

REBELLION AND ETHICAL TURN A New Theory of Postmodern Feminism

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Abstract: Postmodern feminism is a new school of philosophy, which emerged along with industrialized western countries entering the postindustrial society after a hundred years of controversy among three major feminist schools, namely liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. From a philosophical perspective, Postmodernist feminism is characterized by rebellion and subversion of the female character in the traditional patriarchal society, which had important impact on the modern society's development and people's understanding of feminism. By analysing the content of Postmodernist feminism, this paper summarizes the theoretical characteristics of postmodern feminism, analyses the rebellious spirit and ethical turn of postmodern feminism, and combs the philosophical theory for the theoretical research of postmodern feminism. This paper strengthens the innovation of women's social management and promotes the development of the theoretical system of philosophy in China, while enriching the country's research on feminism.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Discrimination, Equality, Feminism, Liberalism, Opportunities, Remodelling, Socialism.

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1. Introduction

Postmodernism marks the change in public's understanding of traditional cultural thought, from recognition and obedience to questioning and rebellion. Feminism rebels against the value systems constructed in the traditional patriarchal society, and the roles imposed on the women. When the social economy develops to a certain level, women are able to perform certain social roles in society, make use of the education system, and gradually uncover and systematically think about their unfair social status. Subsequently, they take different measures to improve women's status in society.

The feminist thoughts are etched within the fabrics of thought in Postmodernism. As a mode of thinking about gender relations formed in the traditional feminist schools, and the self-centred knowledge of women formed with the cultural characteristics of patriarchal society and patriarchal order, they have borrowed doubts from the ideological roots to different forms of expression. Feminism in postmodern world subverts the status of women in the traditional patriarchal society, and questions and rebels against the trends of thought, as well as the social and cultural characteristics of traditional feminism. The unique questioning and rebellious spirit in Postmodernist thought give feminism a new window for thinking and builds the ideological foundation for the subversion in postmodern feminism.

2. Subversion

The subversion of postmodern feminism comes from the subversion of culture, art, and thought by postmodern schools. It embodies the subversion of the patriarchal social order formed under the traditional economic system such as feudalism and capitalism and tries to construct an alternative system with female characteristics. In the traditional feminist schools such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism, in-depth deconstructive thinking was based on the equality of social status and contribution of both sexes, against the hegemonic patriarchal cultural characteristics of gender discrimination and the formation of female secondary familial

and societal roles. However, it lacks a more systematic understanding of the concrete manifestations of feminism under the conditions of different cultural traditions and economic levels, which is characterized by one-sidedness. Postmodern feminism challenges the grand narrative of liberation and rationality and denies all grand theoretical systems to make a deeper analysis and exploration of the characteristics of female gender and social division of labour (Qin 130). It overturns the way that liberal and radical feminism roughly distinguishes men and women according to their physical and ideological merits, and the socialist feminism brings women of different classes into the social operation as a vague whole. It calls on women to explore the physiological differences between the sexes and give full play to the key role of the sexes in the process of social construction, so as to realize the ultimate goal of seeking equality and retaining differences between the two genders. Compared with the traditional feminist schools, postmodern feminism is a further awakening of women's social consciousness when the social civilization develops to a certain extent, which takes the promotion of women's status as the main goal and embodies the deep social progress.

3. Questioning

Questioning is a key step for feminism to form the characteristics that are different from those 'tailored' for women in the traditional patriarchal society. The history, culture, and social trends formed within human cultural development are mostly formed by men as the cultural centre. In this process, women receive the education and edification of male chauvinistic culture, gradually completing the internalization of male chauvinism, and unconsciously substituting a 'female' self into the needs of the development of patriarchal society, which further consolidates the hegemony of men over women. The rise and development of women centric ideologies in modern societies are mostly presented from the traditional perspective of men, while post-modernism's

questioning of tradition brings a new way of thinking to feminism.

Postmodernism, as a movement, itself represents the questioning and rebellion against the philosophy, culture, and institutions of Modernism. Feminism has only been around for more than two hundred years since its birth, during which the influence of the thought within society during different social periods has been great. When the main trend of gender equality faces a decline within society, there will often be a resurgence from the feministic perspective. With the development of capitalism, social tradition tends to operate in a patriarchal way, which can easily squeeze the living space of the female in the public space (Zhang 42). However, Postmodernism brings subjectivist thought centred on self-development to the passive feminism under the patriarchal order. From the perspective of the female subject, patriarchy weakens the self-worth of women, gradually extending the overall subjugation of the female group to the social culture, as the 'second sex'. The feminist questioning brought by Postmodernism is the only way for women to get equal rights with men. Women in the post-modern culture contribute to the general awakening of self-awareness by questioning the nature of traditional female characteristics.

4. Rebellion

The most prominent characteristic of the postmodern feminist rebellion is the revolt against the deep-rooted dichotomy in the traditional knowledge structure. Despite the excessive pursuit of absolute equality between men and women in the fields of political participation and public affairs by liberal feminism, or the denial of different physiological characteristics of men and women within radical feminism, or the opposite relation between men and women in socialist feminism, the evolution and development of feminism has always been side-lined into completely irreconcilable contradictions. The development of feminism must admit that the physiological differences between men and women are unchangeable objective facts,

which are not completely opposite to the equality between men and women pursued by feminism. The ultimate goal of feminism is to advocate the existence of the objective differences between the sexes, and the formation of factual equality in recognizing the differences in physiological characteristics. Postmodern feminism, on the other hand, fundamentally recognizes such differences and denies the binary view of traditional feminism based on gender definitive traits and status. It proposes an integrated mode of thinking, which not only gives women equal status in modern social life and recognizes the value of their social development, but also recognizes the diversified gender modes existing in different groups. Especially in political activities under different cultural backgrounds, feminism, along with race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and gender are brought into the scope of the diversified development of modern society, forming an equal and diverse modern female culture (Yang 13).

5. Rebellious Spirit and Ethical Turn of Postmodern Feminism

The rebellion and ethical turn of feminism in postmodernism are the inevitable traits of development within feminism brought by the increasing proportion of women in today's social life. The reason and expression of feminism's rebellious spirit is an important indicator of the development of women's social status, and the ethical trend in this process represents the dynamic influence of feminism on social development.

5.1. Causes of the Rebellious Spirit of Postmodern Feminism

Acentric consciousness and multi-dimensional value orientation are two features of postmodernism. Postmodernism opposes the conventional understanding of different things under the secular definition. It advocates the deconstruction of the central features of traditional culture through the observation and structure of different perspectives, so as to explore the value of multiculturalism. Concomitantly, postmodern culture does not squeeze different cultures from content to form as traditionalism but recognizes the value of different cultures from different perspectives of interpretation.

People's thoughts no longer need to adapt to social ideal, life significance, national future, traditional morality, etc., instead people's thoughts could be completely liberated while having a deeper understanding of themselves (Feng 167). However, the negation of universal objective truth, progress, and other values leads Postmodernism to value relativism, scepticism, and nihilism, which makes people realize the relativity and diversity of values. Postmodern feminism has opened a new stage in feminist development due to its distinct theoretical views and characteristics, which significantly impact the development of contemporary societies and people's understanding of feminism. For the feminist movement, the emergence of feminism in Postmodernism does not simply imply feminism's copying or application of various postmodern academic concepts. Instead, it enriches and renews traditional feminism from the perspective of women's experience and guides postmodern views to criticize the patriarchal culture and the genital centred discourse with its unique way of thinking and expression for women.

Traditional education is based within the patriarchal society and culture, and female education is mostly based on the demand for women under the patriarchal order. As a result, in the process of understanding the world, the female group usually realizes the individual's cognition of society and self through the deep-rooted, object-centred male thinking mode in the process of education, which weakens the feminine individualistic perception of society and the female's social status. However, post-modernism's rebellion against tradition under the secular definition provides a theoretical basis for female self-cognition's rebellion against tradition. Through the construction of a set of female discourse system that pays attention to differences and emphasizes diversity, it subverts the patriarchal order and eradicates the complex products under the influence of traditional feminist thinking (Liang 117). The urgency for women, who have been in a weak position within society for a long time, to adapt to the current situation after the awakening of group consciousness reflects all aspects

of social life. The rebellious spirit of feminism in Postmodernism liberates women from the traditional thinking, behavioural patterns, and moral standards, so that they have equal social value with men in terms of thought and behaviour.

5.2. The Embodiment of the Rebellious Spirit

Postmodernism opposes the unity of morality. It sets up many possibilities for the existence of truth from different dimensions such as individual, situation, culture, politics, and nation. It breaks the binary between truth and non-truth under traditional thought, and brings many derivative interpretations of different texts, representations, and symbols into the cultural system that is not accepted by the so-called 'mainstream', which in fact is the 'malestream'. In the face of the relationship between men and women, postmodern feminism deconstructs not only the spirit, rationality, thought, and male hegemony under the influence of patriarchal society, but also the concepts of female centrism, gender antagonism, and physiological superiority in different schools of feminist thought. So much so that the influence of social ideology, thinking habit, theme thought, and patriarchal order on female groups can be re-evaluated. It represents the female discourse as no longer existing as an imitation or opposition to men and reconstructs a concept of modern female self-cognition that fits into the basic characteristics of female physiology. It also links the women's liberation with the development of human civilization, constructs a model of harmonious progress between men and women based on gender differences, and realizes the development of thought and innovation of the theory. Postmodernism does not equate the survival needs of people of different genders and cultures with the right to speak in terms of human rights. On the contrary, recognizing the particularity of cultural and historical significance and the standpoint of special perspectives, it endows different groups with special forms of equality and believes that equality in different situations is reasonable. In the case of liberation, postmodern feminism does not oppose liberation itself, but raises questions

on who are categorized as deserving liberation, and from what and where. It does not believe in universal liberation and freedom. Postmodern feminism holds that there is no single feminist theory, applicable to all women. Because women belong to different classes, races, nationalities, abilities, sexual tendencies, and ages, there is no one kind of women that can represent all women. Denial of the general theory does not mean that we can only choose the politically inept relativism. Postmodernism also provides choice of local and regional perspectives and practices, with historical needs, resources, and interests (Dai 71).

5.3. Analysis of the Ethical Turn

Postmodern feminism supports Postmodernism's deconstructive view of 'human' in western traditional humanism, and claims that we should reject the self-centeredness of human beings with rationality as the core content, as done in the past, and completely abandon the distorted female experience that is presented by males from their own ruling needs, while reconstructing the female subject with real female life and experience as the purpose. This kind of real experience not only includes the diverse individual experiences of women belonging to different races, classes, nations, countries, and sexual orientation backgrounds, but also involves the common experience of women due to their common life rhythm and living style, as well as the gender oppression and gender discrimination (Yates 61).

This separates the accumulation of modern female experience, and the completion of female education from the various rules under the traditional patriarchal order and enables the female group to accept the most authentic experience in the educational process. Simultaneously, within this process of cultivating female characteristics, it can focus first on the need of women, to build the basis of female subject. In the construction of the traditional female subject, women have always been 'shaped' as a piece of plasticine to bridge the gap in the development of man's society. They are bound in the

patriarchal order, and the liberation of the female group itself is out of the question. Postmodern feminism calls for the return of femininity based on the physiological and gender characteristics of women. As Sara observed, "It is impossible for the construction of the female subject to play a role in the liberation of women if it leaves and abandons the real female experience" (47). On the other hand, "if we keep to our real experience, we will have the basis to construct the female subject" (Michael 21). Through the deconstruction of Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalysis, Irigaray establishes the subject of 'female women,' and realizes the subversion of the subject image of 'masculine women' customized to male physiological and social needs. Whether it is Jane Franks's inter-subjectivity female theory or Irigaray's 'female women,' it reflects a postmodern feminist subject view constructed based on the female subject's experience and female initiative. This female subject view with a strong postmodern sense is not only a defence to the traditional female subject view, but also a manifestation of the resistance to all the forces controlling the desire to be free from the 'others', including even those with 'good' intentions. This kind of female subject view, which combines the characteristics of women's groups and Postmodernism, is of great benefit to the construction of feminism's subject view and the development of feminism itself.

6. Limitations Postmodern Feminism

In the development process of feminism, due to the imperfect system construction and the unsustainable development of systematic theory, postmodern feminism cannot completely get rid of the limitations of traditional feminist schools in discourse and practice; nor can it completely get rid of the entanglement of grand narratives and quasi-metaphysical discourses. Although postmodern feminism is clearly opposed to the establishment of grand narratives in theory, in its own development process, it constantly constructs grand narratives and quasi metaphysical discourses which are extremely

problematic in the eyes of Postmodernism. For example, Lu Bin, a postmodern feminist, has an obvious grand narrative and quasi-metaphysical discourse featuring in her theory of gender system. The three theories used by Lu Bin to construct her own theory of gender system are Marxism, Levi Strauss's structural anthropology, and Freud's psychoanalysis: these grand narratives are criticized and opposed by postmodern thinkers (Carson 26). On the other hand, Lu Bin tried to find the ultimate causes for women submission —the gender system, and the fundamental way to change the gender inequality — to change the gender division of labour in the field of social reproduction (Azzopardi 38). Apart from gender differences, Lu Bin ignored that there are also class, racial, national, and state differences in women. Although every woman is oppressed by patriarchy, their real situation is very different. Therefore, seeking the ultimate cause of gender oppression and putting forward a fundamental way to change gender has little effect and benefit on the social practice of women's liberation. Although it has some limitations, Lu Bin's gender system theory also has extremely important theoretical and practical significance. On the one hand, the gender system once had important social roles. The vestiges of the gender system established in the distant times still restrict our views on gender. The progress of feminism can not only liberate women, but also liberate the whole of humanity from the shackles of the gender concepts that restrict the development of personality (Christine 65). In addition, the concept of social gender put forward by Lu Bin has made a breakthrough in the study of feminism and women.

7. Progress of Postmodern Feminism

Compared with feminist empiricism and traditional feministic standpoint, postmodern feminism is more radical in epistemology, and more thorough as a criticizing science. It is greatly influenced by the 'linguistic turn' of Postmodernism, which garners a new attention towards scientific criticism (Carson 838). Although postmodern feminism has some overcorrected manifestations on the level of rebellion and

scepticism and presents certain characteristics of super vanguard, it is still one of the most exciting achievements in the development of contemporary feminist thought. Through the renewal and evolution of their own ideas, postmodern feminism brings a new concept of subject thinking to modern women and predicts the arrival of the new conceptual thinking to women. Postmodern feminism has opened a new stage of feminist development due to its distinct theoretical views and characteristics, which has an important impact on the development of contemporary society and understanding of feminist thought (Azzopardi 261).

Postmodern feminism shows its advantages in guiding the cause of women's liberation and development in the world. Under the guidance of traditional feminist theory and various feminist movements, women in western developed capitalist countries have obtained equal rights with men in certain social aspects, such as politics, economy, law, social status, education, employment, and political participation. However, they only reflect the desire of white middle-class women in Europe and America to oppose gender discrimination. If the white middle class women in Europe and America blindly impose their views and experiences of success on women all over the world, it will inevitably cover up the huge gap and different needs between women, make wrong judgments and speculations on women of other races and nationalities, ignore all forms of gender discrimination that govern different women, and lead to the reduction of struggle for power of women in the rest of the world. Women's liberation must call for women of different races, nationalities, and regions to join in and fight for the real, free, and equal development of women in the world.

Since the introduction of feminist ideas from the West to China in the late Qing dynasty, feminism has achieved some results in theory and practice. But in the new historical period, the development of feminism is facing some new problems. Theoretically, there are problems such as unclear definition of feminism and relative lag in the localization of theoretical research. On the practical side, there are problems such as the

proliferation of extreme feminist activities and the low popularity of feminist thoughts. In the contemporary era, extreme feminist activities not only damage the legitimate interests of men, but also hinder the healthy development of the feminist movement. This kind of activities will easily trigger tension and crisis of trust in gender relations, these would inadvertently intensify the conflicts between men and women and create a vicious circle. Therefore, Chinese feminism still has a long way to go.

8. Conclusion

In general, postmodern feminism is the inevitable result of the constant adjustment and improvement of feminism in modern society and the coordination with traditional society in the process of social and historical development. Postmodern feminism ponders on the female-centred experience, negates the social education trend of the traditional male subject from the aspects of the establishment of equal relationship between men and women, promotion of women's status, and provides a new thinking direction for the obstacles of the patriarchal order faced by women for their all-round development. Postmodern feminism emerged in the 20th century as a successor to liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. It contains not only the feminist thinking about survival and development of the female group, but also new feminist thoughts influenced by Postmodernism.

Postmodern feminism advocates the idea of taking women as the centre and considers the role of women in the process of social development and progress. Thus, breaking the indelible self-recognition of women in the patriarchal society and patriarchal order. By paying attention and recognition to women's experiences, it endows modern women with more suitable development needs and enables the feminist discourse of the new era to be independent from the patriarchal order. The development of postmodern feminism brings new impetus to the promotion of women's status, stimulates the enthusiasm and creativity of women in the process of social construction, and brings new vitality to the development of modern society.

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