Western ecofeminist theories. In the third chapter, this article will explore the different development methods and trends of eco-feminist art in different social, historical, and cultural contexts of China and the West, then analyze and explain the main differences and common points of eco-feminist art between Chinese and Western eyes. Finally, based on its previous development and current situation, it analyzes and predicts the future development trends of eco-feminism and eco-feminist art, and whether eco-feminist art can have unique value in other academic fields.

## 1. Introduction

Time back in 1962, a popular environment-friendly book titled "*Silent Spring*" [1] was published and posed a tremendous effect in the world. This book is regarded as the beginning of the modern environmental movement and the initial concept of the ecofeminist theory. "*Silent Spring*" and its profound in the human, merciless critique of the natural arrogance of. With the birth of eco-feminist theory, it set off an upsurge of eco-feminist theory in the world. Various theoretical research and monograph magazines came into being. When ecological feminist theory appeared in China and in its own thirty years of development, eco-feminist art began to develop and prosper[2]. Eco-woman art is one of the achievements of the development of eco-feminist theory. Its birth and development make eco-feminism close to people's real life. Through the understanding of eco-feminist theory, the artist creates aesthetic value and the artistic works of social effects, which increase people's understanding of the ecological feminist theory, expand its development space, not just exist on the surface of the theory. Therefore, ecological feminist art has considerable social realistic significance and artistic value.

## 2. Background: What is eco-feminism? What is the core view of eco-feminism?

First of all, it does not merely emphasize ecology and feminism and a universal literal connection

between them. It is the French scholar Françoise d'Eaubonne that first produced a combination of feminism and ecology. It believes that the social mentality that leads to oppression and dominance of women is directly linked to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the global environment. Thus, it is a new branch of feminism that has been created [3]. According to Charlene Spretnak, the main representative of eco-feminism, the core view of eco-feminism is that “in Western culture there is a historical, symbolic, and political relationship between degrading nature and demeaning women. This relationship is a patriarchal world view. It has three important features: the dualistic way of thinking, the concept of value hierarchy and the logic of domination. In terms of ecological feminism, both gender oppression and ecological crisis originate from this [4].

### 3. The History of Ecofeminism Development

#### 3.1 The History of Western Ecofeminism Development

Ecofeminism has appeared as an academic term in various parts of the world since the early 1970s. The earliest theoretical writings of eco-feminism were the French scholar Françoise d'Eaubonne's “Feminism or Destruction (1974)”[5]. Susan Griffin is one of the famous representatives of cultural and ecological feminism. Susan Griffin's “Women and Nature: Shouts from the Heart”[6] emphasizes the connection between women and nature. Only through women's perception, women's spirit, and women's culture can we lift the ecological crisis and liberate the oppression of women. It also advocates a close connection between women and the nature. Women bred offspring and the nature gave birth to everything. They had the same experience. Women were the nature and the nature was women. Due to women has the particular sense of nature, women can better understand nature. And in 1980, Carolyn Merchant, one of the representatives of socially constructed ecological feminism, published her ecofeminist masterpiece “Natural Death: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution.”[7] Nature changes from life to death. She believes that the oppression of men against women is caused by the “male chauvinism” based on the “dualistic” thinking style of western patriarchal culture and traditional rationalism. She created a critique of dualistic thinking.

The history of the development of the Western eco-feminist movement shows that in the 20th century European men and their own self-alienation are under the social system they led, their control over “other things”, their indulge in militarism and rationalism. The epistemological basis of its logic and thinking. Therefore, Western eco-feminism emphasizes the importance of cultural change rather than economic injustice, and advocates creating a new language in order to reconnect rationality and emotion.[8] In the patriarchal social system, women correspond to nature and body, and men's rational thinking and social development correspond. Women are often compared to various animals such as small cows, foxes, chicks, and so on. Because compared to humans, animal status is always secondary.[9]Therefore, for men, the control and oppression of women is just as reasonable as conquering and controlling small animals and making “woman” a part of their food chain. Under such circumstances, eco-feminists advocated criticizing and opposing the “patriarchal” culture and binary opposition and trying to re-establish the relationship between man and nature, and women and nature.

#### 3.2 The History of Chinese Ecofeminism Development

The earliest documents on eco-feminism in China appeared in 1995: Liu Bing's “Friends of Nature, Ecofeminism, Man and Nature” [10] and Cao Nanyan and Liu Bing's “Eco-feminism.”[11] They gave a basic introduction to the conceptual framework and theories of ecofeminism: they believe that ecofeminism is the product of the combination of women's liberation movement (*Fu Nv Jie Fang*) and ecological movement.[12] In the article “*Eco-feminism and its ethical culture*”[13], the author—Xiao Wei studied the theory and foundation of eco-feminism. She pointed out that eco-feminism is

not only a feminist theory but also an ecological ethics. The ecological feminist theory is based on the ecological criticism of the patriarchal system. Zhao Yuanyuan and Wang Ziyun, in an article entitled “*Eco-feminist Thought Review*” [14], propose that eco-feminism is women through the analysis of the forms of Western eco-feminist theory. The product of the combination of the doctrine and the environmental movement is a variant of ecological ethics.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Compared to the development of eco-feminism in the West, its development in China does not seem to be so smooth. Similar to Western ecofeminism, they all agree with the idea of "associating or simulating women with nature and comparing men with rational societies" and thus oppressing and controlling men and women and humans. The society makes double criticisms of the control of the natural environment. And both believe that the root causes of their oppressive behavior are the same - the weak should be controlled by the strong, where the weak refers naturally to women and nature. Western eco-feminism mostly focuses on the ecological environment from the perspective of women themselves. It then replaces the link between ecology and humans to women to criticize the current status of men and women.

The concept of eco-feminism has just been introduced into China. Chinese scholars generally assume that women have a natural connection with the environment. This idea is actually to de-historicize women's issues and environmental issues, and to "naturalize" the relationship between women and nature, which ignored the deep social roots of the relationship between the two.[15] The difference of Western ecofeminism is that the development of Chinese ecofeminism is based on China's actual social environment. The purpose of China's close connection between women and the environment is to demonstrate the conditions for women's participation in environmental protection and sustainable development. It will provide the basis for the wide deployment of women in environmental protection and sustainable development.[16] Many Chinese ecofeminist scholars think that protecting the environment is the nature of women. Women should do environmental protection or assume positions related to environmental protection. They should do it. Women should take more responsibility in protecting the ecological environment. In fact, this kind of talk in the author's view is another sense of oppression of women in China.

## 4. The Way of Eco-feminist art Development

### 4.1 The Background of Western Eco-feminist Art

The first eco-feminist artists developed from the feminist art movement and the land art (or earth art) movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Although many early land artists were interested in the changes that the natural landscape had caused due to the development of human society, most earth artists seemed to be not interested in the ecological effects of their art.[17] Then, after the development of eco-feminist theory, eco-feminist artists gradually realized the impact of their work on the ecological environment and women's rights-equality movement. Therefore, they were separated from the land art movement and found that creativity was proposed for hierarchical ideology. An art approach to challenge and promote gender and environmental equality. Some examples of early eco-feminist artworks demonstrate their public benefits, such as awakening public environmental awareness and promoting gender equality.[18]

The following will briefly analyze the works of representative eco-feminist artist Brookner, Jackie. Brookner is known for her eco-feminist community artwork. She is more than an eco-feminist artist and more like an eco-architecture designer. She has completed large-scale, environmental protection, and biology-based sculpture and land art projects during her artistic career. Her work often

emphasizes the importance of community, water, discourse and meaning, and the way human beings are connected to and dependent on Earth's resources. Her biological sculpture reflects her strong interest in water, biology and the human body. These creature sculptures are envisaged to establish a connection between art, urban sculpture, biology and culture. For example, her representative sculpture, *the gift of water* (Figure 1).[19] Water gift as part of this artificial wetland filtration system. Two mossy hands enter the pond from the bank. When water flows into the hands, a fountain inflates it and moistens the moss, thus purifying the water. The intimacy of the mosses that grow on the hands shows how all life is related to one another.[20]



Figure 1 Brookner, Jackie. "The Gift of Water"

Although Brookner is considered an eco-feminist artist, she avoids the essence of women and nature by recognizing the complexity of the borders. Bruckner believes that the concept of creating a natural world has been separated. Human beings are one of the main causes of environmental problems. Brookner does not fully associate women with nature - she sees women and nature as part of a larger environment, but emphasizes that they are different from each other, not all women are the same, and not all nature is the same. Bruckner admits that the distinctions and boundaries between man and nature are complex and there are no obvious boundaries, but there are indeed differences between the two.

#### 4.2 The Background of Chinese Eco-feminist Art

Artist Li Xinmo, pointed out that the 30 years of development of feminist art in China was the 30th year when China's cultural ecology and natural ecology were severely damaged. At that time, Chinese society was in a period of urgent need for economic development. Controlling nature and using natural resources to improve people's living conditions at the time and increase social wealth became a political method at that time. In fact, such measures have also occurred in the development period of other industrial countries, but there are differences in time. However, due to the long-term control and extraction of natural resources, the ecological environment has been severely deteriorated. Li Xinmo has started creating a series of works related to contaminated water since 2008, such as "The Death of Xinkai River" (Figure 2). The death of Xinkai River is a picture of her behavior in relation to the death of a dead river and women. In her works, she floats on the green river covered with cyanobacteria, and her body and head are covered with silky algae. Another of her performance works "A Farewell Ceremony" (Figure 3) appeared in December 2015, designed by Eller in the

"Suffocation, Not Just Suffering" art exhibition. This performance art links the death of women with the death of nature. Together. She believes that green is originally a symbol of life. In this performance, green represents death. Lying in the rancid water, the white dress was contaminated and the body was corroded. Just like the social environment in which we live, it was full of suffocating filth and turbidity. Undoubtedly, Li Xinmo's works are severely critical and have strong complaints. In her works, she not only complains about human control and use of the natural world, but also highlights that under the fatherhood social system, women are also suffering from male persecution and crushing. She tried to use her work to arouse the Chinese women's resistance who have long been oppressed and ruled by women. Her works are not only ecological but also feminist. Thus, she highlights more clearly the characteristics of contemporary Chinese eco-feminist art when she expresses her own circumstances in the sympathy with nature.



Figure 2 Li Xinmo .Women and Nature1



Figure 3 Li Xinmo .Women and Nature2

#### 4.3 The Commonness and Individuality of Ecological Feminism in China and Western Countries

In the final analysis, the advocate of eco-ism is for the sustainable development of mankind itself. However, the development of eco-feminism in China is to properly absorb and localize the ideas of eco-feminism in the West. Therefore, they are common and different. The points are obvious: First of all, their common starting point is to try to use the art form to arouse the public's attention to the

seriousness of the current deterioration of the ecological environment to promote protection awareness. They basically acknowledge that there is a kind between women and nature. Special contact, and the use of this special connection as the inspiration for the creation of their own works of art, resulting in a number of ecological feminist related works of art. These works not only embody the artist's desire for gender equality in the patriarchal society, but also hope that women will have special contact with the natural world. They hope that through their works, they can stimulate the motherhood of other women and care for nature. Protecting the overall natural environment plays an active role.

However, the difference is that the western eco-feminist arts are more emphasis on the obvious features of protecting the ecology in their works of art. For Bruker's city sculptures, first of all it is about the artistic expression of ecology, and it also has a feminist perspective. Her works embody her concern for nature as a woman, but at the same time, she does not start from the gender perspective of women, nor does she limit her female identity. Therefore, the audiences can understand through her works that she does not completely integrates women with nature. Looking back at the Chinese eco-feminist art, it is relatively speaking developing and showing itself in a more radical way. Just as Li Xinmo said, eco-feminist art has a contemporary nature in China. It is not an episodic transplant but a feminist art that originates from a real life experience in China. Moreover, it not only needs feminism for women and male participation at the same time, but also breaks gender boundaries with artistic creation in the face of a common survival crisis. It can be seen from this that the focus of ecofeminism in China is still on feminism. In particular, the recent Chinese eco-feminist works of art can all see the artist's strong dissatisfaction with contemporary Chinese society's oppression and even persecution of women's rights. For example, the death of Li Xinmo's Xinkai river, the source of her inspiration was female college students who had been raped and slain. After her body being dumped into the Xinkai River which was contaminated, was filled with the stench emitted by blue-green algae. It symbolized the death of women and the death of green ecosystems. The visual information conveyed by the double cultural metaphor is very strong. Therefore, in China, ecological feminist art has multiples criticalness in the current society.

## 5. Conclusion

Eco-feminism Globalization today, China's eco-feminist criticism has a good prospect, one of the reasons is ironically that Chinese women also bear the burden of history and the actual environmental pressure. The combination of ecology and women's movement has also become a reasonable choice for the liberation of Chinese women. However, the theoretical basis of modern ecofeminism is still somewhat lacking. Therefore, under the circumstance that the theoretical foundation is still slightly thin, it is easy to use ecological feminism as an inspiration source for artists to fall into an uncontrollable ideological dilemma, so that an unconscious audience does not understand or suspect the content and theory of the artist's works. At the same time, artists should avoid extremist tendencies and over-represent or link the experiences of male oppression to eco-feminist thesis, or force women to connect with the protection of the ecological environment to create a so-called women's nature and mission. Not only does it contravene the spirit of Ecologicalism, it also violates the spirit of feminism. However, both Western eco-feminist art and Chinese eco-feminist art have their own reference values and progressive significance.

In general, eco-feminism is an activism and academic movement. It sees the crucial link between natural rule and exploitation of women. However, the future of eco-feminist art in China still has a long way to develop. First, it is necessary to clarify more specific concept of eco-feminism and define it clearly. Instead of doing a work which is simple related to the ecological environment and women's right. It should be the work created by the artist in terms of women's vision and perceptions of

women's and men's in different social, culture and life experiences. This reflects the true characteristics of eco-feminist art.

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