

Rejuvenation and Innovation: The Past, Present and Future of Ethical Literary Criticism

Chen Lizhen

Abstract: The year of 2019 marks the 15th anniversary of Ethical Literary Criticism. As “the father of Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism,” Professor Nie Zhenzhao initiated Ethical Literary Criticism in China in the year of 2004. Since then, the new critical paradigm has gained more and more attention in the global intellectual community. Ethical Literary Criticism fulfils the goal of the rejuvenation of traditional ethical criticism in literature. More importantly, it is defined and distinguished by the trail-blazing courage for theoretical innovation. Over the past 15 years, many scholars have been making great efforts to tap the potential, sharpen the critical edge and expand the boundary of the theory. Ethical Literary Criticism aims to encourage the discussion of ethical value in literature and criticism. In this interview, 8 distinguished scholars, including Claude Rawson (Yale University, USA), Knut Brynhildsvoll (University of Oslo, Norway), Youngmin Kim (Dongguk University, South Korea), Wolfgang G. Müller (Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany), Igor Shaytanov (Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia), Jüri Talvet (University of Tartu, Estonia), Galin Tihanov (Queen Mary University of London, UK) and Tsuyoshi Namigata (Kyushu University, Japan), evaluate the significance of the rise of Ethical Literary Criticism by tracing the history, commenting on the recent developments and depicting a vision for the prospect of this theory.

Key words: Ethical Literary Criticism; contributions; International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism; global intellectual community

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标题: 复兴与创新: 文学伦理学批评的过去、现状与未来

内容摘要: 文学伦理学批评到今年已走过 15 年历程。聂珍钊教授被誉为“中国文学伦理学批评之父”, 他在 2004 年首次提出将文学伦理学批评作为一种

新的批评方法。这种新的批评范式迅速在国际学界收到广泛关注。文学伦理学批评既是对传统伦理批评的复兴，更是以决意创新的勇气构建了较为系统的理论体系。文学伦理学批评旨在鼓励探讨文学和批评中的伦理价值。在过去 15 年中，学界致力于发掘文学伦理学批评的新潜能、新锋芒和新疆界。克劳德·罗森（耶鲁大学，美国）、克努特·布莱恩西沃兹威尔（奥斯陆大学，挪威）、金英敏（东国大学，韩国）、沃尔夫冈·穆勒（耶拿大学，德国）、伊戈尔·奥列格维奇·沙伊塔诺夫（俄罗斯国立大学，俄罗斯）、居里·塔尔维特（塔尔图大学，爱沙尼亚）、加林·提哈诺夫（伦敦大学玛丽女王学院，英国）、波瀉刚（九州大学，日本）等八位国际知名学者通过本文追溯了文学伦理学批评的历史，评价了现状，并对未来提出期许。

关键词：文学伦理学批评；贡献；国际文学伦理学批评研究会；全球学界

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Chen Lizhen: As a platform for scholars all over the world, the International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism, along with Zhejiang University, will host the 9th Convention of the International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism in this November. The previous conventions were held in China, South Korea, Estonia, UK and Japan. This is a significant move to push forward the intellectual exchange between China and the world.

Claude Rawson (Maynard Mack Professor of English at Yale University, USA, Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, president of IAELC): The international status of Ethical Literary Criticism has been demonstrated and consolidated for some years in the conventions held in different parts of the world. I think its value lies not principally as a codified doctrine but as a body of practice that encourages scholars to engage in a primary relationship with literary texts.

Chen Lizhen: The 20th century witnessed the rise and prosperity of many critical theories. All of these theories are like different chapters in a great book of literary criticism. A new trend of critical theory is a destroyer as well as preserver, blazing new trails out of the institutionalized critical practice and providing inspiration for the generation of future theories. As a well-established critical theory, Ethical Literary Criticism becomes a famous intellectual endeavor in China and a noticeable critical trend all over the world. How do you understand the phrase “what belongs to a nation belongs to the world”?

Claude Rawson: In my view, the primary value of a good literary theory is that it

transcends theoretical discourse in favour of an unmediated approach to the full human and aesthetic content of a literary text. The ethical content of Ethical Literary Criticism lies strongly in its freedom from prescriptive or definitional straitjackets. Its rootedness in primal human myth, as described by Nie Zhenzhao's writings, is best read as a recall to heart of the matter centrality. In this sense, as well as in Nie Zhenzhao's recourse to a wide international range of primary mythic patterns, it certainly (and indeed very suggestively) belongs not to a nation but to the world.

Chen Lizhen: As president of the International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism, what expectations do you have for scholars to achieve in the field of Ethical Literary Criticism in the future?

Claude Rawson: Provided the principles I have enunciated above are met with an enlightened pluralism and a sensitive empirical approach to the human documents that we call literary texts, I have the highest expectations of the success of Ethical Literary Criticism in restoring to literary study a sense of its intellectual seriousness. Nie Zhenzhao's personal activism as a promoter of international conferences and professional journals is the surest guarantor of this promise.

Chen Lizhen: As a distinguished scholar in Norway, you have published many books and papers on Henrik Ibsen. This great playwright exerted a great influence on 20th century Chinese literature. His moral seriousness and critical vigor are absorbed into the tradition of modern Chinese drama. Currently Chinese intellectual community tries to approach Henrik Ibsen from the focalization of Ethical Literary Criticism, which is defined by a self-consistent theoretical framework and innovated terms. Compared with the tradition of moral criticism in Europe, what will this critical method bring to the interpretation of this classical writer?

Knut Brynhildsvoll (Professor of North European literature at the University of Oslo, former Director of Ibsen Studies Center, vice president of IAELC): It is an interesting question. I am aware that Ibsen's plays have influenced the development of speech theater in China. Especially his social dramas have attracted much attention because of their questioning the double standards of moral behavior, exercised by people in the male population at Ibsen's time. In western countries one usually approaches moral questions with their point of departure in contemporary philosophy. Many Ibsen researchers have emphasized the affinity between Ibsen and the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and claimed that Ibsen has brought Kierkegaard's existential philosophy on the stage. Even though Ibsen always denied having ever read Kierkegaard, Ibsen experts don't trust his words. In their opinion Ibsen is

one of the founders of the existential drama with strong moral implications. Professor Nie in his *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* has launched a method, which evaluates literary texts from the moral point of view. Ethical Literary Criticism has so far not existed as a separate discipline of literary research. It has traditionally been an inherent part of literary texts and as such an indicator of deciding questions of good or bad. It is professor Nie's merit that he has renewed and in a consistent way made explicit how to enable ethical readings of literary texts. It will be the task of future literary research to prove how influential professor Nie's theory will be in the field of Ibsen research.

Chen Lizhen: Your paper "Self-referential Aspects of Ethical Literary Criticism" tries to take your point of departure in the contradiction "good/bad," which is adopted from moral philosophy. The self-referential components of literary representation play an important role in the formation of a "good" work of art. Ethics forms a vital perspective in literature. It can be approached, however, from many other ways. Then how should we achieve a good balance between ethical negotiations and other functions like contextual, designative and cognitive aspects in literary criticism?

Knut Brynhildsvoll: Ethical Literary Criticism is a method which regularly pays attention to the content and the figures of literary works, not that much to the composition and formal structure. The ethical attitude normally manifests itself in good and responsible actions and emphasizes the positive potentials of human life. In order to avoid the decline into the field of soap opera and Bollywood intrigues one must consider the difference between the moral and the aesthetic meaning of what is good. Today one can hardly overlook that leading authors in their books deal with unethical topics, with crises and conflicts in the field of war and warfare, ecology, economy, environment, natural catastrophes, hunger episodes etc., almost everything triggered off by men themselves. Nevertheless Ethical Literary Criticism is prepared to include such topics in a proper way. Then it is important to notice that even the most terrible incidents may be described in a good or even outstanding way. And so it makes sense to claim that the whole range of unethical literary descriptions still are subject to ethical literary analyses. Of course it is a matter that one can approach today's social conflicts and their literary forms of expression with the point of departure in several literary methods. In order to achieve a higher degree of analytical precision it may as well be advantageous when two or more analytical methods supply each other in illuminating a complex literary text.

Chen Lizhen: Many scholars in China and abroad are dedicated to creating new terms and consolidating the fundamentals of Ethical Literary Criticism. It is a great academic project of the global intellectual community, for the global intellectual community and by the global intellectual community. If we take a look at the future of Ethical Literary Criticism, what can be done to push forward the limits of its theoretical boundary?

Knut Brynhildsvoll: As far as I know, Professor Nie's theory of Ethical Literary Criticism mostly has been tested on novels and short stories. Implemented in his theory is however a lasting conflict between the civilized and the animalistic principle of the human mind, expressed and visualized through the figure of the sphinx, half man, half animal. In order to extract all dimensions of this split figure I recommend throwing a glance at the modifications of this mythology from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex to Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt. I imagine that it may be profitable to extend the genre perspective and include the drama as an additional study subject. The reason is obvious. The structure of the traditional drama is founded on tension. And the tension expresses itself through dialogues, in which contrasting efforts and different opinions are being exchanged. The dialogues articulate meaning through an exchange of dualistic arguments and are in a way a linguistic reflection of the sphinx's ambiguity. Thus it seems to me that Ethical Literary Criticism is a sensitive scale to measure the biodiversity of human life. The totality of human psychophysiology consists of a mixture of good and bad, of man and beast. It is impossible to recognize what is good without comparing it with what is its opposite, the absence of the good. That's one of the reasons why Ethical Literary Criticism is not only a method in literary research, but also an inspiring model for writers who want to discuss the decline of human virtues on the background of ethical values, theoretical as with moral values.

Chen Lizhen: As a distinguished member of Korean intellectual community, you came into contact with Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism and IAELC many years ago. You have facilitated the academic exchanges and cooperation between China and Korea. Ethical Literary Criticism found its way to approach Korean culture and academic research and in return benefited a lot from Korean scholars. The 5th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism was held in Dongguk University, Seoul, South Korea in 2015. It was an important move for the globalization of Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism. Korean scholars embraced the theory with enthusiasm and enriched it with the critical insight of Korean culture. Previously you mentioned that you have noticed some new advancement in the study of Ethi-

cal Literary Criticism in South Korea over the past decade.

Youngmin Kim (Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus at Dongguk University, Korea, Jack Ma Chair Professor of Ma Yun Education Fund at Hangzhou Normal University, China, Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of English Language and Literature of Korea*, vice-president of IAELC): In 2004, the concept of Ethical Literary Criticism, informed by ethical criticism in the USA, was initiated by Prof. Nie Zhenzhao in China and thereafter has achieved the currency value as theory and methodology in literature studies among Chinese scholars. The International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC) was launched, after the 2nd International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism at Yichang in December 2012. As an international literary and cultural organization, IAELC aims to link all those working in Ethical Literary Criticism in theory and practice and to encourage the discussion of ethical value in literary creation and criticism, dealing with the critical issues and agendas concerning the value of literature.

Initiated by the establishment of the IAELC, this movement of Ethical Literary Criticism has now outreached beyond the local boundary of mainland China to the international realm after Ningbo (2013) and Shanghai (2014) Conference: Seoul (2015), Tartu (2016), London (2017), Kyushu (2018), Hangzhou (2019). In 2015, the 5th IAELC international convention, cohosted by IAELC, East-West Comparative Literature Association of Korea, Korean Philosophical Society, and Institute of Trans Media World Literature of Dongguk University, was held at two locations in South Korea: Dongguk University in Seoul (October 2-4) and Busan National University in Busan (October 5-6). Funded by the National Research Foundation and the Ministry of Education of the Korean government, this international conference marked as the beginning of the global IAELC International Conference. The conference theme was “Transnational Ethical Literary Criticism: Humanities in Korea, China, and the World.” The attendance of global literary scholars and critics, and national/ comparatist or world literature specialists, ranging from China and Korea and elsewhere was telling: 35 keynote speakers, including 26 distinguished foreign scholars who represent 20 different countries, 200 Chinese scholars from all regions of mainland China, and 200 Korean scholars. More than 300 hundred papers were read: 35 papers by the keynote speakers (8 Chinese, 7 Korean, 20 foreign scholars other than Chinese and Korean), 200 papers by Chinese scholars and 100 papers by Korean scholars were presented. Besides, 9 special sessions for specified themes, such as “Ethics and the Humanities,” “Ethics of Self and Other,” “Ethical Literary Criticism & National vs Global Literatures,” “Ethics of Drama,” “Ethics of Poetry,” “Ethical Literary Criticism,” finalized by the Round Table Discussion, created the

landmark event for authentic intellectual milieu of SYMPOSIUM on the Ethical Literary Criticism as its original meaning of “intellectual festival” signifies.

The collaborative effort of 35 distinguished keynote speakers from 6 continents provoked Korean literary scholars, critics, and comparatists to further delve into the concepts and new approaches to literature studies in the context of Ethical Literary Criticism. Since the 5th IAELC International Conference, Korean scholars began to investigate the working hypotheses and principles of Ethical Literary Criticism and to apply the methodological terms to the readings of the Western and Eastern canonical/ noncanonical comparative texts. The conference has provided the momentum for the turning point for establishing Ethical Literary Criticism in Korea. The representative papers presented by Korean scholars at the 2015 conference include: “Ethics of Image” by Youngmin Kim (Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea); “Keeping ‘Love Far Away’: Ethics for Otherness in Troubadours” by Minwoo Yoon (Yonsei Univ., Korea); “The Ethics of Causal Necessity in Greek Tragedy” by Woo Soo Park (Hankuk U of Foreign Studies, Korea); “The Motif and Ethics of Migration in Modern Japanese Literature: Focusing on Arishima Takeo” by Inseop Shin (Konkuk Univ., Korea); “When Alice Meets Nam June Paik: Homo Interactus and a Poetics of Dignitinfinitude” by Kyoo Lee (City Univ. of New York, USA); “BIFF (Busan International Film Festival) and Its Vision” by Chanil Jeon (BIFF Institute, Korea); and “The Total Collection of Criticism” by Wangju Lee (Pusan National University, Korea), to name a few. Initiated by these papers, the Ethical Literary Criticism, situated in the combined context of ethics of reading and world literature, have found its niche in the field of literary studies in Korea, creating a new environment, reading the foreign/domestic materials of literary discourses from a new perspective.

The Seoul/Busan Global Conference has provoked the convergence of the ethical literary studies and the humanities at large in the major universities in Korea, including Konkuk University, Korea University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yonsei University, and Dongguk University, in particular. In the era of the so-called 4th Industrial Revolution, these universities dispatch increasing number of researchers and Ph. D. students as delegates to the IAELC Conferences at Tartu, London, and Kyushu after they were granted with national funds from the National Research Foundation of Korea, such as Humanities Korea Project (Konkuk University), Brain Korea Project (Korea University and Yonsei University), and Global Research Network Project (Dongguk University). The research centers of each university have been challenging progressively against the high-tech oriented humanities in the era of the 4th Industrial Revolution, and has been creating the convergent

atmosphere of the humanities at large, by interlinking literature, art, history, and philosophy with digital humanities (Dongguk University) and mobility humanities (Konkuk University), although the basis of this current trend of interdisciplinarity lies in the Ethical Literary Criticism as their commitment to the cause of IAELC manifests.

Chen Lizhen: As a leading scholar in South Korea and vice president of the IAELC, you devoted yourself to the study of Ethical Literary Criticism. In your mind, what are the defining qualities and most intriguing part of the theory of Ethical Literary Criticism?

Youngmin Kim: For the past decades in the scholarly context of China, the definition of human nature has been vague and confusing under the influence of Chinese traditional moral values and the western concepts of human nature. Prof. Nie Zhenzhao in his *An Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* offers a new approach to literature studies both in China and abroad. In this award-winning book selected by NSFC (National Science Foundation of China), Nie Zhenzhao provides a critique, arguing that “both Darwin and Engels failed to make a fundamental distinction between man and animals though explained where human beings have come from” (34). He then proposes that natural selection is only initiating the step to help human being find out who they are in a biological sense and that ethical selection differentiates human beings from animals. By turning to the origin myth of archetypal human beings, Adam and Eve, from the Bible, Prof. Nie’s point is that “the consequential ability acquired to tell good from evil from eating the forbidden fruit helps Adam and Eve to complete their ethical selection and become human beings not only in biological sense but also in ethical sense” (35). To Prof. Nie, the story of Adam and Eve represents the vital role of ethical selection.

In a keynote speech in 2015 Seoul/Busan IAELC Global Conference, he made a distinction between the nature of human being and human nature, defining the former succinctly as “animal instinct or natural instinct” and the latter as “the moral and ethical awareness of human being.” Further Prof. Nie conceptualizes “human nature” in three main features: 1) human nature belongs only to man; 2) human nature is acquired, not innate; and 3) human nature is shaped in certain ethical environments and perfected by moral teachings as the result of ethical selection. What Nie attempts to do is to define the human nature based upon the idea of “moral teaching” which is “the basic environment for man to achieve human nature” (Nie, “Ethical Literary Criticism” 56) .

One thing I and my Korean colleagues have found intriguing in this moral

teaching in achieving human nature is “Sphinx factor,” which represents “an exploration of the mystery of why a man is such a being” (Nie, *Introduction* 36) and “is composed of two parts—human factor and animal factor” (Nie, *Introduction* 38). In fact, Nie structures inventive Chinese idiosyncratic representations of the psychosomatic convergence of human body and the psyche, the representations which are closely related to the German Freudian model of “aesthetics of sublimation” of the primary double tripartite id-ego-superego and conscious-preconscious-unconscious as well as to the French Lacanian politics of representation of the secondary tripartite imaginary-symbolic-real order. Nie’s representations revive the literary studies in an ethical dimension, and demonstrate “the various combinations and alternations of human factor and animal factor” which generate a variety of “ethical events and ethical conflicts” in literary works, thus conveying “different moral implications” (Nie, *Introduction* 38). Human factor equals to “ethical consciousness embodied by the human head,” while animal factor is human being’s “animal instinct, which is mainly controlled by their primitive desires” (Nie, *Introduction* 39). In this way, Sphinx Riddle represents the ethical selection in that it refers to the after-step of the natural selection for the human beings to ruminate over what they have done during the natural selection.

Chen Lizhen: On many occasions you have mentioned that we need to illuminate the working hypotheses and principles of Ethical Literary Criticism as well as to apply the methodological terms to the close/distant readings of the western and eastern canonical/ noncanonical texts. If we put Ethical Literary Criticism into the context of world literature, how can we reconcile ethics with politics in a comparative study of contemporary world literature?

Youngmin Kim: In the Proceedings of the The 5th IAELC Global Conference at Seoul/Busan in 2015, I opened my greeting remarks by introducing the concept “border” in between the inside and the outside of our mind and the body as follows:

Human beings are positioned in the conscious which is the realm of the logic and the daily life as well as in the unconscious which is structured like a language. Then, language in relation to the conscious and the unconscious constitutes the space of the self and the Other. In writing, the discourse of the self and the Other is constructed mostly in the unconscious space of the writer. As a result, the external Other in writing becomes the space within the subject, which inheres in temporality or historicity. Thus, the speaking or writing subject is always already positioned within the structure of discourse. The

tradition of discourse is the fundamental structure which regulates culture and simultaneously the order which gives unconscious impact upon the subject. Therefore, as far as the Other is situated within the self, the linguistic structure has always already existed in the form of the unconscious. The nature of the Other is structured like Moebius strip without distinctive borderline between the inside and the outside. (Kim 1)

Between two zones or regions, one has to cross across, beyond, or “through,” the line to the other side of the starting point. The line “may expand and thicken to become” regions of the boundary between race, gender, class, on the one hand and among languages, cultures, and nations, on the other hand. If one limits the scope of the boundary, these regions become distinct and separate fields of research: literature, culture, geography, and translation. Our mind and body is the interior and the exterior of the skin. Therefore, we as the reader have to look into the mind and to be outside of the mind simultaneously so that we can overlook the shape of the body which provides the structure of the mind as the container. Language is the medium to cross over the borderline of the skin freely.

In this context, aesthetics belong to the way we look at the things we see, while ethics to the way how we reflect upon both what we have seen and the way we have seen. Politics is located in the threshold or in-between. Literary texts represent the things we read and reflect. Then, how do we read and provide the criticism? In the readings of the western and eastern canonical/ noncanonical texts from the comparative/world literature, what one needs to know in this world of big data of literary texts is that we have to have some strategic understanding of such huge amount of knowledge.

I would suggest the Freudian aesthetics of sublimation, Lacanian politics of representation, and ethics of distancing as the strategical methods, for enhancing further Nie’s Ethical Literary Criticism which provides the structure and modus operandi of the ethics of reading. In fact, we need a collaborative effort to create an ethical reading community in terms of Derridian “supplementation.”

In a debate between Gayatri Spivak and David Damrosch which was delivered at The American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Convention in Vancouver, Canada, on April 2, 2011, Gayatri Spivak gives a voice to the death of the comparative literature as a discipline, and she simultaneously articulates in her typical supplementing way her figuring out of “the exact shape of a place that is empty in what is to be supplemented, zooming out, but not in competition with zooming in,” always “crossing the border” in the newly resurrected form of “world

literature.” In fact, in the debate, Spivak, unintentionally in a fragmentary mode, expresses the exact nature of “cultural translation” in relation to “world literature.” The keyword for her discussion is “supplementing”:

We might, then, as a globally dispersed and diversified collectivity, supplement that seemingly practical will to hold the world in a grid. I don’t mean survey courses; I mean the presuppositions of world literature. Supplementing, remember, is to figure out the exact shape of a place that is empty in what is to be supplemented, zooming out, but not in competition with zooming in. (Spivak 468)

I would argue that the rationale for the logic and perspective of this scale, hailing “the birth of a new Comparative Literature,” comes from the ethics of “cultural translation” in world literature. The wall of untranslability across languages and cultures in the networks of world literature will be left open if the reader/writer engages with the difficulties and strangeness in endurance and suffering in the collaborative act of cultural translation.

National literary space of the vernacular language is always already the bordered arena of those struggles or battles over the definition of literature, over technical or formal transformations and innovations against the external linguistic environment. What is at stake is how translators/interpreters as literary critics and scholars mediate between national languages, in particular, literary languages. Translation creates the art of “distancing” by creating a way of situating oneself aesthetically neither too near nor too far. In this regard, the image of geographic scale of world literature becomes more and more a set of distinct platforms upon which geopolitics and other social phenomena are performed. World systems theory posits the global sphere as the most important scale. Locality studies have privileged the local as the scale at which meaning or lived experience is constructed. The paradoxical positions taken on local, national, and global scales were starting points for much of the critical discourse on scale. Ethical Literary Criticism will be the major critical endeavor in the 21st century, the era of political vortex to prepare the readers/writers in the field of literature and the humanities for the pickup lines of understanding the ethical human nature.

Chen Lizhen: Germany is a great country with a bright history of philosophy. A galaxy of philosophers like Kant, Hegel and Heidegger have made significant contributions to the study of ethics. In your mind, what are the greatest differences be-

tween Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism, which is led by Professor Nie Zhenzhao, and the traditional German ethical criticism in literature?

Wolfgang G. Müller (Professor of English Literature at Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany, vice president of IAELC) : In your question you refer to the rich history of philosophy in Germany with philosophers like Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, who have made significant contributions to the theory of ethics. I will first highlight a few exemplaric positions of German philosophers which are relevant to ethics and then proceed to a definition of ethical criticism and a comparison between this kind of criticism in Germany and China. I will begin with Kant's categorical imperative (1785), which says that a human action should always be performed in accordance with the maxim that this action should qualify as being founded on a wished for universal moral law. Another Kantian principle, which is related to the categorical imperative, is the idea that human dignity is inviolable, an idea which implies freedom and free will. The dignity of man is the fundamental principle of the German constitution. At its beginning it states that human dignity is inviolable and that it is the duty of all state authority to respect and protect it. A philosophical maxim, which belongs to the whole world, Western and Eastern, is the "golden rule" of treating others as you want to be treated yourself. This ethic of reciprocity forms the key of Arthur Schopenhauer's ethics in the fourth part of his *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), which represents a counter-position to Kant's ethics of duty. Schopenhauer, who was deeply influenced by Indian philosophy, includes animals in his ethics of mercy. A provocative maxim which has profound ethical implications is Theodor W. Adorno's dictum in *Minima Moralia*, "There is no right life in a wrong one." (Adorno 43) Since dilemma situations are of great significance in ethical criticism, particularly in Chinese studies, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' (1646-1716) early writings on natural law can be referred to, which present a plethora of dilemma situations arising from limited saving resources in cases of emergency. We must be grateful for philosophers' clear-sightedness in their studies of the nature and varieties of ethical problems and situations. But philosophy has its limitations, since it usually has no competence transcending abstract speculation and rationalization. In philosophy insight or cognition is the result of a rational examination and analysis of fundamental issues, performed by devices such as definition, argument and deductive reasoning, while in literature insight or cognition is the result of the representation of events and conditions and feelings analogous to the real-life world of facts. For example, philosophy can define ethically charged situations such dilemmas on an abstract level, pointing out possible courses of action, while literature represents them on the experiential level

of the life of characters who find themselves in precarious or even desperate situations, inviting readers to empathize.

It is not possible to summarize the triumphal march of ethical criticism in the last decades, which began with postmodern criticisms and produced literature-oriented philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, but it is necessary to appreciate the rise of ethical criticism in China and other Asian countries, which represents a special variety of a world-wide phenomenon. As always there is no point in generalizing. It is more fruitful to choose an outstanding example, namely Shang Biwu's recent article (2018) on Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* (2016), which investigates the ethical dimension of this novel with a precision and deep-searching intensity as it seems to have been impossible in earlier criticism. This is of course the result of the author's unusual sensitivity to the moral implications of literature and of his narratological expertise, but it is also owed to a cultural climate, which is strongly influenced by the theory of Nie Zhenzhao, who maintains that literature represents humans suspended in their ways of living and decision-making between good and evil or vice and virtue and may contribute to creating a higher level of ethical consciousness and ultimately attaining a higher degree of humanity. Western and particularly German ethical criticism has not so far-reaching aims, but it is connected with Chinese endeavors in that it believes that the exploration of the ethical complexity of literary works may increase the cognitive capacities of the readers and open their eyes anew at the condition of human life (the *conditio humana*), as it is articulated at the end of Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*: "Ah, *Bartleby!* Ah, humanity!" (Melville 34) An earlier famous example of world literature is the moment in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, when, having heard, in the Second Circle of Hell, the touching story of the adulterous love of Francesca and Paolo, Dante sinks down in a faint.

Chen Lizhen: What to we talk about when we talk about ethics in English literature? Shakespeare, Milton, John Donne, Jane Austen, T.S. Eliot and other great writers always present a complicated and ambiguous vision of human nature. It's not easy to break away from the complication of essentialism and oversimplification. Ethical Literary Criticism should keep its distinctive characteristics and stay as an innovative and efficient method to facilitate our interpretation of literary texts.

Wolfgang G. Müller: You are right in saying that great literature sharpens our awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of human nature or, putting it more concretely, of the conflicting impulses and motives clashing in a person's mind in situations of distress, doubt and dilemma. However, it is my deep conviction that ethical criticism cannot remain at the level of content and satisfy itself with identi-

ifying and analyzing the ethical substance of literary works. Staying at the content level would necessarily lead to the “oversimplification” of which you speak. If one could, for example, summarize the message of a literary work in a neat formula, the work itself would be dispensable. This is actually a danger to which many Wikipedia articles succumb. The complexity characterizing great works, which tends to be ethical complexity, is the result of art. You cannot have ethical intricacy in a text without aesthetic complexity. This is confirmed by the works of the authors you mention, William Shakespeare, John Donne, John Milton, Jane Austen and T. S. Eliot. If Nie Zhenzhao speaks of literature as an art dealing with ethics, I would relate the term art to the insoluble interdependence of art and ethics in literature, which to work out is the critic’s task.

I will briefly adduce two examples to illustrate this state of things. A crucial moment in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* occurs when the protagonist, infuriated after having got evidence of his stepfather’s having perpetrated the murder of his father, comes upon him when he is praying. This offers a perfect opportunity for taking revenge. He draws his sword, resolved to kill him, but sheathes it again, arguing with himself that he would send his enemy’s soul to heaven when killing him during prayer. He would rather kill him during a sinful act (*in flagranti*), so that he would go hell. One could argue that here we encounter an ethically unsoiled hero who is not capable of premeditated murder. But on the other hand he curses his enemy in the most radical way, even arrogating to himself the power, which is actually God’s privilege, to send his soul to hell. Here we see the complexity and contradictoriness of his character, an intricate tangle of motives which could never be represented in philosophical discourse. To choose a less tragic example, the protagonist of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot, faces the problem of saving her family’s hopeless financial situation by marrying the apparently impeccable heir to the family’s estate. It is her moral intuition which causes her to make the right decision and reject the suitor, who ultimately turns out to be an extremely dubious character. It is Austen’s superior art of narrative perspective which gives moral profile to the problem in question, which is again a representation of ethical issues which is beyond the reach of philosophical discourse. There is a danger in ethical criticism to primarily focus on encounters with guilt, vice, crime, hypocrisy and lying. Jane Austen’s novels manage to set out in the most unobtrusive, elegant and stylistically assured way not only social vices, but also social virtues. Her works are a triumph of the aesthetic representation of matters of deep ethical significance. This is what they have in common with Shakespeare’s comedies. Reading her novels provides the deepest aesthetic and ethical satisfaction. Studying them, makes ethical criti-

cism pure pleasure.

Chen Lizhen: Literature is closely related to aesthetics, ethics and other branches of philosophy. The XXIV World Congress of Philosophy, with the theme “Learning to be Human,” was held in Beijing, China, from August 13 to August 20, 2018. Scholars came to share their explorations on the relationship between literature and philosophy. Ethical Literary Criticism was an important part of this event. It is evident and natural to connect the theme of the World Congress of Philosophy with the fundamental judgment of Professor Nie’s moral philosophy “literature is basically an art about ethics.” In order to develop into a well-established theory, Ethical Literary Criticism needs to keep its fundamental principles and open up for new possibilities and diversity of interpretation as well.

Wolfgang G. Müller: The relation between philosophy and literature is of course a special one. In Greek antiquity and for long periods of intellectual history the two disciplines were closely connected. The phenomenon for authors to emerge both as philosophers and literary writers is not rare. Conspicuous examples are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Disraeli, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Additionally, there are narrative works like Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) and Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste* (1773), which are called philosophical novels. Novels like Robert Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* (1930-1943), Sartre’s *La Nausée* (1938) and works by Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco and Vladimir Nabokov, which evince a strong philosophical component, are countless. A most interesting recent author is in this respect J. M. Coetzee, whose late novels manifest the philosophical element with increasing intensity, for instance *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). It is worth noticing that German philosophers like Peter Bieri (*Das Handwerk der Freiheit. Über die Entdeckung des eigenen Willens / The Craft of Freedom. The Discovery of One’s Own Will*, 2001) and Michael Hampe (*Die Lehren der Philosophie. Eine Kritik / The Doctrines of Philosophy. A Critique*, 2014) have set out the ethical potential of narration and tried to appropriate it to their purposes. Yet though philosophy and literature have been twins through all times and though this kinship is particularly obvious in the field of ethics, I would insist on the distinctness of these two forms of intellectual pursuit. Only if we acknowledge this distinctness, can we appreciate the special contribution literature makes to ethics. Together with the German philosopher Gottfried Gabriel (*Erkenntnis/Cognition*, 2015), I would like to distinguish two complementary types of cognition, first, cognition achieved by the rational exposition and discussion of a problem nexus of the world of facts in philosophy, and second, cognition achieved by the graphic

representation of a fictional analogue of the reality of life in literature. The attempt to establish a solid theory for Ethical Literary Criticism would be a gratifying, but problematic endeavour. One reason for its difficulty would be the fact that literature tends to be ahead of theory and theory has to follow and to adapt itself to literature. My suggestion would be that ethical criticism should be based on knowledge of ethical issues such as dilemma situations, which play an important role in Nie Zhenzhao's theory, but it should also be grounded on an intensive investigation of the aesthetic quality of the verbal work of art, for the craft of verbal art is the condition under which the ethical nature of literature comes into existence.

By way of conclusion, I would once again emphasize the close relationship between ethics in philosophy and ethics in literature. In order to elucidate this kinship it is necessary to make a distinction between moral philosophy and ethical philosophy. As distinct from moral philosophy, which is concerned with the definition and clarification of moral values and principles, ethical philosophy has, since Aristotle's *Ethics*, investigated the problematic nature of ethical terms and judgments. Literature has a greater kinship with ethics than with morality, because it lays the focus on the problematic nature of life and its ethical concerns. It does so by presenting a fictional analogue of reality in the sense of Aristotle's term *mimesis*. Literature shows us a world not as a copy of reality, but as world similar to reality, thus creating a basis for empathy and stimulating the cognitive capacity. Both philosophy and literature spell out the complexity of moral issues, the former on the abstract level of rational discourse, the latter on the experiential level of graphic representation. Dear Professor Chen Lizhen, I thank you very much for asking such good questions.

Chen Lizhen: In the 1910's, Russian Formalism came into being and shocked the world with its revolutionary judgements. It is usually taken to be the first school of modern literary criticism in the 20th century and marks the beginning of the transformation and proliferation of literary theory. Viktor Shklovsky and other critics once advocated a theory of literature that was purified and insulated from morality and ethics. In his late years Shklovsky modified his theory and conceded the omnipresent power of morality and ideology. One century later, Ethical Literary Criticism rises as a literary theory and insists to unite art and life in morality and responsibility. It holds that the value of literature lies in its function of moral teaching. What is your understanding about the ethics of literary forms and its relationship with ideology?

Igor Shaytanov (Professor at Russian State University for the Humanities, Rus-

sia, vice president of IAELC): The divorce with any ideology is most memorable from the early period of the Russian Formalism; this was how they understood their professional ethics — to be honest to their subject at hand and not to distort their research with any material supplementary towards the pure verbal matter. But it was the beginning, and the Formalist theory was practically forced to close by the interference of the outward forces just when they were ready to change and to let in new factors in building up their evolutionary picture. They did not work in ethical terms but what they did to advance the literary study must be—and is—appropriated now by many new trends. Why not in the Ethical Literary Criticism?

Chen Lizhen: Yes. Russian Formalism is really revolutionary in its fundamental principles. Its theoretical legacy is inherited by many new trends. The study of Ethical Literary Criticism is also an intellectual endeavor to enhance our understanding about the inner properties of literature itself. Have you found any new academic breakthroughs in the study of the relationship between literature and ethics in Russia over the past decade?

Igor Shaytanov: In Russia we still have not completely lived down the aftermath of the Soviet experience with its ideological prescriptions, either still skidding in its track, or breaking through by all means. For those who insist on changes and renovation there seems to be nothing they can draw on in the native tradition. They have rallied to the echo of the global poststructural and postmodern ideas unwilling to acknowledge that now these ideas also belong to the past with its non-ethical anti-humanistic turn. Ethics and humanism are still seen as the survivals from the Soviet past, the time and its intellectual atmosphere is changing though.

Chen Lizhen: In your mind, what are the contributions that Ethical Literary Criticism has brought to the global academe in the context of world literature?

Igor Shaytanov: The human can and is brought back into literature and makes the study of literature search for new techniques beyond linguistic, structural, poststructural and deconstructural poetics it had been engaged in for so long. This poetics might be positioned as the poetics of world literature in all the variety of its national and human features caught in the ethical perspective.

Chen Lizhen: Ethics has a very long tradition in many cultures and occupies a central position in our life as well as in literature. Professor Nie Zhenzhao's moral philosophy and literary criticism are characterized for his great creativity in the aspects of the fundamentals, framework and new terms. The vigor of the theory lies in

its solid theoretical foundation and openness for new possibilities. Apart from his key notions of “natural selection” and “ethical selection,” he concentrates on the exploration of the relationship between sciences, the mind and moral significance in recent years. Ethical Literary Criticism, with a theoretical appeal for negotiating tradition and contemporaneity, aims to find a new ballast for the postmodern age.

Jüri Talvet (Professor at University of Tartu, Estonia, Member of Academia Europaea, vice president of IAELC) : I very highly appreciate Professor Nie Zhenzhao’s great initiative of founding in China the International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism and the efforts the IAELC has subsequently made to promote morally orientated research in literary studies and humanities. Indeed, I fully agree with Prof. Nie Zhenzhao’s main postulate: especially since postmodernism settled in during the 1980s, the world’s academia of humanities has increasingly revealed a loss of orientation, being seduced mainly by formalist studies and sociology, it means, moving away from discussing works of literature and arts in their integrity and in their moral impact on societies.

In the depth of postmodern philosophy there has been a strong tendency towards nihilism. As the cruelest tragedies and genocides suffered by humankind along the 20th century were incited and committed by some of the worst dictatorships the world has known, postmodernism’s rejection of “ideological and political “grand narratives” is something natural and understandable. Yet, to adapt these conclusions about “grand narratives” from the sphere of ideology and politics directly to the sphere of culture and humanities would be surely a grave mistake. Creative arts and literature have always been in the forefront of resistance not only against political dictatorships, despotisms, tyrannies, autocracies, militarisms, but also against economic imperialism, which above all has been responsible for violating and destroying nature, the very basis of humankind’s existence.

The great majority of the works celebrated as the canon of world literature have always had a strong moral nucleus. They have discussed ethical issues without euphemisms in relating human rationality and brain activity to love, sexuality, search for freedom. The cult of individualistic passion, as well as rational excesses contradicting nature can both lead to social vice and be the cause of moral decadence. These relations are never simple. Naturally, to discuss these issues, art and literature must have its full freedom of expression. If they let themselves be governed by some established official ideology or cultural fashion, it is likely that their moral sensibility weakens and lets them down.

On the other hand, any kind of literary criticism can develop its theory or philosophy only departing from the experience of primary literary creativity. It should

work *a posteriori*, in respect to creativity, rather than invent models for arts and literature. Differently from the products of hard sciences and technology, the products of creative culture seldom become obsolete. Old great works of literature may sound surprisingly modern and postmodern, just because their moral nucleus has no age. What a century fails to grasp and value in a literary work of the past, may be revealed several centuries later and be appreciated by a large global public.

The great semiotic philosopher Yuri Lotman (1922-1993) who worked at my home university of Tartu, dealt in depth with these questions above all in his last works. He introduced the notion of “semiosphere.” As a large intersection zone between noo-sphere (Greek “noos” meaning reason, intellect) and biosphere, Lotman’s “semiosphere” is above all the cultural ground from which some of the greatest and most original human creativity in arts and literature has emerged. It has a lot to do with the ethical nucleus of literature, as well as with literary criticism that aims at explicating that nucleus.

Especially in alliance with comparative literary research, Ethical Literary Criticism can successfully reveal the moral significance of literary works belonging to the existing canon of world literature, as well as bring to the fore of a wider international audience important works created in languages outside the traditional centric Western cultural triangle (English-French- German).

Chen Lizhen: The 6th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism (2016) was held in collaboration with the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature (EACL) and the Institute of Cultural Research and Arts of the University of Tartu. You must have noticed some new advancement in the study of Ethical Literary Criticism in Estonia or East Europe.

Jüri Talvet: Our Tartu conference was organized conjointly by the IAELC and the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature. It was undoubtedly a success in establishing contacts between Western and Eastern literary scholars. Never before had so many Chinese and Asian scholars taken part in an international conference in Estonia (they were about 60 from China, plus at least a dozen from South-Korea). Yet we must also acknowledge the fact that only some few of our participants were able to discuss issues along the lines of the main topic of the conference – the mutual relations between comparative literature, world literature and Ethical Literary Criticism. It is not only because Ethical Literary Criticism still sounds as something new to the Western ears, but also because comparative literary and world literature research themselves have been pushed to an extremely vague zone in the Western academia. The ICLA (International Association of Comparative Litera-

ture) is still among the world's largest forums of literary scholars, but I doubt if the fashionable interdisciplinary trend has really strengthened the position of literary research, in general. On the contrary, it seems that literary scholarship has become in our days less visible than it was before the "postmodern turn."

Therefore, to fortify the position of literature by means of expanding Ethical Literary Criticism remains a fairly hard task. It faces a lot of inertia and comfortable self-complacency. Thus, for instance, it would be relatively easy to adapt to flourishing mass, genre or entertainment literature the key-notes and key-vocabulary of postmodern narratology or sociology, elaborated in France or the US. A much more serious effort and longer toil is needed to apply comparative research to world literature. For the former activity, English would be fully sufficient, whereas for the latter, relying exclusively on English would mean to voluntarily restrict one's perspective of research.

Chen Lizhen: It's important to seek harmony but not uniformity in the study of ethical literary theory or any other theory. More and more scholars gather around the theoretical ground of Ethical Literary Criticism and make new contributions to its progress. One of the central themes of ethical studies is to find a proper way to address the relationship between "self" and "other." We should pay more attention to the overlooked and silent cultures, which is in fact an ethical move in the age of worlding world literature.

Jüri Talvet: For me, the key issue for all study of literature from the point of view of ethics would be the inclusion of the "other." The great complex of ethical problematics becomes manifest only if we relate "self" to "other." As for the immanent ontology of literary creativity, in some of my recent articles I have treated *aesthetics* as its permanent, irreducible and irrefutable "infra-other." The ethical nucleus (the soul, moral core) of any literary work of value can in my opinion basically be revealed and described in the intersection area of philosophy (including its ideological aspect) and aesthetics (image quality). On the other hand, in parallel with the spread of postmodernism (but not at all overlapping with it!), feminist cultural philosophy has shown a notable rise. Both ideologically and socially, woman has been for long centuries the oppressed and (more often than not) ignored human "other." Feminist studies, thus, if ever they manage to avoid sectarianism, can strongly and vitally support the field of Ethical Literary Criticism.

Yet, from the point of view of cultural and human ecology, it would be even more important for Ethical Literary Criticism to shift its focus to the equally ignored and silenced "other" of humankind's culture — cultures of small and minori-

ty nations and ethnic nationalities. Ethical literary research should not restrict its scope to enhancing the study of these minor literatures as objects of museology, but rather to encourage them to develop their native basis of literary creativity in their mother languages. The more freely the peoples of the world can use their native languages to build up their cultures, the richer would be the spiritual content of our universe and the more chance there would be to defend and redeem life for future times.

Chen Lizhen: The 7th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism (2017) was held successfully at The People's Palace in Queen Mary University of London. The symposia are important academic platforms for scholars to exchange ideas and share their new findings. As far as ethical study in literature is concerned, you must have noticed some new developments in the intellectual community all over the world.

Galin Tihanov (George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature, Queen Mary University of London, UK, Member of Academia Europaea): The 7th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism (2017) was a wonderful opportunity to bring together scholars of different countries and generations to discuss Ethical Literary Criticism from various intellectual perspectives. Awareness of Ethical Literary Criticism seems to be growing not just in the UK, but also in other countries in the West, and it is now important to engage younger colleagues in the vital endeavour of finding productive points of intersection between Ethical Literary Criticism and other paradigms and approaches in literary studies. The London Symposium was a continuation of the excellent work already undertaken by Professor Nie and his colleagues at previous symposia on Ethical Literary Criticism; it seems essential to me to keep the momentum going and press ahead with a shared research agenda.

Chen Lizhen: On July 31, 2015, William Baker and Shang Biwu published "Fruitful Collaborations: Ethical Literary Criticism in Chinese Academe" in *Times Literary Supplement* (15). In this article, they assert that Ethical Literary Criticism "has become one of the most vibrant and productive critical theories in China," and "has received increasing recognition from eminent scholars." Ethical Literary Criticism is rooted and influenced by traditional Chinese moral criticism. As a literary theory, it takes, however, a new look and blazes a new trail with a solid theoretical basis, a sound framework and innovative notions. In your mind, where lies the most innovative elements for Ethical Literary Criticism?

Galin Tihanov: I think Ethical Literary Criticism is a new response to the

long-standing question about the place literature occupies in the larger domain of culture, historically and structurally. To me, the most innovative aspect of Ethical Literary Criticism is its *longue durée* approach to literature, through the specific lens of cultural, social, and biological evolution. Ethical Literary Criticism could become an exciting intellectual journey through various stages of cultural history, always attentive to the question of the genesis of ethical norms and moral consciousness, and how these change over time. Ethical Literary Criticism probes into how literature captures—or perhaps even shapes—these changes. In a sense, this is the classic Marxist question: does literature merely reflect historical change, or is it instrumental, playing a role of its own, with its own dynamics, in this process?

Chen Lizhen: There is a strong and obvious impulse of moral criticism in the study of English novels. Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, Matthew Arnold, Henry James, D.H. Lawrence, F.R. Leavis and many other critics take morality as a key word in their understanding of the art of the novel. If we apply Chinese Ethical Literary Criticism to the study of canonical writers like Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, in what sense can we contribute to the above-mentioned tradition of moral criticism?

Galin Tihanov: Moral criticism has indeed been entrenched in traditional literary studies in England, especially in the Victorian age (you could certainly add John Ruskin to the names mentioned in the question) and during the first half of the twentieth century. It seems to me that Ethical Literary Criticism is valuable in that it seeks not just to revise moral criticism, but to modernise and “update” it for our own time. Think, for example, of the possible alliance between the evolutionary dimension that is so clearly articulated in Ethical Literary Criticism, on the one hand, and the current work in cognitive linguistics and cognitive literary studies, on the other. What is more, Ethical Literary Criticism, despite its emphasis on written texts, is capable of surveying the entire domain of verbal creativity, both modern and premodern (including oral culture, i.e. folklore), seeking to identify the specific place ethics and morality occupy in it. I thus think that Ethical Literary Criticism may have potentially useful things to say not just about the literature of Samuel Johnson’s or Arnold’s or Leavis’s age, but also about earlier (and later) works.

Chen Lizhen: Many scholars in China came to know you by reading your correspondences with Professor Nie Zhenzhao on the issue of Ethical Literary Criticism. You emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary study of Ethical Literary Crit-

icism. There is no doubt that we should affiliate Ethical Literary Criticism with Feminism, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, Cultural Studies and other theories. The 8th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism (2018) was held at Kitakyushu International Conference Center, Fukuoka, Japan. Interdisciplinary study of Ethical Literary Criticism was an important theme of this symposium. In the context of interdisciplinary study, do you think Ethical Literary Criticism is able to have imminent impact on the study of ethics and literature in Japan?

Tsuyoshi Namigata (Professor at Kyushu University, Japan): Professor Nie Zhenzhao firstly advocated the concept of Ethical Literary Criticism in 2004. Since then, it has been widely accepted and developed among Chinese scholars as theory and methodology in literature studies, for understanding the relationship between human and human, between human and society, and between human and nature in literary works from the ethical standpoint, as well as analyzing the ethical choices of characters, and the changes of ethical identity when they face with the different ethical environments. It was only in recent years that I became involved myself, especially when I started preparations in Kitakyushu City as the organizer of the 8th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism in 2018.

We can know the outline of its theory through Prof. Nie's book *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* (Peking University Press, 2014), and the academic journals such as *Foreign Literary Studies*, *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature*, *Forum for World Literature Studies*. More than 10 years have passed since the theory was proposed, and I believe that its basics of theory have been steadily formed. At the symposium held in July 2018, however, literary researchers from not only China, South Korea, and Japan, but also European and American countries joined in the active discussions on Ethical Literary Criticism, which indicated me their passions to continue exploring new topics and refining the theory. I understand this interview is part of such ambitious effort.

Your question concerns my report on the symposium, "Introducing the Theory: Dialogues with Ethical Literary Criticism." I argued that Ethical Literary Criticism needs to be further discussed with current theories of literary criticism, postcolonial criticism, gender criticism, cultural studies, etc. Then I was asked what theory we should consider at first. In order to answer this question, I would like to move forward with discussions over the characteristics of Ethical Literary Criticism, based on the introduction summarized by Doctor Jie Ren, who supported the management of the symposium in Kitakyushu City.

Ethical Literary Criticism is a method of critique to read, analyze, and interpret literature works from the ethical point of view, emphasizing the ethical value

of literature and its teaching functions. It focuses on the following five points. First, what kind of morality did the authors have and how did they express it in their works? Second, what is the relationship between ethical norm in the real world and ethical norm extracted from the text? Thirdly, how did the ethical norm of the text affect readers and society? Fourth, how did the ethical tendencies of the author affect other authors and their works? Fifth, how can the relationship between literature and society and between literature and authors be concluded from the ethical point of view, taking into account the authors' morality and the ethical characteristics of their works?

According to Dr. Ren, Ethical Literary Criticism does not merely criticize literature from the ethical point of view, but also develops criticism from historical materialism, and when analyzing ethical issues, it starts from the viewpoint of historical materialism and finds the ethical value of a work according to the moral code which was in use at that time, instead of following the moral code of today. This viewpoint is in common with the cultural materialism that Raymond Williams and others insisted. Furthermore, in a sense, it is meaningful to once again deepen discussions on postcolonial criticism or gender criticism that point out political correctness from a today's perspective. In particular, when it comes to modern Japanese literature, the problem still remains how to evaluate the attitudes of the Japanese writers ranging from the Meiji and Taisho periods as the spread of imperialism to the latter half of 1930s as the war time, and then to the period of reconstruction after W.W.II. I would like to understand the differences and commonalities between criticism from the perspective of postcolonial theory and criticism from the perspective of ethics.

Chen Lizhen: Ethical Literary Criticism takes “ethical selection” and “ethical choice” as crucial actions to make human being an ethical and social existence. It is often associated with the notion of “ethical predicament.” We can apply these terms to the study of Japanese literature. Will it shed some new light on the interpretation of your canonical literature like *The Tale of Genji*?

Tsuyoshi Namigata: Thank you for asking this thought-provoking question. In relation to this point, there was also the question of what works of Japanese literature are suitable for analysis in Ethical Literary Criticism. This is a very difficult question, needless to say, because there are so many literary works also in Japan, but if I have to point out, one of them is *Takeaki ENOMOTO* (1964), a long novel by Kobo ABE (1924 -1993). In this novel, discussions on “loyalty” and “conversion” concerning Takeaki ENOMOTO, who existed as a political figure from the end of

Edo period to Meiji period, are elaborately conducted. What can we say from an ethical point of view when we relate this issue to actual history or to the situation in Japan in the 1960s? As a long-time researcher of the author, Kobo ABE, I am concerned about this. You mentioned classical works such as *The Tale of Genji*, so if we broaden our viewpoint, we can say that both *The Tale of Genji* which portrays courtly romance, and *The Tale of Heike* which portrays the political rise and fall of the Taira family, can be discussed in Ethical Literary Criticism. Other works that gained popularity in the Edo period, such as *Koshoku Ichidai Otoko* (*The Life of an Amorous Man*) or *Koshoku Gonin Onna* (*The Lives of Five Amorous Women*) by Saikaku IHARA, may also show us the historical unique style of ethics on love affairs which are different from today's literary works, so I think these can be the good subjects for analysis.

Although it may be out of the center of theoretical consideration, Ethical Literary Criticism emphasizes the two aspects of human factor and animal factor. In this regard, Ethical Literary Criticism is interpreted as an attempt to analyze literary works in which the characters confront the “human being” in which reason and desire coexist, and in which they depict conflicts and dramas resulting from such coexistence. If that is the case, I believe that the above works can be considered in the sense that the characters face the possibility and difficulty of selecting their ethical identity, and that they make us think about “humanity.”

Chen Lizhen: Do you have a vision for the future of Ethical Literary Criticism? What should be done to keep it up-to-date and vibrant in the post-theory era?

Tsuyoshi Namigata: You asked for some direction or issue on the future of Ethical Literary Criticism. It is hard for me to answer this question immediately, but since “light novels” have become established and it is not unusual for animated films to be adapted into novels in Japan, I would like to see Ethical Literary Criticism applied not only to literary works that do not fall under the category of the “pure literature” or “canon” in Japan, but also to animated films and other contemporary visual works. Thank you very much for your good questions.

Chen Lizhen: Many thanks to all of you, my dear professors, for your kindness and wonderful answers.

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