

# *Analyze the Influence of Social Values on People from New Year Sacrifice and The Bluest Eye*

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**Abstract:** Feminism and black equality are always common topics that society always cares about. It seems that the ill-nature of the people born in outdated regimes has been eliminated, but in fact, the thoughts and cognition of the regimes are still widely spread in current society. Thus, the research topic of this paper is to analyze the traditional form of the interpretations reflected in novels and to illustrate how they affect both people in the time when the novels set and people nowadays. The research method of this paper is first to collect and analyze previous papers about related topics and combine them with current social conditions to carry out research longitudinally. By comparing the People from *New Year Sacrifice* and *The Bluest Eye*, this research result is that the interpretation in the traditional society is still partially passed on and makes a great impact on people today unconsciously, including their stubborn stereotypes of some groups and kinds of behavior guidance to people.

**Keywords:** Comparative literature, The New Year Sacrifice, The Bluest Eye.

## 1. Introduction

As the conflicts between different groups about identity, most common in genders and races, are still a serious problem in current society, this paper aims to study the origins and developments of the conflicts under mainstream social values in different societies at different times from two literature works, *The New Year Sacrifice* and *The Bluest Eye*.

*LuXun, the vital revolutionist of the New Culture Movement of China, writes the New Year Sacrifice.* The short novel tells the whole life of a woman in feudal times of China and concretely shows how feudal ethics bound the underclasses. *The Bluest Eye* is written by a black female author, Toni Morrison, who was an active participant, supporter, and advertiser of the Black Equality Movement of the United States. The long-short story tells the strategy of a black girl, including both the misery of lack of love from her parents and discrimination by the society she suffered from.

In the two novels, we can see that the ‘conflicts’ nowadays seem to be well-reasoned; this is because the traditional social values connived and stipulated that women could only have the lowest status in society or black people were the most inferior group in society. With the development of the social regime and the recognition of equal human rights, the traditional social values have been eliminated; however, the thoughts included in the social values have been passed on from generation to generation, so there are still weakened and even unconscious discrimination, or say stereotypes on some group of people, for example, some duties are only suitable for men, or the negative impressions on the black people.

The reason I chose these two novels to study is that they have something in common: they all converge on the opinion born by the social values of one main character and demonstrate the social conditions at the times when the novels are set vividly.

## 2. Social Values Influence the Protagonists

The social values at the time when the authors set are different from the social values currently. As the yield of the traditional regime, the social values led to the conventional thinking of people and acted as the rules of people's performances. However, as the invisible behavior and cognition guidance, did the social values impose a positive impact on all the members of society, or did they consciously or unconsciously affect some groups of people in negative ways?

### 2.1. Details about the Social Values and the Impacts on the Protagonists

The story of *The New Year Sacrifice* is set in the 1920s, when China was struggling in the shackles of feudal ethics. Feudal ethics was passed from the feudal ethics social system of China, and long-lasting and deep-rooted thoughts laid down a code of conduct for everyone. There were many immoral thoughts passed from the traditional but distorted by the corrupt Qing regime ideology and the Confucian culture, including theocracy, clan power, and husband power. In detail, the powers could be explained as the highest power of God in traditional fete: the absolute control of the patriarch over all his family members, including his children and servants of his family, and the superior status of men over female. By the social convention commonly known as an ordinance, women were the most oppressed group in society. They were not allowed to be educated, choose their own marriage, or even be forbidden to go outside at will; after they got married to the man their family predetermined, they could not remarry morally, no matter whether their husband treated them badly or their husband died [1]. To criticize the social condition, the author set the protagonist as a female character whose husband died, and her mother-in-law sold her to another man to get married in order to earn money. As the protagonist remarried, people around her all called her an indecent woman, and the widow who did not remarry even threatened her that after her death, her soul would be split in two and divided between her two husbands. This shows the ignorance of people's thoughts and the infringement of theocracy (people believed that they would go to hell after they die, and their villainy would be punished after they died), clan power (the clan leader could trade the women in will and regarded them as products) and husband power (it was criminal for women to remarry) suffered by women[2].

### 2.2. Backgrounds and Authors' Attitudes toward the Social Values

*The New Year Sacrifice* is collected in LuXun's novels collection *Wandering*. Directly finding out through the title of the collection, LuXun himself and all the revolutionists who fought with him were confused about how to improve society after the New Culture Movement. Similar to the plot in *The New Year Sacrifice*, facing the protagonist harmed by feudal ethics, the narrator, who was a student educated by the new Western culture, still did not have the true interpretation of the knowledge and, thus, was not confident in what he learned. The plot reflects the problem the revolutionists face: how to continue and widen their reform?

*The Bluest Eye* was written by Toni Morrison at the time when the Black Equality Movement was prevailing. So, what is the inequality between the Black and the White? After the war between the states, slavery in America was eliminated. However, racism still existed. The social value defined that, the black people are the most inferior and underclass group, which led to racial segregation: the black people could only do the things the white people allowed, including the rules that the special canteens for colored people, and the separated education of white children and colored children. This

way of discrimination towards black people were widely approved by the social value and reinforce the separation of racism. Under the social value, the white culture became the mainstream culture. Mentioned in *The Bluest Eye*, everything that have a civilizing effect were advertising the white culture, for example the enlightened reading materials in schools were illustrating happy families of white people [3], nice dolls for gifts were presented as a white girl, and all the movies at that time were telling about the romantic stories of white people. Under this social situation, the black culture has been ignored and belittled, and with the catalyze of the discrimination towards the black people, the black people have started to lose their sense of black identity and caused their internal discrimination: black people from the northern America discriminated the black people in the southern America, and the black women thought upper-class than the black women. However, all of them have something in common: they all accepted the discrimination towards them and also believed that all black people are uglier than other races. Facing with the situation [4], the author and other pioneers fought for the legitimate rights of black people and made significant contributions to the advancement of the black equality movement.

### 3. Similarities and Differences between Writing Techniques

There is a large amount of writing techniques used in the two works, which have something in common and something different, to express the authors' mind diversely and evocatively.

#### 3.1. Narrative Perspectives

The narrative perspective of *The New Year Sacrifice* is the first-person perspective of a back-home student being educated by the Western new thoughts [5]. With his perspective, the author not only tells the story of the cause and effect of the night of 'New Year Sacrifice', but also echoes the title of the collection where the short novels are collected, *Wandering*. By listening to other's paraphrases and viewing the actions of Mistress XiangLin, the author uses the student's perspective to tell the reasons and results of the strategy and the whole life of Mistress XiangLin longitudinally. There are some direct dialogues between Mistress XiangLin and the students, when Mistress XiangLin asked the students whether her soul would be divided into two parts for both of her two husbands after she died. After learning the materialism and knowing that the statement was totally wrong, the student still hesitated due to the lack of confidence and encouragement to fight against the long-lasting conventional feudal ethics [6]. The action of the student confirmed the social situation at the time the collection was compiled [7]: the introduction of new Western thoughts seemed to be effective and hit a bottleneck [8].

The narrative perspectives of *The Bluest Eye* are diverse. The first part, which is the introduction of Pecola's life in her school, is narrated from the first-person perspective of her friends, the Claudia sisters. By using the child's naive language, the United States of the 1950s to 1960s, filling of racism, is laid bare for readers: white people discriminate them, while the colored people and black people also have serious internal discrimination. In addition, the Claudia sisters illustrate the pattern of traditional black people's family: cooperative, caring and hard-working, these spirits give the Claudia sisters encouragement of facing and fighting against racism, by their sense of identity and belonging to black culture, and also in contrast to Pecola's family, which is devoid of love and hates each other, Pecola's desire for love is highlighted. In the following three parts, the author mainly uses omniscient perspective to tell the story of Pecola and the stories of the people who cause the strategy. Interspersed with the narrative from the omniscient perspective, the author narrates the process of being victimized by racism in a small amount from the first-person perspective of the supporting characters, for example the colored women Geraldine and her sense of superiority over black people, Pecola's mother Paulin's loss of her sense of belongings about her black identity and black culture, Pecola's

father Cholly's sense of inferiority toward white people that translates into a aversion to his black compatriots. By setting a long timeline vertically, the author tells Pecola's strategy completely, while at the same time briefly summarizes the social situation of the United States in the first half of twentieth century.

### 3.2. Metaphors and Images

To demonstrate social value, the authors use large amounts of metaphors and images to refer the actual meaning and point out the cons of the values and moral cognition [9].

#### 3.2.1. Special Irony in the Works' Name

The title of the two works, *The New Year Sacrifice* (which is originally named with the meaning of 'blessing' in Chinese) and *The Bluest Eye*, both have positive meaning in the first sight, but actually suggest the tragic end of the protagonists.

*The New Year Sacrifice*, named Zhufu, is a fete of feudal ethics to sacrifice to gods and ancestors. The grand fete significantly reveals people's ignorance and blind obedience to the world under feudal thought. In the end, with the sound of firework in the fete, the protagonist Mistress XiangLin dies by the river.

*The Bluest Eye*, seems to be a niceness, but brings countless pain and ache to the protagonist Pecola. Blue eyes are the unique characteristic of white people, which were given the special image of the identity of white people in the book. As a black people constantly being discriminated, young Pecola misunderstands that she could be respected if she also owns a pair of blue eyes. Finally, by the abuse of racism in the United States in 1950s, after her father's rape of her, Pecola is out of her mind and acts insanelly, believing that the god has already gave her a pair of blue eyes, The Bluest Eye.

#### 3.2.2. Special Irony in the Protagonists' Name

The name of the protagonists in the two novels both have special meanings, which reveal the social situation and imply the opposite ending from the names sounds nicely.

The name of the protagonist of *The New Year Sacrifice* is Mistress XiangLin, which means that she is the wife of XiangLin. However, having been betrothed since she was a child, the protagonist could not even have her own name; this indicates that her only duties in her whole life are serving her husband and his family and raising children. This condition of women before the Republic of China's foundation was expected under the feudal ethical code. To satirize the old moral cognition of the superior power of the husband, or say men, over women, the author sets his protagonist without a practical name on purpose.

The name of the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* is Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old black girl. The contrary to her last name, Pecola's extreme lack of love and caring: her family members hate and discriminate against each other, and white people and colored people regard her and her race with black skin as the most inferior group in society. The author gives the last name to all the family members in the Breedloves, but none of them has ever been bred by love, which is dramatically ironic.

#### 3.2.3. Descriptive Techniques and Images

*The New Year Sacrifice* uses a lot of detailed descriptions in the following aspects: actions, languages, inner thoughts and appearances, side descriptions of other people's actions and dialogues, and environmental descriptions. From the multifaceted description, the author reinforces the impression of the personality of Mistress XiangLin: fatuous, lamentable, hard-working, and downtrodden housewife. Also, the author uses images to help the reader understand what facts he wants to reflect.

For example, the threshold of temple Mistress XiangLin donated all of her savings to build it that would be read by countless people, also suggests the strategy of Mistress XiangLin: being oppressed by the society for her whole life. The author chooses the most oppressed group in feudal society, the ordinary women [10]. Thus, Mistress, as a single protagonist, could also show the oppression to people of traditional feudal ethics because she was the victim of all the rules of feudal society, including the unethical policy, the inequality status, and distinct treatment towards men and women.

*The Bluest Eye* uses a large amount of direct description, as a significant characteristic of black authors, visually shows what the society at the United States in 1950s to 1960s. And by using inner description of what the characters thought about, the author indicates their responses to the social values. Additionally, the author uses several through-text images as references of certain concrete things. For example, as the unique characteristic of white people, blue eye in this novel is the symbol of white identity. As a vital component of black culture, music (especially music composed by black people and black people's folk songs) is the symbol of black culture. The author dexterously uses the images to illustrate social situations, making her language seem to be more literary and thought-provoking.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the research, this paper finds out that the traditional social values, both for the feudal ethics in China before the end of its feudal regime and the racism in the United States before the Black Equality movement, caused negative influences on people, especially for the groups that are regarded to be inferior to others, the women and the black people. In addition, the thoughts from the social values, including men have a higher social status than women or black people are born to be ruder and uglier than other races of people, are passed on by the constantly discriminating behavior guided by the broken, wrong social values, and still impose harm to the groups that are discriminated. This study gives an expatiation to the still-existing social conflicts between different groups of people from the perspective of the development of the thoughts of inequality under unethical social attitudes. The result of the study points out that conventional thinking and stereotypes about different groups are one of the causes of inequality and suggests a way of correcting the social condition by correcting people's cognition and interpretation on different groups.

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