

The Generative Mechanism of Metaphors for Women and Nature

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Abstract: *The metaphorical relationship between women and nature is one of the eternal motifs discussed in academia. Human beings living in ancient societies, due to their limited living standards and social understanding, they used their strong sense of feeling and rich imagination to understand everything in the world around them. And they realized their own expression through metaphors when expressing their knowledge. The original reason for the metaphors of nature and man stemmed primarily from the strong sense of the world and the rich imagination of man (human beings themselves as a criterion for weighing everything). The formation of metaphors between women and nature, in addition to primitive thinking, mainly lies in the similarity of reproductive ability, nurturing ability and nurturing ability, status, encounter and conduct. In addition, socio-cultural construction plays a decisive role in the prevalence of metaphors of nature and women to some extent.*

Keywords: *women, nature, metaphor, generative mechanism, The Similarity, Social Culture*

1. Introduction

Metaphor participates in and constructs all aspects of social things, penetrates the whole of human life, and is a poetic embodiment of human wisdom and ability. After Giovanni Battista Vico examined the primitive people, he found that although the primitive people did not have the ability to reason, they had strong sensibility and rich imagination. Therefore, when they know everything in the world around them, they mostly do it through the use of their imagination. It can be seen that metaphors have existed since ancient times. When people cannot use plain language to portray images and explain the truth, they speak under the guise of other things, so that the unknown becomes known, the profound truth becomes shallow, and the ordinary things become vivid. The metaphor between women and nature is a common type of metaphor, and the metaphor of sex and nature includes both "feminine nature" and "naturalized female". Similarity is the basis for the generation of metaphors, and any metaphor is inseparable from the similarity between ontology and metaphor, so what are the similarities between women and nature? Why is there a connection between the ecofeminist claims to emphasize the relationship between women and nature, and whether the metaphors between women and nature are related to the physiological and gender differences between men and women? Is the metaphorical relationship between women and nature related to our social culture? This paper takes the metaphorical relationship between women and nature as the research object, and studies the above problems.

2. The Original Thinking Mechanism of the Metaphor of "Weighing Foreign Objects Based On People's Own Standards"

The metaphorical relationship between nature and man has existed for a long time. How did the original thinking formed by the metaphorical relationship between nature and humans be constructed? Vico pointed out that metaphor is the most distinctive and therefore the most necessary and commonly used metaphor. "The original poets used 'this kind of metaphor' to make some objects into real things and objects with the essence of life, and to use the method of inferring foreign objects based on people's own standards to make these objects also have feelings and passions..."[1]174. "This kind of metaphor" makes the inanimate things seem to have feelings and passions. In this way, objects with feelings and passions are used to create some allegorical stories, and each metaphor formed in this way is a concrete and subtle allegorical story. Such allegorical stories provide evidence for when metaphors appear in language. He concluded that all similar metaphors between the expression of objects and the

use of abstract minds must have begun from the period when various sciences were taking shape. And the evidence is that the words needed for subtle art and esoteric science in each language are derived from the vulgar human language that lived in ancient society.

Due to the limitation of living standards and knowledge, most of their language involving the expression of inanimate things — metaphorize things through different parts of the human body. Such metaphors also invariably contain human feelings and passions. This type of metaphor is particularly prominent in the metaphor of the relationship between nature and humans. For example, the words "head of a mountain (the top of a mountain), waist of a mountain (mountainside) and foot of a mountain" are used to express the various parts of the mountain; the trees' shapes and branches are described with words like "crown, tree body and tree foot"; the same expressions also include "needle eye", "mouth of a pot (spout)", "saw tooth", "cave mouth", "wheat whisker", "shoe tongue", "ground belly", "ground vein", "fruit pulp", "ore vein", "throat of the river", "groaning land", "roaring land", "roaring wind", "bleeding grapes", "moaning waves", "warm spring breeze", "thirsty land", "breeze blowing", "smiling sea", "swollen grain", "crying resin flux trees", etc., which all metaphorize nature by using familiar body parts or human emotions.

What is the basis for primitive humans to express their thoughts with metaphors? Although primitive people have little ability to reason, they have a strong perceptibility and rich imagination. When they recognize and perceive everything in the world around them, most of them realize it by using their own imagination. When they express their thoughts, they also largely achieved it through metaphors. All metaphors are the manifestation of the poetic wisdom capabilities universally possessed by mankind, participating in and constructing all aspects of primitive society, and infiltrating into all human life. Moreover, the innumerable metaphorical relationship between nature and humans comes from an axiom, that is, "in ignorance, man regards himself as the standard for weighing everything" [1]175. Shu Dingfang believes that "metaphor in language arises from the metaphorical thinking process and reflects the way the human brain understands the world" [2]. When human beings can't directly understand all things in the world, they will use their own physical experience to understand them. And once this metaphorical relationship between humans and nature is constructed and accepted by more people, it becomes a conventional concept.

In summary, when people understand things, they will exert their minds and absorb them; when people don't understand things, they will weigh foreign objects based on their own standards and use parts of the human body or human feelings and passions to express their understanding of things, so that nature is humanized. And when people turn themselves into those things, they turn themselves into the whole world.

3. The Similarity Between Women and Nature Is the Basis of Its Generation

The original reason for the metaphor of human beings and nature mainly stems from human's strong perception of the world and rich imagination (that is, human beings as the standard for weighing everything). When talking about the creation of metaphor, Aristotle pointed out that similarity is the basic principle of forming a metaphor. He regarded being good at using metaphor as an important sign of talent, "because if you want to compile a good metaphor, you must first see the similarities between things that can be borrowed for metaphors" [3]. The "yudi" (similarities and commonalities between two different things or concepts) is the basis of metaphor between things. Michel Foucault also believes that "yudi" plays a very important role in human understanding of things. It can help humans know many visible or invisible things in the world. "It is the similarity that organizes the operation of symbols, making humans aware of many visible and invisible things." [4]

The generation of metaphor is based on similarity, because "similarity is the premise of metaphor generation: without similarity, there is no way to talk about metaphor" [5]. Similarly, the understanding of metaphors between women and nature should also start from the similarity of "yudi". The physical similarity of metaphors between women and nature is mainly reflected in appearance, shape and function.

A metaphor, no matter in what form it exists, the similarity between two things of metaphorizing and being metaphorized makes them pale by comparison. "Metaphor or the use of metaphor, that is, the driving force of metaphor depends on the discovery of similarity" [6]. Since "yudi" is the basis on which metaphor can be formed, similarity is also the basic principle of metaphor formation. As one of the objects of metaphorizing and being metaphorized, the similarity between women and nature is the basic factor in the formation of metaphors between women and nature. Whether they are naturalized

women metaphors or feminized natural metaphors, they are based on the similarity of the two. The metaphors of the relationship between women and nature are everywhere, and the common metaphors in ecofeminism criticism mainly connect women and nature in terms of organizational form, function and status, and encountering character.

First, the organizational forms have similarities. The similarity produced by the metaphor between women and nature is mainly reflected in its organizational form. There is a striking similarity between the natural form and the women body tissue, and "Sand dunes are a symbol of women. That flow sensitive curve — the woman's back. And her chest, hips, hipbones and pelvis. They are the forms of nature." [7] Like the body tissues of women, the earth has bones and flesh. All the mountains and lands are her chest, the metal ore is her bones, and the flowers and trees are her hair. Just as the women body contains bones, blood, tears, etc., the earth also contains its own fluid (rivers, springs, oil, etc. are all her blood), and "other fluids are like the lubricating forms of mucus, saliva, sweat, etc. in the human body" [8]²⁶. The blood, sweat and saliva in the human body have an important role in maintaining the health of the human body, and the blood and fluids of the earth also have important significance for the healthy operation of the earth. As in the various fluids she contains, "liquids solidify and become metals, such as gold and silver, and some fluids become stones, asphalt, and sulphur ores." [8]²⁶

Second, the functions have similarities. The functional similarity between women and nature is mainly reflected in their functions of reproduction, feeding and nurturing, and the similarity in reproduction and nurturing is a common analogy aspect among ecofeminism. Ecofeminism thinker Caroline Mersett believes that the metaphor of the relationship between women and nature can be traced back to ancient myths and legends. For example, the image of "earth-goddess" is likening nature to the mother of humanity. And the situation that the earth breeds everything is just like a human mother gestating her own child. "Both repeat the creation of the universe. The earth is alive and benevolent, capable of containing and nurturing everything. This is a life-giving process." [9] The mother earth combined with the father sun, and then gestated stones, metals, mountains, rivers, etc. in her womb. The author Faulkner described this process of gestating life as, "in this land, decomposition itself is a process of ejaculation, swelling, conception and childbirth, and death does not even exist" [10]. This fertility of nature is similar to the fertility of women. The earth is seen as a living, benevolent, peaceful, rustic and inclusive nurturing women. Her womb is not only the birthplace of mines and metals, but also the mother of all living beings, that is, the earth serves as a benevolent mother. Her womb gave birth to all life. "The earth's creating function is strikingly similar to women's fertility. Women use their own flesh and blood to give birth to children, and turn food into breast milk to feed them. The earth cyclically produces abundant resources and provides a complex biosphere containing all things" [11]. The process by which the earth creates life is just like the process of women creating life. Just like the physiological processes of women's menstrual cycle, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and raising children, nature feeds human beings and all things in the world like human mothers selflessly raising their children. Conversely, women are physically closer to nature, and their menstrual cycle, pregnancy, fertility and breastfeeding are more closely related to the rhythm of nature.

Finally, the conduct, status and encounters have similarities. "The universality of similarity determines that similarity is not restricted by any relationship. Whether it is structural, simple or dependent, as long as there is similarity, metaphors can be created and understood." [12] The positive naturalized women metaphor is to understand the look, figure, posture, appearance, age, youth, personality, wisdom, temperament, morality and so on of women with the various shapes, features, properties and functions of everything in nature (such as plants — flowers and trees, animals, clothing, cosmetics, natural phenomena such as wind, frost, rain and dew, etc.). Behind it runs a very common metaphor mechanism, that is, to transfer certain characteristics of things in nature to women, so as to borrow certain characteristics of natural things to express the characteristics of women, and then to further understand the noble character of women.

The similarity between women and nature is also reflected in the status and encounter between the two. In traditional western ideas, men are rational, while women are sensuous, and because reason is higher than sensibility, so women are controlled by men, and men have the status of authority. In the traditional Chinese thought, the education received by women is based on the three principles and five virtues as well as the three obediences and the four virtues. This kind of educational thought has formed the characteristics of clear men and women labor division. Most of the men activities are outside the family, while the women are mainly inside the family. This formed the statement that the man is in charge of the outside affairs while the woman is in charge of the inside affairs. The woman's being in charge of inside affairs makes her position closely connected with the family. As a woman, her main tasks are to take care of housework, take care of children and the home, and hang on the family.

Similarly, nature is also the subject of being dominated and controlled. The conquest of nature by mankind is just like the control of women by men, both making women and nature in a passive position. Both are controlled and enslaved for a certain period of time.

4. Gender Differences and Social Culture Promote Its Construction

Traditionally, the physiological and gender differences between men and women are the root causes of women's being oppressed. Compared with men, women's physiological menstrual cycles, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and gender differences, as well as their division of labor in agriculture and their roles in the family, make them closer to nature and make them more passive. In the patriarchal society, women are the tools of fertility. As mothers, wives and daughters, they are like everything in nature, and are the property of a male society such as a husband, father or son.

"If women do not mean to be dominated by men, they will not become the weak" [13]. In people's subconsciousness, women are born to serve men. With the development of society, this kind of understanding has become a conventional understanding, which has been constructed into a regulation by culture. "Humans conquest, torment, possession and deprecation of nature have similarities with men's conquest, torment, possession and deprecation of women. This similarity is culturally constructed" [14]. The metaphor between women and nature belongs to the concept of human understanding of the female world and the construction of the female world. It is a universal social tool for humans to understand nature and women. The metaphors of women and nature are closely related to culture, which are deeply rooted in culture and subject to cultural conventions.

Women are considered to be closer to nature than men due to their physical and natural physiological functions (reproduction, fostering, and raising a child); women are excluded from the cultural rights dominated by men because of their roles and tasks, and are controlled and belittled. This not only provides a solid foundation for the intimacy between women and nature, but also clearly separates the genders of men and women, providing strong support for the cultural center of ecofeminism against patriarchy. The image of earth's mother-breeders also plays a role in cultural construction on the side. Earth "as the image of the mother of the breeder, has a cultural coercive effect on human behavior" [8]³. This coercive effect is mainly reflected in the restraint of human destructive behavior, making humans realize that destroying nature and damaging the earth is harming their own mothers, which helps to form a sense of protecting the environment and protecting women.

"The role played by culture should also be emphasized enough" [15]. Only when people dig out the deep structure hidden in the culture can they fully explain why the metaphors of women and nature can be passed down in the continuous history and culture. The construction of social culture has played a decisive role in the prevalence of metaphors of women and nature to some extent. Culture plays a decisive role in the production of metaphors. Metaphor is a structure of complex culture and society. "The metaphor is rooted in the human experience, meanwhile, it is deeply contained in the culture. Metaphors are influenced by culture and also reflect the culture they carry" [5]⁹⁸. The construction role of social and cultural factors is first reflected in the construction of the dominant metaphor of the earth as the mother of the fosterer. "The image of the fosterer earth can be regarded as a kind of cultural coercive force, which restricts the types of behaviors that humans should take to treat the earth in terms of social morality, and the new image of domination and ruling provides cultural support for humans' exploitation of nature." [8]². In other words, the coercive effect of culture makes people accept metaphorical images like Mother Earth. On the one hand, the concept of the earth as a living organism — a benevolent, kind, peaceful and tolerant fosterer is stronger; on the other hand, the new image that allows being ruled and dominated by humans is established. Cultural and social construction provide support for humans' exploitation of nature. Similarly, cultural and social constructs also provide support for the being dominated status of women.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, all metaphors are the embodiment of the poetic intellectual ability that human beings universally possess, participating in and constructing all aspects of primitive society, and penetrating the whole of human life. The metaphor between women and nature arises first of all from the idea that human beings have based themselves on their own things. Primitive people have no ability to reason, they have strong sensual power and rich imagination, and because of this, they express themselves to a large extent through imagination (through metaphor) to achieve their goals. In addition, similarity is a

basic principle of metaphor formation. Metaphors arise on the basis of similarity, and since "metaphorical bottoms" (similarities) are the basis for the formation of metaphors, the similarity between women and nature in terms of reproduction, nurturing, nurturing ability and status, encounters and conduct is the key to the formation of the metaphorical relationship between the two. Finally, socio-cultural construction plays a decisive role in the prevalence of metaphors of nature and women to some extent. The metaphor between women and nature belongs to the conceptual things of human understanding of the female world and the construction of the female world, and is a universal social tool for human beings to understand nature and women, and the metaphors of nature and women are closely related to culture, which are deeply rooted in culture and regulated by culture.

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