

The Latest Development of Ethical Literary Criticism in the World

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The series *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism* exhibits key achievements in the major program of national social sciences by scholars headed by Professor Nie Zhenzhao, who are devoted to the research of foreign literatures, studies in philosophy and social sciences, and interdisciplinary study of world literature, who dedicated themselves to the construction of the ethical literary critical theory and methodology with the application of ethical literary criticism in practice. This series organically combine the generality of ethical literary criticism with the individuality of specific writers and combine the theoretical guidance with realistic practicality in academic research, which will be conducive to the development of world literary criticism and region and country-specific studies in the new era.

Keywords: *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism*, world literature, region and country-specific studies

Introduction

Nowadays, ethical literary criticism has been spread all over the world, and its development at home and abroad is rapid. A large number of books and journals about ethical literary criticism have been springing up, being conducive to literature studies and region and country-specific studies. Many foreign and domestic experts and scholars have made contributions to the study of literature under such interdisciplinary background of ethical literary criticism.

There are a lot of scholars who have made contributions to ethical literary criticism in theoretical construction, various literatures and region and country-specific studies. Nie Zhenzhao has been engaged in theoretical construction and application of ethical literary criticism; Su Hui has contributed to comparative literature, European literature and American literature; Yang Gexin has been engaged in the theoretical construction and American literature; Wu Di has made research on English poetry, Russian poetry and comparative literature; Shang Biwu has contributed to contemporary Anglo-American literature and narratology; Wang Songlin has focused on 19th century English literature and sea literature; Liu Maosheng has been engaged in British and American play and narratology; Luo Lianggong has focused on English poetry and poetics and African American literature; Wang Zhuo has made researches on modern and contemporary British and American literature; Yang Jian has focused on 20th century Western literature, Eastern literature and Eastern

aesthetics; Péter Hajdu has made researches on the fields of nineteenth-century European fiction and Roman poetry; Youngmin Kim has focused on Irish, Canadian and American literature; Namigata Tsuyoshi has made researches on modern and contemporary Japanese literature and culture; Lissa Paul has focused on Caribbean literary studies and Children's Literature; Ren Jie has focused on modern and contemporary Japanese literature; Fu Shouxiang has contributed to comparative poetics and philosophy of culture; Nguyen Anh Dan has made contribution to Vietnamese Novels, including pastoral novels and war novels in Vietnam; Zhou Lu has focused on Russian literature and comparative literature studies; Wu Sijia has focused on film and TV studies, and foreign drama studies; Ge Jinling has been engaged in French literature research... Based on the contributions of scholars home and abroad, ethical literary criticism has come to a new developing period.

In August 2020, the five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism*, with Professors Nie Zhenzhao and Su Hui as general editors, was published by Peking University Press. It is the latest achievement in the study of ethical literary criticism in the new era and reflects the highest achievement in this field at present. The five volumes are *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism* (edited by Nie Zhenzhao and Wang Songlin), *Ethical Literary Criticism of American Literature* (edited by Su Hui), *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* (edited by Xu Bin), *Ethical Literary Criticism of Japanese Literature* (edited by Li Exian) and *Ethical Literary Criticism of Chinese Literature* (edited by Huang Hui). The five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism* combines classic literary works from four representative countries in Europe, America and Asia, and is highly inclusive and of great value for dissemination. It is a masterpiece of the theory and application of ethical literary criticism. It extends and expands on the key intersections between literature and ethics, highlights the literary themes that have received the most attention in recent years, and provides a model for the study of world literature as well as for the study of ethical literary criticism region and country-specific studies in the new era.

Ethical literary criticism was formally proposed by Professor Nie Zhenzhao at a national symposium in 2004, where he first discussed it as a literary research method, addressed the problem, that theory divorced from practice in literary research, with a unique ethical perspective, and established this unique Chinese academic theory that has freed China from the dilemma of accepting and applying Western theory wholesale. Until the completion of this paper (July 2021), there are more than 1000 academic papers and more than 500 master theses and doctoral dissertations on ethical literary criticism in the "China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database" on China National Knowledge Infrastructure, which mainly discuss and construct ethical literary criticism from a theoretical viewpoint, and do further research on literature. In addition, Professor Nie Zhenzhao and other experts and scholars have published a number of monographs on ethical literary criticism, making great contributions to the construction of a school of ethical literary criticism. In just sixteen years, ethical literary criticism has gone through the stages of system construction, practical testing, research and evaluation, and extension and expansion, attracting the attention of more and more scholars at home and abroad.

The publication of the five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism* is a milestone for foreign literature studies, philosophical and social sciences, and interdisciplinary studies of world literature. It is worthy of attention as a guide for the construction of the theory and methodology of ethical literary criticism, the application in the practice of literary criticism, the development of world literary criticism as well as region and country-specific studies in the new era.

I. Overview of Ethical Literary Criticism

Ethical literary criticism is an emerging and highly regarded theory that aims to build an academic discourse criticism system with Chinese characteristics. It actively integrates traditional Chinese resources, emphasizes Chinese cultural identity, and promotes Chinese literary research out of China. Ethical literary criticism calls on readers to pay attention to the literary text itself, to the ethical nature and educational function of literature, and to interpret literature through an ethical perspective. It differs from ethical criticism and moral criticism by expanding both, reducing subjectivity to a minimum, and objectively bringing literary criticism and history closer together. Unlike other critical theories, ethical literary criticism has developed a number of distinctive critical terms that we can understand and grasp, with “ethic” at their core. The characteristics of ethical literary criticism are as follows.

A. Emphasis on the Ethical Nature and Educational Function of Literature

Since ancient times, literature has been closely related to ethics. For example, in ancient Greek mythology, the reason why the love between father and daughter, mother and son, and brother and sister exists was that ethical concepts are absent at that time. The reason why *Oedipus the King* became a tragedy is that humans regarded incest as a sin after they had acquired ethical and moral values. It is clear that ethical and moral judgements have long been a fundamental criterion of literary criticism. In Homer’s *Iliad*, Agamemnon disobeys the rules of ethics by taking the spoils of war and female captives, causing Achilles to become angry and refuse to fight for war. This is a poignant illustration of the importance of ethics, of how breaking moral principles can break the social and ethical order and lead to tragedy. In *Odyssey*, Odysseus, the main character, who consistently pursues the moral goal and moral ideal of reuniting the family, is a rare moral figure in the time with extreme chaos in ethical and moral order. It creates a noble literary character that touches the hearts of readers, teaches them to abide by ethics and morals, makes them deeply appreciate the ethical and moral values of the work, and helps to form a good moral society.

In both ancient and modern times, the works of famous writers have always embodied the power of ethical themes and manifested the author’s pursuit of moral ideals. At the same time, literary critics have developed their ideas after years of research into ethical and educational values. In the second half of the nineteenth century, ethics of literature studies, such as Trevor Creighton’s *Ethics of Some Modern Novels* (1884) and John A. Kersey’s *Ethics of Literature* (1893), emphasized the educational function of literature and explored its ethical and moral values. In 2004, Professor Nie Zhenzhao further literary ethics by advocating the use of it as a tool for literary criticism. This was the beginning of ethical literary criticism and a wave of ethical literary criticism has since been launched. Thanks to the tireless efforts of many scholars, the system of ethical literary criticism has been formed and widely used, playing an important role in researches. Ethical literary criticism is interdisciplinary in nature. It applies theories and principles of ethics to the study and resolution of issues of good and evil. At the same time, it focuses on ethical values in both authors and literary works, while taking into account the establishment of standards of right and wrong and the evaluation by readers and critics in the process of reading and criticizing. There is now a growing recognition of the value of the discipline of ethical literary criticism.

B. Extremely Scientific

Ethical literary criticism is closely related to other scientific fields of human society and is used to do researches on writers, works and society. The strong scientific nature of ethical literary criticism has given rise to distinctive terms in the natural sciences, such as “brain text”.

Ethical literary criticism defines “language” and “character” and uncovers specific connotations from a unique ethical perspective not previously found by scholars. Literature is inseparable from character, without which there would be no material text, and literature would remain in oral form, and still in the stage of the brain text. The concept of brain text is the basis for ethical literary criticism in interpreting “electronic text”, “digital text” and “material text” as opposed to “brain text”. It also explains the value of the existence of the “brain text” and expands on the impact of the development of the Internet and computer age on texts, while explaining the concept of the “material text” as opposed to the “brain text”. It also draws inspiration from Darwin’s theory of evolution, further delineates the three choices of human social development: natural selection, ethical selection and scientific selection, and illustrates the inextricable relationship between these three choices. *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism* is a rare and excellent work. It illustrates the logical relationship between these three choices of human civilization and explores the latest scientific achievements of interdisciplinary ethical literary criticism in multiple dimensions.

C. Extremely Open and Inclusive

A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism is an in-depth study of ethics from different perspectives of Historicism, aestheticism, psychoanalysis, post colonialism, ecocriticism, narratology, formalism, existentialism, and Marxism. It identifies and combines these theories to form a new work that is linked to and named after each of these theories. In works such as *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism*, experts and scholars have conducted thematic discussions on the relationship between critical theory and critical practice in ethical literary criticism, further improving the theory of ethical literary criticism itself and making it serve the in-depth critical practice better. This shows the openness and inclusiveness of ethical literary criticism, and expresses its powerful affinity, adhesion and orientation.

D. Extremely Practical and Guidable

In the 1980s and 1990s, new theories of literary criticism arrived in China and were widely disseminated in the country. There were no less than ten critical theories that are still studied and used by a wide range of scholars today. These theories and criticisms have given great insight into the construction of Chinese literary critical theory. While they have been welcomed and sought after in China, they have also been questioned. China has almost kept pace with the West in terms of literary critical theory, but lacks systems and terminologies of literary discourse criticism with Chinese characteristics. Chinese scholars have been aware of it and have conducted long-standing research, in which ethical criticism, previously regarded as traditionally conservative and outdated, has come into the limelight. The Chinese translated and published Wayne C. Booth’s *the Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), which spread Western ethical criticism. It gave an impetus to the construction of literary theory in China. When pan-cultural studies rise, the study of ethical criticism has become increasingly mature. It has served as a strong guide for literary criticism in China over the past two or three decades, refocusing the value of ethics in literary works and the function of ethics in literary criticism, and further reflecting on the definition, origin,

essence, function and form of literature, etc. from the interdisciplinary viewpoint of literature and ethics. Against this backdrop, Professor Nie Zhenzhao launched ethical literary criticism, with an emphasis on the role of ethics in literature and the role of literature in life, which has attracted widespread attention. Ethical literary criticism connects theory and practice of literary criticism and focuses on ethical values in Chinese literary creating and literary criticizing, emphasizes the didactic function and ethical orientation of literature and further promotes the construction of literary theory in China. Scholars have actively engaged in the dissection of classical literature under the guidance of ethical literary criticism, further refining ethical literary criticism in the reading, interpretation and value discovery of literary texts. Ethical literary criticism provides a new paradigm for literary studies and gives China a place in international critical discourse. It plays an important role in literature researches and theory constructions in China, promotes the exploration of ethical literary criticism in textual analysis, and enhances Chinese cultural competitiveness and cultural status.

II. The Scientific Style of A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism

A. Introductions to Each Sub-volume Compose the Conceptual Terms and Constructs the System

The introduction to *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism* first sets out the theoretical foundations of ethical literary criticism. Then, it explains concepts of “natural selection”, “ethical selection”, “scientific selection” and the Sphinx factors, etc. Finally, it scientifically analyzes the impact of future scientific selection on human beings and how the ethics will be changed. The introduction to *Ethical Literary Criticism of American Literature* discusses about selecting influential literary trends, schools and types of literature, applying theories and terminologies of ethical literary criticism to research on the classic literature, and to draw novel views and conclusions on ethical literary criticism. The introduction to *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* focuses on the personal, religious, political, economic, cultural and national ethical backgrounds of English literature, initiates a diachronic study of the ethical literary criticism of English literature and explores the historical evolution of literature from Old English period to modern English. The introduction to *Ethical Literary Criticism of Chinese Literature* takes the generation and transformation of ethical concepts in Chinese literature as the main thread, integrates ethical concepts, ethical and moral systems and ethical values in Chinese literature, analyzes the cultural characteristics of dynasties and periods, and explores the germination, development and reconstruction of ethical concepts in literature. These introductions play an important role in laying down the theoretical backgrounds, introducing key ethical concepts, and sorting out the frameworks and the threads of the books, which is of great significance to readers and scholars in understanding ethical literary criticism.

B. Well-divided Chapters Echo Each Other and Form a System Together

Each of the chapters is composed of two or three sections and a short summary, which is suitable for readers to grasp the main points of knowledge in each chapter. Chapter 8 of *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism*, for example, is representative. This chapter is divided into three sections to discuss the study of narratology and ethical literary criticism. The first section shows readers the “narrative turn” interpreted by Western and domestic scholars, explains the connotations of making narrative an object of study and different viewpoints in regarding narrative as the main method in three stages, introduces the frontiers of narratology in relation to other fields: rhetorical narratology, cognitive narratology and feminist narratology. The second section reviews the significance of the “double turn” of the ethical turn since the late 1980s, and analyses the two

tendencies of the last thirty years of ethical critical studies in the West proposed by Professor Nie Zhenzhao and the characteristics in ethical literary criticism of Chinese literature. The third section combines ethical literary criticism with narratology, proposes the principle “narrative for ethics”, and discusses how to do researches on expressing ethics and conveying the ethical value of their works by narrative. At the same time, the summary of this chapter concludes with the current state of development of narrative and ethical literary criticism, and explores the potential for the future development of the two’s combination.

C. Context with Clear Diachronic and Synchronic History

The five volumes cover a large number of literary works from ancient times to modern times and highlight diachronic studies and taking synchronic comparisons and contrasts into account.

Ethical Literary Criticism of Chinese Literature is chronologically arranged. It studies works such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Romance of West Chamber*, *Peony Pavilion*, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* and *The Water Margin* chronologically. Based on it, the book researches on key writer. For example, it analyses Bai Juyi’s poetry on moral, natural, free and ethical emotions, discusses the ethical construction, ethical tragedy and ethical demands of works of Feng Menglong, a novelist in Ming dynasty, in macro and micro perspectives, and studies ethical environment and ethical construction of novels in the late Qing dynasty, Lu Xun’s novels in the early 20 century and vanguard novels in 1980s. A study of the ethical setting and its ethical construction in the novels of the late Qing, Lu Xun and the avant-garde.

Ethical Literary Criticism of Japanese Literature traces ethical criticism in Japanese literature in the Ancient and Mediaeval Ages, the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Period and the Modern Period, and then discusses ethical conflicts, ethical reflections, ethical choices and ethical reconstructions in Japanese legendary literature, early modern novels, traditional drama, private novels, Birch school, and left-wing literature. Focusing on the works of four prominent writers, Tanizaki Junichiro, Kawabata Yasunari, Kenzaburo Oe and Haruki Murakami, as objects of study for thematic discussion, the book combines the concepts of ethical relationships of characters, ethical values and choices, political ethical views and brain text in order to obtain new thought-provoking analyses and interpretations.

D. Eye-catching and Focused Chapter Titles to Make Readers Grasp Main Points Quickly

Chapter 8 of *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* is particularly typical. The title “Ethical Expressions in Contemporary British Drama” identifies that the subject of research is contemporary British drama. In addition, the titles of the subordinate sections indicate the perspective and the object of study, so that readers can at first glance understand the internal logical relationship between the subjects and the stratified hierarchy of each chapter and the content of each section. In the chapter 8, the first section explores the ethical will in Harold Pinter’s *Betrayal*. The second explores the choice of identity of the protagonist Marlene in Caryl Churchill’s *Top girls*. The third examines ethical thought in Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia*. These three sections are clearly layered, combining ethical relationships, ethical will, ethical choices, ethical identities and ethical environments which are most familiar to readers, to analyze the ethical dilemmas in each work and to uncover the substance and causes of ethical concern in contemporary British drama.

III. Rich Content in *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism*

A. Ethical Concepts and Ethical Values of Literature Analyzed through Examples

Due to the differences in historical development and social background, the ethical ideas of the various countries have different focuses. The five volumes contrast with each other to analyze the similarities and differences in the ethical values of literature in various countries.

Ethical Literary Criticism of Chinese Literature opens with an account of the emergence, development and reconstruction of ethical concepts in Chinese literature. The book shows the civilization in the system of rites and music in Zhou dynasty by drawing on *The Book of Songs*, a collection of musical songs used to implement the system of rites and music. Revered by Confucians, *The Book of Songs* nurtures Confucian ethics and records the gradual movement from ethical chaos to rationality. The germ of rationality in ethical norms is evident in the phrase “to match heaven with virtue”, which witnesses the importance for people to attach to morality and the power over the environment in the reality. So-called “three mothers” in Zhou dynasty who tutored the kings and the Kiang Taigong who assisted King Wu of the Zhou dynasty reflected the orthodoxy of their ethical identities, the power of ethical teaching and the importance of ethics in society. During the Spring-autumn Warring period, poetry was used as a tool for ethical teaching and to express one’s thoughts and feelings based on “reason”.

Nevertheless, *Ethical Literary Criticism of Japanese Literature* begins with the possibility of ethical criticism of Japanese literature, which identifies four stages in Japan (the Ancient and Mediaeval Ages, the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Period and the Modern Period). In the Ancient and Mediaeval Ages, Confucianism in Chinese mainland was brought to Japan by Dulai people, and influenced the Japanese imperial family, led by the Emperor, and spread widely throughout Japan. After Taika Reform, there were frequent exchanges between China and Japan. Buddhism flourished, and ethical and moral education was emphasized, and each school formed its own distinctive education.

In reading *Ethical Literary Criticism of Chinese Literature* and *Ethical Literary Criticism of Japanese Literature*, it is easy to see by comparison that although the ethics of Japanese literature originates from Chinese ethics, it has developed its own unique characteristics in its formation and development. The ancient Chinese classics, like *The Book of Songs*, have a distinct tendency towards ethical edification, reflect the ethical aspirations of people in literary works. However, Japanese literature is different. Unlike Chinese literature, Japanese literature does not have a clear ethical consciousness, and its classics, like *The Kojiki* and *The Tale of Genji*, fully demonstrate both the disorder formation of Japanese literary ethics, the plural ethical values and the diverse standards to judge good and evil in Japanese literature. The comparisons of the relevant chapters in the two books make readers understand it deeply that although China and Japan are both Asian countries with similar cultural roots, they have distinctive characteristics and differences in terms of national culture, literary ethics and literary aesthetics. Similarly, *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* and *Ethical Literary Criticism of American Literature* reveals the different literary ethics in Britain and America, which are both English-speaking countries but have different cultural and ethical orientations. The essence of literature is ethics, and the literary aesthetic is a means of expressing ethics. As a result, ethical things, like ethical values and ethical judgements, have different tendencies. Ethical literary criticism enables us to appreciate literary works of each country from

the perspective of ethical literary criticism and helps us to recognize, understand and clarify the unique literary ethics of each country.

B. Chronologically Arranged Literary Schools and Ethical Attributes of Works

The five volumes analyze writers and works on period of history and school of literature, exploring the ethical nature of literature. For example, *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* starts with Shakespeare, discussing the ethical orientations of different characters through a comparative analysis of affirmative and negative comic characters, and analyzing how they make different ethical choices as they experience inner conflicts and tangles between good and evil. Chapter 1 focuses on the collective ethical anxieties of the times as embodied in the tragedy, *Timon of Athens*, analyzing the relationship between Shakespeare's tragedy and ethics, and providing insight into the feudal ethics of the emerging capitalist era. Chapter 2 is about the eighteenth-century English novel. In its first two sub-chapters, it carefully analyzes the moral and emotional novels represented by Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* to elaborate on the theme of marriage in the novels, revealing the process of the characters' ethical choices in the ethical environment at that times, and to make critiques of literary ethics around gender relations, ethical orders and affective individualism. Samuel Richardson sets up the trials and tribulations of ethical dilemmas and tests the morality of his fictional characters in his work. Thereby, *Pamela* sets up moral models, exemplifies them for readers and guides them to abide by the ethical order. Henry Fielding develops his commentary in the preface, reflecting his ethical trials and moral growth in his characterization and depiction of his characters' experiences, carrying on the classical literary tradition, and responding to the conflict between love and honor, to guide readers to make the right choice about ethical values. The third sub-chapter draws on the theme of moral persuasion in the eighteenth century as a whole, systematizing and summarizing two themes. One is the moral persuasive role of emotion, and the other is the appropriateness and morality of emotion. In all, the unique way of presenting the content is in line with our thinking habits and enables readers to have a broader horizon and clearer thinking logic.

C. Focus on Some Key Writers, Works, and Literary Schools

The five volumes cover a large number of writers and works in the fields of drama, novel and poetry, with a strong focus on classic writers and their works in depth. In *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature*, for example, its novel section focuses on Charles John Huffam Dickens and Charlotte Bronte in the Victorian era, as well as Kazuo Ishiguro and Ian McEwan in contemporary era. The poetry section focuses on the works of Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney in the 20th century. The drama section focuses on the works of Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill and Tom Stoppard. Meanwhile, *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* stays true to the main line of ethical criticism, using the terms of literary ethical criticism to analyze English literature, even including the works of aestheticism and modernist novels that are not considered suitable for using literary ethical criticism to analyze in people's cognition.

The five volumes select familiar and typical writers for ethical literary criticism, organizing the logical threads of ethical literary criticism for readers. It specifically selects outstanding writers in various fields for researches, combines them with important literary schools and literary trends, and integrates the relevant concepts of ethical literary criticism so as to summarize new academic viewpoints. It provides important ideas and academic examples for the study of ethical literary criticism today.

D. In-depth Selecting Reasons for the Studied Writers

Ethical Literary Criticism of American Literature is a typical example. In chapter 8, the three selected Chinese American writers, Fae Myenne Ng, Gish Jen, and Yiyun Li, have considerable social experience and deep thought about multicultural phenomena. In addition, their works are highly complimented and well accepted in both China and America. Therefore, when guided by the three, readers are prompted to continue to refresh their knowledge of Chinese literature, to innovate in literary ethics criticism, and to explore the complex and diverse characteristics of Chinese works. After reading this chapter, readers will be able to deepen their understanding of ethical literary criticism in relation to the works of Chinese writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum. In chapter 9, the two chosen writers, Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer, are both Nobel laureates of great literary achievement and standing. As descendants of Jewish immigrants who inherited the Jewish culture, they had a profound impact on the American literary scene, enriching and developing the history of twentieth-century American literature. At the same time, in their American Jewish literary works, they all present different aspects and viewpoints of the complexities of Jewish immigrants' lives and the ethical identities and moral situations they generally faced. The research has also contributed greatly to the study of outstanding Jewish writers such as Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth.

E. Core Concepts of Literary Ethical Criticism to Analyze Literary Works

Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature is typical. It examines three initiation stories, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *My Sister, My Love*, reflecting on the realities in ethical choices and ethical identities revealed by the works. For example, it takes the heroic ethics in war novels as a thread, mainly researches on the works of Stephen Crane, Ernest Miller Hemingway and Irwin Shaw to compare heroes and heroism in different eras, further explains military ethics and heroic ethics, and reveals the characteristics of different ethical conflicts in the works. *Ethical Literary Criticism of English Literature* takes the classic works of American Southern literature, such as William Faulkner's and Flannery O'Connor's novels, as the objects of study to explore the ethical issues of Southern traditions, family ethics, senses of community, religion, race, social class and Southern dialects in ethical literary criticism. Furthermore, it guides readers to think about and analyze the ethics of American Southern literature, and provides experience for the application of new ideas and methods in the study of American Southern literature, such as works of Katherine Anne Porter, Thomas Wolfe and Carson McCullers. The core terminologies of ethical literary criticism are simple, clear, and scientific, avoiding the obscurity and unnecessary novelty that easily occur in academic research, and making it easy for readers to grasp terminologies and to apply the methods of ethical literary criticism in the researches.

F. Concise, In-depth and Unique Content

The content of the five volumes is sophisticated, profound and unique. It takes the importance of subject studies into account and presents subject studies entirely, giving readers room to deeply think about them.

Ethical Literary Criticism of American Literature takes ethnic literature as a key part and breaks it down into three chapters for analysis. Chapter 7 explores the ethical values of African American works such as *Black Boy*, *Youngblood* and *A Mercy*, exploring the ethnic specificity behind their ethical values. Chapter 8 explores the ethical choices in novels of Chinese Americans, taking the long novels written by Fae Myenne Ng and Gish Jen and the collection of short stories written by Yiyun Li as the objects of study, and examining the ethical identity,

ethical dilemmas, and ethical dilemmas. Chapter 9 explores ethical identity and ethical dilemmas in American Jewish novels. It researches the classic arguments about ethical identity, ethical dilemmas and ethical choices in Saul Bellow's and Isaac Bashevis Singer's novels to find out the real problems which descendants of Jewish immigrants are facing in reality. These three chapters are interlinked and contrasted, allowing readers to summarize and distil key ideas in preparation for subsequent critical researches.

IV. Impact Assessment of *A Study on the Theory of Ethical Literary Criticism*

Data from online book selling platforms, such as Dangdang, JD and Taobao, show that after the publication of the five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism*, a large number of readers have purchased the five volumes in the market, and its sales are among the top in its category. We can see that its influence is widespread. These figures indicate that ethical literary criticism has a large academic community in China. Clearly, with the publication of the five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism*, the theoretical study of ethical literary criticism will receive a new boost, and the methods of ethical literary criticism will be more widely applied to the study of literature.

According to data from relevant academic websites, the ethical literary criticism founded by Professor Nie Zhenzhao has already built a systematic theoretical system and discourse system. With Professor Nie Zhenzhao's *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* and the five-volume *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism* as the core, the books and journal articles published in China have been very fruitful. It is worth mentioning that *Foreign Literature Studies* and *Central China Academics* published by Central China Normal University Press have set up a section on ethical literary criticism and published relevant research results, which has become important academic resources for the study and application of ethical literary criticism in the academic community.

Conclusion

The five volumes are academic, readable and front-edged, combine theory and practice in a perfect way, and have been well received by the academic community. They provide an in-depth exploration in the field of critical studies in literary ethics, offer new ideas for the study of national literary works as well as region and country-specific studies, and lead to new and complex academic developments and a strong reference in the study of theories and methods in the new age. They contain not only macro theoretical expositions on the history of the development of critical studies in literary ethics and the development of theoretical branches, but also in-depth detailed analyses and theoretical practices of specific literary works, schools and trends. They are rare works that combine academic research with instructional reference, as they are rich in cases, are very informative, and integrate many fields such as literature, philosophy and natural science. The publish of *A Study on Ethical Literary Criticism* is conducive to advancing the exploration and development of disciplinary studies and interdisciplinary research in foreign languages and literature in China, and is also an important inspiration for the construction of new liberal arts.

Finally, it is recommended that Professor Nie Zhengzhao turn this significant achievement into a textbook and apply it to teaching by preparing a tutorial on the ethical literary criticism for the benefit of students nationwide.

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