

# Ecological Consciousness in Li Juan's *My Altay*

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Altay Prefecture in Xinjiang attracted attention of many writers for its unique natural scenery and rich ecological resources. Li Juan's collection of essays, *My Altay*, records her life experience in Altai in detail. This paper intends to identify the ecological elements in *My Altay* from the perspective of ecological literary criticism. The work reflects the relationship between nature and human beings, showing the local natural environment, human history, and the theme of harmonious coexistence between man and nature and the awakening of ecological consciousness of people under the influence of modern commercialized society. It is not only an excellent literary work, but also a model of ecological literature, allowing people to have a deeper understanding of the world and themselves, and reflect on human's attitude and behavior toward nature.

*Keywords:* Altay, ecological literary criticism, ecological consciousness

## Introduction

Altai Prefecture, located in the northernmost part of Xinjiang, China, has become a source of inspiration for many writers with its unique natural scenery and rich ecological resources. Common natural landscapes in Altai ecological literature include magnificent mountains, vast grasslands, clear rivers and lakes. Kanas Lake, for example, is known as a "fairylake on earth", famous for its wide lake surface, rippling green waves, and surrounding snow-capped mountains soaring into the clouds. The Wucui Beach attracts tourists with its rich colors and unique Yadan landform. In the history of Chinese literature, the ecological literature works of Altai region are famous for their profound ecological consciousness and depiction of natural beauty.

Li Juan is a famous writer in Altai Prefecture, and her works are widely praised for their delicate brushwork and deep perception of nature. Her collection of essays, *My Altay*, records her life experience in Altai in detail, showing the local natural environment, human history, and people's lifestyle and life state. In addition, Li Juan's other works, such as the *Sheep Road* series and *Winter Pasture*, also precisely depict the ecological environment and the life of herdsmen in Altai, reflecting the theme of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

This paper intends to identify the ecological elements in her *My Altay* from the perspective of ecological literary criticism.

## Ecological Literature and Ecological Literary Criticism

Ecological literature, as a genre of literature, emphasizes the close relationship and mutual influence between man and nature, and pays attention to the protection and sustainable development of ecological environment. Although Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* was published in the 19th century, its insightful observations of nature and advocacy of simple living had an important influence on 20th century environmentalists and are regarded as

a precursor to ecological literature. *Walden* reveals that the unspeakable purity and kindness of nature always endow people with health and joy; human happiness, freedom, and civilization, to some extent, depend on their harmonious coexistence with nature (Lu & Zhang, 2019).

Aldo Leopold's *People of the Deer* explored the relationship between humans and nature through the depiction of wild animals, which inspired later ecological literature. American writer Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is a classic work of ecological literature. By revealing the damage of chemical pesticides to the ecological environment, it awakened the public's awareness of environmental protection and had a profound impact on global environmental policy.

*Walden*, *Silent Spring* and other natural literature classics have been translated into China, revealing the ecological crisis in the era of industrial revolution. As important issues such as strengthening environmental protection attract more and more social attention, ecological literature has become a literary category with unique value. Writers pay attention to reality, keep up with the times, and deeply reflect the relationship between ecological environment and the development of human society. Ecological literature has become an important concept in the new era. (Xinhua News Agency, 2024)

Ye Mei, president of the Chinese Prose Society, said.

Ecological literary criticism originated in the 1970s, with the rise of the environmental protection movement; scholars began to pay attention to the depiction of nature in literary works and its impact on the real world. Ecological literary criticism is concerned with the depiction and expression of the natural environment in literary works, and how literature affects people's perceptions and attitudes towards the natural environment. It investigates the relation between humans and the natural world and deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented and analyzed in literary works. Ecological literary criticism holds that literary works are not only a form of artistic expression, but also a social and cultural phenomenon, which can reflect and shape people's ecological concepts and values. One of the main goals in ecological literary criticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention during recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies (Mambrol, 2016).

The research objects of ecological literary criticism mainly include the natural theme in literary works, the relationship between human beings and nature, and the ecological thoughts and values reflected in literary works. Ecological literary criticism also covers literary works of different countries and regions, including ecological literary works of Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and other regions, as well as non-literary works such as poetry, prose, novels, and so on.

The value and significance of ecological literary criticism is that it helps to raise people's awareness of environmental protection and promote human's protection and sustainable development of natural environment. It helps to promote the innovation and development of literary creation and inject new elements and vitality into literary works. It helps to promote interdisciplinary exchanges and cooperation, and promote the cross-integration and development of literature and other disciplines.

### **Ecological Elements in *My Altay***

*My Altay* describes the natural scenery and cultural landscape of Xinjiang Altai Region through delicate brushstrokes, showing the harmonious coexistence of human and nature. This work is not only a delicate record

of life in Altay, but also a deep insight into human nature, life and nature, and full of rich ecological literary elements.

First, the work reflects the relationship between nature and human beings. The work depicts the rich natural landscape of Altai Region, as well as the interaction and interdependence between human beings and nature, and appeals to people to respect nature and cherish the ecological environment through the work. In the book, Li Juan recorded her life experiences and observations in Altai in detail. These records are not only a simple running list, but also incorporate the author's deep feelings and thoughts. For example, in describing her interaction with herdsmen, she not only captures their simple and enthusiastic character, but also delves into their attitude of living in harmony with nature.

Li Juan describes her feelings about the wind in the book: "I looked down halfway up the mountain, and then looked up. I see the whole world is a transparent tilt; the whole world is leaning in the direction of the wind. My hair is also flying to the direction of the wind, but my heart, though desire to go together, is struggling in the place where I stand" (Li, 2021, p. 214). In the book, people go through the four seasons in the wind, the Saihengbrak grassland valley in spring, the grand Akan playing and singing meeting in the summer pasture, and the long snowy road after winter... The relationship between man and heaven and earth and nature spreads out before our eyes. The work documents the detailed and Stoic images of life in the villages of Kawutu and Akhala; the second volume, "In the Corner (2002-2006)", describes the daily life of Li Juan, her mother, and elderly grandmother along with the migration and flow of herdsmen: running a grocery store, working as a small tailor, helping the herdsmen to wear cars and dresses, and going to the deep mountains to pick wild wood ear; the swelling tents on the grassland of Shaihenbrak in spring, the noisy and grand Akan concert on the pasture in summer, and the long snowy road in winter... Gobi, grassland, forest, snowy mountains, horses and herders, the delicate and bright text shows the far-reaching and rich survival landscape of nomadic people in the border area.

The work also reflects the awakening of ecological consciousness. The last story of the work "Wood Ear" describes the fanatical scene of people making money for picking wild wood ear: "At the beginning, everyone just looked around the forest to earn pocket money after work. Later, ... People who pick wood fungus come across one or two every day, carrying woven bags and wearing rubber shoes" (Li, 2021, p. 246). The price of fungus is getting higher and higher, the team of harvesting fungus is getting larger and larger, and even the mountain closure caused by livestock plague cannot stop the crowd. People have rushed into the mountains by various means, and the mountains have been in chaos, news of looting has come from time to time, and the woods by the river are filled with a pile of plastic products. At last, nature pressed the stop button, and in the fifth or sixth year of the mania for picking wood fungus, there was no more. At the end of the story, the author compares the snake lying on the moss to the fungus. If people do not ask for the gifts of nature reasonably, nature will turn into a dangerous snake. This experience stimulated her concern and awareness of the ecological environment, and she gradually awakened and recognized the importance of ecological issues.

The work deals with the traditional ways of production and life in the Altai Region, as well as the impact of modernization on the ecological environment. Li Juan mentioned an old Kazakh custom: The cattle and alpacas in the family are only used as food for themselves and their guests, and cannot be bought as commodities. The author laments that this kind of etiquette and custom has not been left under the impact of the great times (Li, 2021).

In addition, the language style in *My Altay* is also commendable. Li Juan's writing is fresh, bright, poetic, and powerful. She is able to accurately capture every detail of life and depict it in vivid, graphic language that makes readers feel as if they are there. Her prose has an optimistic and open-minded nomadic spirit. Her words are unique, transparent, and clever, and the frontier life is full of vitality and poetry in her pen (China Writer, 2018).

### Conclusion

To sum up, *My Altay* is not only an excellent literary work, but also a model of ecological literature. It reflects the interaction and dependence between man and nature through the depiction of Altay and the exploration of the relationship between man and nature, allowing people to have a deeper understanding of the world and themselves, and reflect on human's attitude and behavior toward nature. People can understand and protect ecological wisdom in different cultural traditions and their environmental awareness.

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