August 2023
Doctorate Degree Dissertation

Toni Morrison and Taoism: An Ecological Encounter

Graduate School of Chosun University
Department of English Language and Literature
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August 25th, 2023

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This thesis is submitted to Chosun University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2023

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June 2023

Graduate School of Chosun University

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Abstract

Toni Morrison and Taoism: An Ecological Encounter

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By far the only African-American women laureate for Nobel Prize in literature, Toni Morrison (1931-2019) has undoubtedly written herself into the American and even the world literary canon. From 1970, when *The Bluest Eye* was published, to 2015, when *God Help the Child* was released, a scant forty-five years witnessed her full contribution to world literature, including eleven novels, seven children's books, two short stores, all of which were highly applauded and acclaimed by both readers and critics alike.

Although the richness of Morrison's work has spawned numerous scholarly studies from a variety of perspectives, the approach to her novels through early oriental Taoist philosophy is, still in its infancy. Taoism emerged and developed into a complete system of 'green' philosophy during the chaotic periods of the Spring and Autumn, and the Warring States (770BC-221BC) in China. In dealing with the ecological emergency facing humanity, Taoism, guided by the idea of equality, sees it as an internal matter within the earth's family. In fact, the word 'ecology' itself originates from the Greek word *oikos* meaning 'home'. Thus, the study of ecology can be thought of as the family life of human beings and another organism in the natural world.

As an adept storyteller, Morrison cleverly employs literary aesthetics that combine nature with the characters in her stories. Understanding humanity itself through nature is also crucial

to Morrison's narrative. By interweaving the fates of her characters with the relentless destruction and endless exploitation of nature, Morrison's blueprint for ecological consciousness is constructed in its entirety. These stories, as Morrison tells them, are graphically grounded in the primitive African tradition of black life in harmony with nature, which affirmatively gives her a cultural deposit of ecological foundations.

However, it is undeniable that Morrison and Taoism belong to different linguistic and cultural categories, but certain links between them can still be found when tracing the origins and civilization of humanity throughout history. The earliest primitive religious cultures of mankind were rooted in the African continent and the Africism has influenced different parts of the world through a series of human diasporas, the succession and development of human civilizations, and the expansion of human cognition. And Morrison, as the heir and guardian of traditional African culture, incorporates this ancient culture into her work, revealing a rich artistic foundation and a primitive view of human ecology.

From a realistic point of view, in the face of the modern ecological crisis, Morrison has adopted a literary and artistic approach to express her desire for equality and harmony in the Earth's ecosphere. More than two thousand years old, Taoism is still relevant to today's ecological reality. On the one hand, the ideas of equality, freedom, and harmony are inherent in its philosophy and are eulogized and disseminated worldwide, while on the other hand, Chinese scholar Li Jialuan divides the Anthropocene into "the minor Anthropocene" and "the severe Anthropocene" with the Trinity nuclear test as the dividing line. Admittedly, Taoism is in the former era. Combined with its own intrinsic "green" ideological core, Taoism is perfectly suited to serve as a theoretical guide for today's ecological crisis.

As far as the structure of this dissertation is concerned, it consists mainly of seven chapters. The introductory chapter includes its background, realistic significance, literature review, and structure, closely followed by five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter Two focuses on the ideas of Taoism, ancient Chinese culture and African traditional religious culture, which

provide exotic, energetic, and metaphorical content for Morrison's works and suggest a promising new direction for further exploration. Chapter Three brings Morrison and Taoism together to identify their necessary connection in terms of their response to the ecological crisis, the legendary imagery, and their cultural underpinnings.

In the chapters of textual analysis, this dissertation is divided into three chapters, using the philosophical thought of Taoism as the theoretical scope to respectively illustrate the subjectivity of the Tao through Morrison's *Beloved*, *A Mercy*, and *Song of Solomon* to explain the unity and equality of all things in the world in Chapter Four, the eternal nature of the Tao to illustrate the construction of new hope for black Americans through the novels *Paradise*, *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *God Help the Child* in Chapter Five, and the self-transformation of the Tao to articulate the sublimation of the personal spirit and the realization of the ideal of harmony on earth through the works *Paradise*, *Home*, *Song of Solomon*, and *A Mercy* in Chapter Six. While a detailed analysis of the text is presented through Morrison's characters and plots as a dimension of longitude. Thus, this project is a more comprehensive and experimental study of Morrison's novels from a Taoist philosophical perspective.

In conclusion, this dissertation attempts to interpret the ecological ideas in Morrison's novels through Taoist philosophical thought, while proclaiming the prevalence of social justice and the building of harmony on earth. Such a cognitive option is one that Taoism should apply to solve the ecological crisis caused by human activities and to envision a sustainable future.

Keywords: Toni Morrison, Taoism, ecology, Africism, equality, hope, harmony

국문초록

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현재까지 유일한 아프리카계 미국인 여성 노벨 문학상 수상자인 토니 모리슨(1931-2019)은 의심할 여지 없이 자신을 미국문학뿐 아니라 세계 문학의 정전 속에 써넣었다. 『가장 푸른 눈』이 출간된 1970년부터 『신이여 그 아이를 돌보소서』가 출간된 2015년까지 불과 45년 동안 11편의 소설과 7편의 아동 도서, 그리고 2편의 단편집 등을 출간하여 독자와 비평가 모두에게 큰 박수와 찬사를 받았다.

모리슨의 작품의 풍부함은 다양한 관점에서 수많은 학문적 연구를 낳았지만, 도가 사상을 통한 그녀의 소설에 대한 접근은 여전히 초기 단계에 머물러있다. 도가 사상은 춘추전국시대(기원전 770년-기원전 221년)에 '녹색' 철학이라는 하나의 완전한 체계로 등장하여 발전하였다. 도가 사상은 평등의 사상을 기반으로, 인류가 직면한 생태적 비상사태를 지구 구성원 간의 내부 문제로 여기고 이에 대처한다. 사실, '생태학'이라는 단어 자체는 '집'을 의미하는 그리스어 '오이코스'(*oikos*)에서 유래되었다. 따라서 생태학의 연구는 인간과 자연계의 또 다른 유기체들 사이의 가족 생활로 생각할 수 있다.

능숙한 이야기꾼으로서, 모리슨은 그녀의 이야기에 등장하는 인물들과 자연을 결합한 문학적 미학을 교묘하게 사용한다. 자연을 통해 인간성 자체를 이해하는 것도 모리슨의 서사에 결정적이다. 모리슨의 생태적 의식에 대한 청사진은 그녀의 캐릭터들의 운명을 자연의 무자비한 파괴와 끝없는 착취와 엮음으로써 그 전체를 구성

한다. 모리슨이 그들에게 말했듯이, 이 이야기들은 자연과 조화를 이루는 원시 아프리카 전통에 분명한 기반을 두고 있으며, 이는 그녀의 생태학적 기반의 문화적 근거가 되고 있다.

그러나 모리슨과 도교가 다른 언어적, 문화적 범주에 속한다는 것은 부인할 수 없지만, 역사를 통해 인류의 기원과 문명을 추적할 때 그들 사이의 특정한 연관성은 여전히 발견될 수 있다. 인류의 초기 원시 종교 문화는 아프리카 대륙에 뿌리를 두고 있으며, 아프리카는 일련의 인간 디아스포라, 인류 문명의 계승과 발전, 인간 인식의 확장을 통해 세계 여러 지역에 영향을 미쳤다. 그리고 전통적인 아프리카 문화의 계승자이자 수호자인 모리슨은 이 고대 문화를 그녀의 작품에 접목시켜 풍부한 예술적 기반과 인간 생태에 대한 원시적인 관점을 드러낸다.

현실적인 관점에서 모리슨은 현대의 생태 위기에 직면하여, 지구의 생태권에서 평등과 조화에 대한 열망을 표현하기 위해 문학적, 예술적 접근법을 채택했다. 2천년 이상 된 도가 사상은 여전히 오늘날의 생태학적 현실과 관련이 있다. 한편으로는 평등, 자유, 조화의 사상이 그 철학에 내재되어 있어 세계적으로 찬사를 받고 전파되는 반면, 중국 학자 리지아루안은 트리니티의 핵실험을 경계선으로 하여 인류세를 '소인류세'와 '중인류세'로 구분한다. 도가 사상은 이전 시대에 있다. 고유의 '녹색' 이념적 핵심과 결합된 도가사상은 오늘날의 생태 위기에 대한 이론적 지침 역할을 하기에 완벽하게 적합하다.

이 논문의 구조는 모두 7장으로 구성되어 있다. 서론은 그 배경, 현실적 의의, 문헌 검토, 구조 등을 담고 있으며, 그 뒤로 5개의 장과 결론이 이어진다. 제2장은 모리슨의 작품에 이국적이고 활기차고 은유적인 내용을 제공하고 추가 탐구를 위한 유망한 새로운 방향을 제시하는 도교, 고대 중국 문화, 아프리카 전통 종교 문화의 사상에 초점을 맞추고 있다. 제3장은 모리슨과 도교를 한데 모아 생태 위기에 대한 그들의 대응, 아이디어의 상호 작용, 전설적인 이미지, 그리고 그들의 문화적 기반 측면에서 그들의 필요한 연관성을 확인한다.

본문 분석의 장에서, 이 논문은 도교의 철학적 사고를 이론적 씨줄로 삼고, 제4

장에서 세상 만물의 통일과 평등을 설명하기 위한 도교의 주관성을 각각 설명하고, 5장에서 흑인 미국인들에게 새로운 희망의 건설을 설명하는 도의 영원성, 6장에서 개인 정신의 승화와 지상 조화의 이상의 실현을 명확하게 표현하기 위한 도의 자기 변형의 모습을 제시한다. 본문에 대한 자세한 분석은 모리슨의 등장인물과 줄거리를 통해 날줄의 차원으로 제시되지만, 본 논문은 좀 더 심층적인 탐구를 위해 몇 개의 하위 장으로 더 나누어진다. 따라서 이 프로젝트는 모리슨의 소설을 도교 철학적 관점에서 보다 포괄적이고 실험적으로 연구한 것이다.

결론적으로 본 논문은 모리슨 소설에 나타난 생태학적 사상을 도교 철학적 사고를 통해 해석하는 한편, 지상에서의 사회정의의 확산과 조화의 구축을 선언하고자 한다. 이러한 인지적 선택은 인간의 활동으로 인한 생태적 위기를 해결하고 지속 가능한 미래를 구상하기 위해 도가 사상이 적용해야 할 선택이다.

키워드: 토니 모리슨, 도교, 생태학, 아프리카주의, 평등, 희망, 조화

I. Introduction

A. The Origin of the Project

Just into the second decade of the 21st century, humanity experienced a global catastrophe of coronavirus disease in 2019 (Covid19). This pandemic is a wake-up call to the ecological crisis on this planet. According to the official statistics of the World Health Organization, more than 700 million cases have been confirmed worldwide, of which 6 million have died.[1] But another calamity that directly challenges the peace of humanity is the constant cloud of war between Russia and Ukraine, resulting in hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides and leads to the largest refugee crisis in Europe, with 4.3 million refugees leaving Ukraine, within six weeks of the start of the war, and another 7.1 million people displaced.[2] When will there be peace between people?

With the world's population approaching 10 billion by 2050, climate change altering weather patterns, sea level rising and countries concerned about food and water security, ecological degradation is undoubtedly one of the most talked about issues. Yet, humanity is unrelenting pursuit of prosperity in proving to be an erosion of the ultimate foundation: the ability of the natural order to spontaneously generate the creative vitality that can support long-term survival. Such an ability James Miller terms in *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future*, as "the subjectivity of nature" (xiv). He argues that "Modern human culture, by denying nature's subjectivity and arrogating subjectivity and agency to itself alone, has sowed the seeds of its own destruction" (ibid).

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[1] This statistic can be referenced on the official website of the World Health Organization, and is currently being updated daily. www.covid19.who.int.

[2] From Wikipedia. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Ukrainian_War.

The subjectivity of nature proposed by Taoism is indeed "a radical reversal of the way that modern man thinks about the natural world" (26). Miller further confirms that Taoism rarely considers human beings to be mere "subjects" observing the natural "objective" world, but the "subjectivity is grounded in the Dao [Tao] itself" (ibid). The Tao as "the wellspring of cosmic creativity" (ibid), gives subjective attributes to all its creatures. The concept of equality of all creatures is a prerequisite for solving the ecological crisis.

History has its own rhyme. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (770 B.C.-221 B.C.) in China, when Taoism was born more than two thousand years ago, there were ecological problems similar to those of today. The scientific basis for this can be found in the International Commission on Stratigraphy's definition of the Anthropocene, officially established by this international organization as the degree of human influence on the Earth's ecosystems. Chinese scholar Li Jialuan (2019) in his work *How Daoist Philosophy Responds to the Ecological Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Study of Daoism*, argues that the Anthropocene is divided into "the severe Anthropocene" and "the minor Anthropocene", with the 1945 Trinity nuclear tests as the dividing line. Certainly within the "minor Anthropocene" are the periods of the Spring and Autumn, and the Warring States in China.

As one of the earliest ecological philosophies of the time, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between man and nature, Taoism differed from other mainstream academic schools, such as Confucianism, which taught and enlightened people in a didactic way, proclaiming its core concept of "kingly rule", and Legalism, which relied on stringent laws to establish a totalitarian kingdom and often a very effective war machine to conquer other states. Lao Tzu clearly had other schools of thought in mind when he advocated the rule of nature. He wanted to "win the world by doing nothing" and called for the "teaching that uses no words" (265).

The sinologist James Miller was a keen scholar of Taoist philosophy. In the introduction to his book *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future*, he quotes from the *Tao Te Ching*, "Heaven and earth unite to drop down sweet dew. No one commands

the people, yet they naturally achieve equality" (172), from which he highlights three words that represent the essence of Taoist thought, namely, "unite", "naturally", and "equality". He also describes Taoist thought as "green", emphasizing the concept of harmonious and sustainable development of man and nature on an equal footing.

Just as Taoism proclaims the idea of equality and harmony, so too do most of mankind's early religious thoughts of mankind incorporate this idea into their own teachings. In this respect, traditional African religion, one of the earliest religions on earth, undoubtedly provided the most original blueprint for other Eastern and Western religious thoughts, especially in its embedded animism, which appeals to the concept of the equality of all things. In Africism, the Supreme Being as the Creator of the Universe, gives birth to and nurtures all beings without distinction between the superior and the inferior and has made the pursuit of equality and harmony between human beings and nature its basic connotation and core principle.

Deeply rooted in the African tradition, black American literature has, since its inception, made equality and harmony an everlasting and a primordial theme. Their work, largely based on historical sources, authentically reflects the realities of marginalization, differentiation, and even "otherness". As Morrison puts it, "We have always been imagining ourselves…we are the subjects of our own narratives, witnesses to and participants in our own experience…We are not, in fact, 'other'." (208) And from the perspective of traditional Anglo-Saxon scholars, the term African American literature is ineradicably seem as an enigma and a paradox, or a denial and dismissal of the richness of African-American work. Virtually, Black American literature is "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power Concept. As such it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs of and aspirations of Black America" (Neal 257).

Furthermore, through Du Bois' new exploration of the "striving in the souls of black folks" (307) at the beginning of the 21st century, he would undeniably discover "a veritable vineyard in which, as unstrained and emancipated former chattel" (Samuels vii), African-Americans used their gift of storytelling to blossom and reap a fruitful harvest in the

American literary landscape, encompassing the entire realm from "autobiography and slave narrative to slam…feminist, womanist, and Africana Womanism voices;…modernist and postmodernist voices…" (ibid). Du Bois must applaud Morrison's above descriptions that African Americans "have always been imagining ourselves [themselves]". And meanwhile, Morrison boldly bears the responsibility of "serious scholars" (208) and is also a new presenter of what she defines as a rich "black American artistic presence" (ibid) in Western culture, particularly in America.

However, the comparative school of American literature tends to bring together different literary works and subjective ideas together "as a connecting link between subjects or subjective areas" (Remak 3). Some scholars of this school have focused their attention on establishing a model of interdisciplinary or cross-cultural work, and the sole aim of this model is to eliminate chauvinistic nationalism, which views literature primarily in terms of language or "political boundaries". Susan Bassnett argues, "the American perspective on comparative literature was based from the start on ideas of interdisciplinarity and universalism" (33), particularly concerning "the study of affinities between two international works of literature" from their differences.

This cross-cultural parallel study has been widely applied by other scholars. Like ecocriticism, Scott Slovic responded to "Patrick D. Murphy's call for cross-cultural ecocritical studies on a multinational scale in his 2000 book *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriental Literature*" (619). Chinese scholar Jiang Chengyong also said that "foreign literature studies are supposed to break as many cross-nation barriers as possible and to step towards the realm of literary cosmopolitanism" (103). Conversely, literary cosmopolitanism can create more interchangeable homogeneity for different cultures.

B. The Realistic Significance

The encounter between Morrison and Taoism illustrates the possibilities of interweaving different cultures, explores an interesting conversational reverberation between them, and shows how the Taoist philosophical framework can respond to the ecological crisis encountered in today's reality, a tension between man and nature, and between human beings that is connoted in Morrison's fiction. The applicability to ecological issues is also the reason why Taoist thought remains sought-after and relevant today.

1. The Ecological Blueprint for Sustainable Development

Taoist studies since the 1990s have decisively shifted attention to the insights and inspiration that Taoism, as both a philosophy and a praxis, can offer for solving the worsening ecological crisis. This shift was, of course, the result of a rise in environmental awareness among the general public and in the humanities. Following a series of man-made ecological crises, the second half of the 1990s saw a quiet but significant shift in public attitudes around the world about the importance of the environment and the role that governments should play in protecting endangered species and dwindling natural resources. As James Miller puts it in his monograph, Taoism is "green" and "sustainable" thinking, and he further elaborates on how Taoist thought has historically interpreted the environment and how it can play an important role in addressing today's environmental challenges.

The conference series Religions of the World and Ecology hosted by the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) at Harvard Divinity School over a three-year period (1996-1998), was a microcosm of such attempts. It brought together some eight hundred scholars, religious leaders and environmental specialists from all around the world to "identify and evaluate the distinctive ecological attitudes, values, and practices of diverse religious traditions, making clear their links to intellectual, political, and other resources associated with

these distinctive traditions",[3] as its overall goals stated. The four-day conference on Taoism and Ecology in 1998, organized by Norman Girardot and Livia Kohn, produced a monumental book, *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape*, published three years later by Harvard University Press. As the editors pointed out in the Introduction:

> Daoism and ecology are often invoked as natural partners in contemporary discussion of environmental issues in the West… the Chinese tradition conventionally known as "Daoism/Taoism" reveals an obvious and particularly compelling affinity with global ecological concerns. (Girardot xxxviii)

They continued to argue, however, that Taoism had more to offer in terms of "its possible contribution to recent environmental problems" than "Laozi's enigmatic little treatise" and "Zhuangzi's playfully insightful parables" (xxxix). In order to provide a crucial pretext and context for naming some of the traditional implications of ecological thought and practice, *Daoism and Ecology* dealt with the richness of the Taoist tradition, including the texts of the early mystical philosophy and more texts and practices from later ritualistic religions. Its wide range of contributions included "the theoretical and historical complications associated with a Daoist approach to the environment", "speculative reflections on the significance of the 'classical' texts for a contemporary ecological philosophy,", and attempts to "theoretically and practically 'apply' various aspects of Daoist tradition to the contemporary ecological situation". (ivii)

In terms of religious practice, the Chinese Taoist Association, as the religious body that is the true heir to the great philosophy of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi, has been actively involved in these issues and has developed a series of policy statements and action plans on environmental

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3 The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. "Conference Goals. " 29 Dec. 2018. http:// fore.yale.edu/religions-of-the-world-and-ecology-archive-of-conference-materials/conference-goals/.

issues since the late 1990s. Working with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (IUCN), they have built an “Ecology Temple” in the Heihe National Forest Park near Taibai Mountain in Shaanxi Province, where they enshrine Lao Tzu as a wise god of Ecology. Moreover, with the whole of humanity facing an impending ecological crisis, the Chinese Taoist Association has not been sitting idly by in its abbeys. Instead, they called for specific actions and led by example, including preserving and protecting “the harmonious relationship of all things with Nature”, nurturing “the people by teaching the importance in Daoism of maintaining harmonious relationships among things in the natural world”, and promoting “the non-violent and pacifist ideals of Daoism”. They pointed out some very specific actions that they would like to do more of: “planting trees and cultivating forests” and “making the natural environment beautiful and transforming our hermitages into the paradise worlds”. (Zhang 370)

The book *Daoism and Ecology*, also faithfully records the deeds of the Taoists, “under the leadership of the abbot Yang Chenquan (杨臣全), the Daoist priests of Mountain Wudang temple in Qinghai Province have since 1982 grown 1.73 million trees and have recultivated many acres of grassland.” (xlii) Fan Gaode (范高德), the old abbot of the Huashiyan Taoist temple in Gansu Province, also planted many trees and made the barren hills green. (ibid)

Meanwhile, academic research has made considerable progress in understanding how Taoists have historically engaged with their natural environment, the values that have driven these engagements, and the principles behind these values. Such research at least lends credence to the idea that elements of the Taoist tradition are strongly linked to an ecological self-awareness in which an individual’s sense of self is ultimately inseparable from his or her environmental context. It also helps to promote an understanding of the ethical principles that drive Taoist believers and others to protect the environment and ensure ecological sustainability for the future.

2. The Beautiful Home of Harmony for Mankind

Harmony, derived from the theory of Yin and Yang (陰和陽), is the original meaning of Taoist thought. But the Yin and Yang do not follow the Western dualistic pattern; they form a polar but non-dualistic relationship, "where each requires the other as a necessary condition for being what it is." (Ames 120) Yin and Yang are interdependent; in a polar relationship, each "pole" can be explained by reference to the other. Lao Tzu's dialectic represents the best of a polar relationship: "Being and non-being interdepend in growth… tones and voice interdepend in harmony." (48) Yin and Yang must always be in a dynamic equilibrium to form a harmonious natural relationship; there is no Yang without Yin and vice versa; together they establish the groundwork for all other beings in the Taoist cosmos; and they are embodied in every being they have given birth to.

Taoist harmony, through the dynamic regulation of Yin and Yang, is reflected primarily in the internal and external aspects of human beings. Internal human harmony refers to the state of balance within the human body created by changing Yin and Yang in traditional Chinese medicine. For example, taking the pulse is an essential skill for a doctor practicing traditional Chinese medicine. *Yellow Emperior's Canon of Medicine: Plain Conversation*, the earliest existing Chinese medicine theory work, says, "All changes in the heavens and on the earth correspond to [the variations of] Yin and Yang [in the four seasons]. The changes of pulse conditions also correspond to such variations in the four seasons… Yin and Yang in certain time, and so do the pulse conditions." (205)

In a similar theory, when the masculine force [yang] reaches its climax, it will transform into the feminine force [yin]. The same is true of the feminine essence, which will transform into the masculine force when it reaches its climax, just as *The Discourse of the States* says, "When the sun sets in the west, it will rise against the east. The same is true with the moon, which will wane again when it waxes." (377) No matter how they are transformed, Yin and Yang are always in a dynamic harmony, keeping people healthy and nature at peace. Otherwise

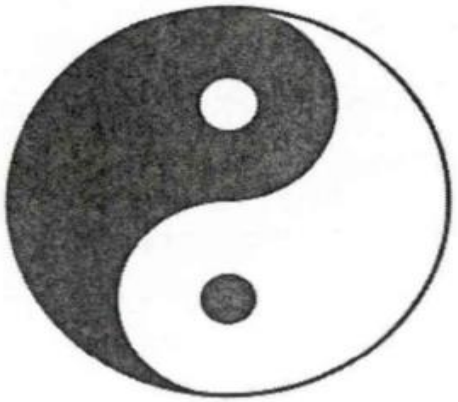
the result is the opposite: the predominance of Yin results in the disease of Yang while the predominance of Yang leads to the disease of Yin. So extreme Yin becomes Yang and extreme Yang becomes Yin.

Man's external harmony, especially between man and heaven and earth, comes primarily from man and non-human nature. The harmony between Yin and Yang is of particular importance because, on a large scale, humans have a responsibility to be the facilitators of such harmony. Just as the *Taiping Ching* (太平经), a late branch of Taoism, states that human beings belong to the realm of central harmony and are assigned the unique duty of protecting, circulating, and cultivating the qi of central harmony between Heaven and Earth, so it is the great responsibility of human beings to maintain harmonious communication with Heaven and Earth in order to bring about cosmic harmony and social peace. In the Taoist cosmos, Heaven is Yang and Earth is Yin. People who live in between serve as a bridge between the pure Yin and Yang. To do so, conceivably they have to be a perfect equilibrium of Yin and Yang themselves. Their equilibrium should also be dynamic, changing with the seasonal and spatial changes of the nature in which they reside.

People also benefit from the harmony of Yin and Yang, and so does everything else. Taoism affirms that each of the myriad of things contains the polarity of Yin and Yang and that life is engendered only when the Yin-Yang poles of each thing are allowed to communicate with each other. In other words, the viability of life depends on the Yin-Yang polarity of all things co-operating with each other. It also means that on the harmonious relationship of all things depends the continuous development of world civilization.

The Tai Chi (太极) diagram is the best illustration of the harmony of Yin and Yang, "which shows the two fundamental energy forces at the root of the universe in interlocking harmony." (Kohn 377) In the diagram, white presents Yang and black represents Yin. The black part has a white circle over its head and the white part has a black circle over its head, which symbolizes the interplay of Yin and Yang. Both the white half and the black half are shaped like

a fish, with both fish swimming forward, chasing each other's tails, symbolizing the constant alternation of Yin and Yang. This image can be better illustrated by a video which shows the movement and transformation of the two elements.



The Taoist idea of harmony also had a positive effect in this case. Qiu Chuji (丘处机), the famous Taoist of the Song Dynasty, was invited to satisfy Genghis Khan's interest in the Taoist secret medicine of immortality, but he took the opportunity to persuade the merciless conqueror to stop killing in order to cancel one of his military conquests. He told the Khan that he who wanted to unite all under Heaven must not kill many people out of bloodthirstiness, and advised him to respect Heaven and love the people. He also dissuaded Khan from hunting by teaching him that the Tao of Heaven is in favor of giving birth and preserving life. Qiu's case is a perfect example of how Taoism can influence policy-making and benefit society. It is not inconceivable that the Taoist teachings can influence today's reality and benefit both humanity and the Earth's ecosphere.

C. Literature Review

1. Morrison and Her Novels

Along with the rise of Morrison's fame, especially after her winning Nobel Prize, more interest in her and her work has grown. In various interviews she has accepted, as well as in some of her seemingly semi-autobiographical essays, Morrison's introductory narrative is constructed to uncover her family background and her formative years. Yet her family upbringing and later formal Western education at school constitute the double consciousness in Morrison's thought.

a. Her Life and Education

Born as Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, a small Midwest town near the shore of Lake Eric, and growing up in a family of storytellers and musicians, Morrison's early life was fraught with the signposts of her later imagination. She ever admitted to Claudia Tate: "My life is uneventful. Writing has to do with the imagination" (Tate 127).

Morrison's parents and her grandparents were also later shown to have had a significant influence on her creativity and imagination. From her parents, George and Rahmah Willis Wofford, as southern immigrants who left the Southern hinterland in search of better social, political, educational, and economic opportunities for their families, Morrison learned many enduring lessons from them, not the least of which was the importance of one's personal identity and cultural heritage—lessons which she passed on to her readers. Her grandfather John Solomon was a skilled musician, and her grandmother Ardelis Willis' grimoire and the stories they told of ghosts and magic familiarized Morrison with black legendary culture. The blurring of the lines between fantasy and reality, fact and fiction, in Morrison's novels, is at least partly due to these stories. Her family background, accompanied by an atmosphere of historical and social awareness, mysticism, superb craftsmanship, and a passion for excellence

and work, initially helped shape Toni Morrison's potential as an artist.

Morrison's sense of self or identity is also reinforced by the cohesiveness of the small black community that raised her for seventeen years, which she left only to attend university. She regards this community awareness as an emotional and cultural bond, a life-giving and life-sustaining complex, which is at the heart of her epistemology. Perhaps inspired by her early experiences in Lorain, Morrison often calculates the psychological distance traveled by the characters in her novels by estimating their proximity to the community. As a repository of self-affirming cultural traditions and beliefs, the black community shaped her personality and provided a degree of protection from external attacks on the spirit, although its negative side is also revealed in her novels. Those who leave the community should take it with them, states Morrison. "There is no need for the community if you have a sense of it inside" (Russell 43). This explains why Morrison writes with black people in mind, while white people are often on the margins of her work, which is the subject of many of her interviews. For example, in an interview with Claudia Tate, she argues,

> When I view the world, perceive it, and write about it, it's the world of black people. It's not that I won't write about white people. I just know that when I'm trying to develop the various themes I write about, the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I invent. It's not deliberate or calculated or self-consciously black, because I recognize and despise the artificial black writing some writers do. I feel them slumming among black people. (118)

One of the great truths of Morrison's scholarship is that her main theme is community. Each of her novels, of course, deals strictly with the questions of "what constitutes a community, what functions a community serves, what threatens a community, and what helps it to survive" (Conner 49). In her own words, "If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or

whatever I write), isn't about the village or the community or you, then it is not about anything" (Leonard 706) Indeed, one of the highlights of Morrison's rich narrative is the focus on the relationship between the individual and the community, however, the complicatedness of this relationship goes largely neglected in many aspects. Most audiences view Morrison's sense of community in a decidedly positive light, as cherishing, cohesive, and curative, and the individual's existence in the community as safety and easiness.

Yet, Morrison's account of the relationship between the individual and the community has also undergone a marked progression. From her early novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, which embody the apparent antagonism between individual and community and the relentless victimization of the individuals by the community that ultimately destroys both Pecola and Sula, to *Beloved*, where Morrison first demonstrates shared concern and individual quest for mutual support to complete a collective exorcism of the ghost of the past, and then to *Home*, where the community fully embraces healing, the rehabilitation of the deeply devastated Cee, all the way to the harmonious integration of the two siblings, this progression from destruction to rebirth, from victimization to reconciliation, illustrates an interpretive response to Morrison's narrative strategy and creative vision.

If Morrison's central theme concerns the relationship between individual and community, interpreting her traditional African bonds, her contemporary voice derives from the Western aesthetic edified and embraced by her university education. Morrison's journey to university is attributed to her mother's constant encouragement. She first took her undergraduate courses at Howard University, during which she majored in English and minored in classics, and upon graduating, she moved to Ithaca, New York, to earn a Master's Arts degree at Cornell University.

Morrison herself insisted that "any critical view that would blind itself to her training in a western, even classical background is misguided" (Conner xii), and since schooling, what has been exposed to her in textbooks was Western. She confessed, "I was terrifically fascinated

with all of that, and at that time any information that came to me from my own people seemed to me to be back woodsy and uninformed. You know, they hadn't read all these wonderful books" (Jones and Vinson 173-74). And Morrison's MA thesis was on the literary structure of suicide in the novels of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Given such a fascination with classical literature, some traces of it ooze vaguely through all of Morrison's work, as her commentary implies that "the Greek chorus…reminds me of what goes on in Black churched and in jazz," and that the endings of her novels are "Greek" in the sense of "suffering" and "realization" (176-77). Although Morrison consented to scholars such as Hurston against the role of Western aesthetic thought in the analysis of African-American literature, she also noted that "finding or imposing Western influences in/on Afro-American literature has value provided the valued process does not become self-anointing" ("Unspeakable Things" 9-10).

Morrison did carry on the tradition, but this inheritance was as tortured and disturbing a thing as the legacies the forebears left to the next generations in her novels. And this tradition has been associated not only with Morrison's work but with the entire African-American literary tradition from its inception. Henry Louis Gates, Jr argued that literature has always been a descendant of two traditions and spoke of being "double-voiced": "In the case of the writer of African descent, her/his texts occupy spaces in at least two traditions: a European or American literary tradition, and one of the several related but distinct black traditions. The 'heritage' of each black text written in a Western language is, then, a double heritage" (4). Therefore, the double voices of African-American novels require that their writing be approached in a similarly dualistic manner: one that recognizes both the African specificity, as well as the Western or Anglo-European characteristic of that writing.

b. Critical Comments

The extent of the critical interest in Morrison's work is broad and varied, as a flurry of

critical articles about Morrison flocked to her after her Nobel Prize. Morrison admits that she has read the reviews, but says that these do not vacillate the direction of her work, which depends only on her experiences as an African American, and on the age-old stories of the African-American community. She also asserts that negative comments about her novels often, "evolve out of a lack of understanding of the culture, the world, the given quality out of which I write" (Gates 407).

A review of some of Morrison's work shows how important it is to raise theoretical questions about critical approaches to black writing. However, the critical reception is too voluminous to be summarized in a sense. Here only a few representative authors and their critical works are mentioned. The first scholarly article on Morrison appeared five years after the publication of *The Bluest Eye* and almost two years after the publication of *Sula*. In the autumn of 1975, a lesser-known publishing house, *Studies in Black Literature*, published an article by Joan Bischoff entitled *The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity*. Despite the brevity of Bischoff's analysis of Morrison's first two novels, she did draw attention to the lingering divisions and moral tensions in Morrison's novels that contemporary scholars of Morrison's fiction have found to be significant.

But Bischoff's method of reaching his conclusion was suspicious. The essay began with a move typical of several early critical essays on Morrison: Bischoff compared Morrison to a great authoritative writer, Henry James. This was a deliberate arrangement on his part. By comparing Morrison and James, Bischoff demonstrated that her subject was a man of note, even though Morrison was unfamiliar to scholars of that time. But this comparison was also important in terms of race. The similarity of them also revealed that her work was not just aimed at a black audience. Indeed, Bischoff continued to invoke the language of universalist issues to promote Morrison: "Though her characters are conditioned by the black milieu of which she writes, her concerns are broader and more universal" (21). Thus, in her brief analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, Bischoff focused on a common theme: the frustrated sensitivity of

Pecola and Sula.

Concerned that drawing analogies between herself and various authoritative writers amounted to imposing false traditions on her fiction, Morrison said in a 1983 interview with Nellie McKay, “I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner.” (McKay 152) In this interview, Morrison asked for the development of a criticism rooted in black culture that allowed for deep and complex readings of her novels and those of other black women writers.

In 1977, the roots of this criticism began to emerge. The first extensive discussion of Morrison’s work by black scholars was not in academic journals, but in the winter issue 1977 issue of *First World*, a full-color, slick-paper publication founded by a group of black intellectuals who wanted to create a forum for political and social analysis, focused on black issues in America, and they wanted to emphasize coverage of black culture to focus on black power, beauty, and the “creative fiction” of black America .

Prior to a close reading of Morrison’s first two novels, a lively editorial review stated, “Although editor and former college professor Toni Morrison is among the most acclaimed of the newer writers, little scholarly or critical analysis of her work has appeared” (ibid). This comment suggested that in the mid-1970s alternative publications like *First World* were important in promoting black writers like Morrison. More important, however, is how the authors of *First World* viewed Morrison’s first two novels. Philip Royster analyzed *The Bluest Eye*, and Odette C. Martin compared Morrison’s treatment of certain issues with other black writers and intellectuals William Wells Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois, Nella Larson, Zora Neale Hurston. In their methodology and nuanced readings of Morrison’s novels, Royster and Martin were careful to lay the groundwork for a criticism that positioned Morrison as an African American writer—an approach to criticism so familiar to today that it may be difficult to recognize the struggle that takes place in asserting and articulating that approach.

Royster and Martin’s focus on the disturbing aspects of Morrison’s work gave readers

some insight into why her novels have taken so long to gain the recognition they deserve. They were designed to unsettle the readers, sometimes dramatically, to stimulate fresh and important understanding. In another important essay from 1977, Barbara Smith argued that *Sula* was a work so full of complexity that to understand it, a new mode of critical thinking must be theorized, a mode she called "black feminist criticism" (169). Smith's controversial analysis of *Sula* as a black lesbian text has not only caused surprise but also brought to light the inadequacy of current research methods both for *Sula* and the work of other black writers.

The evolution of black feminist critical discourse meant that the neglect Morrison received for her first novel in the mid-1970s changed dramatically at the start of the next decade. The enthusiastic reception of *Song of Solomon*, published in 1977, and *Tar Baby* in 1981, propelled the development of criticism and made Morrison a nationally known and acclaimed author. Not surprisingly, therefore, Morrison's novels began to attract a variety of critical approaches, including Elizabeth Abel's 1981 influential feminist study of the dynamics of female friendship in women's work, and Hortense Spillers' seminal black feminist study of *Sula* in 1983. (Peterson 5). As the decade unfolded, Morrison's work has been discussed in lengthy studies of African-American literature, most notably Keith Byerman, Jane Campbell, and Melvin Dixon, and especially in studies of black women writers such as Mari Evans' *Indispensable Black Women Writers* (1984), Barbara Christian's highly acclaimed *Black Feminist Criticism* (1985). Also, in 1985, Bessie W. Jones and Audrey L. Vinson's *Toni Morrison's World: Explorations in Literary Criticism* was published, the first book to present Morrison in its entirety. The book includes, in addition to important interviews with Morrison, essays on various themes in Morrison's fiction and learning questions for teachers to use in the classroom.

Beginning with Jones and Vinson's book, scholarly work on Morrison has grown exponentially in terms of the absolute number of articles, book chapters, and books, as well as the variety of methods employed. Even in the mid-1980s, this type of scholarship was already abundant, and it is no wonder that Morrison took the opportunity to comment on the

appropriateness of some of these approaches. In *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*, she argues,

> My general disappointment in some of the criticism that my work has received has nothing to do with approval. It has something to do with the vocabulary used in order to describe these things. I don't like to find my books condemned as bad or praised as good when that condemnation or that praise is based on criteria from other paradigms. I would much prefer that they were dismissed or embraced based on the success of their accomplishment within the culture out of which I write. (342)

This comment might be taken to mean that Morrison claims that only African-American culture is a relevant context for her work. But her continuing reflection on the issue of cultural connections, on the relationship between black and white Americans, combines a fascinating reading of Melville's *Moby Dick* with thoughts on white ideology in her Tanner Lecture of 1989, on the title of *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*, and in her analyses of Cather, Poe, Twain, and Hemingway in her *Massey Lectures at Harvard University*, published as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* in 1992.

Morrison's examination of how white ideology was established on "an American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American" (38), suggests that blacks and whites are mutually constitutive: thinking in terms of race is always thinking in terms of binary differences, so thinking about black or white in America automatically invokes the energetic reference to another racial culture. Indeed, both sides have received significant recognition. The two novels in Morrison's trilogy, *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992), show that these historical novels powerfully express a rethinking of both African-Americans and American history. The books she edited on the *Clarence*

Thomas-Anita Hill confrontation and her published treatise on the O. J. Simpson trial demonstrate that Morrison has become an increasingly important voice commenting on the socio-political and cultural changes in the United States in the 1990s. (7)

Scholars have studied Toni Morrison using a variety of contemporary theories that emerged prolifically in the late twentieth century in the U.S. Linden Peach's *Toni Morrison* (2000) uses a neo-historical framework in its discussion of Morrison's engagement with black history; Aoi Mori's *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse* (1999) employs Alice Walker's feminist theory as a framework; Gurleen Grewal's postcolonial approach in *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1998); John N. Duvall's *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (2000) takes a modernist and postmodern perspective on the concept of identity.

Another development in Morrison's criticism tends to focus on the cultural dimensions of Morrison's texts, situating them within a post-structuralist framework, in which interrelated aspects of culture—history, identity, race, etc.—are explored together. Therese E. Higgins' *Religiosity, Cosmology, and Folklore: The African Influence in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2001) takes Morrison's novels as a postmodern discourse on race and culture, delving into the roots of blackness that can be traced back to Africa, and other critics claim that Morrison joins other contemporary writers in a post-modernist exploration of the text. For example, Barbara Rigney notes how Morrison interrupts the traditional linear narrative of the novels and introduces historical events where she does best in order to reinterpret history and redefine the subject; Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin's *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels* (1994) looked at cultural determinants where factors overlapped. And then American scholar Stephen Knadler in *De-regulating the History of African American Body Politics* (2009). The scholar K. Zauditu-Selassie published *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison* in 2009, which details the traditional African cultural ideas that permeate almost all of Morrison's novels.

With the rise and rapid development of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, more interdisciplinary studies joined Morrison studies, and most of Morrison's works were involved, such as Itishri Sarangi's *Toni Morrison's Beloved and Sula: An Ecocritical Study* (2017), and Maniklal Bhanja's *Ecocritical Perspectives in Select Novels of Toni Morrison* (2018), which highlight that nature and women are both the victims of men's oppression, prejudice and the practices of inequality. The ecofeminist interventions proposed in these novels seek to achieve global peace to create a harmonious world. American scholar A. J. Wardi is passionate about research on Morrison's fiction and its relation to nature. Her two books were published: *Water and African American Memory* (2011) and *Toni Morrison and the Natural World* (2021), which comprehensively analysis of nature's elements in Morrison's work.

Since Morrison's award, her study has reached a new stage in the world of scholarship, with various approaches taken to further substantiate this. Chinese scholars Wang Shouren (王守仁) and Wu Xinyun's (吴昕芸) monograph *Gender, Race and Culture: A Study of Toni Morrison's Novels* in 2004 marks the maturation of Morrison's studies in China. It is worth noting that since the 21st century, with the development of contemporary Chinese literary theory, some Chinese scholars have tried to analyze Morrison's works by adopting new perspectives different from Western critical tradition, such as body theory, for example, Ying WeiWei's doctoral dissertation *Black Women's Body and Construction of Self in Morrison's Novels* in 2012, which highlights Morrison's black female characters' self-construction through their bodies, which serve as a crucial means for humans to perceive existence and help form their primordial connections to the secular world. Justine Tally, a Spanish Scholar, whose *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison's Stories and Truths* (1999), *The Story of Jazz: Toni Morrison's Dialogic Imagination* (2001), and *Toni Morrison Beloved: Origins* (2009) are deemed to be in-depth and inspiring scholarly works on Morrison's works, especially her trilogy, and Annie-Paule Mielle de Prinsac, a French scholar, whose *De l'un l'autre: L'identite dans les romans de Toni Morrison* (1999) analyze Morrison's individual's novels as well as

themes such as the dilemma of double consciousness by exploring the identifying psychoanalysis as the operative narrative strategy to uncover the process of remembering and forgetting.

In conclusion, as a black female writer with a strong influence in the world's literary world, Morrison's scholarship and literary criticism will continue to be studied with a broad perspective and a richer cross-cultural dimension. This dissertation tries to explore Morrison's works in light of the ecological idea of Taoism in the East.

2. Taoism and Ancient Chinese Culture

a. A Brief Introduction

There are two main theories about the origin of Taoism. One relates to what is seen as " a development of early animism and magical practices"(Cooper 1), which is grounded in "the legend of the Yellow Emperor, living some three thousand years B. C., who was reputed to have been instructed in magic, mysticism" (ibid). The other argues that although Taoist doctrines exist much earlier, classical Taoism originates from Lao Tzu, whose philosophy is later developed by Zhuangzi as a purely metaphysical teaching. However, historical records show that there are no authentic texts, but only fragments, before the classic Taoist writing of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*. Yet as the most authoritative works on Taoist thought, *Tao Te Ching*, "more translated than any other book except the Bible" (ibid), contains just five thousand words, while Zhuangzi's book now has thirty-three chapters, which are thought to be expanded from the original seven internal chapters by later additions and revisions.

In the traditional Taoist sense, the cosmology, philosophy, and religion of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi are closely linked, in which traditional ethical standards and morality are widely practiced, while meaningless rituals and magic are rejected. Taoist philosophy is the art of

living and social relationships, which addresses the whole of Nature and human beings, and also concerns the rhythm of life, the purity of mind and spirit "together with the absence of calculated activity, as expressed in the doctrine of non-action (無爲), and the presence of spontaneity, balance and harmony" (ibid). As a philosophy of detachment from all that is artificial, complex, and worthless, Taoism is about using "the light within to revert to your natural clearness of sight" and engaging with the world, but "in harmony with the light" (ibid).

The fundamental goal of Taoism is to achieve balance and harmony between the Yin and Yang, with all manifestations occurring between the two poles of everything. This balance and harmony must be achieved in oneself and in the world until the two become one, but can only be resisted if imposed on the individual from outside. One can only transform oneself until that self is in a state of equilibrium. This is why Taoism and Confucianism always lead by example.

However, both Taoism and Confucianism have the word "Tao", or "Way" as reference to the ancient sages. But in Confucianism the "Way" is ethical, while in Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi the "Tao" is metaphysical. In reality, the contributors to the classical texts have much in common with the Confucian contemporaries. All of them insist that it is indeed morally necessary for individuals to "develop or transform themselves in ways that most people do not, thereby enhancing their own well-being and the well-being of others around them" (Kirkland 33). Moreover, both Taoism and Confucianism undeniably believe that the governor of a state should rule rationally and promote rightly the ideal. But, the Confucian ideal ruling is called the Kingly way (王道) or benevolent governance (仁政). "A reverence for 'naturalness is the most distinguishing characteristic of the Daoist scheme of values and what most clearly separates it from Confucian theory, which extols hard work and striving." (Liu 211) Taoists are more concerned with "people's continuities with invisible dimensions of reality with which most Confucians concerned themselves less directly" (33).

Another contemporaneous school of thought to Taoism is Mohism (墨家), which is "the only classical Chinese value system that was ever embodied in a cohesive social organization"

(45). The school of Mohism, led by its founder Mo Tzu (墨子), takes a transcendent view of everything at that time and corrects the pathology of society by training its followers to become missionary activists who will work to recruit a public community committed to Mohist socio-cultural goals, if possible through persuasion, and if necessary, through armed action. In a sense, Mo Tzu (墨子) is an idealist who, like Lao Tzu, believes that society should be governed by the wise and virtuous. But his definition of wisdom and virtue reveals a more practical mindset and a strong dedication to achieving a vibrant society in which people strive to protect each other from harm and deprivation. Mohists understand virtue "in terms of doing good, not in terms of being good" (Kirkland 46), which implies that the goal of Mohism is to focus on stimulating the desired practical activities.

The last mentioned in connection with Taoism is Legalism (法家). Its founder, Han Feizi (韩非子), employed some familiar terms from the classical Taoist texts, including Tao and the non-action (無爲). To be specific, the Tao is used as "a general term for the method of procedure, and the non-action as an exhortation that the ruler should keep his hands off the workings of the government" (49). These terms are elevated to key ideas by the redactor of Legalism, which suggests that the Legalists hope to appeal to those in government service.

Thus, classical Taoists are distinguished from other schools by their interest in impersonal spiritual realities and in the transformative power of the people who properly nurture them, while they are more interested in the cultivation of the biological spirit, sometimes believing that such cultivation will change the world.

b. Review of Relevant Literature

The influence of Taoist philosophy is not only deeply rooted in indigenous Chinese culture, but also has a strong international dimension, through the most representative classical works, *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*. In the study of Taoism abroad, the early missionaries and

sinologists play a crucial role in the dissemination of ideas and the translation of literature. The first complete official translation of *Tao Te Ching* was from the French sinologist Stanislas Julien's *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu* (The Book of the Way and Virtue) in 1842, with the original text and annotations. The British sinologist Frederic Henry Balfour first translated into English the complete version of Zhuangzi's *The Divine Classic of Nan-hua: Being the Works of Chuang Tsze, Taoist Philosopher* in 1881. Given the spread and development of the two works in Europe, the Taoist thought has been gradually and uninterruptedly integrated with European culture and indeed with the culture of the whole world.

In modern times, Taoist thought has demonstrated a strong compatibility through its fusion with science and technology. As the historian, biochemist, and sinologist, the British Joseph Needham first delved into the contribution of Taoism to science and technology. His *History of China's Science and Technology* gave Taoism its rightful historical place in the field of science and technology after lecturing on *China's Contributions to Science and Technology* in Paris in 1946. The American sinologist Nathan Sivin was also enthusiastic about the study of Taoist alchemy practices and their contribution to science and technology. His book *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies* (1968) and the journal article "On the Word 'Taoist' as a Source of Perplexity. With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China" (1978) were pioneering studies in this field. And then in 1984, the British sinologist Piet Van der Loon published *Taoist Books in the Libraries of the Sung Period: A Critical Study and Index*, providing a roadmap for subsequent Taoist studies.

As the twentieth century progressed, the study of Taoist thought by Western scholars took on an all-encompassing and diverse trend. Sinologists and foreign scholars developed from mere introductions and fragmentary interpretations to systematic elaborations and expanded from religious interests to philosophical discussions and all aspects of Taoism, including its alchemy and science, its rituals and practices, and its relationship to Chinese culture in general. The first international conference on Taoism, held in Italy in 1968, was the culmination of this

trend.

At the dawn of the new century, the unexpected ecological and social consequences of modernization and globalization have prompted mankind to look retrospectively for the prime culprit. Many indigenous traditions, such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam, offer concepts and practices that can be incorporated into ecological ethics and policy discourses. Reflections on the ecological crisis have been accompanied by a steady stream of works about the impact of Taoism on ecological issues. James Miller's book *China's Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (2015) offers a critique of modernity through an ecocritical analysis of Taoist thought and values.

Chinese scholars in the new century have also begun to adopt China's own ecological resources dating back to the Taoist philosophy of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi to localize ecological challenges. Lu Shuyuan's (鲁枢元) painstaking work on the integration of environmental issues and Chinese ecological culture is marked by *The Specter of Tao Yuanming* (2012), in which he took the umbrella topic of the human-nature relationship, and reduced all the classics of Chinese culture, including the *I Ching* (易經), *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), *Zhuangzi* (莊子), *Analects* (論語) and *Mencius* (孟子), to a case study of the nature poet Tao Yuanming (陶淵明). This book realizes the collision and exchange of Chinese-Western theories, as representatives of different cultures such as Lyotard, Heidegger, and Derrida engage in a spiritual dialogue with Lao Tzu, Zhuangzi, and Tao Yuanming across space and time. Another scholar, Zeng Fanren (曾繁仁) based his theory of "Ecological Existential Aesthetics" on the doctrines of Taoism and Confucianism and found parallels with Taoist principles in modern ecocriticism. In addition, many other literary scholars and academics have devoted themselves to the study of the integration of Taoist philosophical thought with contemporary ecology, but truly, as Jame Millers says, "the study of Daoism and ecology had undergone rapid revision and expansion in the past ten years but is still in its infancy" (2635).

3. African Traditional Religious Culture

a. A Brief Introduction

An exploration of African religious culture requires a review of the origins of the name Africa. In Latin, *Africa* refers to "the land of the *Afri*", which indicates just only the region occupied by Romans, while other areas are considered uncharted territory. As early as 264 to 146 B.C.E., the inhabitants of North Africa lived in the city-state of Carthage where they were called *Afri*. The Romans conquered Carthage and gave the region a new name: *Africa*. Over time, *Africa*, which represented only the Roman province, extended to the whole continent today.

The term "African traditional religion", then, implies the inclusion of obsolete and extant religions in Africa, particularly indigenous African religions as experienced in all five regions of the continent, as well as the basic designation of African religious expression. Intriguingly, African religious expressions are available in both singular and plural forms. "The singular represents the oneness of the religion of Africa as far as the spirit of the religion is concerned. However African religion can also be expressed in the plural concerning the expressions of the religion of Africa by many African ethnicities." (Lugira 120)

The diversity and unity of cultures reflect both the long history of their development and the university that human religions have, just as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and others. In the case of African religion, the African continent is seen as a whole, and its religions are also united in a geopolitical context. According to M. F. Asante and A. Mazama in their co-edition work *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, Africism, as a term coined by Aloysius M. Lugira, refers to "the system of African religious beliefs, ritual practices, and thought concerning the Supreme Being, suprahuman beings, human beings, and universe" (11). The unity of African religion, as reflected in the diversity of religious expressions in Africa, is represented by the

umbrella term of Africism.

To be specific, classic African religious thought, beginning with the introduction of Christianity and later Islam, are important precursors to much of the continent's thought. The character of justice makes the same appeal to ethics; the same striving for immortality exists in living where good prevails over evil; the same open devotion to the ancestral spirit, as preserved in the community of life creates appreciation of the human cycle. Languages and conceptual equivalents, such as *Amen*, *Amani*, and *Imani*, are transgenerational and trans-geographic, and remain a vibrant part of African religious heritage.

Like most grassroots religions, African traditional religion is based on the religious experience of its founders and followers, because of the essentially oral tradition, with its emphasis on interpretation of experience rather than the collection of sacred scripture. This has led to one of the greatest obstacles to the study of African traditional religion being the lack of written records of their ancient history by Africans. All that has been obtained from the indigenous Africans are oral traditions that have been adversely affected, with the results that difficulty bringing them together into a systematic document. Usually practicing religious Africans engaged in codification or record-keeping through inheritance or apprenticeship that acquired their positions or jobs. In a sense, they have no formal education at all.

Today, however, many African religious workers with degrees, including doctorates, serve communities in Africa and abroad. Myriad treatises and academic papers have been produced on African traditional religions, such as the *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, co-edited by M. F. Asante and A. Mazama. As its outreach continues to develop, African religion is also widely practiced and finds a place outside Africa. Priests seemingly satisfy international demands for their spiritual services, and the popularity of websites such as "Outstanding Priests of Traditional African Religion" suggests that "the Americas and the United Kingdom are increasingly becoming homes of the religion" (131).

Much of the international attention may be attributed to the depth of thought in African

traditional religion and the strong human will return to tradition. Traditional African religion consists of three main components: belief in divinities, reverence of the ancestors, and the practice of religious healing, with each having its own corresponding and accompanying worship. As E. E. Evans-Pritchard, after studying the components of religion, comments, "All this amounts to saying that we have to account for religious facts in terms of the totality of the culture and society in which they are found, to try to understand them in terms of what the *Gestalt* psychologists called Kulturganze, ….They must be seen as a relation of parts to one another within a coherent system, each part making sense only in relation to the others." (18)

Firstly, Africans believe in the authenticity of the Supreme Being and other deities. The existence of a creator is also the basis of African reality. More than any other people, Africans believe in a Supreme God, because the first people to show reverence for the unknown came from the African continent. It is authentic not only in the sense of oral tradition, but also in the historical sense, as it contains the familiar names of the world's oldest gods, such as Amen, Ausar, and Bes. In ancient African cultures, nothing is more unified and consistent than believing in the Supreme God. Whether on the Nile, in the Congo, or in the valley of the Niger, Africans have embraced the idea of a Supreme Being. A legend goes that "a Supreme Being or First Ancestor arrived with the first ancestor of a group of people in a region. Sometimes these two entities are the same being, and at other times they are separate" (Asante and Mazama xxiii).

The Supreme Being is one of a kind and incomparable, which explains why there are no its images in African, neither carved nor painted. Even the entire continent of Africa strongly believes that the Supreme Being, who may be male, female, or both, creates the universe, animals, and humans, but soon withdraws from any direct involvement in human affairs. In some parts of Africa, God didn't complete creation and left the rest to other lesser deities. But "neither can one conclude that there are many creator deities. At best, one must accept that the nature of the divinity is one, but the attributes of the one are found in the numerous

manifestations of the one as the many" (xxiv). The nature of divinity is a different statement from that of there being only one God, although in most African regions the creation is only one aspect of God's responsibility.

Moreover, the idea that the Supreme Being imbues animate and inanimate objects with souls seems to be a religious necessity. According to this view, certain souls "would exist or did exist as a part of an immaterial soul and was therefore universal and eternal" (58). This is the essence of what animism teaches. The term animism was first used in 1871 by Edward Burnett Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture*, referring to African cultures. Most people who believe in animism agree that "all religions, African, Western, or Eastern, have some form of this belief in the spirit, soul, or breath force existing all things" (ibid).

Secondly, the veneration of the ancestors is of fundamental importance. Ancestors have honored and reverence because they are elders who have walked the path that the living must walk. They are the ancestors of all the living and are in a state of spiritual presence that empowers to be of help to those who are alive. In African religious culture, there is a strong belief that rituals and ancestor worship can influence the fate of the living, a belief that has reached a level of sophistication and refinement in the African mind over thousands of years.

Indeed, the ancestors are at the service of the living as much as the living are at the service of the ancestors. Ancestors help the living with conflicts, marriages, mediation between family members and health issues; in return, the living perform rituals to enshrine their ancestors. Sacrificial liberalizations are usually offered in the form of drink or food, as it is believed that the ancestors continue to live as they did when they were on earth. So, even when they're spiritual, they need to be materially nourished. Such offering may be made individually or collectively, or they may be made by the religious officials who perform them on festive occasions.

The spirits of the ancestors are deities with which Africans are most intimately connected, and also have priority in terms of social order and harmony. This is why Africans look to their

ancestors to keep them from becoming moralized. Avoiding activities that the ancestors considered immoral is one of the main ways in which descendants maintain social equilibrium. The descendants must make every effort to ensure that they do not stray from the moral path left by their ancestors. If someone disobeys, the ancestors can make them die suddenly and make them die.

The reverence that Africans have for their ancestors is universal in Africa. The social construction of African communities or regions is woven together by a reverence for ancestors that bridges many institutional relationships. Needless to say, she explains that such a reverence for ancestors "not merely a reflection of the supernatural world; it is the only world lived in by many Africans" (47). Thus, the ways of worshiping in Africa are relatively similar in Africa.

Thirdly, within the framework of the religious beliefs that define Africans, the practice of healing is an integral part. For them, "Healing is a sustained ritual process of righting the disequilibrium generated by spiritual, natural, psychological, and social factors, which are often expressed in the form of physical or mental problems" (309). In the indigenous regions of Africa, the causes of religion and disease are intricately intertwined. Beliefs about the disease have raised concerns about health, while healing practices have helped to satisfy the need to treat.

A religious view is the ancient appreciation of traditional healing systems: how people understand illness or misfortune, and what treatment and prevention mechanisms they use. Traditional African healing is in holistic aspect, including "the physical, mental, psychological, material, and emotional aspects that result in a total well-being and wholeness" (309). Hence, this healing emphasizes not only the symptoms of disease, but also the internal condition of the individual. In a sense, the focus of treatment is on the person, not just the disease.

The practice of healing in combination with the supernatural power of religion is well suited to traditional African culture. In African beliefs, illness and other misfortunes are often attributed to supernatural causes, such as the severely desecrated spirits of their ancestors. Even

illness is seen as a direct intervention of the divine or evil spirit, signifying that something needs to be changed. And the subsequent diagnostic process, treatment, or prevention is usually carried out and supervised by diviners or healers, who act as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds

However, the ancient perception of the healing arts follows a relatively fixed tradition of transmission. Diviners and healers are sometimes associated with specific deities responsible for divination and treatment. For the Yoruba, Orunmila is the God of divination and fortune-telling, who also "controls 201 roots and leaves and knows their application in curing various illnesses" (310). The method of treatment may include the use of herbal remedies with medicinal properties for the treatment of symptoms. Medicinal preparations can be taken by mouth, as an ointment, in a bath or by scratching. However, others, including people from the same community, are never told about these ancient medical techniques and knowledge.

In addition, seclusion is another healing that can purify the individual's body and spirit, which provides "a symbolic system of understanding the potential relations among the biological, cultural, and spiritual through the body, the locus where transformation occurs" (596). This solitary healing proclaims "the reality of human growth, cultural expectation, and adaptation"(ibid), and conveys what is seen in the cosmos as "a vibrant social responsibility" (ibid). The physical journey requires certain regulations, which can be physical and psychological movement from one state of being to another, making the previous state a memory. Culture as a vehicle for the daily life of Africans, especially ancient religious cultures, is an extraordinary guide to social activities and needs to better inherited and developed the in the future.

b. Review of Relevant Literature

African culture is complex, as are its systems of believing and practicing. This complexity

also leads directly to the fact that would-be African scholars often adopt vague terms such as "amorphous", "savage", or "primitive" in order to circumvent the process of representation. But one of the greatest obstacles to the actual study of traditional African religious cultures is, of course, the lack of written records of African antiquity. With the evolution of history, the transmission of cultures, and the mixing of East and West, several native scholars and other researchers have set out to narrate the system of African religious culture by collecting fragments of the same "tradition" based on the original oral tradition.

Leo Frobenius's *the Voice of Africa*, published in English in 1913, was one of the first monographs on African religious culture in the 20th century. The "great light of the Church", as he put it, and the fact that he attended certain ceremonies, gave him an insight into the life and faith of the people. Regarding the importance attached to the religious rituals, indigenous scholars W. M. Eiselen and Isaac Schapera argued in *Religious Beliefs and Practices* in 1936, that certain supernatural beings played a central role in the complex system of ritual worship of African peoples. Max Gluckman in *The Realm of the Supernatural among the South-Eastern Bantu* in 1937, also aimed to collate and evaluate representations of the ritual practices, based on a collection and assessment of existing ethnic studies of indigenous people in Africa. John S. Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* in 1970 provides a systematic study of African reflections on God in the context of traditional African religion and philosophy. His monograph discusses African names and concepts of God, as well as its relation to spiritual beings, human beings, and other objects in nature.

In discussing the connection between the divinity of religion and reality, W. D. Hammond-Tooke in *Ancestor Religion* in 1981 defined religion as a common social phenomenon involving a belief in the "immeasurably superior to men" of being or existence over humanity, addressing existential questions about life and death, thus confirming his use of the term "traditional ancestral religion" when referring to traditional African religion. And also in another of his books, *African Religions and Philosophy* in 1969, Mbiti stressed that in

traditional African life, no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular appeared to some degree, so religion is inseparable from the daily life of communities and individuals, extending even into the spiritual realm beyond physical death.

On healing and health in African religions, *Rituals and Medicines: Indigenous healing in South Africa* by Hammond-Tooke in 1989, purposes to explain in an accessible way the Africans approach health issues, which are inextricably linked to local religious beliefs and practices. Similar research was done in A. Winifred Hoernle's *Magic and Medicine* highlighted the study of indigenous medicine and "magic" practices in South Africa. She also noted that both Western science and African magic are attempts to control the natural and human environment for the benefit of the practitioners and the community.

Some scholars have written encyclopedias of African religions to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of African religious cultures, such as M. K. Asante and A. Mazama's *Encyclopedia of African Religion* in 2009. The main purpose of this book is the authors' view of African religion as unity, and of the continent as a whole. In short, the religious cultures of Africa are fraught with legends and historical mysteries, and the relevant literature as well as monographs provide the primary material necessary for further study, analysis, and elaboration of the specific beliefs of African peoples.

D. The Structure of the Dissertation

There are a total of seven chapters in this dissertation. Chapter One introduces the general background, significance, literature review and structure of this project, and also includes Morrison's experiences and her currently studied works, which forms a clear overview of her oeuvre.

Chapter Two deals with the roots, development, and core concepts of the two religious cultures: Taoism and Africism. The former, coming from Eastern culture, adheres to the Tao as

the core or creator of all things in the universe and had built up a self-contained system with a worldview based on the Tao as the essence, a view of life based on the nature of human beings, and a methodology based on inaction, forming a whole set of philosophical systems. The latter, however, originated on the African continent, the cradle of the earliest mankind. Although there were separate religious peculiarities in the various primitive places, they were all united under the general system of thought of Africism as a whole, to the Supreme Being as their Creator God. And then in the course of their constant intercourse with nature, the most primitive religious ideas emerged, such as the belief in the animism of all creatures as divine, the idea of justice and freedom in the human world, and the idea that the individual could achieve spiritual purification and elevation through seclusion.

Chapter Three, as the innovative point of this dissertation, elaborates on the application of Taoist thought to interpret the ecological ideas in Morrison's novels, combing the realities of the response to the ecological crisis, the ideological connection, the illusory nature of flying, and the root connection of traditional culture to construct a bridge between Morrison and Taoist thought.

Chapter Four begins the main body of this dissertation. In conjunction with the Taoist idea that all things have subjectivity, this chapter elaborates on the idea of ecological equality embodied in Morrison's novels by detailing the idea on three levels: the equality between humans and trees in *Beloved*, the equal relationship between sisters of different races in *A Mercy*, and the communion between humans and mystical spiritual beings in *Song of Solomon*, which is consistent with the idea of the unity of heaven and man.

Chapter Five deals with man's spiritual hope. The eternity of the Tao, which is at the heart of Taoist thought, is what has led to the birth and proliferation of human beings, and the spiritual freedom promoted by the Tao is what has led to the determination of human beings when faced with the choice between life and death. The rebirth after death and the reawakening of the spirit embodied in *Paradise*, *Sula*, *God Help the Child*, and *The Bluest Eye* are also

based on the miserable fate of the characters and the freedom and desirable hope of embracing a new life.

Chapter Six is about the self-creativity of the Tao, emphasizing the ability of all things to transform themselves and naturally form the harmonious symbiosis of the entire ecological landscape. Morrison has constructed geographical spaces that resemble earthly utopias for the suffering people, such as the all women's Convent in *Paradise*, Clearing in *Beloved*, Lotus in *Home*, *Shalimar in Song of Solomon*, and the new mansion house in *A Mercy*, where people can find a self-sufficient life, a paradise of self-enjoyment and a home for self-healing, and where individuals can find themselves to achieve integration between self and society.

The last chapter is the conclusion, which summarizes the main points made in the previous chapters by pointing out that the purpose of Morrison's ecological thinking is to emphasize the unity of man and nature, and the equality of man and man in order to achieve the vision of a harmonious and beautiful society built in harmony with nature.

II. Taoism and Ancient African Religion

A. Taoism

Before introducing Taoism, one point should be clarified here. The distinction between *tao jia* (道家, Philosophical Taoism, or the School of Taoism), and *tao jiao* (道教, Religious Taoism, or Religion of Tao) is not the primary concern of this dissertation, which are both translated into English Taoism. The latter *tao jiao* (道教) is not much involved with this research, and the reason is that when it comes to *tao jiao* (道教), many people immediately think of a social organization or power as identified by the number of its followers or adherents.

Feng Youlan, a famous Chinese philosopher, stated that "there is a distinction between Taoism as a philosophy, which is called *tao chia* (道家, the Taoist school), and the Taoist religion (tao chiao,道教)" (5-6). There are both differences and connections between the two categories. Taoism began as philosophy and then formed its religion, hence *tao jia* (道家)is chronologically before *tao jiao* (道教). This dissertation mainly focuses on the philosophical thought of Taoism.

1. Historical Development

Taoism, or Daoism, is an umbrella term that originated between the periods of the Spring and Autumn, and the Warring States periods (770 BC-221 BC), before the unified Great Qin Empire (221 BC-206 BC). Like many other philosophical schools and religions, Taoism developed in a dynamic mode, from preaching to practice, constantly absorbing other progressive ideas and modifying its own in the process.

As the founder of the Taoist school and a highly revered sage in religious Taoism, Lao Tzu

is said to have lived in the 4th century BC and bequeathed to posterity a valuable work, *Tao Te Ching*（道德经）, also named *The True Classic of the Way and Virtue* (道德真经). According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Judith Magee Boltz provided a comprehensive introduction to Lao Tzu and his experiences at the time, including as the teacher of the well-known great saint Confucius, and some sacred and divine descriptions in the history of religious Taoism.

Another Taoist philosopher is Zhuang Zhou (庄周), also known as Zhuangzi, who lived in the 4th century BC. His eponymous work *Zhuangzi* or *The True Classic of Southern Splendor* (南华真经), is a classic of Taoist philosophy, as is *Tao Te Ching*. Both give a profound insight into the nature of the universe and of man, and the relationship between man and nature; to be more precise, *Tao Te Ching* explains the Tao in a direct but metaphysical way, while the *Zhuangzi* relies on didactic narratives, poetry, parables, and anecdotes to give a metaphorical account.

Lie Yukou, or Lieh-tze, the third great Taoist philosophical master, also wrote his eponymous book *Liezi* or *The True Classic of the Ultimate Virtue of the Void*（冲虚至德真经), which is considered the most practical of the great Taoist texts, compared to the esoteric philosophy of *Tao Te Ching* and the allegorical narrative of *Zhuangzi*. Therefore, Lao Tzu, Zhuangzi, and Liezi are the most typical representatives of Taoist philosophy, and their works and embodied ideas are the mainstream thoughts of Taoism.

As mentioned above, Taoist thought remains dynamic in its evolution, and has been continuously enriched and developed along with the growth of religious Taoism throughout the whole history of ancient China. Additionally, a shift towards the pursuit of longevity and even immortality also appeared in the development process, attracting much patronage in the form of cash or peerage from many luxuriously satiated and carefree members of the ruling class, from emperors to the local landed gentry. In this way, Taoism gradually came to be regarded as a spiritual support and reliance in the minds of ancient people.

The Han Dynasty, as an important juncture in time, witnessed the division of Taoism into

different regions. The Tian Shi Tao (天师道) in western China, which was later known as the Zhengyi Tao (正一道), and the Tai Ping Tao (太平道) in northern China, are the first organizations of the religious Taoism that took place during this period. We know the *Taiping Tao* and its organizer Zhang Jiao（张角）at the end of the Han Dynasty well through one of the Chinese four classic novels, *The Three Kingdoms*, which sets the historical background for the suppression of the Yellow Scarves Rebellion, while the Tianshi Tao, as another branch of Taoism, was led by its organizer Zhang Daoling (张道陵) to pledge allegiance and finally gain the trust and recognition of the ruling class, and has continued to grow to the present day.

Hundreds of years later, many different sects of religious Taoism arose, with the emergence of some famous philosophers who paid great attention to combining Taoist theory with realistic practices, such as Ge Hong (葛洪), Yang Xi (杨羲), and Wang Chongyang (王重阳). After the Ming dynasty, the various Taoist sects gradually merged into two major ones—the Zhengyi Tao (正一道) and the Quanzhen Tao (全真道). It is worth noting that the representative figure of the Quanzhen Tao is Qiu Chuji (丘处机), one of the famous Taoists, who was once invited by the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan (忽必烈) to teach him the secret of immortality. During their conversation, Qiu introduced the emperor to the Taoist idea of respecting Heaven and loving the people, and the Tao of Heaven is in favor of giving birth and sparing life, and so on and so forth these ideas. That is why the Zhengyi Tao and the Quanzhen Tao have developed to this day. This is the panorama of Taoism. The whole history of Taoism has been covered in Stephen R. Bokenkamp's book *Taoism: An Overview in the Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones.

2. International Spread

The dissemination of Taoist thought and its representative works throughout the world has continued unabated to the present day. Its spread as a religious ideology was first attributed to

the missionaries who came to China from various countries. Thus the translation of Taoist thought and its masterpieces, mainly Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and Zhuangzi's *Zhuangzi*, came from churchmen who were initially fluent in several languages.

The Christian Jesuit Matteo Ricci was the first one to introduce Taoism to Western countries. In *De Christiana Expeditiona apud Sinas* (on China Journal in Italian), Ricci translated it and brought it to Italy. In 1667, the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher published his work *Illustrated History of China*, including the thought of Taoism, which was well known in Europe in the 17th century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the spelling name of Taoism was first used in *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Taoism Described and Compared with Christianity* by James Legg, a British missionary and the first lecturer in sinology at Oxford University. (Li 10)

The earliest version of *Tao Te Ching* was presented in Latin as a gift to the Royal Society in London in 1788, but it was not published at that time. A French translation of Taoism was later produced in 1820. The first English translation was made in 1868 by John Chalmers, a Scottish Protestant missionary, and was called *The Speculations on Metaphysics, Polity, and Morality of "the Old Philosopher" Lau-tsze*. Based on Chalmers' translation, the Scottish missionary and sinologist James Legge completed his translation of *Tao Te Ching* for Oxford's *Sacred Books of the East* series in 1891. In modern times, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki's English translation of *The Canon of Reason and Virtue: Lao-tze's Tao Teh King* in 1913; Franz Esser's German translation of *Dau do Djing: des alten Meisters Kanon vom Weltgesetz und senem Wirken* in 1941; Victor H. Mair's *TaoTe Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way* in 1990.

A number of Chinese scholars have also worked hard to translate the *Tao Te Ching*. Among them, probably the most authorized version is that by Lin Yutang in 1948, published by America's Random House. This is the English version used in this dissertation. Others include John Ching Hsiung Wu's *Tao Teh Ching* in 1961, sinologist Din Cheuk Lau's *Tao Te Ching* in

1963, Gia-Fu Feng's *Lao Tsu: Tao Te Ching* in 1972, co-translated by his wife Jane. They all have made great contributions to the translation of the *Tao Te Ching*.

Another Taoist work, *Zhuangzi*'s was translated much later, almost at the end of the 19th century. In 1881, the British scholar Frederic Henry Balfour published his edition under the title of *The Divine Classic of Nan-Hua: Being the Works of Chuang Tsze, Taoist Philosopher* in Shanghai and London, which was the first complete English translation. And the best translation into English is by Burton Watson in 1968, a sinologist scholar in the United States, who was then a teacher at Columbia University. He published *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* in the Columbia University Press. (Wang 56) The Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber published *Reden und gleichnisse des Tschuang-tse* (*Words and Parables of Tschuang-Tse*), a German translation of *Zhuangzi*, in 1910.

Chinese scholars play an important role in the translation of *Zhuangzi*. Feng Youlan's *Chuang-Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* in 1931. Lin Yutang provided a partial translation of *Zhuangzi in The Wisdom of Laotsz in 1948*. Wang Rongpei and Ren Xiuhua offered a complete translation in 1996, published by the Hunan People's Publishing House. This dissertation adopts this English version of *Zhuangzi*.

Less attention was paid to the translation of *Liezi*. Only three translations were completed: A.C. Graham's *The Book of Lieh-tzu* in 1960, Eva Wong's *Lieh-tzu: A Taoist Guide to Practical Living* in 2001, and Liang Xiaopeng's *Lieh-tzu* in 2005. Other works and articles on particular branches or sects of Taoism are too numerous to mention here.

By studying the historical development and various translation versions of Taoism, it can be concluded that the philosophical thought system of Taoism has been developed and matured through the accumulation of history in constant replenishment and renewal. At the same time, through both outward transmission and translation, Taoist thought has been preliminarily recognized and studied abroad. As the trend of globalization becomes more and more obvious, especially the integration of different cultures, people all over the world are learning from each

other's traditional cultures, including sinology. Above all, culture knows no boundaries.

Moreover, as a philosophy that everyone agrees on, Taoism is more desirable, like a bottle of old wine, and still plays a guiding role today. Lao Tzu also described it in his book *Tao Te Ching* as "He who holds fast to the Tao of old; To manage the affairs of now".[4] Those who know its meaning associate everything they see with the precious knowledge left by their predecessors, and put it into practice. This is the true meaning of philosophy, that is, the natural law of Tao in Lao Tzu's thought. Therefore, in order to better understand the philosophical thoughts of Taoism, some core concepts are briefly summarized here.

3. The Core Concepts

Specifically, the concepts of Tao (道) and Te (德), nature or naturalness (自然), non-action (無爲), and qi (氣), are provided to establish the main framework of Taoism in this dissertation to some extent.

a. Tao (道) and Te (德)

From the original name of the philosophical school *tao jia* (道家), the Tao is the central concept of Taoism, which is regarded as the entire cosmogony in its system of philosophy. Therefore, in almost all translations of *Tao Te Ching*, the zero translation strategy is adopted for the Tao, mainly based on its understanding. As was recorded by the great Chinese historian Sima Qian (司马迁), Lao Tzu lived for a long time in the Zhou dynasty and decided to leave when he saw its decline. When he reached the Pass of Han Gu (函谷关), the keeper Yin Xi (尹喜) pleaded with Lao Tzu to leave a book to future generations before hermitage, So Lao Tzu

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[4] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 102.
执古之道，以御今之有。

agreed to complete the book, which consists of two parts of about five thousand words to expound on Tao and Te, and then he disappeared.[5] As for the relationship between Tao and Te, Masami stated, "When referring to Tao as it exists in the actual world, Laozi calls it *de*" (Lin 180). Here are a few characteristics of Tao.

Firstly, the Tao, as the ontological duality of both substantiation and its elusiveness, is described at the beginning of *Tao Te Ching*,

> The Tao that can be told of is not the Absolute Tao;
> The Names that can be given are not Absolute Names.
> The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
> The Named is the Mother of All Things.[6]

It is completely beyond description, explanation, and even the name is just a symbol for Tao. It undoubtedly exists in everything, but what man perceives as the Tao is not what it is. Man can't trace its root and concrete forms even though it appears around us. From a dialectical point of view, the Tao is the unity of Being (the Named) and Nothingness (the Nameless), that is, the dialectical relationship between substantiation and elusiveness. For a concrete thing of real existence, it nurtures and nourishes all living things in the world as "the Mother of All things".

However, "The Nameless" of the Tao increases its elusiveness and defines its eternity. The eternal qualities are described in detail in *Tao Te Ching* from the time of its creation, as well as

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5 Sima Qian (司马迁). *ShiJi* (史记). Shanghai: Chinese Dictionary Publishing House, 2004: 887.

6 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 41.
道可道，非常道;名可名，非常名。无名天地之始；有名万物之母。

the form of its existence:

> Before Heaven and Earth existed
> There was something nebulous:
> Silent, isolated,
> Standing alone, changing not,
> Eternally revolving without fail.[7]

The Tao that appeared "Before Heaven and Earth", works constantly and unceasingly and "never fails" in its own man "The more it is worked, the more it brings forth."(63) As the creations and manifestations of the Tao, "Heaven and Earth", the cycle of the seasons, and all other things accompany the Tao to work without ceasing, which testifies to the eternal nature of the Tao.

Secondly, Tao's creative attribute of "the Mother of All Things" can be shaped to be the genesis status of the precedence in terms of ethics and chronology. Like the legend of Nuwa's (女娲) creation of mankind in China's prehistory, Tao also emphasizes the power of the female to give birth and to be inclusive. *Tao Te Ching* shows,

> Out of Tao, One is born;
> Out of One, Two;
> Out of Two, Three;
> Out of Three, the created universe.[8]

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[7] ibid: 145
有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，独立而不改，周行而不殆。

[8] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 214.

The “one” is derived from the Tao, which is the figurative embodiment of the Tao’s maternal attributes. The “One” cannot give birth to anything, so the Tao divides “One” into “Two”: Yin (阴) and Yang (阳). The “Three” is the harmonious cooperation between Yin and Yang that produces the myriad things in the world. (Liu 3) But rather, the creativity of the Tao points more to self-creativity or self-transformation. The created universe carries the Yin at its back and the Yang in front. Through the union of the pervading principles, it reaches harmony.

Thirdly, the subjectivity of the Tao is the ultimate ground of all things in the world, including human beings. The subjectivity of humans is rooted in the fact that he, like other living things in nature, emerges from the world of nature, understood as earth, heaven, and the Dao, as do other living things in nature.

> Man models himself after the Earth;
> The earth models itself after Heaven;
> Heaven models itself after Tao;
> Dao models itself after Nature.[9]

The above “model[ing]” sequence is considered by James Miller to be “the most famous cosmological statement” (31), and Miller’s version of the translation makes the last sentence more specific and realistic as “Dao follows its subjective nature” (ibid), highlighting the subjectivity of the Tao.

Fourthly, as the creator of all things, the Tao is an egalitarian, taking away from the haves to compensate for the have-nots. By describing the Tao as a bow, its workings are impersonal

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道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。

[9] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 145-46.
人法地;地法天;天法道;道法自然。

and impartial, benefiting all beings without any conscious kindness.

> How the universe is like a bellows!
> Empty, yet it gives a supply that never fails;
> The more it is worked, the more it brings forth.
> By many words is wit exhausted.
> Rather, therefore, hold to the core.[10]

In addition, many characteristics of the Tao as ontology, such as water, infants, and the god of Valley will be narrated in detail in the context.

Furthermore, Te (德) is the embodiment of the Tao mentioned above, and functions in Taoist ontology as a bridge between humanity and the incomprehensible or largely elusive Tao. In *the Chinese Etymology Dictionary*, Te is noted as "virtue" or "morality". In English, Te has been variously translated as moral excellence, virtue, ethical nature, spiritual power, charisma, character, and so on. (Li 45) In Lin's translation of *Tao Te Ching*, all of Te have taken the word character in form. "The marks of great Character follow alone from the Tao."[11]

b. Nature or Naturalness (自然)

As mentioned above, the Taoist statement shows that "Dao models itself after Nature", where "nature", according to James Miller, is "its subjective nature" of the Tao, that is, Tao's own subjectivity. Admittedly, here "Nature" serves as a value orientation, an ideal, rather than a

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[10] ibid: 63-4.
天地之间，其犹橐龠乎？虚而不屈，动而愈出。多言数穷，不如守中。

[11] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:132.
孔德之容，惟道是从。

material nature such as the environment in the modern sense. Chen Guying quoted Jiang Xichang in his book of notes and commentaries on *Tao Te Ching*: "When Lao Tzu mentions the idea of 'naturalness'[Nature], he is referring to a state in which not a bit of effort is applied and yet things unfold and develop of their own accord." (132) Wei Qingqi also argues in *Toward a Holistic Ecofeminism: A Chinese Perspective*, "The Chinese word nature has two apparently discrepant meanings: the original sense of spontaneously being what it is and the modern sense of nature, but this divergence can be perfectly accountable if we presume the modern distinction between nature and nurture." (775)

From the perspective of morphology and its connotation, nature in *Tao Te Ching* can also be confirmed in a very different way from nature in the modern sense. The Chinese character 自 denotes "self" and 然 means "so". This "self-so" (自然) state poses a Taoist ideal: everything, including man, Earth, Heaven, and Tao, models itself after Nature, or an intrinsic subjective nature of themselves. (145-46) Therefore, the Tao exists and runs its course in a completely Nature manner, not dependent on anything else but itself, as Lao Tzu says, "without anyone's order but is so of its own accord".[12]

However, as Raymond Williams defines nature as "the most complex word in the [English] language" (219), the word originates from the Latin word *natura*, which denotes "the essential quality and character of something" (ibid). Its characteristics are inherent, intrinsic rather than external, and it has the quality of spontaneity rather than dependence on external forces. In this sense, it corresponds to the philosophical nature of Taoism.

In addition to the philosophical sense of nature, the nature we refer to in modern times is in essence of materiality, which means "the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings." (ibid) Hence, in the "modeling" sentences of *Tao Te Ching*, "Man

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12 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 242.

夫莫之命而常自然。

models himself after the Earth; The Earth models itself after Heaven",[13] "Heaven", "Earth" and all things between them are exactly in the scope of what we call nature in modern languages, both English and Chinese. In Chinese alone, the terms such as *tian* (天), *tian di* (天地), *tian xia* (天下), *huang ye* (荒野), *shan shui* (山水), express the concept of nature in a straightforward or implicit way. From the above analysis, the nature of Taoism is perfectly compatible with the modern meaning, although it sometimes has some metaphysical connotations, especially together with the Tao.

c. Non-action (無爲)

Echoing Liu Xiaogan's commentary on nature and non-action (無爲) in Taoism, he argues that "'naturalness' is the core value of the thought of Lao Tzu, while Wuwei [non-action,無爲] is the principle or method for realizing this value in action." (212). Hence, as the methodology of the Tao or nature, non-action (無爲) is a practical guide to action, and "The Tao never does, yet through it [the non-action] everything is done".[14] From a morphological point of view, non (無) is a negative prefix, and action (為) is the core of the word, meaning to do or act. Therefore, the Chinese term 無爲 is literally translated as non-action or doing nothing.

For this reason, some modern Chinese people, as well as some foreign sinologists, often misunderstand the true meaning of the non-action (無爲). They think that non-action means doing nothing at all, effortlessly doing, or at least partially acting, and also implies a nonchalant attitude towards whatever happens around them. When a person is described as non-action, which is used here as an adjective, it means that he has not achieved anything in his work or in

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[13] ibid: 146.
人法地，地法天。

[14] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 194
道常无为而无不为。

what he has completed, so he is called a non-action person, not an ambitious or aspiring person.

Then, going back to the historical era of Lao Tzu, non-action(無爲) negates excesses, including competitive rivalries and conflicts between rival states, as well as the harsh taxes, forced labor, and oppression imposed by expansionist rulers on their people. And as a personal philosophy of internal practice, non-action (無爲) renounces competition, social ambition, and conflicts that lead people go astray from the Tao, and guides people to stay away from worldly affairs, to retreat to their hermitages for cultivation or to pursue longevity, even immortality. (Li 84)

Nevertheless, the Chinese scholar Liu Xiaogan argues that this was a one-sided interpretation of the concept of non-action at the time. In *Non-Action and the Environmental Today*, he explains that "the concept [of non-action] also positively implies a special manner and style of behavior, namely, 'action as non-action,' or 'actions that appear or are felt as almost nothing,' or simply, 'natural action'" (317). This "natural action" means those actions that are natural and Tao-consistent in themselves, and that take place naturally, spontaneously, and moderately.

Non-action (無爲) is therefore a natural way of acting, not the denial of all actions. The Western sinologist James Miller acknowledges Liu's statement and suggests that "it [the non-action] is intrinsically connected to the concept of the subjectivity of nature" (37). He also explains the basic meaning of non-action in *Tao Te Ching*,

> I do nothing
> And people transform themselves
> I practice tranquility
> And people align themselves
> I have no involvement in affairs
> And people prosper themselves

I have no desires

And people simplify themselves.[15]

Obviously, the non-action (無爲) as the methodology of the Tao allows its transformative power to work spontaneously and creatively in the multiple subjectivities of the surrounding world. This is still an ethics derived from the essential understanding of the Tao, advocating an ethical relationship between the Taoist "I" and the people (民), in which the spontaneous self-transformation of the latter is catalyzed by the former through the non-action (無爲). And the end result is to "transform themselves," "align themselves," "prosper themselves," and "simplify themselves". These natural values rooted in the Tao are derived from the subjective natural forces generated by the Tao. In the Taoist context, non-action (無爲) leads the Taoists to pay attention to the internal self-transformative capacity, rather than seeking external creative behavior to influence or be influenced by.

d. Qi (氣)

Qi (氣) is one of the most complicated and multifaceted concepts in ancient Chinese philosophy, and there is no equivalent word for it can be found in other languages. Its original meaning is closely relevant to the breath of humans and animals, and also refers to some physical and meteorological phenomena such as wind, steam, cloud, and mist, because they share a cognitive similarity with the breath of humans and animals. Therefore, according to these two forms of existence of qi (氣), James Miller also divides the flow of qi into two categories as well, "The first is the physical landscape as a system through which qi (氣) flows, and the second is the human body." (44)

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[15] Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 265-66
我无为，而民自化；我好静，而民自正；我无事，而民自富； 我无欲，而民自朴。

The most notable manifestation of the traditional Chinese cultural landscape regarding the flow of qi (氣) is *feng shui* (風水), literally wind and water. For example, the simplest principle of *feng shui* is to build a house near a mountain and a body of water. In addition, *feng shui* is used to place tombs and other objects in the landscape to take advantage of the natural flow of air in the earth. Zhuangzi compares the wind to the breath of the universe, "the universe blows out a vital breath called the wind… there are crags and cliffs in the mountains; there are hollows and caves in the huge trees. They are like the nostrils, mouths, and ears, like gouges, cups, and mortars, and like pools and puddles".[16]

Moreover, the flow of qi (氣) in traditional Chinese culture is often compared to the flow of water, as water can be "interpreted verbally as flowing and water or liquid vitality is that which 'streams'." (Miller 47) Although some seemingly hard substances maintain a fixed structure, they are essentially "liquefied" within. This liquid vitality can be understood in *The Way of Water and the Sprouts of Virtue*, "The Dao is empty [empties], yet using it does not need to be refilled. A deep spring (淵)—it seems like the ancestor of the myriad living things." (72)

Here the Tao is perceived as a kind of watery abyss or deep spring form from which the liquid vitality of life gushes out. This liquid life is "like the ancestor of the myriad things, that is, the source of the various genealogies from which the living beings arise. (Miller 47) These "myriad things", including plants, trees, rocks, animals, human beings and so on, are understood to occur within the confines of biological space and time, consisting of the liquid vitality that flows from one generation to the next. Just like the maternal nature of the Tao mentioned above, the birth-giving sequence of "Tao, One, Two, Three, and the myriad things" is traditionally analyzed so that "one" stands for primordial qi (元氣), which is also called the

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16 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:16-17.

夫大块噫气，其名为风。山陵之畏佳，大木百围之窍穴，似鼻，似口，似耳，似枅，似圈，似臼，似洼者；激者，謞者，叱者。

flowing liquid vitality.

In addition, the flowing liquid vitality or the flowing of qi (氣) is a vital element in the life and death of human beings. Zhuangzi's thought on the nature of qi as the "vital spirit" is further explained in the book of *Zhuangzi*, "the birth of a man is the convergence of the vital energy, which in turn forms lives. The breaking-up of the vital energy causes death".[17] Zhuangzi's philosophy of qi-based life, also derived from the Tao, is that the human being is temporary, while the qi is eternal. When a person vanishes, the qi still exists in the universe. And then the qi can converge again to form new life, further illustrating the Taoist philosophy of life's periodic recurrence.

Apparently, the objectivity of qi (氣) is explicitly interpreted in Zhuangzi's thought as something that cannot be controlled by man himself, nor can it change with human will. To have it or not to have it will determine the life or death of human beings on the globe. But it is worth noting that in the course of Zhuangzi's argument, the changes in human life and death are defined in a natural way, similar to the change of seasons. This also confirms the Taoist principle that man, earth, and heaven should ultimately follow nature, the way of the Tao.

As for the transformation of the qi, James Miller also believes that qi flows or moves through everything, including the landscape, human bodies, and all forms of life, and that qi breaks down the boundary between the different categories of all living things in the modern imagination, because qi itself exists and flows through all levels of the world.

Meanwhile, the Taoist concept of qi also serves as a certain medium of spirituality connecting humans, and non-human entities in the universe. It can be called trans-spirituality, because in the same sense, in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Alaimo proposed the term trans-corporeality to transcend the boundary between bodies and the physical world: "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is

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[17] Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:429.
人之生，气之聚也；聚则为生，散则为死。

always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'." (2) Based on Alaimo's trans-corporeality, Xu Jingcheng proposed the term trans-spirituality in *Early Daoism, Ecocriticism, and the Anthropocene: The Case of Edward Thomas*, "By trans-spirituality, I mean to suggest the psychological and mental reciprocity between humans and non-humans: the spiritual experience which, more or less unavoidably, depends on somatic experience in relation to a wider socio-cultural, material, and political environments" (259).

Another function of Taoist thought linked to the qi, and yin, yang is to maintain health or the practice of *yang sheng* (养生), which is "cultivation of health to achieve long life through breathing techniques, dietetics, gymnastics"(Goossaert 1617). Zhuangzi and other Daoist philosophers and practitioners follow their own principles of Tao in the manner of nature to practice the equilibrium of yin and yang. For example, the Taoist sage named Natural Energy (鸿蒙) was asked by General Cloud (云将) about how to "harmonize the essence of the six vital breaths",[18] he said:

> Cultivate your mind, that's all. Follow the natural course of events and do nothing, and all things will transform by themselves. You only have to ignore your physical form, get rid of your wisdom, and forget yourself together with everything in the world. You only have to mingle yourself with the essence of nature, free yourself of worries and cares, and become as soulless as dead ashes. In this case, everything in the world will return to its root source without knowing it.[19]

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[18] Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:165.
合六气之精以育群生。

[19] ibid:167.
意！心养！汝徒处无为，而物自化。堕尔形体，吐尔聪明，伦与物忘，大同乎涬溟。解心释神，莫然无魂，万物云云，各复其根。

James Miller also analyzes the view that human health requires the achievement of balance in the dynamic process of yin-yang transformation, and highlights the integration of yin-yang and the five phases in traditional Chinese medicine, which is written in the *Simple Questions on the Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*. In his analysis of the *Comprehensive Treatise on the Regulation of the Spirit in Accord with the Four Seasons*, Miller argues that human health must be in harmony with the broader macrocosmic dynamics in which it is located. (59) The best way to solve health problems is through prevention. Thus, the regulation of the body is summarized by the sage in the Taoist works, that is, the constant coordination inside and outside the body.

The last point about qi is a specific form of practice or activity that is still popular with ordinary people today: qi gong (氣功). By controlling the flow of qi in the body, practitioners can achieve the purpose of exercising the physical body, while at the same time concentrating on the mind and becoming aware of the existence of their own being, the Tao and the cosmos. According to Tucker in *Ecology and Religion: An Overview*, he argues that "In Taoism the body is an energetic network of breathing-in and breathing-out that expresses a basic dialogical pattern of the cosmos. Through this process, individuals open themselves to the inner meditative landscape that represents a path of organic unity with the cosmos." (2605)

Overall, as made clear at the beginning, the purpose of this dissertation is not to prove Taoist philosophies and concepts from a modern scientific point of view, but to see how the Taoist value system and ideas can help us to live harmoniously with nature and build a common future for all people and a community of life for non-human nature in general. Of course, these concepts of Taoism presented above are not a complete set of Taoist ideas, but basically build up its framework by highlighting some core concepts.

B. Ancient African Religion

1. Africism

The term "Africism" was coined by Aloysius M. Lugira to refer to African religious beliefs, rituals, and thoughts about the Supreme Being, Suprahuman beings, man, and the cosmic. Africism is an indigenous religion and philosophy of Africa with its own peculiarities that has developed independently from other cultures since time immemorial.

Perhaps it is more historical to explain Africa in terms of etymology. Africa is the name given to the continent by the original inhabitants of North Africa, who were called *Afer* and *Afri* in the singular and plural respectively. In 146 BC, the African homeland was colonized by the Romans, and the name was changed to Africa, meaning "land of the Africans". In fact, the root word *Afri*, with the suffix *–ca* to be added at the end, determines the meaning of *terra Africa*, which means "land of the *Afri*". Initially, *Africa* referred to what is now the former Roman province of North Africa. Over time, from unofficial designation to official recognition, and in accordance with the linguistic rhetorical pattern of using a part in place of the whole in metonymy, *Africa* came to mean the whole continent. Similarly, the root *Afric* can be followed by the suffix *ism*. Linguistically speaking, it makes sense to use the suffix *ism* when referring to "a system, of a theory, or of practice that can be religious, ecclesiastical, and philosophical, depending on the situation at hand" (Asante 12). Thus, "Africism" is an umbrella term that essentially represents the African continent and its religion as a whole. (xxi)

Yet, Africa, the world's second largest continent, remains the least known for its intellectual and cultural contribution if the written record and its people are taken as the source of knowledge about it. Even so, some of the inadequacies about Africa are based on the subjective perceptions and attitudes of the missionaries, traders, and seafarers who conquered the continent through religion, trade, or arms. As the cradle of human history, and also the origin of early human religion, which points to "the fact that Western or Islamic categories, which come much later than African religion" (xxii), Africa's great contribution to religious,

spiritual, and ethical thought has not received the attention of religious people worldwide.

As a monotheistic religion, Africism has withstood the most brutal atrocities of mankind and the devastation of its people with great resilience, which has also firmly established the people's unity of life and faith of people throughout the African continent. For example, the earliest awareness of human origins on this continent and of the reverence for nature and the mysteries of life and death were experienced in Africa, where the world is also a place of energy, vitality, and life, and the calming of chaos through the regulation of the spiritual world is the main task of man to remain in harmony with nature. In Africa, the existence of spirits is not a controversial issue in most societies. The presence of the spirit is used to maintain balance and harmony and also represents a constant quest for equilibrium.

The distinctive features of Africism include notions of the Supreme Being, Suprahuman beings, man, and the cosmic, which are the most fundamental concepts in the African people's perception of the world, and the world's understanding of Africa.

Firstly, the Supreme Being in Africa is God. He has a paramount status that is recognized in all African primary sources and has been handed down in African folklore since time immemorial. Before the advent of writing on the continent and the world, most Africans relied primarily on oral methods and visual materials to transmit and disseminate knowledge about their religion and system of thought. All this ultimately contributed to the enlightenment of wisdom and the birth of saints in Africa.

In the authentic historical context of Africism, a saint is a person admired within the tribe who has grown up to be perceived as an educated and exceptionally wise person. Such a person carries with him or her the two main components of the aspirational halo: religion and wisdom, both of which have been orally transmitted and preserved through the continent's myths, legends, proverbs, stories, songs, ritual performances, and other art forms. In the midst of these primitive artistic treasures, the Africans gradually perceived the existence of a spiritual order and the formation of hierarchies of thought. They have identified the source and origin of this

order as the Supreme Being above whom there is no other being. In Africism, the Supreme Being is the central apex of the pyramid of the African concept of God.

However, this God has many names, depending on the culture of each region of Africa. Nevertheless, Africans express their devotion to the Supreme Being by any name but do not make any substantial changes to the more ancient and unchanging beliefs in their hearts. Here, the concept of the Supreme Being has, on the one hand, an essential unity and, on the other, a diversity of manifestations of names. Because of the ideological unity of the people, the Supreme Being is firmly monotheistic in the African system of religion and thought. Because of the recognition that there is only one God, Africism is the first monotheistic religion in the world.

Secondly, Suprahuman beings are also held in high esteem in the hearts of Africans as a living presence in the spiritual world. Some of them were secondary gods, i.e. gods of a lower rank than the Supreme Being, who were considered to have assumed the spiritual role of guardians and mediators between the Supreme Being and humanity, while others were called as ancestors, whose spirits gave a sense of Suprahuman beings and also protected the living members of the family. Africism has, therefore, always expressed, through various religious rituals, the respect and love that ancient Africans had for their ancestors and other gods, something that is deeply ingrained in their genes.

Actually, the ancestors serve the living members of their family, just as the living worship them. The ancestors come to the aid of the living in the meditation of tribal conflicts, marital situations, and other mundane matters between family members in which the Supreme Being is not usually involved. In return, the living will perform rituals to provide the ancestors with wine or food as if they were still living together as important members of the family.

Even some matters concerning the harmony of the social order have to be resolved through the ancestor, which means that in African families and societies, the priority and spiritual guidance of the ancestors are justified being in existence. The ancestral spirits are the

closest gods and must be consulted on important occasions. For this reason, Africans regard their ancestors as the guardians of morality.

Gods, as ancestors and other spiritual beings, are specifically and respectfully placed in a pantheon of gods in the ancient African tradition. A pantheon is where the gods of a particular people are grouped together and considered to be the gods of that particular people. It was on the African continent that man first built the first temples, just like these pantheons in Africa, and by far the largest religious site in the world is the Karnak Temple in Egypt.

On this basis, some people consider Africism to be polytheistic because of the fact of the existence of the worship of secondary gods and ancestral spirits. It should be noted, however, that Africism recognizes the Supreme Being as the only God, above all gods and spirits, without dissent or blasphemy. Africism clearly expresses monotheism but can accept the existence of secondary gods and other spirits without deviating from the idea of monotheism, the Supreme Being.

Thirdly, a few words can be used to describe the African people: industriousness, piety, and friendliness. A quotation from the *Encyclopedia of African Religion* describes the African view “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Asante 13). It is a proverbial phrase that emphasizes the communitarian tendencies of Africans who, in the context of Africism, are bound together by common religious beliefs. Their innate identification with the Supreme Being, the Suprahuman, and the ritual activities surrounding him is a clear manifestation of their religious devotion. Their specific forms of devotional religion are embodied in rites of passage and other public ceremonies, and the former are practices, customs, and rituals that people perform in order to successfully pass through all the stages of their lives, which specifically include from birth, initiation, marriage, aging, to death and even reincarnation.

The last is about the universe created by the Supreme Being, in which countless things live in symbiosis. When the earliest Africans looked around at all the things growing on the

continent, they eventually invoked the originator of all things *Kawamigero* which in the ancient African language means 'the Greatest dispenser'. From a religious and philosophical point of view, Africism considers the universe to be the most sacred of all African beliefs, including space, time, and the basis of all elements within it.

2. Challenges and Influence

Since independence as a united continent, many Africans have a new appreciation of the value of their religion and are no longer feel insecure about their religious heritage. This insecurity was instilled by foreign religions and colonial rule, which regarded African religion as inferior.

However, as colonization and the capital entered the African continent, other religious cultures encountered African religion. The first foreign religion to arrive in sub-equatorial Africa was Islam. Muslims first landed in Africa in the 8th century. Africans were regarded as infidels by the newly arrived Muslims. The 15th century was the beginning of the spread of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa. Long established in countries such as Egypt and Ethiopia, the European voyages of discovery that began with the Portuguese brought Catholicism to Africa, and then Protestantism from the 17th century. Anything with elements of African belief was seen by many missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, as the devil. According to John Baur in 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, he argues that "This was due to two misconceptions: on the one hand, there was the unfortunate but quite common European prejudice that Africans were a primitive people without religion; on the other hand it had become generally accepted in Europe that all magic and all spirits were devilish" (57).

In response to the challenges and questioning of African religions, African leaders have turned their attention to education. The study of African traditional religion was first introduced at leading universities in southern parts of Africa, such as the University of Ghana, the

University of Ibadan, and the University of Sierra Leone. These institutions of teaching and research are based on the later systematization of African traditional religions.

Moreover, this growing interest in African traditional religions is not confined to Africa, but has had a global impact. The term "African Traditional Religion" is being introduced into the curricula of higher education institutions around the world, and professors in Europe and the United States are doing research in the field, even though they may never have been to Africa or have had little contact with the actual situation anywhere in Africa. On the other hand, dissertations on these topics are being written and accepted almost everywhere in the world.

John Mbiti's 1990 book *African Religions and Philosophy* attracted extraordinary attention and widespread interest, bringing African religions into the modern discourse on how people experience the sacred. Born in Kenya, he studied in Uganda and the United States, culminating in a doctorate at Cambridge University. As a professor, he taught religion in Africa and Europe and was director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches. However, one criticism of the book *African Religions and Philosophy* is that Mbiti "further complicates the discourse on African religion by insisting on a plurality of religions in Africa" (xxii), rather than on the unity of African religion which is unquestioned by most scholars. M. K. Asante and A. Mazama co-edited the *Encyclopedia of African Religion* in 2009, which takes as its starting point the unity of African religion, although in the context of unity, there is diversity in the expression of different branches of religion, just as in the universality of religion seen in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or other human religions where external unity and internal distinctions coexist.

This interest is not purely academic. While the academic interest has shifted from an anthropological or sociological attitude to antiquities collecting, and is currently shifting into a serious and respectful direction, there is also a deeper interest among those who are convinced that religion has a satisfying spiritual value.

However, traditional religions have to face the reality that they are "losing ground to other

faiths or simply to secularism and Westernization" (131). In 1993, Simon and Schuster's *State of Religion Atlas* listed eight African countries where traditional faiths were the dominant religion. By 2007, that number had dropped to five. But, despite some decline, African religion is still widely practiced and has found a place outside Africa. Priests of ancient African religions appear to be in demand internationally for their spiritual services. One of the most popular websites on African religion, called "Outstanding Priests of Traditional African Religion", proclaims that the America and Britain are increasingly becoming the sought-after spiritual home of African religion.

3. The Main Ideas

a. Animism

In 1871, the British anthropologist Edward Burnett Taylor, in his book *Primitive Cultures*, used the term *animism* for the first time to refer to African cultures, defining it specifically as "a general belief in spiritual beings" (58), and going on to say that "all African religions have as a minimum the idea of material and immaterial things having breath or a soul" (ibid). This notion is one of the oldest forms of religious belief in the world, dating back to the prehistoric times on the African continent.

Broadly speaking, the essence of this concept is that the spirit exists in every object, whether animate or inanimate, which is the premise of Africism. In this structure of consciousness, a particular spirit will exist in every specifically objective substance, so that the universality and eternity of all things becomes an inherent quality.

Animism's belief that the spirit, soul, or the power of the breath is present in all things has had a profound influence on all religions, whether African or European, Western or Eastern. For there seems to be a certain commonality in human religious beliefs, which means that the

idea of the spiritual or invisible world is the cause of the widespread perception in religion that human beings are activated by this mysterious life force. However, some believe that this mysterious life force that exists on Earth is a vapor or a shadow that can move from one body to another, or within a human being, in a kind of cross-combination, internally and externally.

According to the theory of animism, as interpreted by Tayor, it was the African people who gradually developed the concept of spiritual power in their minds, and with it, the role of religious thought in everyday human practice became more prominent and obvious. And further, this view was confirmed by philosophers after Tayor, who identified the initial intellectual responses of Africans in different states of consciousness. Humanity then attributed this series of changes in thought to the spiritual pacification of primitive religion.

In short, animism as a function of African religions has influenced the world to such an extent that the idea of the integration of the spiritual and material worlds, and the interdependence of the sacred and the secular, or the animate and the inanimate, all based on the idea that all things possess spirit or breath, is implicitly or explicitly expressed in the teachings of several religions throughout the world, and at the same time it becomes a prerequisite for the idea of the equality of all things.

b. Justice and Freedom

The concepts of justice and freedom are the those that are inseparably linked as important features of the Supreme Being’s creation of all things in the initial stage. In the conceptual system of Africism, justice could not be maintained without freedom, which in turn could not stand in an unjust system of human organization. Justice refers to the contribution of the individual to society as important as the contribution of society to the development of the essential and spiritual being of the individual. This principle applies to the whole of nature and is thus projected onto the individual and the social collective.

Justice itself is derived from the original intention of the Supreme God, which is to maintain within society the basis of equality in the traditional consciousness inherited from time immemorial, and which in turn leads to a prescriptive social and moral code through consensual religious thought, so that the idea of injustice is completely rejected by the African people at the deepest level of their minds. In the face of these differences, the same thing is shown to be justly manifested, according to the Deity of Creator, i.e. the Thing-as-all and the Thing-within-all.

It should be noted, however, that while differences between individuals are unavoidable, they cannot be used to violate the principle of equality, since such discrepancies are essentially a universal asset of human solidarity. Any violation leads to injustice, which seems contrary to the original intention of the Supreme Being. But justice is embodied in the infinity and justice of creativity, and with the perspective of the universality of God, all are under the rule of the Creator. Therefore, social justice is constituted under the universal principles of God and religion.

It also needs to be made clear that justice is not simply about giving everyone what they deserve or righting wrongs. Its true fulfillment is accomplished through the free cooperation of the individuals and the collective. Social justice is thus the stable and unifying moral bond of the social organism formed by African religions, involving the union of diverse individuals together, while freedom ensures that man is an indispensable and independent factor in the construction process. The combination of the individual and social factors leads to the operation of an individual-community binary dynamic in which justice is only the mediator of the relationship, and freedom is an essential link in the realization of the process.

c. Seclusion

Seclusion in Africism refers to the ritual celebration of the transition from one stage to

another by separating oneself from a larger group. In general, three aspects of seclusion are interpreted: firstly, seclusion is synonymous with the concept of the grown-up ceremony in African religion, one of the three main stages of one's life, namely, separation, transition, and incorporation, and it is also associated with the human life cycle. Secondly, the seclusion marks the beginning of initiation into religion, becoming a clergyman, or attaining a traditional political position closely linked to religion. Thirdly, seclusion also emerges as a mediated way of gaining access to power and responsibility defined by a group and it can redefine or change the objectivity and subjectivity of an individual or group of people. Generally speaking, seclusion is important in terms of its social, spiritual, and political structure.

Indeed, seclusion is a process that not only defines the initiates as sacred, but also identifies particular spaces or places, times or periods, and sacred rituals, and provides a way for the people to participate in the culture of the group and the new status he or she will bear. It is in the particular space or time that cultural values are reinterpreted and the germination of new ideas is infused and inculcated. The surroundings of seclusion evoke self-doubt and self-reflection in the initiators. In some situations involving a group of participants, seclusion can create a sense of spirituality, a sense of the warmth, solidarity, and unity of the group, although it is sometimes suffused with a deeper awe and momentary intimacy.

For individual, seclusion provides a transcendental system for understanding the potential relationships between biology, culture, and spirit through one's body, which is the site where transformation takes place. The body as an entity, is the vehicle that carries the individual on a cosmic journey where his or her presence in the community is fully and authentically realized. Through this process of emptiness, transformation takes place in the reality of human growth, cultural expectations, and social adaptation, and is transmitted to the universe, a connection that is seen as a representation of spiritual awakening and physical vitality.

Yet, the journey of seclusion requires the possession of certain rules, which may be a physical or mental training of the mind, and most of the time is a reflection of the movement

from one state of being to another, making the previous state a spiritual disdain. Thus, in the rituals of seclusion that deal with the life cycle and the rituals of new initiation as well as traditional political status, the mysterious nature of seclusion allows the body to exist in a new form of being, and in the process of moving towards a new life, spiritual transcendence and the flow of power are transmitted as the person's consciousness changes, but of course, this course or change is only manifested in certain individuals or groups.

In short, as one of the oldest religions, Africism is a large, complex, and comprehensive system of thought that has had a profound influence on other religions that have followed. The above is only a list of three ideological concepts that may be relevant to this dissertation, not others, such as totems, nature, ancient symbols, etc.

III. The Encounter between Toni Morrison and Taoism

Although there is no documented literature on Morrison's exposure to Taoist philosophy, the only intersection is a trip she made to Beijing with other American literary figures in 1983. On this trip, she spoke of her peace-loving mission as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and the need to pass on the culture and language of her people as a legacy from generation to generation as a legacy. One thing to remember about Morrison is that she always liked to wear the hand-made straw hat she bought during this period.[20] For her, a high regard for craftsmanship is a sign of her love of culture. Yet culture, as an indispensable element of life, is "the medium through which humans exercise their humanity and express and affirm their view of reality" (Zauditu-Selassie 1)

For the African diaspora, culture goes beyond surviving to defining itself and sustaining a communal ethos. As a space of cosmic connection, identity, significance, and values are created and reshaped to adapt and connect. So it is most likely that the connection between Morrison and Taoism is in the air.

A. The Treatment of Ecological Crisis

In *How Daoist Philosophy Responds to the Ecological Crisis*, Li Jialuan places Taoist thought in the period of "the minor Anthropocene", as opposed to "the severe Anthropocene" of today, and "'the minor Anthropocene' can rightly signify the precursory period before 'the severe Anthropocene' when humans have started exerting influence on the Earth geology and ecology" (3).

The term Anthropocene was coined by Paul J. Crutzen as a Nobel Laureate and Eugene

20 From Li Hong's "Remembering Toni Morrison's Trip to China" in *Society & Culture*. Aug 24, 2019.

Stoermer in 2000, and they "proposed in IGBP's Global Change newsletter 41 that humanity had driven the world into a new geological epoch, 'the Anthropocene.'"[21] Two years later, Crutzen published his famous article "Geology of Mankind" in *Nature*, which gained widespread attention in the scientific community of Earth geology, tracing the history of research on the growing impact of humans on the environment and formally invoking the term "Anthropocene". This classification of the "Anthropocene" is determined by the degree of human impact on the Earth's ecosystem, and its official announcement is made by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS). And the final result is that "the severe Anthropocene" starts with the Trinity nuclear test in 1945, while "the minor Anthropocene" or pre-Anthropocene, begins with the human agricultural revolution about 10,000 years ago. (Li viii)

Hence, from this point of view, the historical context of early Taoism is that humans have already exerted the same impact on the biosphere as they do today, only less in comparison. The essential similarity also makes the Taoist thought potentially applicable to modern reality.

Taoism, a native Chinese religion, arose during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (770BC-221BC), a time of human tragedy and ecological disaster, including wars, starvation, class bifurcation, and social unrest, which still exists in modern society as well. From its inception, Taoism plays a "less-harmonious" role among the many schools of thought in ancient China. It differs from the ideals of Confucianism and its sage rulers: the Way of Kings (王道), or benevolent governance (仁政), and from the stringent laws of Legalist ruling to establish a totalitarian kingdom and a very effective war machine to win the wars of that time. Rather, Taoism espouses a method of governance that conforms to the idea of naturalness and preaches to people to forget the bounding of politics, which matches the idea of the non-action (無爲), guiding the best ruling is to do anything naturally to the point of being close

[21] IGBP. "Have we entered the 'Anthropocene'" 25 Feb. 2019

to doing nothing. “A reverence for ‘naturalness’ is the most distinguishing characteristic of the Taoist scheme of values and what most clearly separates it from Confucian theory, which extols hard work and striving.” (Liu 211).

Lao Tzu’s message of naturalness for the rulers is detailedly echoed in *Tao Te Ching*. In Chapter 23, “Nature says few words”[22] should be understood that it conforms to the principle of naturalness for the rulers to rule by saying few words, which also explains the Taoist core idea “teaching the doctrine without words” (47) on naturalness. The principle of naturalness is what the rulers use to win the trust and faith of his people, and meanwhile proposes the natural way of life. Lao Tzu advocates a low-desire lifestyle, meeting only the basic needs, “for the belly and not for the eye.”[23] People then can live a simple life that conforms to the Tao in an innocent, natural manner. As Zhuangzi argues, “All ignorant, they did not lose their virtues; all desireless, they were in a state of natural simplicity as uncarved timber, which kept intact their inborn nature”.[24] Hence, humans return to their inborn nature, which means that they will reach a harmonious consensus with nature.

The reclaiming of the innate nature of black Americans is an idea strongly expressed by the writer Morrison. Her work is a true account of the history of black people’s struggle to find themselves, covering almost every period of the American South and North. From the perspective of black Americans, Morrison flattens the narrative into historical periods, while also examining crucial moments in American history. *Love* and *Tar Baby* focus on life in the

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22 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:140.

希言自然。

23 ibid: 90.

为腹不为目。

24 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:137.

同乎无知，其德不离；同乎无欲，是谓素朴；素朴而民性得矣。

late 20th century, while also presenting ideas about discovering and colonizing the New World; *A Mercy* offers a fresh look at New England at the end of 17th century; *Beloved* is seen as definition of the literature of slavery; *Jazz* deals with reconstruction, black immigration and urbanization; *Paradise* is as much about the phenomenon of all- black towns in the early 20th-century as it is about the American establishment itself; *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* epitomize small-town life set in the Depression years (the 1930s and 1940s), while the plots of *Home* and *Song of Solomon* are rooted in the intense struggles for racial and gender equality in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. *God Help the Child* is Morrison's final novel, focusing on the social phenomena of race and child abuse in the early 21st century.

Indeed, by weaving history into these novels as a narrative thread into these novels, Morrison is ultimately committed to exposing the limitations of institutions and capital on black people. Thus, saving the natural environment, eliminating white patriarchy, and easing the tensions of hostility between white and black individuals infuse these books with vital energy, Morrison writes about "individuals who are always embedded in the public" (12). Morrison illustrates the cruelty and injustice of institutions and social hierarchies by portraying black people whose histories have been suppressed, erased, or forgotten by the dominant culture. Under the white standards of beauty, the characters in Morrison's novels come to view the reality of their physical bodies with disgust or even hatred, and to believe in the fantasy that the white world is the answer to all their problems. Lacking white beauty plunges the character into a psychological abyss, rendering the character incapable of functioning as an emotionally healthy person. For an individual, the loss of identity means a disconnection from history, culture, voice and language, and that the consequence is a loss of subjectivity. These standards also have a devastating effect on the African American community as a whole, for light-skinned African Americans discriminate against dark-skinned people, and the parents discriminate against their dark-skinned children. Consequently, African American children, in Morrison's novels, learn about white culture, the black community, and their own self-worth through the

legacy of racial discrimination. Forty-five years after Morrison's first novel, the last one published offers a curious reflection on the similarity of where she began in the first: the protagonists are both young girls on the brink of discrimination in a society where white is the dominant aesthetic, and where they have suffered the same social scorn. The injustices of slavery and its aftermath haven't been dealt with and the racial oppression remains a contemporary reality, the cycle of abuse and violation repeating itself.

Great minds think alike, as in the encounter between Morrison and Taoism, based on the objective realities of the history they face. Finding a solution to the harsh reality of equality and harmony will be the ecological link that binds the two together.

B. The Pursuit of Individual Freedom

As an important exponent of Taoist philosophy, Zhuangzi is a wonderfully imaginative sage who has perceived the true essence of dealing with the earthly world, and he presents his own perception throughout the book of *Zhuangzi* in the form of fabulous fables, such as his commentary, "ninety percent of my talk which is fable-like relies on other people to expound my thoughts" (565). One of his core ideas is wandering. What he means by wandering is first and foremost that of the individual, but also that of humanity and of all living creatures. Zhuangzi aspires to a free life and hopes to achieve absolute wandering. "Suppose someone rides on the true course of heaven and earth and harnesses the changes of the six vital elements of *yin*, *yang*, wind, rain, darkness, and brightness to travel in the infinite." (9)

Zhuangzi's idea of wandering is closely linked to absolute freedom, which is a symbol of liberation from bondage and the achievement of emancipation. By saying that "set [ting] your mind at flight by going along with things as they are. Cultivat [ing] your mind by resigning yourself to the inevitable" (71), Zhuangzi takes "setting the mind at flight" as the wandering of his mind, a form of spiritual freedom: "I'm about to keep company with the creator of things.

When I get tired, I will ride on the bird of ease and emptiness, flying out of the universe, to wander in the land of nothingness and stay in the boundless wild field." (137) In his experience of "setting his mind at flight", Zhuangzi can not only enter the visionary "land of nothingness" but also enjoy the supreme pleasure of mingling with nature. His thoughts are inevitably tinged with mysticism, which makes Herbert A. Giles, one of the foreign translators of *Zhuangzi*, dub Zhuangzi a mystic.

Zhuangzi is both a saint and a mystic. His words are therefore in a way connotative and prescient. In the book, he is no stranger to the weirdness of contemporary human society, "all sorts of strange things and fantastic phenomena"[25] and he foretells the appearance of all living beings today. Just as time is a bird forever on the wing, "The life of a man between heaven and earth is as brief as the passage of a horse through a crevice in the wall."[26] Two thousand years in the history of the river is, relatively speaking, a moment, and "a height of 90,000 li at the windy time of June"[27] is just like "the air, the dust, and the microbes float in the sky at the breath of the wind"[28] along with the spreading wings of Kunpeng (鲲鹏). Thus, Zhuangzi, more than two thousand years old, can be encountered by contemporary scholars and readers, with his flying Kunpeng (鲲鹏) and infinitely accessible imagination.

Bird imagery is used to unravel Zhuangzi's flight from Kunpeng and the flight to freedom in Western literature. In ancient Greek mythology, Daedalus and his son Icarus were destined to escape from their imprisonment on Crete by flying across the sea on wings made of wax and

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25 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:27
恢诡谲怪

26 ibid: 441.
人生天地之间，若白驹之过隙，忽然而已。

27 ibid: 3.
…九万里，去以六月息者。

28 ibid: 3.
野马也，尘埃也，生物之以息相吹也。

feathers to freedom. For Morrison, she inherits and refines an understanding of flight, completing her own "groping for avian imagery and the search for redemptive flight first articulated in slave songs and narratives and then imagined more existentially in texts" (Bloom 54).

The old folk legend of black Americans has long been passed down among the blacks of Shalimar, a small town in the South where some blacks could fly, including Solomon, Milkman's great-grandfather. Clearly, Morrison's intention is to express the alienated dream of black oppression in white society by continuing the allegory of flying for freedom in world literature. It is the yearning for freedom and the independent personality of the black man who could not escape the cruel reality, but who endeavored to protect his identity. For example, Morrison opens *Song of Solomon* with a scene in which Robert Smith, a black insurance company clerk, appears to be committing suicide but is actually pursuing his ancestral dream of volitation.

The author adopts the same mode of flight as Daedalus, with the broad blue wings curved forward around Smith's chest, while a note pinned to the door of Smith's little yellow house is used to propagate his specific message with a hint of Zhuangzi's broad-mindedness. Through Smith's vilification, Morrison attempts to set up an ideological prop: the only way out for black people is to retain their own individuality and to pursue themselves courageously and persistently. In this sense, the seemingly tragic volitation is seen as a positive construction of identity, as it is also a path to freedom.

The novel ends with the protagonist, the Milkman, leaping from Solomon's Leap, the top of a mountain in Shalimar, as an echo to the insurer's volitation at the beginning. From the flight of Smith, to the Milkman's search for the Flying Solomon, to the volitation of Milkman himself, Morrison presents the readers with a complete story of flight to freedom. In essence, Morrison's story of escape to freedom is somewhat like Zhuangzi's "spiritual freedom without any bondage" (15).

C. The Universality of Animism

In 1708, Georg Stahl, a German physician and chemist, developed the theory that it was a physical element, *anima*, that animated living organism, just as elements such as hydrogen and oxygen exist in nature, *anima* also contains more or less elemental living matter. Etymologically, the Latin word *anima*, originally meaning breath, is also a central part of what makes up the term animism.

In some academic and religious discourse, animism refers to most indigenous religions and is often considered one of the most primitive forms of religious ritual upon which more advanced cultures or religions may have been established. In addition, many scholars have modern interpretations of the term, with some novelties. Interestingly, this new usage is consistent with the increasingly popular self-identification of some indigenous and nature-worshiping religious people, and gives it a more positive association. Two accounts have thus emerged, the old animism and the new animism, both of which have anthropologists at their core: one by Edward Taylor, who established the old animism by borrowing terminology from earlier scientists and philosophers, and the other by Irving Hallowell in his new animism. The role of the new animism is derived partly from his study of the grammar of the Ojibwe.

In 1871, Edward Taylor, often considered the founder of anthropology, adopted Stahl's term animism to mark the core issues and characteristics of religion. For Taylor, animism identified a primitive but universal category of religion, namely belief in the soul or spirits. He argued that "a soul existed in every object, animate or inanimate" (Asante and Mazama 58), and also confirmed that "all regions, African, Western, or Eastern, have some form of this belief in the spirit, soul, or breath force existing in all things" (ibid)Yet, this "breath force" can be seen as "a vapor or shadow that can move from one body to another, passing between

humans or between humans and plants or animals" (ibid). Indeed, inanimate objects have the "breath force" within, too.

Taylor's major contribution is a systematic anthropological study of animism, which is central to his view of human history and the definition of religion. Animism begins and continues as an attempt to make sense of the world as a mythical mode of discourse that explains life and events to those who are not yet fully comfortable with the practice of rationalist science. Taylor's aim is to find a more adequate solution to the curiosity and confusion caused by the first humans on earth. Therefore, animism is the first major theory to be considered and taught to future generations.

The new animism is a perception that Irving Hallowell gained from his contacts and exchanges with the Ojibwe of south-central Canada in the early to mid-twentieth century. According to Ojibwe knowledge, "the world is full of people, only some of whom are human" (Harvey 18). The Ojibwe believe that a vague but mysterious identity exists between "people" and "human". In distinguishing between human and non-human things, they also challenge modern notions of what it means to be human. "To be a person does not require human-likeness, but rather humans are like other persons". And in the case of "person", it is a broader category under which sub-groups can be listed, such as humans, rock people, bear people and others. These so-called people share common characteristics: they are interconnected beings, constituted with others; they are capricious beings, deriving meaning and power from their interactions; and they are social beings, interacting with others. People are interconnected beings, constituted by their various interactions with others.

In contrast to the popular, species-specific, Western definition of the human being, he clearly expresses a key part of the argument for a worldview approach to the study of culture, insisting on the notion of the spirituality of what humans and non-humans have in common. For example, Hallowell argued that stones are not only grammatically alive, but in certain cases have been observed to have animate properties, such as spatial movement and open "mouths".

A particular stone may be treated as a "person" rather than a "thing" (20). This is the more nuanced animistic narrative expressed in the indigenous way of life.

Thus, both Tayor's and Hallowell's animism regarded spirituality as universal and eternal, and saw it as the most primitive form of religious ritual. In his 1871 book, *Primitive Culture* Taylor defined the concept of animism as a general belief in a spiritual being. After Taylor, other anthropologists used it to refer to African religion, and it is usually assumed that all African religions have at least the concept of something material and immaterial with a breath or a soul. Some religious believers therefore argue that all regional religions, African, Western or Eastern, developed and grew on the basis of this belief.

Influenced by this claim, the legend of Taoist originated in the East, more than 2000 years ago, is also linked to the animistic nature of African religions. In *An Illustrated Introduction to Taoism: The Wisdom of the Sages*, Jean C. Cooper argues that Taoism's origin is seen as "a development of early animism and magical practices" (1), which is supported by "the legend of the Yellow Emperor, living some three thousand years B. C." (ibid). As one of the early names, Taoism is originally called "the method of Huang and Lao", and here "Huang" refers to "the Yellow Emperor", traditionally considered as "one of the earliest rulers in Chinese history and the single most important foundational figure of Chinese civilization" (Hu and Allen 9). Supposedly, the Yellow Emperor was "reputed to have been instructed in magic, mysticism" (Cooper 1). It is undoubted that "In a Taoist hagiographical book (a biography of venerated people) called *The Record of Immortals* (列仙傳), Huang-ti is presented as the leader of hundreds of deities" (10), and most importantly, "many Taoist scriptures were attributed to him" (24), such as the *Talisman Scripture of Huang-ti* (黃帝陰符經) and *the Dragon-Head Scripture of Huang-ti* (黃帝龍首經). In fact, these classical scriptures of Taoism were compiled, "sometime after the beginning of the Common Era" (ibid).

Like the spirituality of African animism, the Taoist concept of qi (氣) exists as a kind of spiritual medium within all things, linking human beings to non-human things in the universe.

This dynamic spirit is not limited to human, but also applied to all species, even to nature as a whole. The flow of life energy in the form of qi transcends the human body and the exchange of energy encompasses the natural rhythms of nature, including all living things. From the qi point of view, humans are essentially equal and universal to other species and objects on the planet.

As a writer of predominantly black narratives, Morrison fully integrates literary themes into traditional African religious culture, bringing spirituality to the characters with complex and intertwined fates, such as the mythical figure of the trees, Pilate Dead, who communicates with her ancestors, and Baby Suggs, who leads the collective spiritual healing of an entire black community in Clearing. Drawing on the spirituality of African culture that permeates her work, Morrison's encounter with Taoism in the context of a mythical culture is possible.

IV. Tao's Subjectivity and Morrison's Idea of Equality

As far as subjectivity is concerned, it is immediately and directly linked to the human being, whose subjectivity in return is closely linked to the ability to think. Just as the modern philosopher Descartes' famous statement "I think therefore I am" highlights the subjectivity of "I" by emphasizing the connection between the two verbs "think" and "am", while the objective existence of "I" as a person depends on the sense of "I" as a subject. The emphasis on the subjectivity of the "I" is the main expression of many modern scholars and philosophers, while the natural organisms outside the "I" are seen to some extent as beings to be observed and perceived.

However, Taoism proposes "a radical reversal of the way that modern human beings think about the natural world" (Miller 26). Miller further confirms that Taoism does not regard human beings merely as "subjects" observing the natural "objective" world, but all things' "subjectivity is grounded in the Dao [Tao] itself" (ibid). The Tao imparts subjective attributes to all that it produces as "the wellspring of cosmic creativity" (ibid). In other words, subjectivity is not a uniquely human attribute, and the ability to think, imagine, and act freely, is not what distinguishes human beings from "Nature", but is intrinsic to the nature of all living things given by the Tao.

According to *Tao Te Ching*, the chapter 25 contains a famous cosmological statement：

> Man models himself after the Earth;
> The earth models itself after Heaven;
> The Heaven models itself after Tao;
> Tao models itself after Nature.[29]

29 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:146.

James Miller interprets this passage by dividing “man”, “Earth”, “Heaven”, and “Tao” into three spheres: man, nature, and the transcendent universe. Moreover, “they are related in that they follow from or are normatively modeled on one another in a process of hierarchical creativity.” (31) Human beings should follow the example of Earth, which should follow Heaven, and in turn follow the Tao. Here “nature”, in James’s version of the translation “Dao follows its subjective nature” (31), refers to the Tao itself. Thus, the subjectivity of the Tao is logically the subjectivity of nature, or rather, the subjectivity of nature is a concrete embodiment of the subjectivity of the Tao.

In the Taoist world of thought and philosophy, the subjectivity of nature connotes the idea that innumerable things are equal, for the Tao originally created all living things on the principle of making no distinction between the superior and the inferior. Nature’s subjectivity embodies the idea of equality in the following three aspects:

Firstly, Nature is egalitarian, taking away from the haves to compensate for the have-nots. As depicted in the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu vividly compares the Tao to “the bending of a bow” (306) and concretely explains, “The top comes down and the bottom-end goes up. The extra (length) is shortened, the insufficient (width) is expanded”,[30] which is the Nature’s way to “take away from those that have too much, and give to those that have not enough” (ibid), quite differently from the man’s way, “He takes away from those that have not, and gives it as a tribute to those that have too much” (ibid).

Nature works in an impersonal and impartial way, benefiting all beings without any conscious “benevolence”, as Confucius claimed, and is known in Chinese as *ren* (仁).

人法地，地法天, 天法道，道法自然。

[30] ibid :306.

高者抑之，下者举之。有余者损之，不足者补之。

Following Lao Tzu's clear distinction between the way of nature (the way of Heaven) and the way of man, Zhuangzi also contrasts the two using the examples of Bo Le (伯乐), the horse master, the potter, and the carpenter. Bo Le was "good at handling the horses", which resulted in the death of half of them; as for the clay handled by the potter and the wood handled by the carpenter, Zhuangzi posed the provocative question, "Is it the inborn nature of clay and timber to fit the compass, the angle square the try square and the ruler?" (135) This is an almost revolutionary inspiration in a world where humans, motivated by greed and consumerism, have invaded the planet they share with other creatures on the basis of anthropocentrism and capitalism. This greedy colonization of nature is beneficial for humans, but fatal for non-humans. The Anthropocene is saturated with social and ecological injustices; the rich classes of countries are to blame for this urgent crisis. "Average possession means happiness; surplus means trouble. This applied to all and it is even more obvious with material acquisition." (535) The Taoist teaching is still valid today.

Secondly, nature and human beings complement each other as equals in a symbiotic relationship on Earth. Concerned about the current state of the ecological crisis, an initiative to protect and care for nature's ecological home is often mentioned, but the Taoist view of human contact with the natural world is not directly related to "saving nature" per se. In fact, this idea is still free of anthropocentric ideology. It seems a little arrogant. The Taoist claim is reciprocal: nature can also save man from his own body, and it is precisely in this pharmacological view of nature that the Taoist tradition and Chinese medicine intersect. For example, Tu Youyou (屠呦呦), who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015, drew direct inspiration from Chinese Taoist medicine in developing the drug artemisinin to treat malaria.

The pursuit of such an approach to nature, therefore, implies the pursuit of a perspective in which human beings paradoxically recognize their dependence on the natural environment. In this interdependence, Taoism advocates the "ecology of cosmic power" in order to "cultivate Dao", which recognizes the complexity of the relationship between human beings and nature,

and cannot be reduced to the notion of protecting nature according to some preconceived image of its "authenticity" (Miller 2013: 283). But for the natural world to save humanity, it needs to understand that there is a close correlation between the vitality of the human body and the natural composition of the natural landscape, and it also requires an openness to the idea that nature has, to some extent, its own subjectivity and dynamism. Indeed, the Taoist approach to human ethics and nature is fundamentally based on a full understanding and application of the concept of nature's own subjectivity.

Thirdly, equality is the connotative idea of Taoist philosophy. Lao Tzu's "Mystic Unity" (257) and Zhuangzi's "Uniformity of All Things" (17) are both important expositions of the view of equality advocated by Taoism. They argue that although things in the world appear to be different, they are in fact all the same. "From the viewpoint of Tao, nothing can be called noble or mean because the noble and the mean succeed each other endlessly…Since all things are equal, where lies the long and the short of anything?" (321) Meanwhile, Zhuangzi confirms that people seem to make different comments and have different views, but since things have no real difference in essence, "right is infinite and wrong is also infinite" (19), all disputes and arguments about right and wrong are meaningless, with ulterior motives behind them. therefore, he affirms that the uniformity of things is the only natural law to be followed by the perfect man, who makes no arguments and adapts himself to nature.

Not only is the idea of equality embedded in Taoist thought, but Africism, one of the earliest forms of religion on earth, also advocates the idea that the Supreme Being God reigns among all living things on the continent and that all things are equally endowed with the vital force of life, whether human or non-human. Asante and Mazama in their book argue that "the idea that a soul existed in every object, animate or inanimate, appeared to represent the sine qua non of religion. A particular soul, in this construction, would exist or do exist as a part of an immaterial soul and was therefore universal and eternal" (58).

While Morrison, as "a memory keeper and a historian" of African culture

(Zauditu-Selassie 4), embeds the idea of equality deeply in her work, making each novel "a commemorative site where readers can participate in re-collecting buries knowledge to refortify and restore a sense of identity and cultural connectivity to the village—the community as Morrison expressed" (ibid). Through the catalysis of memory, myth, cosmology, and cultural ideas, Morrison revives a vibrant cultural and spiritual history, challenging the myth of being robbed and forgotten as a result of the Middle Passage and subsequent traumas.

A. Integration, Companion, and Personification in *Beloved*

The nature and black characters in Morrison's stories are both in objective and passive situations, and they share a tragically intertwined fate and reality of total marginalization. The "notorious" scarred tree on Sethe in *Beloved* objectively indicates the brutality of slavery, exemplified by Baby Suggs' unconscious behavior of being surprised, "hid [ing] her mouth with her hand" (93), but Morrison also figuratively portrays the sheltering and attractive charm of this mother tree for Paul D and Beloved who returns as a ghost. According to James' interpretation, trees can also subjectively provide the special care of a heartfelt companion, in addition to the moments of solitude and desolation.

1. The Divined Tree

As described above, the Tao is personified as "the Mother of All Things", who nurtures the growth of all beings and is passed on from generation to generation. In fact, it is in dependence on mother and nature that man's most primitive trait is exercised. Lao Tzu compares the mysterious and inexplicable Tao to a mother, describing the omnipotent and everlasting character of the Tao, and uses the natural capacity of a mother as a metaphor for the unending phenomenon of the birth of the universe, as in the words of the *Tao Te Ching*, "It [Tao]

is called Mystic Female. The Door of Mystic Female is the root of Heaven and Earth".[31]

In traditional African religion, trees have important connotations and symbols. Africans can draw on a common spiritual vocabulary that "gives trees a sacred and cosmic meaning" (670). Indeed, in many African creation stories, the cosmic trees are said to originate all human life. It is because of this connection with life that trees are also associated with fertility, regeneration, and even death.

The oldest and thickest tree in the forest is usually considered to be the mother tree, due to the fertility of both trees as and people. According to Suzanne Simard, a forest scientist, he argues that trees can talk to each other through a vast underground communication network where trees share their information. The Mother trees use their language, "a vast and complex network of root systems and fungal threads" (Wardi 71), by which the mother trees can recognize their children and give them space and more sustenance. "When mother trees are injured and dying, they send what Simard characterizes as 'messages of wisdom onto the next generation of seedlings' in the form of carbon and defense signals, and these two compounds increase the resilience of those trees to future stresses. While mother trees show a preference for their kin, they benefit the forest in general by increasing its resilience." (ibid)

From the Mother tree's care for its offspring to the commitment to the forest as a whole, its vital role in maintaining the health and survival of their surrounding ecosystem is evident. Like human mothers, they selflessly nurture the next generation and protect their children with their own lives, all for the sake of the children's health and freedom.

In *Beloved*, Morrison also portrays a great human mother figure, Sethe. The novel uses her as an axis to spread the narrative in a comprehensive way. Morrison's masterpiece, the *Beloved* profound subject matter has moved the whole country since its publication and is considered

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31 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 64.

是谓玄牝, 玄牝之门，是谓天地根。

one of Morrison's finest novels. As for the background of its creation, Morrison was inspired by the true story of a runaway slave Margaret Garner who killed her own child to avoid returning back to slavery. The protagonist Sethe was a slave on the plantation Sweet Home. Because of unbearable torture and insults, she flees to House 124, where her mother-in-law Baby Suggs lives. Later when she is discovered by the Schoolteacher and his captors, she decides to slit her two-year-old daughter's throat to prevent her child from returning to slavery. From then on, House 124 is full of the baby's venom. Finally, with the benevolent sponsorship of the black community, the ghost is exorcised from the house. Sethe and her youngest daughter, Denver, build a new life in the black community, learning to deal with their painful past while focusing on the future.

In the novel, the trees become the characters' closet natural partners. Together with the memories and the traumas they have suffered in the past. Sethe, Paul D, the ex-slave in Sweet Home, Denver, Seth's youngest daughter, and even Beloved are closely linked to the mother trees in the novel.

Sethe and a tree is the best known story. In *Beloved*, a tree bears witness to Sethe's unbearable past. As a black woman, she has suffered so much injustice and abuse, even though having she has a temporarily happy time in Sweet Home. She recalled the wretchedness of her escape to the Bluestone 124, and she was pregnant at that time. The bumpy fleeing made her collapse from exhaustion in the woods, where she was about to give birth. Luckily, a white girl called Amy Denver came along and midwifed her to help her deliver. When Amy saw the debilitated Sethe lying on the grass, she told Sethe: "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the blanches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom" (79). In Amy's eyes, it is a whole tree, from the trunk to the leaves, like a hand-painted tattoo vividly on Sethe's back, which she has never seen before. But through talking to Sethe, Amy

began to understand the tree, which embodied the severe beatings and abuse at the hands of Sweet Home's white owner.

The next time the scar tree appears is in the Bluestone House 124. When Baby Suggs caught sight of exhausted Sethe covered in dirt and blood, she immediately wiped her body and found "roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulder" (93). Stunned by the scene before her, Suggs could not help but "hid[hide] her mouth with her hand" (ibid). She had never seen such a scene before, despite having been a slave for almost half of her life.

Actually, this type of tree is called a bitter-berry shrub, which is closely related to Sethe's miserable fate, at least as far as its name is concerned. In the ripening season, it grows "a cluster of sour berries that span in hue from dark crimson to black" (Wardi 69). Its black-red berries are as sour as Sethe's life. The outer bark of the tree is blackish and rugged, matching the protruding parts of Sethe's epidermal wounds, which are difficult to heal well and will leave permanent scars on her body. The leaves are shaped like serrated edges, metaphorically signaling danger. In a sense, the a display of this plant on a person's back not only illustrates the cruelty of the perpetrator, but in another way Morrison wants to link nature and man together.

A few scholars have focused on Sethe's tree scars through the prism of literature. According to Lorie Watkins Fulton in *Hiding Fire and Brimstone in Lacy Groves: The Twinned Trees of Beloved*, he states that "the deadened skin of Sethe's back clearly represents feelings about the past that she refuses to give free rein" (190). The scars on her back have been dry, but what is left in her heart has been blooding, such kind of memory stays still. In *From the Same Tree: Gender and Iconography in Representations of Violence in Beloved*, Sandy Alexandre endorses that the scars represent "black female trauma writ large as chokecherry tree", also supplementing "as a woman's rape tree and as a man's lynching tree" (925). Therefore, the tree image witnesses the hurt not only in Sethe's physical body but also in her psychology.

From the ecocritical point of view, Sethe is deliberately portrayed as a tree by Morrison in

the novel. But she has to admit that, objectively, she is forced into a relationship with the tree by the white Schoolteacher, and, subjectively, she establishes the inseparable bond with the tree. Inside the body, she nourishes the tree's growth with blood and flesh. Morrison herself narrates in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken*, "With all due respect to the dream landscape of Freud, trees have always seemed feminine to me" (390), so Morrison imbues the chokecherry with a kind of affection from Sethe, a love for children, nature and all living things, and eventually the tree becomes Sethe and Sethe becomes the tree.

It is no coincidence that Morrison's idea of merging a tree and a man into oneness is in accordance with the fable of Zhuangzi's Dream as a butterfly (庄周梦蝶), which is a thought-provoking philosophical discourse.

> I, by the name of Zhuang Zhou, once dreamed that I was a butterfly, a butterfly fluttering happily here and there. I was so pleased that I forgot that I was Zhuang Zhou. When I suddenly woke up, I was astonished to find that I was as a matter of fact that Zhuang Zhou. Did Zhuang Zhou dream of the butterfly or did the butterfly dream of Zhuang Zhou? Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly, there must be some distinctions. This is called "the transformation of things.[32]

Zhuangzi is famous for his skillful use of language in the form of metaphors and his appliance of fables for the expression of deep philosophical ideas. Sima Qian's *Historical Records* (史記), the earliest book to mention Zhuangzi and his book, this book "contains over

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32 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1999:46-47.

从前庄周做了一个梦，梦见自己变成了蝴蝶，翩翩飞舞，感到非常愉快和惬意，不知自己是庄周了突然惊醒，便见直挺挺躺在一个庄周。不知道是庄周做梦变成了蝴蝶呢？还是蝴蝶变成了庄周呢！那么，庄周与蝴蝶必定是有分别的了。这种转变就叫做"物化"。

100,000 words, with more than 100 fables of all kinds" (35). Through vivid and simple stories, these fables reveal profound morals. His dream of being a butterfly, such a common thing that everyone can do, comes to Zhuangzi's mind, but the difference is that Zhuangzi uses the butterfly as a subject to imagine himself, and uses the subjectivity of the butterfly to look at external objects. So he keeps wondering whether it is he or the butterfly who is dreaming.

This notion of whether Zhuang Zhou is dreaming of the butterfly or the butterfly is dreaming of Zhuang Zhou, as well as the idea of whether Sethe is a tree or the tree is Sethe, lies mainly in the fact that the butterfly and the tree have their own subjectivity, and all have their own being in nature. The conclusion of "the transformation of the things" also confirms the interchangeability of the subjectivity and objectivity of all things, and through this interchangeable thinking, all things in the world can grow and develop under their own guidance of subjectivity.

Given Zhuangzi's logic, and from the subjectivity of a butterfly's perspective, the mother tree on Sethe in *Beloved* can have its own autonomy to find the siblings and children. Like Wardi Anissa Janine's arguments in *Toni Morrison and the Natural World*, "this scar evidences Sethe's elision with trees" (70), and then she confirms that Sethe is "trans-corporeally part of the arboreal world, and while Paul D is associated with trees, Sethe is the tree, an important gendered difference that is in keeping with Morrison's reflection on trees as maternal plants" (ibid). In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben also describes the mother tree more specifically by supporting their children's trees:

> Acorns and beechnuts fall at the feet of larger "mother trees." … The small beech trees, which have by now been waiting for at least eighty years, are standing under mother trees that are about two hundred years… The stunted trees can probably expect another two hundred years of twiddling their thumbs before it is finally their turn. The wait time is, however, made bearable. Their mothers are in touch with them throughout

their root systems, and they pass along sugar and other nutrients. You might even say they are nursing their babies. (34)

Sethe's mother, Ma'am, is also a mother tree linking Sethe together with their affectionate and blood roots, even to the cultural roots of African Americans. She is one of the millions of suffering black mothers, a strong and unyielding mother tree protecting Sethe and fighting slavery to the death. She took a masculine name for Sethe and always kept Sethe by her side. The use of herbal abortifacients to terminate all her pregnancies resulted from the coercive acts of white men that she made to control over her fertility. In her vague memory, Sethe could only think of her mother working in the rice field, "Ma'am was in the rice" (234). The memorable phrase "in the rice" reminds her and her mother of the original African cultures they used to cultivate. In her book *Black Rice*, Judith Carney gives a description of the rice culture that originated in Africa, "the development of rice culture marked not simply the movement of a crop across the Atlantic but also the transfer of an entire cultural system, from production to consumption" (2).

As a crop left behind by Africans in America, rice is not only a foodstuff but also a cultural tradition that is deeply ingrained in the hearts of black people, so Sethe's mother is buried in the rice, symbolizing that she has preserved the black cultural tradition and passed it on to Sethe.

The heartfelt maternal love that Morrison deliberately highlights in the novel is expressed through the many mothers, like Sethe, who are connected to or integrated into the objective natural world. Ma'am eventually hanged herself publicly to signal her continued opposition to slavery, while Sethe was deprived of the milk she needed to feed her baby by the cruel master's Schoolteacher, leaving a scar on her body and mind that will never go away. Among these various horrors and memories, the most painful for Sethe is her own infanticide, her own behavior and a seemingly deformed expression of maternal love, which also causes great shock

and horror in the psychology of Paul D and her youngest Denver, and which even Morrison herself is unwilling to revisit after finishing the novel.

However, the scarred tree that remains on Sethe's back is a clear indication that the dead baby has been growing as well. "A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know." (18) After eighteen years of tending the little tree with Sethe's own flesh and blood, she has a subconscious feeling that her Beloved will return sooner or later. She also realizes that the ghost in Bluestone Road 124, who drives away her two boys, Howard and Buglar, is the one she needs to compensate for her mind. The words of Baby Suggs bear this out: "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby." (6)

Nevertheless, Beloved, as a teenage girl who comes as a ghost in disguise, brings memories and traumas to Sethe. Certainly, she is also in search of her mother's tree and claims her lost love from Sethe. It cannot be denied that Sethe's infanticide is a constant focus of criticism, but attention to the act is given to Sethe's deep affection for the child, despite Beloved's pre-existing hatred and misunderstanding of Sethe.

In Morrison's conception, Beloved appears as a ghost with an ecological scenario. Coming from the stream, Beloved sits close to a mulberry tree: "All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat… It takes her the whole morning to lift herself from the ground and makes her way through the woods past a giant temple of boxwood to the field and then the yard of the slate gray house" (50). She strolls through trees to find Bluestone Road 124 and rests on a stump near the house. It seems that Morrison's well-designed appearance of the stumps recurs in the narratives, at least more than six times, such as Denver's recollection that she "had not been in the tree room once since Beloved sat on their stump" (76). We know that a stump is only a small part of a tree, just a bottom with its underground root, seemingly mapping onto Beloved's suffocating killing

by Sethe in the form of not a crown of a tree, but still linked to the roots of a mother tree.

Related research on tree stumps finds that the stump is a symbol that straddles life and death from the prism of botanical work. In *The Hidden Life of Tree*, Wohlleben tells a fact about an old-aged tree stump, and its "interior had[has] completely rotted into humus long ago[which] [is] a clear indication that the tree must have been felled at least four or five hundred years earlier" (2). Further investigation reveals that the stump still has some contact with the ground, but it is inferred, "Without leaves—and therefore without photosynthesis—that is impossible. No being on our planet can maintain a centuries-long fast, not even the remains of a tree, and certainly not a stump that has had to survive on its own. It was clear that something else was happening with this stump. It must be getting assistance from neighboring trees, specifically from their roots… The surrounding beeches were pumping sugar to the stump to keep it alive" (ibid). Wohlleben's idea, confirmed by the experts on this research is true, which elucidates the evidence that trees have their own internet network through their roots, and continue to function normally although cut off to be stumped.

In African tradition, trees are associated with living and regenerating, as well as dying. Some Africans believe that the nuts, leaves, roots, or branches of trees can cure diseases and thus regenerate the sick person. For death, the Akamba, for example, believe that "the wild fig tree was the place where dead souls resided" (670). And trees are the medium between the world of the living and the world of the dead, according to the indigenous people of southern Nigeria. When villagers die, their spirits pass through these sacred trees. Other powerful spirits may also live in the trees of Africa.

Morrison's tree is therefore an incarnation of her own ancestral tradition, and the concept of the Tao is interpreted as a representation of different cultures.

2. The Anthropomorphized Trees

Sethe is seen as a divine mother tree, caring for her family and her regenerated Beloved, while the trees in the novel are also anthropomorphized as siblings to the lonely and helpless Paul D and Denver, Sethe's youngest daughter.

Paul D, another important character in the novel, is emotionally attached to Sethe, which leads him to the Bluestone House 124, where he will vision the happiness with Sethe. He also witnesses Sethe's tree scar when he arrives at 124 Bluestone after a hard journey. Unlike Amy and Suggs, he describes the tree as "a revolting clump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home" (25). For Paul D, trees are trustworthy partners and must be accessible to everyone. He was an enslaved man on the Sweet Home Plantation, and one of the few men allowed to take a short break from the agricultural laboring, a respite that he cherishes under a tree he calls "Brother". "His choice he called Brother, and sat under it, alone sometimes, sometimes with Halle or the other Pauls." (ibid) assuming that Paul D's behavior is filmed on the screen, the scene is very graphic and vivid in that he talks lovingly to the Brother, pats his "arm" to make him smile, hugs each other, and cries bitterly for a while. Sometimes his work partners accompany Paul D in silence, because all of the black men in Sweet Home are forbidden to communicate with each other.

It is reasonable for Paul D to define his relationship with the tree as his brother. After all, man and nature are a unified whole on the globe, and if nature is seen as the head of this large family, then man, plants, mountains, animals, etc. are all siblings. Hence, Paul D's evocative naming of the tree as a sibling with whom he speaks invites a reflection on plant sentience. Indeed, when it comes to studying the sentience of the botanical world, Charles Darwin, the famous naturalist, and biologist, is the most authoritative scientist. In *The Power of Movement in Plants*, he has discovered that plants move in their volition, that is to say, plants have subjectivity in a sense.

According to Daniel Chamovitz in *What a Plant Knows*, he states that Darwin and his son carried out the relevant experiments and testified that "phototropism is the result of light hitting the tip of a plants' shoot, which sees the light and transfers this information to the plant's midsection to tell it to bend in that direction. The Darwins had successfully demonstrated rudimentary sight in plants" (15). in addition to the sensitivity and positive phototropism of plants, Darwin also came up with the concept of the "root brain", which implied that the tips of plant's roots are human's brains, controlling the various movements of plants. In *The "Root-Brain" Hypothesis of Charles and Francis Darwin*, Baluska and other authors confirm that plants "recognize self from non-self, and roots even secrete signaling exudates which mediate kin recognition. Finally, plants are also capable of a type of plant-specific cognition, suggesting that communicative and identity recognition systems are used, as they are in animal and human societies, to improve the fitness of plants and so further their evolution" (12).

From a biological point of view, Darwin confirmed that plants have a complex nervous system within themselves, which, according to evolutionary biology, evolved earlier than humans and other lithospheric life forms. Therefore, to some extent, plants can exhibit almost any thought and behavior that humans manifest, and may even surpass us.

This statement is similar to that of Ge Hong (葛洪), a very influential scholar in Taoism. He articulated that in the relationship between humans and nature, it was an inappropriate notion that man should save and protect nature; rather, nature can save man from his body. One successful example is Tu Youyou (屠呦呦), who won the 2015 Nobel Prize in Medicine for inventing artemisinin to cure malaria. She was originally inspired by the pharmacological work done by Ge Hong. Then this instance aims to illustrate that "to pursue such an approach to the environment thus means to pursue a view in which humans paradoxically recognize their dependence on the natural environment in order to transcend it" (James 25). Therefore, in Taoist thought, the intricate relationship between man and nature is not presented simply to protect the environment, as is usually the case, but to understand the way in which the natural

world benefits man. We should also transform the traditional mode of nature's objectivity into its subjectivity. Like human beings, nature has a subjective initiative.

Paul D's kinship with the tree proves this point. Indeed, trees have their own subjective agencies. With this capacity, the trees have the potential to help Paul D escape from Sweet Home. Advised by the Cherokees, the experienced farmers, who told him to follow the direction of the flowers, Paul D began his journey:

> So he raced from dogwood to blossoming peach. When they thinned out he headed for the cherry blossoms, then magnolia, chinaberry, pecan, walnut, and prickly bear. At last, he reached a field of apple trees whose flowers were just becoming tiny knots of fruit...When he lost them and found himself without so much as a petal to guide him, he paused, climbed a tree on a hillock, and scanned the horizon for a flash of pink or white in the leaf world that surrounded him. (133)

On the way north, Paul D makes an arduous journey for half a year, with all kinds of flowers in bloom. However, the description of the journey of the flowers indicates that Paul D has been shadowing the interspecies of all kinds of trees and flowers, with the season changing from spring to summer. Additionally, the plant's blossoms also represent fertility and harvest, which is what human strives for, just as in *Belonging*, bell hooks maintains: "Living close to nature, black folks were able to cultivate a spirit of wonder and reverence for life. Growing food to sustain life and flowers to please the soul, they were able to make a connection with the earth that was ongoing and life-affirming" (36). From the point of view of vegetal propagation, Paul's search for trees materializes. As a matter of common logic, his tree journey symbolizes the conclusion that he purports to find another giant tree that is pregnant with new life, hope, and more importantly freedom.

For Paul D, the trees are like brothers to him, comforting him in times of trouble and

guiding him on his way to freedom, while the “emerald”, a little tree-house like a sister, accompanies Denver, Sethe’s youngest daughter, throughout her childhood. Denver is also the only person who remains rational at the end of the novel, and it is thanks to her wit and courage that Sethe is rescued from the brink of the catatonic breakdown, entangled by the ruthless Beloved, and Denver boldly walks out of 124 Bluestone Road to seek help from the black community. In the face of Sethe’s constant accompaniment, “only victims” (1) in their ghosted family, Denver’s growth begins with understanding her mother’s love and the “hurt” that makes death preferable to living. It could be suggested that Beloved’s physical growth is merely a foil Denver’s spiritual growth, for both draw their strength from Sethe’s abundant maternal love. In reality, Denver’s life has been profoundly affected by Sethe’s infanticide, and she must come to terms with what she has been repressing for most of her life: “the hurt of the hurt world” (28).

Filled with fear and loneliness, but unable to talk to anyone, in her childhood, Denver has her own private place outside of the Bluestone House, namely called the “emerald” room. It is a little room “seven feet high”, naturally formed in the woods, “hidden by post oaks, five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring” (34), and surrounded by tree walls with “fifty inches of murmuring leaves” (ibid). Each time she has to get down on her hands and knees to get in and then stand up straight as if being in the embrace of trees. The little girl likes to stay there, away from her home which is haunted by the horrors and ghosts, “closed off from the hurt of the hurt world”, which “wore[wears] her out” completely (35). What she needs is her conception “produced[s] its own hunger and its own food” (ibid) which are provided by the little tree room, at the same time, the little girl can talk with every tree and get emotional communication in the way of “murmuring”. In this way, the little tree room has become a close partner in spirit with Denver. Wardi states that Denver’s “elision with plant life as she begins to adopt autotrophic attributes” (79).

Morrison also emphasizes the giant box-woods in the novel, likening them to a “temple” (36) that “sanctifies the arboreal structure and links Denver to Grandma Baby” (Wardi 79),

where it is reserved for spiritual rituals and activities such as prayer and sacrifice. In general, a temple is a place of residence and meditation for the practitioners of various Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, etc. A Taoism temple, *guan* (觀) in traditional Chinese, or *daoguan* (道觀), where the Tao is observed and cultivated.[33] It is a complex of buildings that is reputedly constructed according to the ancient elements of yin and yang (陰陽) and is usually located in a secluded area with a beautiful natural scenery. Its secluded tradition, favored by high mountains and water, continues to this day. "By observing the scenery, Taoists are perhaps better able to take advantage of the vitality that flows through the landscape, known in Chinese as the 'Tao' or the 'Way', aligning themselves with it and being transformed by it." (Miller 25) Therefore, being in the natural landscape is very suitable for the practitioners to breathe and let blood flow in their inner world, which has the best effect on nourishing the vital energy, or qi (氣) in Chinese.

In this completely natural and tranquil environment, the trees become Denver's companions, like Paul D. The plant world, provides them with comfort, self-salvation, and self-confidence, allowing them to find deep affection in such a ruthless society. So does Sethe, and during Beloved's brief staying at the Bluestone, Sethe continues to offer her daughter all kinds of flowers and shiny materials of beauty: bright clothes with "yellow ribbons, shiny buttons and bits of black lace" and "fancy food" (240). She spends much energy turning the house into a large garden, with an abundance of violets, dandelions, and forsythia, accompanied by the plants with Beloved.

Like what Sethe did for Beloved, floral tributes to the deceased as traditional rituals are ancient and multicultural, such as All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in Western countries, the Ghost Festival in China, and Chuseok in Korea. Flowers and trinkets are resonant with these commemorative events. "Families honor the memories of deceased loved ones around family

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33 Quoted from Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Taoist-temple.

burial plots gaily decorated with real and paper flowers, lively paper streamers, glowing candles, and offering of the decedents' favorite foods." (Buchmann 117) The mourner's house is decorated with chock-full of flowers and scattered flower petals on the ground "show wandering spirits of the dead their way back home" (118). This does not mean that Morrison will have an Easter celebration, but the scene in the novel suggests that the flora has cultural and religious links with the departing. It is understandable that Sethe has complicated feelings about Beloved.

After Beloved has been evicted and disappeared at the end of the novel, Paul D returns and stands in the courtyard, he is "amazed by the riot of late-summer flowers where vegetables should be growing. Sweet William, morning glory, chrysanthemums. The odd placement of cans jammed with the rotting stems of things, the blossoms shriveled like sores. Dead ivy twines around bean poles and door handles" (271). Some flowers have died silently, and others need to live vividly, which also reflects the ecological status of the Sethe's family. As for Sethe, she is couched in the house like a botanical garden: "Lying under a quilt of merry colors. Her hair, like the dark delicate roots of good plants, spreads, and curves on the pillow. Her eyes, fixed on the window, are so expressionless." (ibid) At the same time, she sings, "Jackweed raise up high. Lambswool over my shoulder, buttercup and clover fly." In order to emphasize the uniformity of humans and the vegetal, Morrison depicts a scene of integration between Sethe and the botanical world, along with Paul D and Denver at last.

All in all, Morrison says that her whole life belongs to geography. It is a feeling that gestures towards her ecological idea, highlighting the constellation of people, plants, and history. In Morrison's ideology, plants are necessary for the survival of humans as the dominant form of life on earth and are not only evocative of history, but they are history. Morrison uncovers the complicated, multifaceted, and contradictory discourses written about the botanical world, which is a living memory of an African past.

B. Reciprocal Affection, and Mutual Independence

According to the above elaboration, the closeness and equality based on the subjective nature of all things are embodied in *Beloved* as the deified and personified trees. The next further illustrates the relationship between humans. Since, trees, as concrete representations of this material world, can be considered equal to family members, shouldn't people be more equal to each other?

Zhuangzi uses a metaphor to illustrate this. He compares all the people in the world, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, to the organs in our human body, "The hundreds of joints, the nine apertures, and the six internal organs: they are all parts of our body in their own proper places. Which part is dearer to me? Do you like them all, or do you have a favorite among them? If you like them all, are they all your ministers and servants? Can't they rule over each other? Or do they take turns as lords and ministers?" (21) The importance of each organ to us is unquestionable, and such distinctions as "ministers", "servants" and "rule" simply do not exist.

He further elucidates with a concrete and vivid case comparing a finger and a horse, to tell the truth about the equality of man and man from the perspective of the Tao, "Using a thumb to show that it is not a finger is not as good as using something else to show that it is not a finger. Using a white horse to show that it is not a horse is not as good as using something else to show that it is not a horse. Such is the case with Heaven and Earth, everything in the world—they are just like the case with the finger and the horse" (26). In this discourse, Zhuangzi sees Heaven and Earth as the concretization of the finger and the horse. Through this analogy, no matter what finger or what horse color belongs to a conceptual category before Heaven and Earth, they are all the same and equal. So white, black, brown, and other skin colors are all fingers or horses from the perspective of the Tao.

Similarly, Peter Singer, an advocate of the Western animal liberation movement, also

advocates the principle of equality, but notes that inequality exists not only between animals and humans, but also between humans of different races and genders:

> Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, specialists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is identical in each case. (9)

In his response to the humanitarian crisis in East Bengal in 1971, Singer was equally committed to the principle of equality, especially the natural justice of distribution, and expressed the position that "whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance" (239). Guided by this idea, he has developed a self-contained ethic that encompasses racial justice, social justice, and species justice. He also clearly states that the principle of equality can only be truly upheld and achieved when racism, sexism, speciesism, and all other oppressive ideologies are completely eliminated.

Black Americans have been in this matrix of oppression for a long time, ever since they set foot on the North American continent through the Middle Passage of the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the unequal treatment, they can still depict a harmonious scene of sharing "sweet dew" naturally in literary works. This chapter is about how sisters of different races can still help and love each other and form strong friendships despite the status quo of social inequality. For example, a group of girls working together on the farm in *A Mercy*, and Sethe and the little girl Denver, who delivers her baby.

1. Sisterly Love in *A Mercy*

Morrison's *A Mercy* presents the story of the pre-statehood period in Virginia, which coincided with the period when the social class structure was still blurred. The novel is a fictionalized account of a time of "racial balance was such that most whites were in both intensive and extensive contact with blacks," (Sobel 3) and it seemed that European social hierarchies were out of place on the land of America, as "there was no readymade template whereby English society could be inscribed on the New World, and the presence of Indians and Africans underlined a crucial difference between colonial and metropolitan society" (Horn 191).

In this general context, Morrison created a diverse community of women in the New World, specifically Jacob Vaark's farm. These women who gathered Jacob's place did succeed in shaping a Utopian home based entirely on female bonds. Rebekka Vaark, Jacob's wife, is a white, devout Christian woman troubled by the recent untimely deaths of her two young children. In fact, their marriage is an arranged one, and Jacob needs to pay for her travel from England to the New World. The arrival of the mail-order bride from Europe also indicates the beginning of a new role for European culture in this new society.

Rebekka's journey across the Atlantic is not an easy one, for she goes to an unknown place, marrying a man she has never met, Jacob Vaark, who is an orphan, after inheriting 120 acres of virgin land from an uncle whom he barely knows. From then, he establishes himself as a farmer trader in the harsh, relentless wilderness. Unlike Senhor D'Ortega, an aristocratic slave-trader, Jacob is kind-hearted, with no well-off family background, and is however "determined to prove that his own industry could amass the fortune" (26), which is also the root of his ability to give his wife Rebekka and other servants to labor and struggle together in the early days.

As his mail-order bride, Rebekka is also in poor economic and low social status, which forces her parents to make such a decision. It can be testified through the fact that she, along with several women, is the last one boarding the ship *Angelus* due to their lower class, gender,

and race. “Rebekka learned… soon as they were separated from males and the better-classed women and led to a dark space below next to the animal stalls.” (81) The lower-class women have to extrude themselves into a small space where “anyone taller than five feet hunched and lowered her head to move around” (ibid). With no other options available to them, these women had to face the harsh conditions of the ship. Even though Rebecca has white privilege, she is still subjected to what Friedman calls “other components of identity” (5), such as gender and class. Despite their specific backgrounds, these female characters communicate with each other, and “together they lightened the journey; made it less hideous than it surely would have been without them” (82). They turn their experiences in small spaces into positive ones and begin to talk, curious to learn about each other’s lives.

This experience at sea also gives her the confidence to face her future husband and a new life in a new environment, while bringing valuable friendships to the Vaark farm. Despite the seemingly obvious mistress-servant relationship, a deep friendship of mutual dependence eventually develops between Lina and Rebecca in order to survive in the wilderness. They eventually make friends and when “the first infant was born, Lina handled it so tenderly, with such knowledge, Rebecca was ashamed of her early fears and pretended she’s never had them”. Because they are also of similar age, in their late teens, they long for companionship in such a hostile environment.

Lina is a Native American girl acquired by Jacob before his marriage, who is primordially suspicious of Rebekka, “yet the animosity, utterly useless in the wild, died in the womb…The fraudulent competition was worth nothing on land that demanded…They became friends. Not only because somebody had to pull the wasp sting from the other’s arm. Not only because it took two to push the cow away from the fence… Mostly because neither knows precisely what they were doing or how.” (62) This friendship between them is established based on the objective factors of the harsh living environment in the New World on the one hand, and from Rebecca’s subjective thoughts on the other hand.

Dealing with a specific environment that challenged them—full of wasps and other deadly dangers of the primeval wilderness—the women experienced a law of equal competition in the material world, equality that was synonymous with a total wilderness, and even equality of opportunity in dealing with death. In this primitive state, without considering any sense of social class, and without having an advantage over the other, their eventual friendship is based entirely on each other's individual abilities as well as on collaborative survival.

As the women farmed together in Jacob's absence, it seemed that the hierarchical structure of power between the European settler and her Native American slaves was converted, just "focus[ing] on building community" (hook 154), they minimize the differences of class and races between them, and try to create a pleasant environment to live in. Their shared goal of survival forms the kind of "mute alliance that comes of sharing tasks" (87). Both understand that "fraudulent competition was worth nothing on land that demanding" (53), and they "were the company for each other" (ibid). Hence, the bond between Lina and Rebecca is not a fictional relationship for Morrison's writing purpose but reflects an understanding that "race relations in early Virginia were more pliable than they would later be, largely because disadvantaged blacks encountered groups of whites—indentured servants—who could claim to be similarly disadvantaged" (Morgan 8), and the reality is that Rebecca is not wealthy enough to escape the necessity of laboring alongside indentured laborers of various socioeconomic as well as racial backgrounds. As Morrison describes in the novel, the early Virginia colony is like, "an approximate social and economic (as opposed to legal) parity sometimes outweigh[s] inchoate racial prejudices." (10)

Thus, this kind of friendship depends on solidarity among women, and should not be limited to any physical decision, but rather to a willingness to care for and help other marginalized women. Similarly, Elizabeth Schultz defends the possibility of interracial friendship, stating "one's capacity for compassion, generosity, humor, and wonder is the basis for the friendship between women" (69). The fundamental aspect of friendship is built on the

ability of female characters to come together in different ways and is not limited to a specific race or ethnicity. As Quashie also argues further on it, “The practice of being girlfriends… is not, cannot be, exclusive to an/others who are Black women... In fact, the ultimate ethos of the identity is against reliance on easy coalitions and subjectivities that are granted.” (203)

The friendship in need provides a way for them to survive because as long as they could rely on each other, they could endure the hardships of running a farm alone, and compensate for their vulnerability as women in a man’s world. Just like the comments from the novel, “Although they had nothing in common with the views of each other, they had everything in common with one thing: the promise and threat of men. Here, they agreed, was where security and risk lay. And both had come to terms” (98). Despite their differences, they are united through their sisterhood, and they identify with each other’s limitations and assist each other to survive alone in the wilderness.

This sisterhood is also reflected in the interactions of the main character Florens, with Jane, a white girl from a Presbyterian village in the novel. Florens, a young, literate slave girl born to an African slave, was bought by Jacob from her former Portuguese master as an African slave. With a sort of mercy, she is rescued from a master implied to be a sexual predator, D’Ortega. However, from then on, Florens is susceptible and haunted by the choice of her mother in saving a son and selling a daughter. In fact, slave mothers all experience the confining contradictions imposed on them, as Paula Eckard argues, “slave mothers’ experience of maternity proved to be more wrenching. Their sexuality and their ability to bear children rendered them particularly vulnerable within the system of slavery.” (18) For a mother, Florens’ mother tries to secure a better future for her daughter, a future with hopes that Florence will escape at least the cruelty of sexual abuse. “I [Florens’ mother] knelt before him[Jacob]. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes. It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy. Offered by a human. I stayed on my knees.” (166-67) hook explains, “in the midst of a brutal racist system, which did not value black life, [the slave mother] valued the life and freedom of

her child enough to resist the system." (44)

Long trapped by her "hunger mother" (73), Florens shifts her affections to a free male black named Blacksmith, who constructs the mansion for Jacob. Her encounter with the little white girl Jane happens while on her errand to find the blacksmith, and Florens temporarily stays at Widow Ealing's home in a small conservative religious village. Due to the strict rules of the community, the Widow is very wary of Florens' staying with her, during which Florens witnesses Jane's being whipped by her mother to prove that she is not the demon, "holding her face in her hands while the Widow freshens the leg wounds. New strips of blood gleam among the dry ones." (109)

By them being alone together and talking, two little girls of different skin tones know the difficulties of being misjudged and marginalized. In fact, they have a lot in common. Their friendship stems from their awareness of their status as outsiders in the society. Therefore, Jane decides to ignore the community leader's orders and guides Florence out of the village, showing her an escape route. Florens states: "We come to a stream…Daughter Jane hands me the cloth of eggs. She explains how I am to go" (114). Jane shows Florens how to get away and provides the food for the journey. It shows the strength of women's bonds from different ethnicities and races because their "coupling is an alliance, a political and spiritual union" (Quashie 207). The closeness between Florens and Jane is possible because they identify with and care about each other, and because they share identities of otherness at that time.

According to Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class*, she argues, "sisterhood between black and white women was indeed possible and as long as it stood on a firm foundation it could give birth to earthshaking accomplishments" (104). Florens and Jane's friendship reveals the possibility of black and white women building a sisterhood because they unite and assist each other, even if temporarily. A comparison can be made with Morrison's other novel *Beloved*, where the pregnant Sethe encounters a white girl Amy Denver, halfway through her escape.

2. Sincere Succoring in *Beloved*

Another sisterly sentiment comes through in *Beloved*, where with a strong desire to escape slavery and produce milk for her baby girl, Sethe manages to escape Sweet Home. On her way to freedom, she runs across Amy, an newly emancipated indentured servant girl who is on her way to Boston to buy velvet. At first glance, the two are found to be similar in many ways, both motherless and both with "good hands" (90), one for making indigo ink and the other for deliveries and massages.

The two worked hard before finally deciding to flee for freedom, one to Cincinnati and the other to Boston, both on the other side of the Ohio River; Amy slept plenty of days in the sun, enjoying freedom and tranquility, the same rare luxury Sethe and her husband Halle enjoyed every Sunday at noon in the sunny hours; Amy was starving when they meet each other, and Sethe "is lying in the wild and believing this baby's ma'am is gonna die on the bloody side of the Ohio River." (90) Their seemingly similar characteristics bring them together, and the two walk effortlessly into a space "chatting about nothing in particular" (89), with no barrier or defenses in between. This is the initiation of their short-lived friendship.

It seems that Sethe finds some sense of community in Amy (the name itself implies friendship, derived from the French word 'Ami'), alluding to the historical white men who helped black slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. Amy was sincere at their first encounter, telling Sethe her real name and her destination without reservation, "Boston, get me some velvet… They don't believe I'm get it, but I am." (94) She does not hesitate to share it with Sethe and convinces Sethe to believe in her dream of velvet. After years of living under contract, Amy has not lost the imagination to chase freedom, however, Sethe's destination seems closer in terms of space, Cincinnati compared to Boston, but farther away from true realization, and has a long road to travel before Sethe. She does not seem to have imagination

at all, no plan, that over the years she had lost any notion of community, that her heart was filled with suffering without any place for love.

In the emergency, the amiable-named Amy did not spare Sethe, a strange and fugitive black woman, her generous assistance, without which Sethe and her daughter could not have survived. Amy not only helped her reach the "lean-to" (90)—a temporary shelter for the two—but also delivered her baby; she also provided Sethe with the courage to continue living. When Sethe is in despair and believes she is about to die, it is Amy's "voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that she wasn't just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours" (70). Amy gave her brother the strength and the confidence to survive, as did the singing and dancing. "There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well." (100) In the absence of authority, they empower themselves and become autonomous at least for the moment.

Here Morrison hints at reconciliation between black and white; she is exploring a world of peace and hopes uninterrupted by any authority. Most importantly, it is Amy's role as a midwife that binds the two women together, albeit briefly. Without Amy's help, Sethe would not have been able to give birth to her premature baby girl, Denver, a child who barely survived. When Sethe went into labor immediately after reaching the Ohio River, she had to rely on the strong hands of her teenage female companion as the baby was "face up and drowning in its mother's blood" (99).

Abandoning hope in someone other than herself, Amy no longer begs Jesus, but with her "strong hands", "two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws—a slave and a barefoot white woman with unpinned hair" (100) together they accomplish the redemption of life. Although their connection is tenuous, they are not brought together by race, a factor that looms like an invisible wall between Sethe, a former slave, and Amy, a "barefoot white woman." (ibid) Not surprisingly, Amy is determined that "she wouldn't be caught dead in daylight on a busy river with a runaway" (90). She insists that Sethe eventually tells her baby girl that "Miss Amy

Denver, of Boston" (100), to help bring her into the world.

Despite all the dangers, successfully navigating the river could mean gaining freedom, Sethe's body responded to this realization accordingly: "As soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it." (83) Morrison seems to emphasize Sethe's riverside birth, just below an abandoned, sea-flooded boat, with "white girl" Amy then acting as her midwife, and Sethe immerses herself in the Ohio River: "river water, seeping through any hole it chose, was spreading over Sethe's hips." (84) This scene evokes the baptism of the river, emphasizing that the river is healing, renewing, and most importantly, transforming: water is a "primary signifier for metamorphosis and metamorphic potential" (Patton 43). The birth waters flowing into the Ohio point to a new life. Sethe and her child are on the "right" side of the river. Denver, who gave birth in Ohio, was simultaneously baptized and healed.

William Marks, in his paper on the therapeutic properties of water, argues that "Even though there are many meanings and beliefs on the ritual of baptism…water in some form is always seen as the common denominator for the cleansing of the body and regeneration of the spirit" (117), which is indeed really embodied in *Beloved*. To the extent that Denver's birth in the water heralded a new beginning for Sethe and Amy, the river was the threshold that marked their new life. For this purpose, Amy washes her hands in the Ohio River, and Sethe ingests holy water when, in response to her thirty requests, Amy "gave her some Ohio River water in a jar" (90). Washing hands and drinking of Ohio, the river of freedom foreshadows Amy and Sethe's complete liberation and also bears witness to the friendship between them, between black and white.

Similarly, a scene happened in Morrison's other work *God Help the Child*, but this time, a black woman rescued a white little girl in an emergency. "My black lady saw him and threw her arm in front of my face. The birdshot messed up her hand and arm. We fell, both of us, her on top of me." (105) This is the first-person account of what happened by the white girl named Rain. The black lady in Rain's saying is one of the novel's protagonists, Bride. The closeness

between Bride and Rain is testified beyond their distinctive complexions, through a question-and-answer format from Rain and her adoptive mother at home, “Why is her skin so black” and “For the same reason yours is so white” (85), and even Bride resolutely blocks the gun for the little girl at the critical moment, which can be seen that the color of black and white between them has completely faded. Both of them perceive a deep understanding of the equal existence of each other. In the end, Rain pins all her affections on the sentences of “maybe I’ll see her again sometime. I miss my black lady” while Bride departs.

Indeed, whiteness and blackness are historically loaded symbols, which is a constant reminder of the distinction that certainly aimed to legitimize slavery in the Americas and promote social hierarchies. But objectively, accepting the consciousness of blacks and whites as oppositional consciousness rests only in a discourse that relies on the binary opposition of blacks and whites, rather than an ideological category of absolute difference. Although most cultures view white as pure and clean and associate it with “money and power” (St. Clair, 43), its pigment is anything but pure, as white can be deadly to produce. This kind of white paint includes “chalk or zinc, barium or rice, or from little fossilized sea creatures in limestone graves”, but the “greatest of the whites, and certainly the cruelest, is made of lead” (Finlay 108), which is toxic as a natural material.

Therefore, black and white are also relative from a philosophical point of view, as stated in the *Tao Te Ching*,

> Being and non-being interdepend in growth;
> Difficult and easy interdepend in completion;
> Long and short interdepend in contrast;
> High and low interdepend in position;
> Tones and voices interdepend in harmony;

Front and behind interdepend in a company.[34]

From these comparisons by Lao Tzu, it can be seen that everything in the world does not exist in isolation, but is interdependent in opposition, and simply emphasizing one side is unilateral. The same expression is found in *Zhuangzi*, "If we look at things in regard of their likeness, everything in the world is one",[35] and everything is just different in its name, but essentially the same, just like the road, people walk several times before they put it the name, "A path is formed because we walk on it; a thing has a name because we call it so".[36] Therefore, Morrison places unity and harmony in the novel, black and white can be integrated with each other, presenting a scene of true friendship in the world, which also highlights the conciliation in the novels. She hopes the prejudice, hatred, and misunderstanding soon vanish through the waves of the Ohio River.

C. Mythology, Supernatural, and Interoperability

In Chines myths and legends, man and heaven are connected, and the ancient emperors have dual responsibilities as the gods of heaven and the gods of earth. It is also clearly described in the famous novel *Journey to the West* (西游記), among which the three worlds of heaven, earth, and the underworld are separately divided, but they are interlinked and communicative. Therefore, the idea of the unity of man and heaven or Nature in Taoist philosophy also has its historical roots, and a person who knows everything between heaven

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34 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:47.

有无相生；难易相成；长短相形;高下相倾；音声相和；前后相随。

35 ibid: 26.

自其同者视之，万物皆一。

36 ibid: 26.

道行之而成，物谓之而然。

and earth is called “a true man” by Taoism. Zhuangzi gives a definite description of him, who “know[s] what the heaven can do is to know that everything comes from the heaven”.[37] He further describes “the true man” in detail, “He would not fear when he climbed a height; he would not get wet when he jumped into the water; he would not feel hot when he jumped into the fire”,[38] and cites some specific ancient figures, such as “Pengzu [彭祖] got it [the message of Heaven, or the Tao] and thereby lived a long life from the time of King Shun [舜帝] to the time of the Five Princes; Fuyue got it and thereby became the Prime Minister to King Wuding to rule over the world, and since then, mounting on the eastern Milk Way and riding Sagittarius and Scorpio, has ranked among the stars”.[39] Therefore, Taoism firmly believes that in the medium of “the true man”, “the heaven and the man are one—no matter whether people like it or dislike it, no matter whether people think so or do not think so.”[40]

In African religious consciousness, the Supreme Being, who generally symbolizes the highest status, “rarely plays a role in the daily activities of the people. No one would even think of knowing this being or trying to know him or her as ‘personal savior’.” (xxiii) In everyday life, Africans mainly appeal to their “personal savior[s]” to their ancestors. In their minds, “the visible and invisible worlds are intertwined in an intimate interplay of the living and the ancestors” (52). The spirits on earth and in heaven, as well as the ancestors, live in “a powerful drama of maintaining the moral order, keeping harmony in place” (53). Since this order is

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37 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1999:105.

知天之所为者，天而生也。

38 ibid:105.

若然者，登高不栗，入水不濡，入火不热。

39 ibid:115.

彭祖得之，上及有虞，下及五伯；傅说得之，以相武丁，奄有天下，乘东维，骑箕尾，而比于列星。

40 ibid:109.

故其好之也一，其弗好之也一。其一也一，其不一也一。

beneficial to everyone, those who are alive should make every effort to maintain it.

And Morrison is a person who understands this order while maintaining such harmony. Raised in her family's traditional black culture, Morrison has a love of apotheosis stories and bizarre African legends. In her work, the "discredited" knowledge that her many characters possess is seen, "Some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was 'discredited…' That knowledge has a very strong place in my work" (342). By doing so, Morrison makes Pilate Dead frequently communicate with her deceased father, receives ancestral apocalypses, and guides her nephew Milkman Dead to fly. Another legendary figure Circe, who lives as long as Zhuangzi's description of Pengzu (彭祖), can know everything about the entire black community and has a mystical connection to her black ancestors.

In addition, Morrison also recounts the true story of infanticide, however, "the departed [child] are [is] never far away from their old communities…as privileged personalities" (53). Although the return of Beloved is in the form of a solicitation of maternal love, it is a direct expression of the African belief in the reincarnation of people after death. "Africans think of world-affirming, not world-renouncing, activities." (52) Quite different from the notion in Asia, which indicates "the rounds of existences and cycles of rebirth from which men might escape by Nirvana", or "the idea of reward or punishment by rebirth into a higher or lower state" (ibid), Africans think that the present world is not an illusion, as Morrison's writing in her novels.

1. Mythical Names and Ancestral Spirits in *Song*

Morrison's novel is fraught with the Bible's discourses with its enigmatic nature, especially the usage of some characters' names. At the outset, the epigraph, "The fathers may soar and the children may know their names", implies the important role of names in the novel. The title "Solomon", is an ancient Israel King portrayed as a wealthy, wise, and powerful giant

in the Hebrew Bible. While due to the exegesis of Hebrew and Christian versions, *Song of Solomon* as a biblical book remains controversial among scholars, and certainly, they think of it as a peculiar work. According to Judy Pocock in *Through a Glass Darkly: Typology in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, he describes, "This poem of romantic and sexual love, placed in an idyllic setting full of vivid images of nature, never mentions God and seems to have no religious significance" (170). But Rabbi Akiba guards its place, "The whole world is not worth the day on which the *Song of Songs* was given to Israel, for all Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies" (Pope 19). Hence interpretations vary among people around the world, one of which interests Morrison, "Because the 'beloved' of the poem has long been considered a black woman— 'I am black but comely'—the "song" has been seen as God's gift to African American women" (171).

In the novel, the person who first chants the song is Pilate Dead, an old woman with odd behavior and tattered clothes. "O Sugarman done fly away; Sugarman done gone; Arman cut across the sky; Sugarman gone home…" (6) It is a song full of mystery, hiding the secrets of her ancestral history. Pilate is the only person in the novel, who can connect with her ancestors through supernatural powers, or a ghost, by which her father (Jake, or Macon Dead I) told Pilate the hidden truth of "Sing, Sing". It actually conveys a message about the secret of her familiar history. Pilate cannot discover it until she and her nephew arrive at the Shalimar, their original place in the South. It turns out that Sing is also the name of Pilate's mother who was deceased at the time of Pilate's birth. Thus, the names, the supernatural elements, and the song are all linked together to constitute the overall mystery of the whole novel.

In addition, the explanations about the "Sugarman" in the song add to the complexity of the legend story. One is that it seems that "the discovery of Milkman's true name requires him to burrow through layers or distortions of names—Sugarman, Charlemagne, Solomon, Shalimar—that also signify an absence of narrative fixity of certitude" (Fletcher 188), which is mainly due to the fact that the words in the song may have been harmonized during the

transmission process, resulting in the phenomenon of a diversity of names.

The other explanation is from a historical perspective about the plantation of sugar cane in the South. According to Hobhouse in *Seeds of Change*, "Because sugar cane was a labor-intensive crop, the ratio of slave/sugar always remained at least ten times greater than the ratios of slaves/tobacco or slaves/cotton, or any other crop grown in servitude." (38) Naturally, the slaves engaged in manual labor related to sugar production are closely associated with the sugarman. Pilate's ancestor Solomon is one of them. Unable to endure the heavy labor and the mental torture, he resolutely chose to fly with the dream of freedom. With this novel, Morrison pays tribute to this period of African American history and those people like Solomon.

Pilate's name originates in the Bible, too. In the Bible Pilate (Pontius Pilate) is a male figure, whose mother died when giving birth to him. He was the Roman governor of Judea, but a controversial figure, described in the Old Testament as an indecisive man, while in Jewish literature as a man with a strong desire for authority. But it is worth noting that in the Bible Pilate eventually sentences Jesus to die on a cross. And How come such a man's name is used for a girl?

How his father (Pilate's father Jake), confused and melancholy over his wife's death in childbirth, had thumbed through the Bible, and since he could not read a word, chose a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome; saw in them a large figure that looked like a tree hanging in some princely but protective way over a row of smaller trees. How he had copied the group of letters out on a piece of brown paper, copied, as illiterate people do, ever curlicue, arch, and bend in the letters, and presented it to the midwife:

"It's a man's name."

"Pilate. You wrote down Pilate."

"Like a riverboat pilot?"

"No. Not like no riverboat pilot. Like a Christ-killing Pilot. You can't get much

worse than that of e a name." (18-19)

It is not discernible in Jake's words, also Macon Dead I, that he adopts the name for his daughter as a feeling of hatred for the slavery of his time, and how he longs for redemption.

With the seemingly heavenly nature since her birth, Pilate comes "struggle out of the womb" (27) after her mother's death, and surprisingly, "her stomach was as smooth and sturdy as her back, at no place interrupted by a navel" (ibid), in this way of self-born like Eva created by God. Because of this innate property, her various elusive behaviors can be seemingly explained by heaven's revelation. One of those is the ability to communicate with her dead father. Pilate keeps some bones because her father often comes to "see" her and appears to her shortly after she gives birth to her daughter Reba, telling Pilate, "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (209). Considering that the voice is that of the white man who died in the cave, Pilate returns to it and collects the bones because "Papa told to, and he was right, you know" (210).

Pilate has a posthumous relationship with her father Jake who acts as a guide to Pilate both in her childhood and into her adult life. In the interview with Christian Davis, Morrison commented that she felt a keen interest in the relationship between an ancestor and a living person, "It's interesting –the concept of an ancestor not necessarily as a parent but as an abiding, interested benevolent, guiding presence that is yours and is concerned about you, not quite like saints but having the same sort of access, none of which is new information" (Davis 227). Her views on this concept reflect Ashanti and other African people's philosophy regarding ancestor intervention. According to John Mbiti, in many West African societies, death is regarded as a process by which a person is removed from the physical world but continues to exist, in the collective memory of the people, in one of the two dimensions of time: the Sasa and the Zamani. Sasa, a Swahili word, suggests a "sense of immediacy, nearness and 'now-ness'"; Zamani refers to the "period of termination, the dimension in which everything

finds its halting point. It is the final storehouse for all phenomena and events. The ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before" (28-29). In this cosmology there is no future or hereafter; the dead dwell in personal or collective immortality, but always in the present.

Individual spirit living is guaranteed as long as survivors remember the departed and recognize them by name should they "appear", as those who live in the Sasa period are wont to do. According to Mbiti, recognition by name is important, for it ensures that the departed remain alive, as "living dead", and active in the spirit world. When they are no longer remembered and recognized, usually after the last people who knew them have departed, they become completely dead as far as family ties are concerned and enter Zamani and collective immortality. They lose contact with the family, and whatever traces of their names survive to do so only in genealogies, folklore, and myths. In this cosmology, Pilate's father, Jake, can be considered as a living dead. He is still in the process of dying and therefore resides in both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

The spirit of Jake appears many times during Pilate's childhood and her adulthood. His first appearance occurs when his children flee the protective arms of Circe and get lost in the woods. Pilate and Macon are walking in the dark and "there was this wind and in front of us was the back of our daddy. We were some scared children" (41). The second appearance occurs right after the children awake one bright, sunny morning: "…we saw him there on a stamp. Right in the sunlight…, Papa got up after awhile and moved out the sun on back into the woods" (43). The third Jake guides them into a cave where they find a sack of gold and its owner and then disappears. The rift between Pilate and Macon begins at this point: Pilate refuses to take the gold and Macon insists on it, and finally, they choose separate paths. The spirit of Jake stays with Pilate throughout her life, and he occasionally appears to her repeating the words "Sing, Sing," and "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (147). Pilate interprets the first massages as a request by her father to sing because she can sing beautifully and the

second as to carry the bones of the man whom she believes she and Macon killed in the cave of Pennsylvania. Dutifully Pilate returned to the cave and arrived back home with a sack, "the content of which she never discussed" (ibid).

Pilate thinks that she has the bones of the murdered man, but in reality, those are the bones of her father. The body that Jake's spirit refers to is really his own: his body is abandoned after his death. In addition, Jake is left behind by his father, Solomon who flies off and leaves his wife and his twenty-one children behind. Jake's request to "sing" really refers to Sing, his wife. Ironically, Morrison has Pilate misinterpret Jake's message as a request for her to sing songs. Many years later, after he returns from his southern journey, Milkman tells Pilate that Jake is merely repeating his wife's name. But Pilate is correct in believing that her father asks her to sing and sings the songs of Solomon. In doing so, Pilate passes on the heritage and story of her ancestors to Milkman. As a result, Milkman sings the song and carries on the tradition to the next generation.

As to Circe, Milkman is charmed by the strange house before him with its "sweet, spicy perfume" of ginger and a promise of goodies and gold. In Greek mythology, Circe is identified as Omphale of Linda, goddess of the omphalos, whose sacred naval stone marked the center of the world. Morrison recounts that myth by making the absence of the omphalos the mark that cuts Pilate off from the world. Circe provides Milkman with one of the clues he needs to complete the genealogy that will reconnect Pilate and her "Sugarman Song" to the song of the children of Shalimar: the name of his grandmother, Sing, Susan Byrd helps him fill in the remaining gaps so that when he finally begins to pay attention to the children's endless round, he has no doubt that the flying African is none other than the father of his grandfather, Jake.

Jake's flying "across the sky" represents the African's ancestor's spirit of freedom. Morrison skillfully lays out the flying spirit in the African genes from the opening scene of the novel which is rendered as an obvious and seemingly foolish suicide, "the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent" (3), Mr. Smith, his flying away, accompanied with Pilate's

singing on the site, reversing into a classic scene of a black man flying back to Africa in search of freedom, combining legend and reality in a reasonable way, and more miraculously, at the moment he landed, the birth of a new life, Milkman Dead, descends from the gate of heaven and earth. It is a black cultural heritage with a touch of mystery.

Pilate's words toward Ruth in a whispering voice, "A little bird'll be here with the morning." (9), just testifies to Morrison's fine articulation of these plots. The appearance of "the little bird" articulates the flight of Smith and also anticipates the future flying of the inherited tradition of the Milkman. In fact, throughout the narrative, Pilate keeps singing and rushes to push the impending-birth woman, Milkman's mother Ruth, through the crowd to the hospital, like being bestowed a divine revelation. Hence, Milkman and his aunt Pilate have been closely related from the beginning, both of whom successfully inherit the valuable spiritual legacy of their ancestors after several trials and tribulations at last.

As her mission, Pilate communicates with the ancestral celestial beings, that is, with mysterious beings from heaven, to complete the inheritance of the valuable spiritual wealth of black Americans, helping Milkman and black people like him who have migrated to the northern cities, far away from their ancestor roots, to return back, and achieve salvation. This is the reason for the mysterious supernatural power that Morrison has given Pilate.

2. Supernatural and Soliciting of Love in *Beloved*

Frankly speaking, the presence of supernatural forces can be found in many of Morrison's novels. Since her work is mainly on the theme of black Americans, Morrison considers slavery as a historical reminder of a national disgrace and should be buried. she ever delayed the writing of *Beloved*, because she could anticipate the pain of recovery and confrontation. She said, "I had forgotten that when I started the book, I was very frightened… It was an unwillingness and a terror of going into an area for which you have no preparation. It's a

commitment of three or four years to living inside… because you do try to enter that life" (Kastor 3). Despite her unwillingness to enter this area, Morrison went ahead and finished writing the book "that has signed the beginning of the recovery of a people's historical experience in America".

Hence, Beloved may be the most unambiguous endorsement of the supernatural, due to partly ghosts, zombies, devils, and memory. She comes back in snatches until her story is retold, a discovery shared by the characters and the readers as the primary step to collective spiritual recovery. With the appearance of Beloved, Sethe must confront the guilt of her actions and in that self-absolution find a future. For the readers, Beloved makes them recover the past, present, and future. Supernatural to a world with limited notions of reality, Beloved is nothing more or less than a memory that comes to life that has too conveniently been forgotten. Though initially an invisible force only capable of the typical poltergeist activities—moving chairs, rattling cabinets, frightening dogs and children—Beloved eventually manifests herself as a ghostly apparition, then as a full-blooded human being. Finally, Beloved grows to the right proportions until she explodes under the collective gaze of an indignant gathering of women.

From the viewpoint of African belief, "The position of the African ghost in the other world depends largely upon the style in which the dead man departs the world… Without a proper burial, the ghost could not go to its final destination but would linger around and wreak fitting vengeance on the survivors. In Loanda, much of the defeating noise at a funeral is for the purpose of driving away these evil spirits, which are also appeased by sacrifices and abstinences of all kinds" (Puckett 91). Beloved fits the description of the unhappy ghost. Though she has no quarrel with her burial, she certainly has a problem with the way she died. The noise that the women of Sethe's community produce serves to aid in the exorcism of Beloved, the evil spirit.

Unhappy ghost or evil spirit as she is, Beloved represents not only the spirit of Sethe's daughter; she is also the projection of the repressed collective memory of a violated people; she

represents the returned of all the faces, all the drowned, who lost their being because of the force of that Euro-American slave-history. Being the ghost of the murdered child, Beloved epitomizes the inconceivability not only of slavery but of the extent to which it dehumanized people.

> Who is Beloved?
>
> Now we understand: she is the daughter that returns to Sethe so that her mind will be homeless no more.
>
> Who is Beloved ?
>
> Now we may say: she is the sister that returns to Denver and brings hope for her father's return, the fugitive who died in his escape.
>
> Who is Beloved?
>
> Now we know: she is the daughter made of murderous love who returns to love and hate and frees herself. Her words are broken, like the lynched people with broken necks; disembodied, like the dead children who lost their ribbons. But there is no mistaking what her live words say as they rise from the dead despite their lost syntax and their fragmented presence. (Bhabha 17).

The historical Sethe, Margaret Garner, killed her daughter so that she would not become a slave, a more frightening and terrifying prospect than death itself. Such a story plumbs the depths of human depravity, something that most people choose not to contemplate. Morrison says she wrote Beloved convinced that "this has got to be the least read of all the books I'd want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia". (Angole 120)

According to Spiller, slavery and the Middle Passage denied cultural entry into American culture and reduced the black slaves to subjective absence. Spiller's analysis of slavery clarifies

the link between Beloved's identity as the ghost of Sethe's preverbal infant and her collective identity as the trace of the "Sixty Million and more" victims of slavery and the Middle Passage. Sethe's infanticide inadvertently consigns Beloved to the same pre-cultural limbo as the slave; when she returns to the world of the living she carries with her traumatic memories of a place of undifferentiated bodies that suggests the material conditions on board. On the other hand, Beloved carries her memories of the histories violence done to the black body during the Middle Passage, the place where, as she recounts in her monologue, it is impossible to mourn: "If we had more to drink we could make tears" (210). On the other, she is herself a bodily memory, a memory that she took on flesh.

Beloved allows a family of escaped slaves to come to terms with the guilt of having survived, to negotiate the claim of those who did not make it, those whom they have been forced to leave behind. It is as if the survival of Sethe, Paul D, Denver is predicated on the recognition of those who did not survive, as if their movement toward "some kind of tomorrow" is dependent on recognizing those who remain in the prison, as if the realization of their own subject-hood is bound up with the remembrance of the subject-less anonymity of the Sixty Million and more.

Morrison suggests that "the purpose of making ghosts real is making history possible, making memory real" ("Darling in Taylor-Guthrie" 249). In other words, incarnating the past in the form of Beloved enables the characters and the readers to confront the past, "making it possible to remember" the past "in a manner in which it can be digested" (ibid). However, Beloved's material presence also clearly indicates the indigestibility of the memory of slavery; she returns precisely because, like those who died during the Middle Passage, she has been, in Morrison's phrase, "unceremoniously buried". She returns in the flesh because her death has not been adequately symbolized or put into words.

That Morrison has indeed written such a successful book suggests that readers share Morrison's need to purify themselves; once again writer, readers, and text participate in a

dynamic of identification. Beloved, then, reappears as a mysterious sprite for recovering psychological and spiritual memory. It is only through memory that the past can be integrated into the present, providing what it means to be human. However, her spirit may be back where she has been wandering for eighteen years, along with thousands of souls and spirits like Beloved, who have not disappeared and are immortal.

In conclusion, this chapter is a comprehensive interpretation of the idea of equality throughout, effectively linking the Taoist philosophy “On the Uniformity of All Things” (齊物論)” with amicable relationships of three realms: human, Nature, and the supernatural divinity which are all embodied in Morrison’s work. These three domains are not understood as absolutely distinct spaces. Conversely, they are related closely, because they all ultimately follow the principle of the Tao. Like the reverence of Morrison’s African ancestors for the Supreme Being, everything is the masterwork of the Creator.

V. Tao's Eternity and Morrison's View of Hope

As the Creator in Taoist philosophy, the Tao is undeniably eternal. It came into existence "before Heaven and Earth" (145), and has been in a state of "eternally revolving without fail" (ibid). Lao Tzu compares the Tao to an ever-present the spirit of the Valley or God who serves all things in the world through unceasing work. "The Spirit of the Valley never dies. It is called the Mystic Female. The Door of the Mystic is the root of Heaven and Earth. Continuously, continuously, it seems to remain. Draw upon it and it serves you with ease."[41]

The eternity of the Tao is mainly materialized in the *Tao Te Ching* as the existential nature of qi (氣). Chapter 42 of the *Tao Te Ching* is the first to explain it clearly, "Out of Tao, one is born; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe."[42] The *Huainanzi* (淮南子) gives the earliest explanation that the "One" is the primordial qi (元氣), which is created by Tao; and the "Two" is yin (陰) and yang (陽), two kinds of qi that have evolved from the original qi, which is regarded as the essential characteristic of all things and yin-yang as the two states of qi itself, and the harmonious cooperation between yin and yang produces the innumerable things in the world. More specifically, qi is the flowing energy of all the vitality of life that was created by the Tao.

In fact, qi is one of the most complex and multi-layered concepts in Taoist philosophy, with no equivalent in any other language. Its original meaning is closely related to the breathing of humans and other living beings. Three of its characteristics are described below:

Firstly, independence and objectivity. The objective nature of qi is a property of natural

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41 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948: 64.

谷神不死，是谓玄牝。玄牝之门，是谓天地根, 绵绵若存，用之不勤。

42 ibid: 214.

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。

matter that travels through forests and mountains in the form of physical or meteorological phenomena, such as wind, clouds, mist and steam. Zhuangzi literally compares the wind to the breath of the universe, "the universe blows out of a vital breath called the wind." (15) The natural shapes, such as the crags and cliffs in the mountains and the hollows and caves in the giant trees, are all personified as the nostrils and mouths of mankind to breathe. Later, in the Warring States period, the concept of qi came to mean the vital spirit, the life force of all creatures. Nourishing the vital spirit through diet, yogic exercise, and breath control became an important part of the Taoist quest for immortality.

The nature of qi implies its more than human scope. The vital spirit of life is not limited to humans like some higher animals, but applies to all species and even to all of nature. The flow of life energy in the form of qi transcends the human body, and the exchange of energy covers the natural rhythm of nature, including all objects. From the perspective of qi, there is no great difference between humans and other species and objects on earth. This more than human mentality of Taoism goes against the anthropocentrism.

As for the independence of qi, it is linked to a person's life and death; when qi flows in the body to form the energy of life, the person lives, and when qi dissipates, the person dies. As Zhuangzi argues, "The birth of a man is the convergence of the vital energy, which in turn forms lives. The break-up of the vital energy causes death" (429). To further elaborate on qi as an independent nature, Zhuangzi also affirms, "There are remarkable changes in the dead man's physical form, but there is no injury done to his mind; the dwelling place for his spirit has changed, but the spirit is not dead." (127) His clear statements point directly to a qi-based theory of life. It is qi that takes on the human form; the form is transient, but qi is permanent. When a particular form vanishes, the qi that formed that form continues to exist, moving independently and freely in the universe.

Secondly, eternity and immutability. Understanding the unchanging nature of the qi of life means making empirical observations based on conclusions about the general phenomena of

life, while a truly philosophical confrontation with life and death must also come from an exploration of the origins of life.

Zhuangzi has his own profound views on this, aptly illustrated in a story about his behavior after the death of his wife. Without mourning, he was "squatting on the ground, singing and beating time on a basin",[43] and explained to his friend Huizi (惠子), who had come to pay his condolences, that the cycle of life and death was a continuous transformation of qi or the vital force, like "the succession of spring, summer, autumn and winter" (341). As a philosopher, Zhuangzi has already thoroughly understood the question of human life and death, and therefore provides a very objective commentary on the origin of life. Zhuangzi's view of human life frees his followers from the constant fear of death and helps them to face the vicissitudes of life with a natural and non-pessimistic attitude. The human life cycle is just the natural and inevitable movement of qi that determines the ups and downs of life, just as nature determines the waxing and waning of the moon and the coming and going of any other natural phenomenon. By accepting this fact of life as a natural occurrence, man would transcend the illiberal obsession with life and other man-made ways of doing things.

Thirdly, mystery and inscrutability. The mysterious nature of qi is mainly expressed in Taoist thought as *fengshui* (風水), or geomancy, which is a system of placing tombs, houses and other objects in the landscape to take advantage of the natural flow of air in the earth. The classic says that qi rides the wind and disperses, but remains when it meets water. So, a place that attracts water is the most desirable, followed by a place that catches the wind. In Taoist culture, such places with good *fengshui* are the tombs dedicated to the ancestors, who can communicate with their living family members through mystical qi, and the houses inhabited by the living, who can communicate with their deceased ancestors in the form of qi. Qi is thus

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43 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:341.

方箕踞鼓盆而歌。

the mysterious, boundary-crossing tool that connects humans to other beings on the planet.

Zhuangzi also told a story to illustrate how qi could be used to communicate across borders. When one of his friends, Zisanghu (子桑户), died, the others decided to compose a song to celebrate his death, just as Zhuangzi has done when his wife died. Then, Zhuangzi called them people who were "not confined to the human world" (105) and gave a more direct explanation of qi, " Together with the Creator, they are now wandering in the vital breath of the heaven and the earth." (ibid) Leaving aside a more detailed explanation of this story aside, one thing is very clear: humans can communicate with non-human nature through qi, although this requires the Taoist practitioner's own cultivation and practice of conditioning the body and mind to do so.

Much like Taoist qi, the term animism in African religious cultures originally meant breath. Animism was first defined in 1871 by the British anthropologist Edward Burnet Tayor in his book *Primitive Culture* as "a general belief in a spiritual being"(58). Subsequently, other anthropologists have used the term to refer to African religions, usually assuming that all African religions have at least the notion of something material and immaterial with a breath or a soul. Yet, it is this minimalist idea that constitutes the concept of a religion, which is one of the oldest forms of belief on earth. The essential condition of religion seems to be the belief that this mystical breath is present in every object, whether animate or inanimate. Thus, in this structure of thought, a particular soul will exist or does exist as "a part of an immaterial soul, and is therefore universal and eternal" (58).

It is precisely because of this religious interpretation of the animistic nature that man seems to have this surreal belief, which means that the idea of shadow, spirit, soul or breath is the reason for the universal view in religion that man is activated by this life force. Original religious thought proclaims that the nature of the human spirit is unfettered, like the breath of a living creature, and that the vitality of life must return to the universe even after death. As the saying goes among Africans, "We die in order to undergo change as a process or as a 'dam of

time' it permits life to flow and regenerate to create a new state of being free the spirit" (Fu-Kiau 27).

Morrison has a deep appreciation of this religious tradition and expresses it in her work as a bearer of African culture. The themes of death and rebirth are often explored in Morrison's work, partly to remind more people of a human history full of blood and tears, and partly to express her desire for freedom and dreams through the regeneration in her novels. As her African ancestors believed, the life force is "comparable to the sun…The sun is present in its rays; it heats and brightens through its rays" (567). With the light and warmth of their ancestors, Morrison's characters can ignite a new anticipation of life and pursue their dreams with hope. This chapter explores three aspects of Morrison's work in terms of their hope and anticipation: the women in the Convent who are reborn free from patriarchal restrictions, Queen in *Child*, and Eva in *Sula*, who are reincarnated and spiritually unbounded by the power of fire with the qualities of destruction and rebirth, and the younger girl Pecola's desire for freedom through spiritual redemption from the distorted values of her race.

A. Patriarchy, Slaughter, and Rebirth in *Paradise*

Like Baby Suggs, the existence of the living dead has been missed by loved ones and blacks in the community because of her previous kindness in healing others in Clearing, such as "Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone" (137). Morrison also portrays a Suggs-like character, Consolata, in another of her works *Paradise*,

Morrison's *Paradise* sets the tragic tone of life and death from the very beginning of the novel. "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time." (3) The author moves the action along as the gunmen hunt their targets: the women in the Convent. At the same time, Morrison also describes the town of Ruby, nineteen kilometers away, where the men

with guns live, as having a calm and peaceful atmosphere.

> From the beginning, its people were free and protected. A sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight..... And if a light shone a house up a way and the cry of a colicky baby caught her attention, she might step over to the house and call out softly to the woman inside trying to soothe the baby. (8-9)

A woman sitting alone in the silence of the night, contrasted with the sound of gunfire, and the pandemonium in the distance. The irony here is that the town of Ruby owes its tranquility to the violent massacre outside. However, the white girl who was first shot is also placed at the same time as the "a colicky baby" at midnight, revealing the simultaneous occurrence of human life and death. Morrison deliberately interweaves different details, deliberately creating a nebulous connection between birth and death.

Such a beginning seems to have the opposite effect of the novel's title *Paradise*, which might refer more directly to the Garden of Eden, in *My Garden*, Jamaica Kincaid refers to "the garden to which all gardens must refer, whether they want to or not" (223). The paradise built by Morrison is actually in line with the US-Western development policy at that time. Shari Evans in *Programmed Space, Themed Space, and the Ethics of Home in Toni Morrison's Paradise*, argues that after the Civil War, many all-black towns in Oklahoma were touted as the paradise of the West, with slogans like, "Oklahoma—the future land and the paradise of Eden and the garden of the Gods… Here the negro can rest from mob law, where he can be secure from every ill of the southern policies" (38). The paradise is promoted not only as a physical place but also as a safe space, an interweaving of social and ecological landscapes that Morrison reinvents in Ruby and Convent.

1. Rigidity and Hierarchy

The novel presents the two Oklahoma paradises as different situations: the conservative and stubbornly deadly Ruby, and the free and upwardly mobile Convent. In the all-black town of Ruby, men's control over women is enacted through the town's own philosophy of racial segregation and selection. Ruby's pre-existence, Haven, was built by the Old Fathers in retaliation for the "Disallowing" by white men and light-skinned black men, who refused to let them settle because of their poverty and "8-rock" skin color, which is an abbreviation for eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people" (193). However, the all-black town of Haven, and later Ruby, was and is still a community modeled on white values of power, status, property, and skin color. However, the New Fathers led by the Morgan brothers Deacon and Steward, who were also major participants in the massacre, control the financing of the town through capitalist ventures in banking and real estate. According to Peter Widdowson in *The American Dream Refashioned*, "Ruby is not just an isolated black small town but American at large, since all its values replicate the conservative values at the heart of white America." (306)

Because of this white domination, it is natural for these men to be hostile to the women in the Convent. Eventually, nine of Ruby's "nice" men, fearful of losing control of the community, hunt down the women. With God on their side, the men storm the convent and massacre the five women living there.

In fact, Morrison's *Paradise* is indeed based on a real event that took place in the south-western state of Oklahoma. Although the temporal sequence is disordered, the novel is set within the historical framework of the land rush in the Oklahoma Territory and the massacre in the Convent, which corresponds to a quasi-event that occurred several years before the publication of *Paradise*, "some black nuns occupying a convent near a small town were shot by local residents for practicing what the attackers claimed were pagan rites" (Jessee 87), which

proves the authenticity of race and gender issues and depicts a complete historical picture of racial discrimination and hierarchical imbalance.

According to this historical fragment, the author created the novel and designed the plot in a similar way. This is why the novel begins with a deliberately slaughtering scene. On one side are the men in the cars, armed to the teeth with modern rifles; on the other side are the unprepared, unarmed women using the utensils in the kitchen.

Coincidentally, the oven, as one of the utensils of the kitchen, is also a symbol of the culture of Ruby, which is located in the square of Ruby Town. It is a commemorative and remarkable emblem, and a public communal cooking device, but it is no longer functional. According to Cynthia Dobbs in *Diasporic Designs of House, Home, and Haven in Toni Morrison's Paradise*, "in Haven and then in Ruby, Morrison turns the conventionally feminine domestic space of the kitchen inside out, rendering the Oven a public icon of the town fathers' Utopian plans. Private, feminine utility becomes public, masculine memorial." (116) At this point Morrison adds a strong sense of irony. As Shari Evans notes in *Programmed Space, Themed Space, and the Ethics of Home in Toni Morrison's Paradise*, "No longer the site of communal food preparation or even baptisms, no longer necessary for either material or spiritual sustenance, the Oven has become simply an empty monument." (389)

Moving from Haven to Ruby, the 8-rock people have to discreetly dismantle the oven and carry the "bricks, the hearthstone, and the iron plate two hundred and forty miles west" (Wardi 6), then arrive at the destination to reassemble and cement all the parts together. The oven was dissembled and reassembled again, just as their minds needed to change and not just stick to the old ways.

In fact, the oven, which represents the family's past culture, is directly involved in this slaughter. It is at the oven that the men of Ruby confer on their plan to assassinate the Convent women, "Like boot camp recruits, like invaders preparing for slaughter, they were there to rave, to heat the blood or turn it icicle cold the better to execute the mission." (280) After the

slaughter, the rest of the town is ashamed to talk about it, as a matter of dishonor. Since then, however, the oven has collapsed into the ground, along with a serious tile, revealing that Ruby's cultural roots have completely died out.

Ruby's men's control over women is enforced by the town's philosophy of racial seclusion's "Disallowing". Ruby's antecedent, the all-black town of Haven, was built by the Old Fathers in retaliation for the "disallowing" of whites and light-skinned blacks, who refused to let them settle because of their poverty and "8-rock" skin color. However, Ruby was and still is a community modeled on white values of power, status, property, and skin color. They adamantly reject outsiders because of the purity of their deep black blood and skew Ruby's entire ecosystem in unhealthy ways.

A case in point is Fleetwood's four sick children in Ruby, "The reverence for the darkest of skin color is a logical explanation for the high levels of infant illness, if not mortality: inbreeding (in whatever culture) leads to disability of all kinds" (Wagner-Martin 117). It is the evil consequence that only the intermarriage policy in Ruby brings about, leading to the weakening of the local human genre. In *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, Amdrea O'Reilly catalogs many registries of broken mothering in *Paradise*, "The barrenness, abortions, miscarriages, sickly children and dead babies, as well as the maternal abandonment and neglect, motherlessness, mother loss, mother-daughter estrangement described in Paradise, represent Haven's and later Ruby's inability to sustain community" (139). In an interview, Morrison herself confirms that the community "carries the seeds of its own destruction" (156). In *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*, Montgomery, a famous botanist, also elucidates the importance of biotic diversity, "as ecologists know, diversity conveys resilience, which can help keep agriculture sustainable. Monoculture generally leave the ground bare in the spring, exposing vulnerable soil to erosion for months before crops get big enough to block incoming rain" (206). The act is therefore unreasonable and harmful to every specie in the entire biotic world, and the same goes for Ruby.

But not only do the men of Ruby fail to recognize their own conservatism and its consequence, they see the presence of the Convent as a moral threat. They disdain the "throwaway people" who live there because they represent what is "Out There", what the all-black paradise of Ruby must keep out. In Lone's words, they are "not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is of say not a convent but a coven" (276). The older generation of Ruby men feel that the community is falling into evil ways: disrespectful children, inappropriate sexual relationships, abortions, and nudity. And they put the blame on the presence of the Convent women. Eventually, nine of Ruby's "honest' men, afraid of losing control, hunt down the Convent women because of their fear of losing control. "With God on their side", the men storm the convent and massacre the five women who live there.

2. Healing and Underground Meditation of Women

Connie falls victim to the raid by Ruby's men. Smiling in the face of death, such a saintly figure is perfected by Morrison in this slaughter. She "narrows her gaze against the sun, then lifts it as though distracted by something high above the heads of the men" (21), and behaves with ease. In contrast, the humiliated man opposite her is eager to find a pair of sunglasses behind which he can hide. Probably because Morrison depicts the Convent women as a self-empowered maternal community free from racist and sexist cultural constraints, Connie maintains her composure until she is shot in the forehead. Morrison herself also describes Connie's composure in the face of danger, "It's interesting and important to me that once the women are coherent and strong and clean in their interior lives, they feel saved." (ibid)

Her quietness and cleanliness come from her benevolence and inclusiveness. Connie is a typical maternal identity role in the novel. This character reminds us of what Morrison suggests in her description of the new directions for criticism of black writing in her interview with

Robert Stepto, in which she argues, “And then there’s the black woman as a parent, not as a mother or father, but as a parent, as a sort of umbrella figure, culture-bearer, in that community with not just her children but all children, her relationship in that sense, how that is handled and treated and understood by writers, what that particular role is.” (27) Apparently, that’s the role Connie plays among the women of the Convent, such an “umbrella figure” and “culture-bearer”, a woman of affection and kindness, wisdom and insight. As the text says, “the dimmer the visible world, the more dazzling her ‘in sight’ became” (247).

Moreover, her inclusiveness is embodied in her acceptance of the other four women who have come to the Convent for temporary refuge. However, one possibility suggested by Sarah Aguiar in *Passing on’ Death* is that the five women may have been dead before arriving at the Convent, “Gigi arrives at the Convent in a hearse; Mavis in the Cadillac in which her infant twins died. Pallas cannot speak at first, and Seneca engages in self-bloodletting” (514). While this bold extrapolation of possibility is intriguing in itself, it also supports a reading of the novel in terms of the ecologically natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth, which is consistent with the theme of nature, a natural rule that also includes human and non-human actors. the reincarnation of life and death also resonates with the non-human environment, the underground, which reveals that “life depends on recycling past life” (Montgomery 19).

The organic dovetailing of the past of the other four, involving death or trauma, with Connie’s unique underground meditation is the result of Morrison’s ingenious arrangement. This cloistered space in the form of a root cellar, evokes an underground garden where produce is presumably stored and the smell of herbs lingers. And Morrison’s characterization of the basement unmistakably gives it a quiet and comfortable atmosphere, “There is a small room in the cellar… It’s cool and dark in the summer” (237). In fact, a root cellar is made by digging deep into the earth, suggesting a space between the human dwelling and the earth. It is an ancient technique for integrating humans into the biosphere, using the earth’s insulating properties, and root cellars have been used in many cultures.

For African Americans, the root cellar is not only the space needed to ensure the safety of people and produce in African American life but also the space for their personal survival and nourishment. Morrison uses this history of the root cellar and human civilization to express her appreciation for the physical rooting and spiritual nourishment that the women of the Convent perform in their own special space.

Each time Connie meditates, she presents a disembodied spirituality with "thick eyebrows, pearly white teeth; no-grey hair, pearly-smooth skin" (262). She instructs them to scrub the basement door, undress, and lie down, preparing everything in the hazy light under the soft sight of Connie.

> How should we lie? However, we feel. They tried arms at the sides, outstretched above the head, crossed over breasts or stomach. Seneca lay on her stomach at first, then changed to her back, hands clasping her shoulders. Pallas lay on her side, knees drawn up. Gigi flung her legs and arms apart, while Mavis struck a floater's pose, arms angled, knees pointing in. (263)

These women lie naked and in various poses, like the newly created angels of Genesis, and in the silence Connie walks slowly, drawing the silhouette of each body on the ground, and speaks of the indivisibility of the soul and the body, "My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who taught me my body is nothing my spirit everything… After she is dead I cannot get pass that. My bones on hers are the only good thing… Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve." (263)

As for Connie, with her newfound strength she takes on the role of their spiritual leader for the group, offering what the girls cannot get from the outside world: caring, love, understanding, and a family. They realize that the community is the place they want to be in their minds. Connie's underground contemplation marks a transformation for the other four

women, who all experience the dark night of the soul. This mysterious transformation has profound implications for the women as it symbolizes the beginning of their spiritual transcendence. Melanie R. Anderson says of Connie, "If Beloved is interpreted as a child spirit attempting to deal with the trauma of slavery, then Connie, a character in *Paradise*, becomes a mature spirit guide with one foot in the real and another in the beyond, memorializing and healing the scars of slavery, Reconstruction, and the civil rights movement through her interaction with the four women in the Convent and the townspeople of Ruby" (309).

Similarly, Connie's underground meditation is essentially the same as the Taoist practice of yang sheng (養生), which focuses on nurturing the mind and spirit. What is slightly different from underground meditation is the location. The places where Taoists practice are generally called the temples or observatories (觀), which are usually located in the mountains and beautiful landscapes that are far away from the hustle and bustle of the city, according to the tradition of Taoist temples that continues to this day. "By observing the scenery, Taoists are perhaps better able to take advantage of the vitality that flows through the landscape, known in Chinese as the 'Dao' or the 'Way', aligning themselves with it and being transformed by it." (Miller 25)

Such a transformation is a way of connecting the outer landscape of the mountains and rivers with the inner world of the human being of bones, blood, and breath, also called the inner body landscape, which is known in Chinese as "cultivating the Tao" (修道). For the health of the individual, it is also called yang sheng (養生).

As a matter of fact, there are many similarities between Connie's underground meditation and Taoist yang sheng (養生). Firstly, the unification of the inner body and the external world. Both are about bringing people into contact with the substances of nature, such as mountains, rivers, and the earth, to achieve the integration of man and nature. Secondly, the unity of tranquility and cleanliness. A quiet environment is a crucial factor, whether it is the silence of the underground or the tranquility away from the noise of the city. And just as individuals are

required to either bathe, dress neatly, and sit on a mattress, or lie naked on the ground, for deep piety. Thirdly, and most importantly, both for the purification of the spirit and the nourishment of life. Women who have experienced difficult fates are spiritually baptized in underground meditation to rekindle their hope in life, as are Taoists who leave worldly matters behind to purify their minds.

In terms of cultivating life, Zhuangzi is the one who has the most to say, "Cultivate your mind, that's all. Follow the natural course of events and do nothing, and all things will transform by themselves. You only have to ignore your physical form, get rid of your wisdom, and forget yourself together with everything in the world."[44]

Taoist thought lies in the fact that man practices self-enlightenment through meditation, and internalize himself to feel the existence of Tao by regulating the qi (氣) in the body to reach a state of unity with nature, purifying the mind and cultivating the body in the process. In *Ecology and Religion: An Overview*, Tucker argues that "In Daoism, the body is an energetic network of breathing-in and breathing-out that expresses a basic dialogical pattern of the cosmos. Through this process, individuals open themselves to the inner meditative landscape that represents a path of organic unity with the cosmos" (2605).

After the basement's contemplation, the women step out to the outside, where preordained rain makes a vital contribution to the last ritual of their healing, "Consolata, fully housed by the god who sought her out in the garden, was the more furious dancer, Mavis the most elegant. Seneca and Grace danced together, then parted to skip through fresh mud. Pallas, smoothing raindrops from her baby's head, swayed like a frond"(283). In African religion, rain, as a form of water, is intimately and ultimately linked to the human concept of fertility, the process by which life is passed on to the regenerated, and is of paramount importance to the people of

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44 Zhangzi, Zhuangzi. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:167.

意！心养！汝徒处无为，而物自化。堕尔形体，吐尔聪明，伦与物忘，大同乎涬溟。

Africa.

In Africa, however, the rain dance is not only a prayer for rain but also an expression of appeasement and gratitude to the spirits. It is “practiced to appease the spirits and create fertility, productivity, and harvest in the land” (562). In their minds, drought is seen as something out of balance, a function of comic chaos, and it’s everyone’s responsibility to work with the spirits to bring things back to normal. Although customs vary from tribe to tribe, the idea is essentially the same across the African continent, making sacrifices “so that the spirits will remember to bring rain to those who have shown their gratitude” (ibid).

These traumatized women are grateful for the blessings of their ancestral spirits, but also for Connie, who as the new mother superior in the Convent, guides and facilitates the spiritual rebirth that the natural world continues. Moreover, the above description is full of images of rebirth: rainwater as amniotic fluid, Pallas as a mother, and women as plants. They are delighted to forget their old memories and recover new identities in the Convent.

3. Reincarnation and Expectation

The worst results of patriarchal coercion appear in Morrison’s novels, where barbaric killing destroys the paradise of the Convent women. As Lao Tzu said, “The more sharp weapons there are, the greater the chaos in the state”.[45] Morrison draws on slaughter to suggest the brutality of slavery, but from the side also offers the possibility of reincarnation.

Reincarnation is a commonly accepted term in various religions, meaning “a dead person returns to life in another being” (565). But Africans believe that “humans who die return to the Earth in different human forms, but not, as is found in India, as animals”. And one reason

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45 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:265.

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people call for an ancestor's rebirth is that "souls are reborn in children, and the souls who are reborn may be the grandparents returned" (52), which represents the reunion of the family and the regeneration of hope.

Yet, in *Paradise*, Morrison devises a rebirth paving that shows the bodies of the women in the Convent suddenly disappearing after the massacre. The community of Ruby considers various scenarios, one of which is that "the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air" (Paradise 296) Their bodies are not found because they have taken on another form, a point that the women's friend Billie Delia ponders as she contemplates their absence, and she is just "the only one in town who was not puzzled by where the women were or concerned about how they disappeared. She had another question: When will they return?" (308).

Another person, the Reverend Richard Misner, who has reflected on these women's deaths, argues that "it is our own misfortune if we do not know in our long life what she knew every day of her short one: that although life is terminal, life after life is everlasting. He is with us always, in life, after it and especially in-between, lying in wait for us to know the splendor" (307). The idea that life continues to exist in a realm other than the physical body is confirmed by the resurrection of the women at the end of the novel and their appearance before their relatives and friends.

A few days after the shooting, Misner and his fiancée return to the Convent and try to piece together what happened, doubting the murder in the absence of physical evidence. For Anna Flood and Richard Misner, what they see is the color pink or red to reiterate the unforgettable moment and the memory:

> At the edge of the garden, a faded red chair lay on its side. Beyond was blossom and death...shriveled tomato plants alongside crops of leafy green reseeding themselves with gold flowers; pink hollyhocks so tall the heads leaned all the way over a trail of bright squash blossoms; lacy tops of carrots browned and lifeless next to straight green spikes of

onion. Melons split their readiness showing gums of juicy red. Anna sighed at the mix of neglect and unconquerable growth. The five eggs warm umber in her hands (304-5).

By depicting the garden, a space of life and death with their "heads leaned" and "readiness showing gums of juicy red", Morrison implies that the bleeding bodies of women fertilize the soil and thus become part of the flora, which is a realistic explanation for the disappearance of the women's bodies. They are buried underground so as to enrich the soil as a form of compost, and the garden harvest is limned as evidence for this. Compost is produced by the decomposition of decaying substances in the soil, which then becomes an abundant soil additive, a biological transition from waste to nutrition for the vegetables. The fertility of the vegetation in the garden may be generated by the women's self-sacrificing contribution, which fertilizes the soil and later becomes one element in the growth of fruit. In Morrison's conception, the garden is therefore a place of the cycle of life and death.

Whether in the form of decomposing bodies and decaying plants or not, death is omnipresent in the garden. Beyond imagined abundance and pristine lands aside, various stages of disease, decay, and death are as much a part of the biological world as growth and hope. That life is born from death is never more evident than in the biophysical world. In nature, dead organic matter is considered to be the most effective nourishment for new life. "Soil organic matter is essential for sustaining soil fertility not so much as a direct source of nutrients but by supporting soil ecosystems that help promote the release and uptake of nutrients." (Montgomery 205)

Anna gathered five fresh eggs in her hands, which corresponded to and symbolized the five women of the Convent, linking women not only to nature but also to motherhood. However, the men denigrate a hen and eggs in their search for the Convent: "Peering out he sees an old hen, her puffed and bloody hind parts cherished, he supposes, for delivering freaks—double, triple yolks in outsize and misshapen shells" (5). Above all, the maternal

quality of women and eggs is somewhat similar, and eggs are materialized for fertility and new life in the shells. As a philosophical saying about chicken and eggs, "The egg is in the chicken, and the chicken is in the egg. Chicken and egg arise in mutual dependence. Neither is independent" (Squier 14). The purpose of this conclusion is to explain the complex entanglement of life, death, and rebirth that eggs and chickens embody in duality. Eggs as one of the constructed forms of life, are in the borderland between death and rebirth, even life and death, which is perceived at the moment when Mother Superior is on the verge of death, "I can't see anything unless it's right up on me. Like living in an eggshell" (47), suggesting that she is about to leave her outer body in order to regenerate a new life.

In *Myth and Mind*, Harvey Birenbaum also argues that the transformation is embodied as "stages of life, phrases, emotion, aspects of personal relationships—all pass and alter, often in predictable rhythms, but also in ways that provide continuity in difference, complementarity in unity, self-transcendence, and self-exhaustion" (31-32). Like life in the garden, the women have embraced death. Though transformed, they still exist, as reflected in the fresh eggs and the uninterrupted flowers in the bushes. Morrison establishes the relationship between women and the earth in her portrayal of the Convent women. Essentially, the power of the earth is associated with those women who have the ability to wield spiritual power. These elements of nature, trees, bushes, mountains, and earth, have a feminine character, just as hunting is a male privilege, like Ruby's men.

In primitive African culture, agriculture promoted the sacred notion that it was "an act of solidarity with the earth and access to power" (140). However, the women of Ruby can only mow the lawn in front of their homes to confirm that they have not completely departed from their ancestral traditions, compared to the Convent women's autonomy to cultivate, Ruby women are in a state of complete powerlessness. Conversely, the women of the Convent, who mainly grew crops such as peppers which "have all the qualities needed to bear life" (ibid), demonstrate "the symbolic landscape of power raising the ire of the men incensed about the

nature of women who do not need men and prefigure their demise." (ibid)

Peppers, as one of the crops representing the subsistence life of the Convent women, which also "have all the qualities needed to bear life", occur when Anna and Misner are in the backyard of the Convent. It must be said that Morrison has given peppers certain mystery about "passages or means of access" (Zauditu-Selassie 140). As they collect the peppers, one senses a door, the other a window. "Who saw a closed door; Who saw a raised window." (305) Zauditu-Selassie argues, "In the Kongo spiritual system, doors and windows are considered *well*, or portals between the material and spirit realms. These doors revolve and spirits can egress and ingress at will, evident by the women who visit with living." (140) Similarly, these doors are open to the victims in the Convent.

Morrison is indeed answering the call from her homeland, Africa, as each woman of the Convent returns to their place and family, proclaiming that they have been reincarnated back. They are not specters but embodied, living women. For example, Gigi was seen having a bath in a cool lake: "This was lake country: viridian water, upright trees and—in places where no boats or fishermen came—a privacy royal would envy. She picked up a towel and dried her hair." (310) Pallas's silhouette emerging in her mother Dee Dee's sight, Mavis's chatting with her daughter Sally in the restaurant, and even Seemingly-Seneca's encounter in the street, in which they all seem as relaxed and natural as if they were standing in the garden of Covent.

As for Connie, she is reunited with the Mother God, Piedade, "black as firewood," whose "black face is framed in cerulean blue". Piedade sings to her and rocks her like a cradled baby. This gesture of cradling is predicated in the novel, "the Convent women are nightly rocked to sleep, eschewing beds in favor of hammocks" (Wardi 45). Likewise, Connie rocks Mother Mary Magna who is dying in her arm, "so the lady had entered death like a birthing" (223). Thus, in Piedade's rocking, it is as if Connie has gone "home to be at home" (318). Morrison suggests that Connie has crossed the abyss of water into another realm and rests in the arms of the Mother Goddess.

In addition, Morrison deliberately places the figures in the final scene of the novel on the seashore, a place where water and rebirth can be linked, seemingly returning to the environment of birth again. “Our ancient ancestors came out of the water and evolved from swimming to crawling to walking. Human foetuses still have ‘gill slit’ structures in their early stages of development and we spend our first nine months of life immersed in the ‘watery environment’ of our mothers’ wombs” (10). The first experience of life is bathed in amniotic fluid, which immediately emphasizes the intimate connection humans have with water, and simultaneously, nurtures life as a mother, “water is life’s matter and matrix, mother and medium. There is no life without water” (ibid).

In the context of African American history, the life-giving element of water also has a special significance, “since more than any other single event, the Middle Passage—the transit from Africa to America—has come to epitomize the experience of people of African descent throughout the Atlantic world” (Berlin 14). From this perspective, the waters of the Atlantic Ocean are like the amniotic fluid of the mother’s fetus, concretizing the fluid boundary between freedom and slavery and giving birth to the African American culture. The sea and African cultural roots are woven together in a panorama of new life in *Paradise*.

B. Fire, Lethality, and New Anticipation

Morrison places Connie’s rebirth by the sea, a place with water on which humans depend, and connects it to the historical and cultural context of the first arrival of black Americans on the North American continent. Likewise, fire is another natural factor concerning human life, The Greek philosopher Empedocles confirmed that fire was the origin of life, “All creatures are born from and born by fire.” (Harris 44) If the occurrence of fire is one of the important symbols of human civilization, “it is a fire that has made humanity” (47).

Obviously, fire has always accompanied the origin and development of mankind,

connecting the life and death of man, and also playing a complementary role between man and nature. As Zhuangzi said that life and death are "just like the eternal succession of day and night, a natural course of events".[46] He also takes an example of the generations of fire transmission that never come to an end to illuminate this idea. "The resins and the firewood may be consumed, but the fire will burn on. No one knows when the fire will end."[47] The fire as a source of light eventually burns out, and the spark is passed on and never extinguished.

However, fire is complicated enough to sometimes cause destruction, so we routinely think of it as dangerous and deadly, but in an ecological prism, a forest fire is a healthy cycle for ecological systems. Actually, fire is a primary aid to "habitat vitality and replenishment, a catalyst for beneficial change known as succession." (Wardi 106) DellaSala and Hanson in *The Ecological Importance of Mixed-Severity Fire* argues, "It is not just that plants and wildlife have coped with fire, but also thrive in the rich postfire environment" (xxxi).

In the forest, fire clears dead trees, leaves, and competing vegetation from the forest floor so that new trees can generate, and it thins out plants to allow more sunlight in and keep them healthier. It improves wildlife habitat and returns nutrients to the soil. Ecologically, DellaSala and Hanson argue, fire is an essential natural force that is vastly underappreciated in its role as one of nature's chief architects. In nature, there are short-term winners and losers in any natural change event, and fire provides no exception. Some species thrive (pyrogenic or hygrophilous) in the immediate post-fire environment, while others move on (fire avoiders), but almost all species benefit at some point in post-fire succession. Thus fire is nature's way of maintaining what has been described as 'pyrodiversity'. (xxx) The ecological benefits of fire to the

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46 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:111.

(生死)其有夜旦之常，天也。

47 ibid:55.

指穷于为薪，火传也，不知其尽也。

timberland are implicit in the novel, highlighting the trans-corporeal relationship between human bodies and the non-human environment.

1. Death and Transmigration in *Child*

In her last novel, *God Help the Child*, Morrison fully explained the close connection between life and nature, especially fire, in the scene of Queen Olive's death, is Booker's aunt-cum-mother, and also a confidante of Bride, then after locating Queen and Booker. Booker Starbern is a rather mysterious character. He loves to read, which in fact seems to be his only occupation. Initially, he comes forward as a simple and lazy man. However, the reason for this is the nature of his relationship with Bride. They do not seem to communicate with each other, like two islands floating in the sea, functioning as a kind of support and comfort, but not really present on an emotional level. Although they have a connection, they never really cross over to the other side. Physically, Bride and Booker are together, but mentally and emotionally they are alone with their trauma. Booker's trauma is associated with the death of his elder brother, Adam.

Fortunately, Booker has gained the support of his aunt, Queen. She is there for Booker and guides him in the mornings. Although she is not geographically the person closest to him, they develop a close relationship at this stage in Booker's life and she takes on the role of a safe and comforting attachment figure.

Morrison's anthropomorphic description of the fire is highlighted at the beginning of the novel. "It began slowly, gently, as it often does: shy, unsure of how to proceed, fingering its way, slithering tentatively... then gaining confidence in the ecstasy of air, of sunlight, for there was neither in the weeds where it has curled." (164) Morrison portrays the gestures of natural fire with delicate words, "ecstasy", "gently", "slowly" and "shy". However, the next paragraph connects fire with Queen: she burned the bed-springs to destroy bedbugs, and a spark "lurking

in the yard" became a house fire. Morrison continues to personify the fire as she explains that it was joyfully "sucking delicious embroidered fabric of lace, of silk, of velvet" (164). At last, Queen died of complications from her severe injuries. Moreover, her death is voiced in a discourse of regeneration.

After Queen's body has been cremated, the burned remains are a symbol of fertility in the novel. The ash, into which fire transforms physical material, is a solid remnant of charred material that is not just detritus but can be used as a disinfectant and a fertilizer that enriches soil nutrition. A Washington Post article entitled *Volcanoes Provide a Boom for Gardeners* states that volcanic sites are some of the most fertile places on the planet. Volcanoes helped form our planet—its water, air, and soils—and their eruptions continue to nourish us by bringing up huge payloads of elements in the form of lava, rock, and ash that eventually break down into plant-nutritious forms.

Queen's cremated remains constitute another register of fire and ash in the novel, and are significant in several ways. The fire that took Queen's life also consumes her deceased body:

> Brooker preferred something environmentally friendly that could be buried and in time enrich the soil, when they discovered there was no graveyard within thirty-five miles or a suitable place in the trailer park for her burial, they settled for a cardboard box to hold ashes that would be strewn into the stream. (172)

Booker's initial intention is to return his aunt's ashes to the ground in the form of soil nourishment. It is really a way of returning to the roots of life. Just as the assertion in *Toxic Burials: The Final Insult*, "Nature teaches us that dead organisms are recycled into the biota. Death is an inevitable part of life. Edward Abbey urged us to strive for a good death, just as we do for a good life: 'We should get the hell out of the way, with our bodies decently planted into the earth to nourish other forms of life… which support other forms of life'." (1818)

In fact, there are such green burial products that transform human ashes into growth material for plants. People support this type of burial because it preserves the memory of their loved ancestors in a miniature forest where family members can approach and mourn them. Even “not with gravestones and marble statues, but with birds chirping and a nice breeze rustling the leaves” (Stinson 25). However, the burial seems to be different from the traditional rituals of burial, “for most of human history, the dead simply returned to the earth” (Stowe 1817).

Eventually, Booker put Queen’s ashes stored in a cardboard box and scattered them into a body of water. Whether her body is attributed to the soil or water, it belongs to the embrace of nature. In the novel, Queen is depicted in terms of plant life, particularly in the throes of medical treatment for her burns. A tube of clear liquid draining into her veins looks like “a rainforest vine”, and her mouth is covered by a “white clematis bloom”. At this moment, Queen embodies the natural world in life, but is on the verge of returning to it in death.

After Booker had scattered the ashes in the stream, Bride told the truth about her pregnancy. Upon hearing the news, Booker turned to take the last look at his aunt’s ashes floating on the water, “Booker gazed at her a long time before looking away toward the river where a smattering of Queen’s ashes still floated” (174). Booker’s steady gaze at his aunt’s ashes suggests that he naturally associates the cremated remains with Bride’s pregnancy, imagining the creation of new life through the enrichment of water. Fire and water, the two elements of nature are intertwined here, with the possibility of articulating destruction and rebirth.

From a practical point of view, fire also plays an important role in ecological balance, the balance of life and death in the non-human environment. For example, The National Park Service situated at Yellowstone National Park in the United States has taken the policy of “Let It Burn” in the early 1970s for “maintain[ing] the ecological role of fire by allowing natural processes to occur with a minimum of human influence” (Stephen 3). However, a policy fire in

1988 did destroy a large area of forest, including 1.4 million acres of land, which for a time led to serious public scepticism about the National Park Service and local government. The seemingly devastating action has been widely credited with positive results afterward, "fire opens up forest canopies to allow new plant communities to flourish. Burning also served to limit trees in grasslands and released nutrients from fallen trees and dead vegetation, which increased the productivity of soil" (5). Human beings should also be like all living things in nature. The withering and regeneration of plants are the natural heritage, where the rich diversity of species creates the beauty of nature with humans and the non-human environment.

2. Sacrifice and Spiritual Freedom in *Sula*

Fire and death are also reflected in another of Morrison's novels, *Sula*, which is set in scenes of loss and grief. As Phillip Novak comments, "Death not only structures the narrative but also governs it, determines the elaboration of character and event. Death presides. And *Sula* endlessly presides over death" (185).

Unlike Queen in *God Help the Child*, whose death is attributed to an accidental fire, Eva, the matriarch of the novel *Sula*, takes it upon herself to take the life of her beloved son, Plum. As an important character in the novel, Eva makes sacrifices on more than one occasion. Abandoned by her husband, she is left with only three children. When she is down to her last three turnips, she leaves behind her nine-month-old son and two daughters. Her return is accompanied by rumors that she "stuck [her left leg] under a train and made them pay off" (31). Despite Morrison's concealment of the truth of this claim, when Eva returns eighteen months later, "with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg" (34), she is unrecognizable to the community as a cripple.

It happens that Zhuangzi also describes a crippled man named Wang Dai (王骀), who lost a foot but was honored as a sage, because "he knows the ultimate truth of things so that he does

not change with them" (87), even when something as important as life and death happens to him, "life and death are of vital importance to men, but they do not affect him in the least. Even if the heaven and the earth turn upside down, he will not perish with them" (85). For him, the loss of a foot is "just like the loss of a clump of earth" (ibid). This is indeed similar to Eva in a way.

Their similarities go far beyond their morphological handicaps, and they are basically the same in their approach to freedom and life. Zhuangzi further illustrates this by borrowing a story about a fish in a pond. The story goes: "When springs dry up, the fish are stranded on the land, moistening each other with their breath and dampening each other with their slime. But much better for them to live in the rivers and lakes and forgot each other" (Wang 111). Instead of dying in this suffocating environment, it is better to plunge into the paradise of freedom to wander, at least spiritually unlimited freedom. Thus, it is also an open attitude to view life and death with this kind of mind. Zhuangzi thinks of the belief that "The great earth endows me with a physical form to dwell myself in, makes me toil to sustain my life, gives me the ease to idle away my old age, and offers me a resting place when I die. Therefore, to live is something good and to die is also something good".[48] This broad-minded view of life and death also makes Wang Dai a highly regarded person by Zhuangzi, who considers him to be "on the verge of transcendence".[49] Eva is also a person who has an objective attitude towards life and death.

When Eva's only son, Plum, comes home from the battlefields of the First World War, he becomes addicted to drugs. Realizing that she has no choice but to eliminate his addiction, Eva feels desperate. Out of a mixture of love and desperation, Eva immolates her own child, "who floated in a constant swaddle of love" and "to whom she hoped to bequeath everything" (Sula

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[48] Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:113.
大地用形体来承载我，用生存来劳苦我，用衰老来让我安逸，用死亡来让我休息。所以使我生存得好的原因，就是使我死亡得好。

[49] ibid: 89.
择日而登假。

45). Years later, when Hannah, Eva's daughter, confronts Eva about Plum's death, she explains that she considers this as something a mother should do to put her child out of his misery, "He wanted to crawl back in my womb and well… I ain't got the room no more even if he could do it" (71). She thus testifies to Eva's experiences as a typical strong-willed female parent.

Although some critics have commented on Eva's act of sonicide, more people tend to believe that she is motivated by the mother's desperation in the hope of his spiritual liberation and purification. Like the fire in *God Help the Child*, the novel *Sula* follows Morrison's conception of writing, which shifts from the destructive nature of fire to its purifying character. According to James Benn in *Written in the Flames*, he affirms, "The practice of auto-cremation, is but one manifestation of the range of practices known as 'self-immolation' [and] is not easily reducible to a single cause, meaning or interpretation" (41). Although self-immolation does not happen in *Sula*, it is an apt description of Eva's act because it evokes a sacrificial burning that is equally irreducible to a single cause. Given Eva's love for Plum, it is a profound personal loss to take his life in order to heal him, a behavior reminiscent of Sethe's infanticide in *Beloved*. Eva respects fire and believes that it can baptize her son's soul.

> He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined was the great wing of an eagle pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought. Everything is going to be all right, it said. Knowing that it was so he closed his eyes and sank back into the bright hole of sleep. (47)

From the above descriptions, there is no explicit depiction of pain in Morrison's description of Plum's inner thoughts and physical sensations. Rather, it is more of a description of Eva coming into the room and caressing him. Eva, who is physically handicapped and cannot walk around the house, abandons her wheelchair and painfully climbs the stairs on crutches to enter Plum's room and hold him in her arms. As he sleeps, Plum is not aware of the

fact that he will be sacrificially set on fire shortly after this maternal caress of love. The novel's narrative also does not mention the burning of Plum's flesh, but it is notable that Morrison conceals these details in order to ignore the process of destruction and place more emphasis on the baptismal ritual of spiritual rebirth. Embodying the fire through the lens of natural ecology, "There is beauty and ecological value in forests that may seem lifeless to many shortly after the fire, but which are actually representative of ecological renewal the moment the fire occurs and for decades thereafter." (DellaSala and Hanson xxxiv)

In this way, Eva uses fire, which plays the same role in nature, to repair and renew her son's life vitality. Finally, Eva is convinced that she is restoring his free identity: "I just thought of a way he could die like a man" (72). In *Phlogiston*, Steve Mentz provides a reference model for fire similar to Eva's immolation: "Thinking with flames outlines a twinned ecology of consuming and remaking" (61). Likewise, Eva does indeed consume and remake Plum's new self. Since Morrison uses religious terminology in this scene, identifying the burning as baptism, the logical conclusion is that Eva believes she is releasing her son's soul: "When fire and air burn, smoke rises, and this physical movement towards the heavens fuels many allegorical interpretations." (Mentz 70) further reinforcing the religious overtones of Eva's incineration.

Eva's burning of Plum has received much condemnation and little compassion from critics. Perhaps encouraged by Morrison's comment on Eva that she cannot stand the pain of Plum, many tend to criticize Eva for her over-powerfulness and willfulness to "cast aside those who do not serve her well" (Taylor-Guthrie 15). In *Fiction and Folklore*, Trudier Harris explains Eva's killing of Plum as a self-centered action. Plum's drug addiction offends her sense of what a man should be, especially someone for whom she had probably sacrificed her leg. To see such sacrifices thrown back into her face negates the very existence Eva has carved out for herself. In this sense, Eva becomes the vengeful goddess in destroying a creature who has failed to worship in an appropriate manner at her altar. Madhu Dubey argues that Eva burns her

son because he expects her to nurture him again and that Eva's refusal to play mother all her life dramatizes the unhealthy consequences of the Bottom community's prescription that black women center their lives around reproduction. Some other critics argue that Plum is literally killed for his desire for the mother. Barbara Rigney writes, "Plum's desire to return to the mother is unconscious, but more perversely, Eva is perfectly aware of her own desire to permit that return." (94) One could also interpret the burning as yet another evidence of Eva's so-called matriarchal, man-hating consciousness. Indeed, if Eva's words are taken literally, her dream of Plum crawling back into her womb might very well be interpreted as incestuous desires. And critics of mother and son attachment could go on interpreting Plum's mental illness and drug addiction as evidence that his mother's closeness emasculated him, rendering him unfit for the manly duty of war. For instance, Barbara Lounsberry and Grace Ann Hovat argue that Eva recognizes, in their words, that "the diminishment of the Black male may be caused by excessive mothering by both Black wives and mothers, as well as by social discrimination." (126)

However, Morrison's text seems to resist such closed interpretations based on a literal reading of Eva's statement. First of all, Eva's burning of her son is in accordance with her own concept of love and survival. Eva takes Plum's life in order to free him, and herself, from misery. Trying to explain her killing of Plum to her daughter, Eva says:

> I ain't got the room no more even if he could do it. There wasn't space for him in my womb... I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again… and I would have done it, would have let him if I'd have the room but a big man can't be a baby all wrapped up inside his mamma no more; he suffocates. (71)

Apparently, Eva's words about Plum's crawling back to her womb are highly metaphorical. Plum's desire to return to the womb is a metaphor for escaping from reality through drugs. In

Eva's words, her son is not dying, but suffocating. That is what a mother cannot bear. Eva explains to Hannah that she "just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb" (72). The most significant thing about the text is that when Eva hears Hannah's question, "What'd you kill Plum for, Mamma", she involuntarily remembers the biting cold in the outhouse twenty-eight years earlier. Even before she can form an answer to explain her killing, Eva remembers the outhouse where she held her baby Plum in the dark and used the last bit of lard in the house to end her baby's pain once and for all: "He had been screaming fit to kill...Eva shivers from the biting cold and stench of that outhouse." (70-71) This earlier experience is so poignant in Eva's life that if we turn back to scrutinize Morrison's description of Plum's burning we may discover that this sense of death is symbolically connected to the scene in which Eva saves Plum's life. When in burning the adult Plum "sank back into the bright hole of sleep" (47), and we are reminded of the "grateful" sleep of baby Plum after Eva pulled the hard pebble out of his bowels. Furthermore, it is through Plum's perspective that we are informed that he feels loved and has the illusion that he is about to fly at the moment of his death: "He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined was the great wing of an eagle pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought. Everything is going to be all right." (47) And Plum's thought echoes Eva's decision "to end his misery once and for all" (34). The distinctive connection between these two scenes encourages us to interpret Eva's burning of Plum as an act of saving him from great pain. Just as Sethe kills her baby girl to save her from slavery, Eva sends Plum to death in order to save him from the drug addiction that she believes to be worse than death itself. Morrison presents this murder as an act of painless killing, or mercy killing to liberate one's soul from restrictions.

C. Tragicized Aesthetic and Aspiration in *Bluest*

Pecola Breedlove, the little black girl, is the protagonist in Morrison's Virgin novel *The*

Bluest Eye. In an interview in 1980, Morrison commented that her motive in *Bluest* was to write about the marginalized little girl who has never before been seriously treated in any place and by any person in literature. As Linden Peach extolled, "It was the first novel to give a black child center stage; previously, the black child had not only been peripheral but doubly marginalized as a comic figure." (7) Pecola desperately wants to get rid of the "ugliness" label imposed on her by society and pinned her hopes on having blue eyes to change her fate, ease her family tensions, and receive fair treatment at school. However, reality gives her the cruelest treatment, her father's incest destroyed her physical body, her mother's indifference gives her relentless scars, and even the coaxing from Soaphead Church completely pushes her to the abyss of collapse in mentality, and so far the little girl has almost become a walking dead. Fortunately, Morrison in the end gives her a ray of hope for rebirth.

1. Neglect and Contempt

Pecola's tragedy lies in her incapacity to build her healthy self both spiritually and physically in such a society. What she encounters is a socially constructed self that contradicts her true self-existence. This can be demonstrated by the absence of any form of punctuation in the last repeated primer of the preface, which also indicates that the mental space available for her growth has disappeared, eventually allowing the disintegration of her spirituality leading to a final state of insanity.

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymotherfa
therdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehousetheyareveryhappyseejaneshehasareddressshe
wantstoplaywhowillplaywithjanewithjanethekittenwillnotplayseemothermotherisverynice
motherwillyouplaywithjanemotherlaughslaughmotherlaughseefatherheisbigandstrongfath
erwillyouplaywithjanefatherissmilingsmilefathersmileseethedogbowwowgoesthedogdoyo

uwanttoplaydoyouwanttoplaywithjaneseethedogrunrundogrunlooklookherecomesafriendthefriendwillplaywithjanetheywillplayagoodgameplayjaneplay (4)

Written in the turbulent times when Africans in America affirm in a shrill voice that "Black is Beautiful," Morrison supplements her strident narratives of what it means to be black in a racist America. Like Larry Neal's *arguments in Visions of a Liberated Future*, "The main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for black people to define the world in their own terms. The black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics." (62)

Further, Morrison attempts to adopt the eyes as a mirror to challenge the aesthetics of white supremacy and to illustrate how, under the oppressive ideology of black and white, the spiritual world of black people, like Pecola, is distorted, stifled, and even to the point of her final cothurnus by images of reality. From a social perspective, Pecola's spiritual breakdown lies in no sane society chooses to build its future on foreign cultures, values, or systems.[50] And the same goes for individuals, who do not attach their own firmness to others but stick to their inner nature.

Zhuangzi also makes a wonderful statement about holding fast to a person's inner nature, and keeping everything in its natural state, and not being changed by the imposition of exterior influences. He thinks that "everyone in the world has been affected by external things and thus has changed his inborn nature" (153), and affirms that some "sacrifice themselves for the sake of gains and wealth" (ibid), some "for the sake of name and fame" (ibid), and others "for the sake of their families" (ibid). And Pecola's prayer for blue eyes is initially for the sake of family harmony, "if she looks different, beautiful, maybe Cholly (her father) would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove (her mother) too", due to frequent quarreling between them, and then for the sake of winning affirmation for herself, which reflects the distorted concept of aesthetics in

50 Waliggo quoted in the foreword to Magesa, African Religion, xii.

society at that time. Therefore, in Zhuangzi's view, a person should gain "the acceptance of the essence of their inborn nature and the predestined fate" (155).

However, Morrison renders the monotonous social aesthetic and the little girl, who is heavily victimized by this social climate. In her 1993 "Afterword" to *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison reflects on her writing of the novel, "The reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts[about beauty], made me think about the necessity for a claim. Why, although reviled by others, could this beauty not be taken for granted within the community?" (Bluest 210)

Pecola Breedlove, in a black community in 1941, Ohio, where she is ceaselessly told how ugly she is, lives with her constantly bickering parents. As social and familial factors fuel her desire for blue eyes, she is eventually driven mad by her own fanatical wish, suggesting from this how black women become victims of white aestheticism internalized by the black community. Morrison begins by describing the plight of Pecola's life, which is rife with atrocities, disdain from her peers, and resentment from other adults. Completely muddled, Pecola blames her plight on her ugliness and dreams of pleasing others by changing her appearance. To this end, she begins to pray to God for the bluest eyes, her parents will not quarrel or fight in front of her, the shopkeeper will be warm and welcoming to her, and her classmates and teachers will go out of their way to appreciate her.

This opens the first step in Pecola's victimization of the bluest eyes, which contains a psychological basis. Psychoanalysts, beginning with Freud, have argued that the child's experience is not initially integrated or continuous, nor does it initially become the experience of an independent self. It is in the process of learning to understand one's separation from the mother and being able to identify one's own experience that the child is able to locate his or her experience in his or her own body.

In the black community where Pecola lives, the aesthetics of the white culture have been internalized: they preferred light-skinned girls. She is shunned by the community and is not afforded the protection of the individual in line with African cultural values. As a person is not

an individual, but an integral part of a community. Just as Denver, the little girl in *Beloved*, eventually throws herself into the arms of the black community, seeking help to exorcise the ghost. However, for Pecola, "the notion of this young girl not being protected transgresses African morality and ethics." (Zauditu-Selassie 27)

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone. He or she must exist collectively, constructing his or her own existence through connections with others, including his or her contemporaries and previous generations. The individual is part of the whole. John S. Mbiti explains that physical birth is not enough; the child must undergo the ritual of integration into society in order to be fully integrated into society.

The African view of the individual requires a balance between a collective identity as a member of society and an individual identity as a unique individual. In general, African philosophy tends to define individuals according to the social groups to which they belong. An individual is considered first and foremost a member of a particular community for it is the community that defines who he is and what he can become. For Pecola, not only does the external white community of Lorain, Ohio, define who she is and who she can be, but the African community also limits her. Having internalized whites' own aesthetic views, the black community also dictates Pecola's existence.

Even all of Pecola's family are distastefully indifferent to her and regard her as ugly and disgusting. This intensified Pecola's blind belief in her ugliness and every day "long hours she sat looking in the morning, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (45). Still, in the mirror, Pecola had compassion for herself and attributed her misfortune to her ugliness, imagining that with another beautiful look, her living condition might be disparate. That's why Pecola adores, "If her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different." (46)

A number of feminists agreed with Freud and Lacan's description of a mental projection

not of the actual body, but of the body as a kind of emotional map. Freud's ideas are elaborated in Lacan's argument that, during the mirror stage, the child forms an image of his own body by his own reflection in a mirror. This image of the body as a whole forms a sort of provisional identity and presupposes conditions a more stable symbolic identity. During the mirror stage, the child embarks on the process of coming to understand itself as situated in the space occupied by its body; or, to put it otherwise, embarks on the process of acquiring a stable emotional investment in its body and psychological continuity. Only when it has a body image can it understand its body as a 'mine' and possess a perspective on the world.

Likewise, the function of the mirror in the process of objectification is expatriated by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. To Beauvoir, once a child becomes a young girl, she will reject her dolls forever and find the miracle of a mirror, which molds her knowledge of herself and the concretization of her own existence. To a woman, the image in the mirror is the self she perceives. Unlike men who need no mirror images to enhance their transcendental existence, a woman, having identified her passivity, sees a mirror as the society, the entire universe, and everything into which all her future possibilities are condensed. In this sense, any woman so long as she can transcend the Other self-reflected in the mirror, can dominate space and time and possess wealth, fame, and joy just like men do.

Therefore, the self for whom psychological continuity is a possibility hence has to be created through a series of interactions between the child, the people around it, and the broader culture in which it lives. (Baier 45) Equally, psychological continuity has to be sustained, and social circumstances can either foster or damage it. In *The Bluest Eye*, all of Pecola's interactions with the shop owner, her school teacher and classmates, and the community she lives constituted the emblematic mirror that offers her rudimentary knowledge of herself as a distasting ugly black girl.

If the first psychological step predetermines the tragedy of Pecola, then the second step towards being objectified appears to be the real murderer of her life. such objectification stems

from the internalized white aesthetics that favors blonde hair, blue eyes, and creamy skin.[51]

Since her desire for beauty cannot be realized, Pecola's contempt and disgust for herself become so intense and uncontrollable that she completely denies herself: in utter desperation, she hopes that her physical body will disappear. Her self-talk is described in detail in the novel:

> "Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away...Slowly again. her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. (45)

To a young child, the body is a subjective projection, a tool with which he or she learns about the world. Through observing his or her own image, the child gradually views him/herself as an object and accepts the aestheticism and judgment of him/herself imposed by the outside world. In this case, when examining her "ugliness" in the mirror fully immersed in the superior white culture and their biased social judgment, Pecola blindly negated herself by detesting her bodily existence and desiring the disappearance of her ugly body and a substation of beautiful blue eyes.

In addition to the spiritual death caused by Pecola's own internalization of the concept from white aesthetics, another notable character is her mother, Pauline Breedlove, which is an accomplice in Pilate's tragedy. The black girl's aesthetics is destroyed by her mother's

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[51] According to Trudier in *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, the mythology Morrison explores in the novel centers upon the standard of beauty by which white women are judged in this country. They are taught that their blonde hair, blue eyes, creamy skins, and so on.

acceptance of white masculine parameters of beauty: long, stringy hair, preferably blond, keen nose, thin lips, and light eyes, preferably blue. She, despite her original unsophisticated and kindness, unconsciously accepts the gaze of men and white aesthetics in the film she saw during her pregnancy and judges every face she saw by it. In her life, she loved to caress the white-skinned blond-hair little girl of her white host and detested the ugliness of her own black child. Worse still, intolerable of her own blackness, she sedulously lavished her only money on clothes, cosmetics, and even her hairstyle and molded some white characteristics on her own body. "As what the body embodies is a biological type that needs to be interpreted in society, s subject acquires his/her own body through perceiving the world. Yet, reversely, society largely decides on the individual's attitude towards his/her body." (Scholz 59)

The conviction of "ugliness" consciously and unconsciously being imposed on Pecola, having the bluest eyes means having everything—love, acceptance, friends, family—a truly enviable place in society. Hence, Pecola's quest for the bluest eyes, her magical talisman, has been interpreted as the modern quest for a holy grail.[52] Such conviction tempts Pecola into abandoning freedom and becoming an object.

To such a quest of Pecola together with her mother, Satre held that it is a catastrophic self-deception which arises when the self is, rather than to realize itself, but willing to be declined to the object, indulged in the existence of "being-in-itself" (Tillich 12). When trapped in self-deception, a man usually "takes other's viewpoint to judge his self" (ibid). Women's self-deception actually happens when they accept their role as objects and abandon their potential as free and creative subjects.

The self-deception was explicitly pointed out by Morrison in an interview in 1994, "I

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52 The holy Grail refers to a treasure that serves as an important motif in Arthurian literature. It is said to bestowed with eternal youth or sustenance in infinite abundance by people seeking. Here, it implicates Pecola's mad pursuit.

thought in *The Bluest Eye*, that I was writing about beauty, miracles, and self-images, about the way people can hurt each other about whether or not one is beautiful" (Taylor and Danille 40). As it was, the image of the blue eyes permeated the entire novel, which informed the readers what hurt the blind acceptance of white aesthetics could inflict on a young innocent black girl and the black culture as well.

As the last step to aggravate such hurt, Morrison intentionally culminated Pecola's life of tragedy in her rape by her own father, Cholly Breedlove, whose "touch was fatal" (206) for his own daughter. Dorothy Willner in *Incest and Incest Taboos*, argues that the prohibition of incest is intended to reduce the physical and psychological damage that sexual activity can cause to children when imposed by more adult aggressors. She also points out that "fathers dominate their daughters by virtue of male dominance over females and by virtue of household authority" (ibid). However, Cholly's incest is a fatal destruction of Pecola's body while he gives in a complete trance "her filled the matrix of her agony with death" (206). The complete physical destruction leaves Pecola to accept the merciless unchanged fact that her black body cannot perish, and her spiritual death approaches step by step.

By the way, her father Cholly's behavior has proved that he was already a total social outcast, which leads to his eventual death. As a proverb that is prevalent in African America, "A whistling man and a cackling hen, both come to no good end" (Zauditu-Selassie 40). Cholly was abandoned by his mother on a railroad trackside dump when he was four days old and is described as a "whistling stranger" (114). His miserable life is just a microcosm of such a white supremacist society.

Under the shadow of his father's death, Pecola also gradually moves into the depths of hell. With her broken body and the growth of her unrealistic desire, Pecola has lost herself and spent all day and all night, envisioning her white skin and blue eyes.

Against this backdrop of social deformity and spiritual deprivation and cultural absence, Morrison begins to discuss an alternative cultural resource. In the form of magic, Pecola seeks

magic to help her resolve the yearning of being ignored by God. After being raped, Pecola asks the town's mystic, Soaphead Church, to give her blue eyes to cope with her shattered life. Soap Church is to offer request services for local people like "keep[ing] my baby's ghost off the stove. Break so and so's fixing" (172). Pecola seeks his assistance for her much-coveted blue eyes, which nevertheless becomes the catalyst for Pecola's final madness.

Like other black people in the community, the Soaphead's self-loathing as a black man is materialized in the fear of the body's filthiness and he "abhorred flesh on flesh. Body odor, breath odor, overwhelmed him. The sight of dried matter in the corner of the eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, skin crusts—all the natural excretions and protections the body was capable of—disquieted him" (167). Disgusted by filth and the materiality of his body, the "clean old man" chooses to exercise his "clean, kind and friendly" behavior on the "least offensive" human being: the little girls. By conspiring with Soaphead to murder an old dog named Bob, who hated him, in exchange for Pecola's coveted blue eyes, her ultimate mental collapse comes with the dog's agonized death, but the dream she has been seeking desperately was also shattered.

2. Seeds of Future and Sprouting Chances

Morrison makes a pointed remark at the end of the story, "So it was. A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment." (204) From this, it is obvious that Pecola's tragedy is more the fulfillment of her dream rather than the dream itself: to Pecola, blue eyes are not the safeguard of happiness.

Therefore, judging from the sequence of steps leading to Pecola's tragedy, her loss of identity can be viewed as a process of negative social construction: as a product of the community she lived in, the influence of her mother, the incestuous act of her father, even the

deception of Soaphead. As for Pecola, this proves that her absolute loss in mental and physical aspects is not only determined by her consciousness but is also conditioned by social and family factors.

In the final scene, little Pecola becomes insane, soliloquizing about his bluest eyes in the garbage all day long, and searching in the garbage. As the narrator of the story, the adult Claudia states:

> And now when I see her searching the garbage—for what? The thing we assassinated?... I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. (206)

Just as Anissa Janine Wardi argues in Toni Morrison and the Natural World, “Marigolds, resilient flowers that bloom better and more profusely in poor soil, are long-lasting, flowering from spring to fall.” (47) How can a tough plant like a marigold not grow in Lorain, Ohio? According to the structure of the novel arranged by Morrison, it begins with autumn and ends with summer, suggesting a cyclical narrative in tune with the rhythms of the natural world, and the title of the final ending is also in summer, the summer of 1941 when Lorain, Ohio, “would have been ablaze in shades of crimson, orange, and gold.” (ibid) In this season of blooming flowers, isn’t it surprising that marigolds alone are missing?

Just the prologue to the novel begins, “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow.” (1) It is narrated by Claudia, which conforms to the African American’s principle of signs and causality relative to the natural world. From a historical point of view, the implicate meanings of the signs for Africans must be reflected. Like Mary Frances

Berry and John Blassingame's argument, "One of the major functions of the signs was to enable the slave to deal with the ever-present and always specter of death, seeking control over a harsh world where masters and overseers were capricious and irrational." (250)

In fact, Marigolds are a kind of flower that also appeared in Morrison's *Beloved*, for instance, Sethe ever picks up marigolds on the way to the carnival in town. Obviously, it is a pleasing flower. Why does the narrator Claudia remark on the whole country's hostile attitude to the flower? And in a twist of irony, Wardi also testifies that "in the late 1960s, the president of Burpee Seeds launched a campaign for marigolds to be named the national flower of the United States" (48). Notwithstanding rose is the title of honor for the final result, the position of marigolds in people's minds is not undesirable, but lamentable, and thus, in a sense, Morrison has adopted the marigolds of 1941 to indicate Pecola's final destination. Also, she wrote in an afterword to the novel decades later, reflecting on her opening lines, "What, then, is the Big Secret about to be shared: The thing we (reader and I) are 'in' on? A literary aberration. A September, an autumn, a fall without marigolds. Bright, common, strong, and sturdy marigolds." (213)

Morrison ends with a desperately mental breakdown Pecola wandering the garbage, and murmuring "between tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottle and milkweed" (159), which implies that the poor little marigold may be in season to grow and bloom among the sunflowers and milkweeds. According to Wardi, both the sunflowers and milkweeds have healing properties, which are very beneficial for Pecola to some extent, "The genus name of Asclepias was given to the milkweeds by Carl Linnaeus, the father of the modern binomial nomenclature system, after the Greek god of healing, Asclepius, because milkweed had many medical uses." (60) And the sunflowers are "hyper-accumulators, which means they uptake metals from soil in large quantities. In general, phytoremediation provides a much less invasive way to clean soil than digging it all out of the ground or using other treatments" (ibid).

Therefore, the environment of the garbage could not be better for Pecola. It is also Pecola

who, in the glimmer of sub-consciousness that remains, is able to identify with the safest place in the society—between those objects that are used and discarded—the last image in the novel, as Morrison reinforces the communal equality between humans and non-humans. And Pecola is a landscape that exists beyond the body, absorbing the trash that is dumped on her—a hybrid body in which the toxicity of social power, class, place, and race are entwined, and she takes root and grows like such a marigold waiting for the next flowering.

This chapter concludes with an exploration of the eternity of the Tao in the form of the manifestation of qi combined with the primordial and inherent nature of animism in traditional African religions, closely following the theme of building hope embedded in Morrison's fictional narrative. It is an intrinsic human trait to be hopeful and to yearn for freedom, whether it be as far back as the time of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi more than two thousand years ago, or the contemporary struggle of oppressed black Americans to find freedom and hope, even sacrificing their maternal lives in exchange for the change of rebirth. Specifically, their aspirations are manifested on three levels in Morrison's work: the struggle of the Convent women against the restrictions of patriarchy in Paradise, the rebellion of the little girl Pecola in *Bluest* against race and distorted aesthetic of values, and the desire and quest of Queen in *God* and Eva in *Sula* for spiritual freedom through the power of nature.

VI. Tao's Creativity and Morrison's Thought of Harmony

The creativity of the Tao derives from its maternal quality. Lao Tzu intuitively portrays the Tao as a reality or substance, not just a human imagination or consciousness, and anthropomorphizes it as "the Mother of All Things". The Tao, as the mother, nurtures "All Things" in the universe, including human beings, and all other organisms. The nature of the Mother means that the Tao is the essence of creation, as described in *Tao Te Ching*, the Tao gives birth to things, "Out of Tao, One is born; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe."[53]

Indeed, the Tao created the universe, humans and other creatures, but soon withdrew from any direct involvement in human affairs, in a way similar to the Supreme Being of Africism. The difference, however, is that while the Supreme Being left administration to other deities, such as Nyonmo, the god of rain, and Dzingbe, who rules the sky, the Tao selflessly bestowed creativity on its methodology: the non-action (無爲), as expressed in *Tao Te Ching*, "The Tao never does, yet through it [Non-action], everything is done".[54] Through the non-action, the Tao deals with the trivialities of the world in order to achieve the naturalness of all things. As Liu Xiaogan argued, "the concept [non-action] also positively implies a special manner and style of behavior, namely, 'action as non-action,' or 'actions that appear or are felt as almost nothing,' or simply, 'natural action.'" (317) This "natural action" refers to those actions that conform to nature and the Tao by themselves, which take place naturally, gradually, moderately, in a manner that does not infringe on other beings or harmonious way.

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53 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:214.

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。

54 ibid:194.

道常无为而无不为。

James Miller has a more detailed view of the non-action. In his doctoral dissertation, he gives a specific explanation of the non-action , "*Wuwei* (non-action) in the *Dao De Jing* was the supreme model for political action, not non-action: it is the means by which social harmony is established" (Miller 2000:7). Thus, the non-action is not doing nothing, but a means of achieving social harmony. Miller believes that to realize non-action is to be in harmony with the operating rules of the Tao.

In the previous section on the " Tao models its own subjectivity", Miller also suggests that the essence of Taoism is to convey an ethic of non-attachment to things, namely, to rely on its own change and creativity without any external interference. He further implies an ethic of deference or respect for the spontaneity of nature's transformation. Therefore, the non-action should be understood as non-intervention, the aim of which is to create a harmonious balance of the natural order in harmony with the Tao.

Intriguingly, Miller draws an analogy between non-action and a catalyst. A catalyst is a chemical that enables a reaction process to proceed with high efficiency, but is not itself involved in the reaction and is therefore not consumed by it, and the whole process still takes place and the reaction is successfully completed. Miller also quotes Chapter 57 of *Tao Te Ching*:

> I do nothing and the people are reformed of themselves.
> I love quietude and the people are righteous of themselves.
> I deal in no business and the people grow rich by themselves.
> I have no desires and the people are simple and honest by themselves.[55]

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55 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:265-66.

我无为，而民自化；我好静，而民自正；我无事，而民自富；我无欲，而民自朴。

As this passage makes clear, the *Tao Te Ching* is not here promoting some kind of individualistic transcendence of the world. Rather, it promotes an ethic of the relationship between the self "I" and the people. The non-action of the former promotes the spontaneous self-transformation of the latter. The catalytic effect of non-action enables the transformative power of the Tao to work creatively in the multiple subjectivities of the surrounding world. In the Taoist understanding of the world, "this creative power resides in the subjectivities of things themselves." (Miller 39) Thus, the Taoist scholars believe that the forces of reforming arising from themselves are enormous, and the way of non-action "amid a world of transformative subjectivity is far more effective than the way of action upon a world of passive matter" (ibid), in particular when it comes to being "spontaneously transformed, governed, and made prosperous and simple" (38). Thus, through a series of self-adjustments and transformations catalyzed by the non-action, human beings have the capability to change themselves and adapt to society in a harmonious way.

Adapting to society is particularly difficult for those minorities who are outside the mainstream and marginalized. they not only achieve spiritual self-harmony through self-adjustment and change, but also accept and integrate into reality in their own way. For African Americans, Morrison understands the bleakness of their neglect and oppression, and also creates seclusion or secluded spaces for the traumatized characters to transform and uplift themselves spiritually to the greatest extent possible.

In fact, the seclusion, as an embodiment of African culture, "provides a symbolic system of understanding the potential relations among the biological, cultural, and spiritual through the body, the locus where transformation occurs" (597). The process of seclusion also identifies certain spaces or places, times, or periods. Hence, Morrison has carved out her own ideal paradise like Milton's Eden to depict the beatific and unaffected spaces that are owned and private by black people. Accordingly, the characters in Morrison's novels, always inhabit or underwent transformative experiences in liminal spaces, such as plentiful and peaceful the

Convent in *Paradise* is that it, for the Convent women, represents a kind of poetic dwelling on the wilderness of Oklahoma Territory, far away from the patriarchic society. And like Baby Suggs' Clearing in *Beloved*, she gathers all the community of black people to their private space in the forest, letting them enjoy the hilarity, joyfully singing and dancing, the aim of which is to get rid of the distress and displeasure to find themselves back.

For individuals, Morrison has also created for them the physical world of self-transformation as well as the spiritual space to find their way back to their inborn nature. In *Home*, Frank Money and his sister Cee dispel and heal their psychic wounds by devoting themselves to nature in Lotus, their new hometown with fresh air and fragrant flowers. Decidedly, Morrison's turn to flora is not only "exclusively a literary device that provides solace from racial violence and trauma" (Wardi 91), but it also provides an untrammeled and harmonious space for Frank and his sister to return to their former time. Then, Macon Dead III in *Song of Solomon*, also Milkman, finds his own true identity and follows his ancestral tacks to return to nature in Sharlima, a small southern town, which is also the place of Macon Dead's ancestor Solomon's flying for freedom. And last, Florens in *Mercy* tells her story through her own writing on the wall in a separate room to recover her true self, to break free from the shackles of love, friendship, and maternal affection, and finally to respond to the unforgiving reality.

A. Free Geospatial and Self-Transformation

The most ideal model in Lao Tzu's mind is "a small country with a small population" (小國寡民), where the material wealth produced is completely designed to meet the needs of the people, and armor and weapons will not be used at any time. The most important point is that the monarch or king governs according to the way of the sage, who "take[s] away from those

that have too much and give to those that have not enough".[56] As people's own wishes, they can "be satisfied with their homes, Delight in their customs".[57] It seems that people have returned to the "ancient times when perfect virtue prevailed" (至德之世). At that time, by breaking the seals and contracts that represented power, people would be bent on seeking simplicity and innocence, like "break[ing] the tallies and seals, [and] the people will be unsophisticated",[58] by destroying measuring devices symbolizing economic profits, like "crush[ing] the weights and scales, [and] the people will no longer quarrel",[59] and by abandoning the laws standing for ruling tools, like "abolish[ing] all the sagely laws, [and] the people will be able to listen to reason".[60] In this way, people find their inborn nature and live in harmony. For countries, "Neighboring countries lay within sight of one another" (ibid). Hence, this is a scene of total natural harmony.

In Western philosophy and literature, such ideals as "a small country with a small population" (小國寡民) and the "ancient times when perfect virtue prevailed" (至德之世) also exist, and the utopia in the cave allegory dialogues of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato has always influenced the Western thought system, especially in the literary world.

Today, such idealization of this kind is often seen as lost due to ecological degradation and other subjective and objective factors. But as a place to which humans aspire, Morrison

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56 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:306.

天之道，损有余而补不足。

57 ibid: 310.

安其居，乐其俗。

58 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:173.

焚符破玺，而民朴鄙。

59 ibid: 173.

掊斗折衡，而民不争。

60 ibid: 173.

殚残天下之圣法，而民始可与议论。

achieves it through the ideal geographical space created in her works. In Convent, these traumatized women enjoy an idyllic life of self-sufficiency, self-management, and worry-free living, and in Baby Suggs' Clearing, the black people of the community share the joy of carnival together, both of which are their own free paradises.

1. Group Leadership and Sufficiency in Convent

Launching in the late 18th century, the Westward Movement lasted for a century and occupied a unique place in both American history and literature, of which Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land (1950), James Fennimore Cooper's subsequent novels, "The Leatherstocking Tales" etc. are examples that underline the importance of western America and the imagination of living space. Morrison's *Paradise "*inscribes African Americans in the US mythic history of westward migration" (Gauthier 396), which expands the imagination of living space for homeless southern African Americans, most of whom, to escape racism, seek opportunity in the eastern or northern cities during or after the Reconstruction, but do not consider migrating west. This is why *Paradise* rewrites the history of the Westward Movement. It highlights the African Americans in this great history.

In *Paradise*, the Convent is juxtaposed with Ruby to represent two physical places that are also different symbols. Ruby, the all-black town constructed by the 8-rocks, is a real home for these deep-skinned blacks to escape from the racial discrimination enforced by whites and light-skinned blacks. The Convent, originally a corrupted embezzler's mansion, then turned into a boarding school to discipline local girls, finally becomes a true paradise for five homeless women.

Quite unlike Ruby, where great efforts are made by these stubborn and stony forefathers to maintain the purity of the blood and immortality of the 8-rock blacks, and they adamantly

reject outsiders because of the purity of their deep black blood, as “the reverence for the darkest of skin color is a logical explanation for the high levels of infant illness if not mortality: inbreeding (in whatever culture) leads to disability of all kinds” (Wagner-Martin 117), the Convent is closer to the state of living freely with nature, and five women can get along equally and harmoniously.

The Convent, like Lao Tzu’s “a small country”, is governed by the sage-like figure of Connie and conform to the natural principle. Firstly, it is a natural and poetic place with a little wilderness. Located in the wilderness of the Oklahoma Territory and seventeen miles from the all-black town of Ruby, the Convent is a middle landscape between the wilderness and the patriarchal society. The Convent is so lush and peaceful that it is a kind of poetic dwelling for the women of the Convent, a physical and spiritual home.

The Convent, a feminine paradise in contrast to the patriarchal all-black town, could be explained by its garden image, which is filled with an aura of wildness. “In contrast to the manicured ones in Ruby, the Convent is surrounded by vegetation that is the embodiment of an open attitude, a garden that shows traces of wildness instead of the neat cultivation of civilization.” (Stave 29) The image of the Convent’s garden as one of wildness was presented through Mavis’s perspective.

> Now, behind the red chair, she saw flowers mixed in with or parallel to rows of vegetables. In some places staked plants grew in a circle, not a line, in high mounds of soil. Chickens clucked out of sight. A part of the garden she originally thought gone to weed became, on closer inspection, a patch of melons. An empire of corn beyond. (41)

It contrasts with the all-black town, whose garden image is, at first sight, well organized. “They drove down a wide street, past enormous lawns cut to dazzle in front of churches and pastel-colored houses. The air was scented. The trees were young. Soane turned into a side

street of flower gardens wider than the houses and snowed with butterflies." (45) The two images of gardens thus unfold different bucolic styles, on which the distinction between the natural way and the man-made way is based.

The Convent's wilderness is in keeping with the natural way of management, which sees non-action as a means to an end. It turns out that women from different backgrounds can live happily together, and vegetables and poultry can also grow wild in the garden. So it is non-action that makes the Convent run smoothly and satisfactorily for the people and their subjects, as Zhuangzi explains this kind of governance from the natural way, "The heaven does not give birth, and yet everything in the world grows out of it; the earth does not grow anything, and yet everything in the world is nurtured by it."[61] Undoubtedly, the non-action way follows the way of heaven and maintains all things in their own way.

The all-black town of Ruby, however, shows more human traces. It becomes unbalanced when deliberate measures are taken to run the town in a humane way. The town built by the southern ex-slaves gradually transmutes into the southern garden image: the "two-story house" (Beavers 6), which, Beavers argues, is a recurring trope in Morrison's novels, "useful in our effort to ascertain domestic power relations" (92). The "two-story house" symbolizes patriarchy, as evidenced in the chapter entitled "Grace", in which the power relations are represented by Arnold Fleetwood's "two-story house", where women have to stay upstairs while men are downstairs discussing. Thus the all-black town follows the trajectory of southern pastoralism, and the women in the all-black town are shaped as southern ladies, who, under the influence of patriarchy, are different from the wild Convent women.

The Convent is located in a remote suburb of Oklahoma, far from the town, and the only access to the Convent is a dirt road that is "approached by a dirt track barely seen from the

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61 Zhangzi, Zhuangzi. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:173.

君原于德而成于天，故曰，玄古之君天下，无为也，天德而矣。

road" (10). But the outsiders and their vehicles have free access to the Convent through the main road, which implies that it is open to everyone, contrary to Ruby's "disallowing". The thoroughfare is of course made of earth and plants, with no tarmac or asphalt. After a storm, the Convent is surrounded by mud and completely isolated by the earth, but the soil can enrich the women's gardens, where all the crops they need grow and ripen freely, satisfying all their needs for life.

Secondly, the Convent maintains a self-sufficient natural way of life, preserving man's "inborn nature" and keeping their "natural simplicity". In fact, the Convent in the novel is not a working farm, but a kind of homestead where the women live their own lives sustainably and autonomously, using few resources. This is particularly evident in the agricultural products produced by the women of the Convent: "They made sauces and jellies and European bread. Sold eggs, peppers, hot relish and angry barbecue sauce" (241). According to Westmacott, "In a self-sufficient system, chickens and pigs mean far more than eggs and bacon. They are symbolic of an integrated system where scraps and crop residues are turned into manure and returned to the land. To a gardener, a manure heap is a source of satisfaction, symbolic of fertility and growth" (92). He also affirms that "self-sufficiency, self-reliance, independence, and resourcefulness are four fundamental agrarian values" (91) that the Convent women are gradually adopting as they gather there one by one.

In her conversation with Lone, a midwife from the all-black town, Connie is told that she needs "what we all need: earth, air, water" (244). The elements that Lone points out form the essence of the Convent women's agrarian practices, which "implies that organic farming is employed in the Convent garden" (Mori 71). Organic farming represents the wildness of the Convent women, which could be demonstrated by the peppers they grow and sell, although radically different in terms of their temperaments, emotions, and suffering of past traumas, they are unintentionally united in the Convent.

They grow "the hottest peppers in the world. For a pricey price, you could buy a string of

purple-black peppers or a relish made from them. Either took the cake for pure burning power. The relish lasted years with proper attention, and though many customers tried planting the seeds, the pepper grew nowhere outside the Convent's garden." (11) It is noted that the women did not have the seeds of this kind of peppers, and that it was actually Connie "who discovered the wild bush heavy with stinging-hot peppers and who cultivated them" (225). The soil in the Convent is the decisive factor in planting the peppers so the customers in Ruby cannot grow the same seeds in the same growing ares, only seventeen miles away, which is a good example of the independence of the women in the Convent.

Meanwhile, the Convent women grew and harvested their own vegetables, canned what they produced, and raised chickens for meat and eggs. This is attested, for example, in the case of Mavis, who initially comes to the Convent for help, and Connie serves her a "roast chicken supper" (48) and asks her to shuck pecans to sell. Even the dying Mother Magna is just only given "a bit of chicken" by Connie (47). Thus, the raising of chickens is an essential part of meeting their daily needs.

By the 1970s, chickens were being kept in almost every backyard, and in setting *Paradise*, Morrison used chickens as a motif that demanded critical attention. Susan Merrill Squier in *Poultry Science*, argues that historically, the raising of chickens as liminal livestock was a female-centered activity carried out in the family backyards. She further comments: "Raising chickens gave farm wives not only the power to amend the farm diet when necessary but also precious economic (and therefore at times even social) autonomy. When the rise of extension education in poultry farming destabilized this arrangement, producing a new image of the scientific male farmer, women lost control over an aspect of their daily lives and crucial income as well" (129).

In addition to chicken farming being economically self-sufficient within a family, Squier argues that chicken farming is also culturally bound up with women, asking and answering the questions, "Why are women like chickens and chicken like women?": "They both produce eggs,

are both subject to bodily regulation and regimentation, and are both being shaped bio-medically and socially to be the object of male sexual and economic desire." (155) The natural cycle of chicken and egg metaphorizes how women are objectified in real life. And, of course, the nitrogen-rich chicken mature is used as an organic fertilizer to fully replenish the nutrients in the soil, making the Convent a sacred place of independence from the outside world, a paradise on earth that satisfies itself without wanting more.

The other aspect is the kitchen of the Convent, where the hungry and anorectic women are cured physically and psychologically. In the chapter entitled "Consolata" (Connie), the narrative based on memory is interwoven with Connie preparation of a meal for the four traumatized women; the Convent, with its characteristic of abundance, is then demonstrated through ingredients such as corn, pecans, and the various garden products that grow abundantly in the Convent. For example, Connie needs Mavis, who comes just a moment after her arrival, for helping shell a basket of pecans that she has harvested from the backyard garden, although Mavis is a little reluctant. "You give in too quick. Look at your nails. Strong, curved like a bird's. Fingernails like that take the meat out whole every time." (43) The dialogue implicitly indicates that Connie treats Mavis as a member of the family, even though she just arrived and is performing domestic chores.

As Connie confirms, planting and selling products is the main source of income for them to survive, so much that the Ruby women frequently approach the Convent to trade with them. Taking a conversation as an example between Connie and Mavis who initially comes when her car needs repairing: "Wait a while. Today maybe, tomorrow maybe. People be out to buy." "Buy? Buy what?" "Garden things. Things I cook up. Things they don't want to grow themselves." "suppose nobody comes?" "Always come. Somebody always come. Every day. This morning already I sold forty-eighty ears of corn and a whole pound of peppers." (40) The Convent's idyllic association with Nature has a practical connotation for the women surrounded by the gift of Nature that offers.

Morrison's demonstration of the size and scope of the women's kitchen is particularly poignant as it is presented through the viewpoint of the Ruby invader Steward. "The kitchen is bigger than the house in which either man was born. The ceiling is barn-raft high. More shelving than Ace's Grocery store. The table is fourteen feet long if an inch…Stock simmers on the stove. It is restaurant size with eight burners and on a shelf beneath the great steel hood a dozen loaves of bread swell" (5). The milk on the table that the invader named Steward consumes explicitly depicts the life of self-sufficiency in the Convent, "he uses his left to raise the pitcher to his mouth, taking such long, measured swallows the milk is half gone by the time he smells the wintergreen." (7) The Steward's behavior validates the self-sufficiency of the Convent, which is completely independent of any support from the outside, but the peppers' trade and the milk consumed by Steward also show that some items in the Convent can be exported to the outside world. To satisfy one's own needs and to provide for others is just the meaning of the way of Heaven (天之道), which is "to take away from those that have too much and give to those that have not enough".[62]

Thirdly, the Convent is ruled by a wise figure named Connie, who adopts the non-action as her management, with the attributes of openness, equality, and inclusiveness. It is an open community for all those who need help, especially those traumatic women, who have spent the the past eight years "had come…Each one asking permission to linger a few days but never actually leaving" (222). Compared to the Indian girls, who are constrained to a limited space, the other four Convent women, who initially regarded the Convent as a temporary refuge, were free to come and go. Besides, for political purposes, the school is set for disciplining the angle in the house, in other words, the girls "graduate to Indian maidens" (Womack 35). Thus, the constrained and disciplined Indian girls run away one by one, but the four wandering women,

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62 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:306.

天之道，损有余而补不足。

under the guidance of their spiritual mentor Connie, transform the physical house into a real home where "the women's traumas are ritually and somatically acknowledged and tended" (Grewal 47).

By healing the physical and psychological wounds of the other four women, Connie plays the role of their spiritual guide. She unites them, emphasizing the importance of female alliance rather than hiding in personal space. "I call myself Connie Sosa. If you want to be here, you do what I say. Eat how I saw. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (262). The statement she makes during the feast is the trigger for the healing, which is confirmed by the silhouette of the body painted on the basement floor, which means that these women are coming out of the spiritual wasteland; it also means that a solid, united female alliance is of great importance in healing their trauma.

So, as director of the Convent, Connie's approach is to let nature take its course, work together and share the benefits. She is also an equal participant in agrarian farming and cooking in the kitchen, quietly contributing her efforts to all the women of the Convent. Zhuangzi's philosophy, while recognizing the need for a leader and his governance, tended towards a much more egalitarian perspective. He believed that the common subjects of a vassal state were also descended from Tao and were naturally endowed with innate abilities of self-government in a natural manner:

> When an enlightened king governs his state, his meritorious deeds are felt all over the world but they do not seem to be out of his efforts; his influence reaches everyone but the people do not feel that they depend on him; his achievements are not attributed to him but all the people enjoy themselves; he is shrouded in mystery and wanders in the land of nonexistence. (139)

Furthermore, with the all-black town of Ruby as a reference point, the issue of race also

reflects the inclusiveness of the Convent. In Morrison's essay *Home*, she describes longing and expecting space as her home: "I want to inhabit, walk around, a site clear of racist detritus; a place where race both matters and is rendered impotent… I want to imagine not the threat of freedom, or its tentative panting fragility, but the concrete thrill of borderlessness." (Stave 9) However, the Convent in *Paradise* puts into practice all the qualities of the place Morrison longs for. It is indeed a place of "clear[ing] of racist detritus" which embodies the "borderlessness". Compared to Ruby, the Convent clearly doesn't have anything to do with binary oppositions like black and white. The women in the Convent appreciate the feeling of the "thrill of borderlessness" regardless of race.

As one of the most obvious markers in Morrison's work, the colour of the eyes is one of the strongest signs of race. For instance, Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* has a confirmed belief of having a pair of the bluest eyes, which can make her possess an attractive appearance to the community. Hence, eye color can change one's identity. In *Paradise,* Morrison deconstructs this idea that Pecola yearns for,

> The woman in the bed laughed lightly. "It's hard, isn't it," she said, "looking in those eyes. When I brought her here they were green as grass."
>
> "And yours was blue," said Connie.
>
> "Still are."
>
> "So you say"
>
> "What color, then?"
>
> "Same as me-old lady wash-out color." (47)

Therefore, the color of the eye loses all significance here. Mother and Connie have an eye for light colors while the other girls probably have dark ones. The fact is that Mother's eyes used to be blue and Connie's green eyes but now both have altered to old lady's gray eyes. It is

obvious that unlike the determinant feature of eye color for Pecola, the Convent women regard it as a changing, fluid, non-determining factor—the same as race.

By fostering a community of the Convent, Morrison aims to unveil the truth about race, a paradise that is blind to the color of a person's skin and promotes equality, harmony, and compassion rather than superiority, discrimination, and hatred. Evidently, the Convent portrays the chaos that goes against the traditional concept of racial purity where the town of Ruby rules in the novel, even the mainstream prevails as the supremacy of the white race at that time in American society.

The Convent, like America itself, is a melting-pot community of mixed races; Connie, for example, appears to be of Brazilian descent, meaning she has Latin roots, and possibly a mixture of Portuguese, Indian, and black blood. Mavis is probably a black American from the suburbs, like Gigi and Seneca. Pallas is the child of an interracial marriage family. In addition, the leader of the Convent manages to create an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable, regardless of their skin color. In a way, the Convent represents the true belief in the "American dream", where everyone has the same rights and equal opportunities.

2. Collective-Adjustment and Raptures in Clearing

Like the Convent, Baby Suggs' Clearing in *Beloved* is also a small geographical place, a "wide open place cut deep in the woods" (100), where, as the "unchurched preacher" (87), she leads "every black man, woman, and child" (ibid) for raptures, such as singing and dancing. Baby Suggs, once the spiritual leader of the community, exhorts the newly emancipated blacks, like her, to put aside the deep-seated resentment and grudges and get into the arms of nature, listening with your heart to the voices of the African ancestors. She preaches, "Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it… And O my people do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off, and leave empty. Love your hands...Raise them up and kiss

them… you got to love it, you!" (88). Suggs understands that spiritual comfort is what the community desperately needs and engagement with the spiritual traditions of Africa is a necessity for them.

In fact, in ancient African spiritual traditions, the woods, "a metaphor for a place dense with spirits, are an abode for the invisible powers" (Zauditu-Selassie 158). As Ras M. Brown argues, in addition to its role as a place filled with ancestral spirits, the wooded areas or *feenda* also provide Africans with healing and magical survival or *minkisi*. Similar to the old traditions in Africa, where sacred woods are inhabited by personal deities and other supernatural beings, the Clearing represents a space for Africans to repair the brokenness of the past, using dance movements to free their bodies from the trauma caused by the rigid and suffocated slavery. "In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the Clearing while the people waited among the trees." (87)

Paul Cloke and Owain Jones in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, argue that trees are culturally significant landscapes that evoke memories as "deep currents of meaning swirl around our culture(s) and brush the branches of any tree place which is being encountered, experienced, narrated, or imagined at any given time" (19). It is Sethe's message of camaraderie among black people, the power of dancing in the Clearing, and the transcendent nature of her leading songs, even just to "listen for the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind" (89). The missing spaces of the past can be compensated for by the power of the present and memories to connect and continue to produce far-reaching meaning.

Baby Suggs also represents the spiritual power of the barriers removed or broken in the hearts of the community people as she leads them to deliverance in the Clearing. The grove is defined not only by the benevolence of Western Christianity they believe in, but also by traditional African rituals. The African spirituality guides and sanctifies this place accompanied by the evocation of original forces.

More spiritual connection is built in the background that resonates with African traditional

values and their original attitude towards the natural world. After "revealing in the dazzling truth of her humanity and connection to Nature, Baby Suggs sees herself as the subject of an African reality of equalitarian values" (Daniels 4), she tries to share what to do for American Africans with her community. Through her inspiration in the Clearing, the community members are spiritually supplicated, helping them to break through psychological barriers. As for the community members, their "feelings of well-being do not result solely from Baby Suggs' powerful sermon but are due, in part, to the physical healing function in the Clearing" (Wardi 76).

From the perspective of current health science, Baby Suggs' Clearing encompassed by plenty of trees are indeed healthy for the ecosphere especially human. As we know, trees can absorb pollutants, fertilize the soil, and resist pests and illnesses. A healthy research in Japan, called "Shinrinyoku" which is "a forest bathing trip" (Li) with a short, pleasurable time, was conducted in 2005. The participants are in the surrounding of a forest for a few days (two or three days), which is testified to be beneficial, which can coincide with Morrison's ecological idea in *Beloved*. It is believed that the plants create "essential oils known as phytoncides" (Li), which are "compounds derived from plants, wood, and some fruits and vegetables that prevent them from being eaten by insects or animals and slow the growth of harmful fungi and bacteria" (Wardi 76). The plants that produce this type of oil are vegetables and plants with special flavors, such as spicy onions and garlic, fragrant tea trees, and pine trees. These mixed plant substances are healthy for the botanical world and for humans. Taken by themselves, humans living in trees or plants, are much easier for them to improve their immune system functioning to adapt and relieve stress. As a result, the entire black community visits the Clearing every weekend, where they are exposed to the phytoncides emitted by the trees, which is itself a medical treatment for their physical trauma. In addition, their attachment to Suggs' spiritual comfort and awakening to their love strengthens the community's unity and strive for freedom in the future.

In fact, Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing can function as Taoist meditation, a must for Taoist practitioners, in the form of individual or collective, as mindfulness or focusing the mind on a particular thing, with the aim of achieving mental clarity and "controlling your vital force", namely "fasting of the mind" (心斋). Zhuangzi directly referred to the meditation directly:

> You must concentrate your attention. Do not listen with your ears, but with your mind; do not comprehend with your mind, but with your vital energy. Your ears can only hear and your mind can only comprehend. But the vital energy is an emptiness that is responsive to anything.[63]

The practice of "the fasting of the mind" is a unique method of Taoist spirituality that teaches people to pay attention to and communicate with other people and things using the mind rather than specific sense organs in the body. One of the most important points is to get in touch with nature and even the whole universe with one's mind, to achieve the integration between man and heaven, and to completely get rid of earthly worries and losses completely. Therefore, it is natural for a human being to open his mind in order to heal his spiritual and physical wounds.

After the death of Baby Suggs, Sethe goes to the Clearing with Denver to find herself and gain energy for life. "For Sethe, it was as though the Clearing had come to her with its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of the words" (261). Her catharsis is a silent collaboration with the memory part of the forest. Morrison symbolizes that a harmonious relationship with

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63 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:55.

若一志，无听之以耳而听之以心，无听之以心而听之以气。听止于耳，心止于符。气虚而待物者也。

nature is positive for black people, because what the forest offers is the natural process of purification that can heal the trauma caused by social injustice.

B. Seclusion, Transformation, and Harmony

Just as a geographical space like Clearing, provides an ideal free haven for the collective self-realization, spiritual self-improvement revolutionizes individual transformation. James Miller argues that "this creative power resides in the subjectivities of things themselves" (39), which means that this self-transformation exists inside them, and belongs to "a world of subjectivity and agency rather than a world of objectivity and passivity" (40). Therefore, in the individual's subjective world, personal spiritual belongs is particularly important, just like the Frank siblings in *Home* finally return to their own homeland and are completely liberated, especially when they find their spiritual belongings, "I ain't going nowhere… This is where I belong" (126). Milkman in *Song of Solomon* achieves his spiritual improvement in Shalimar where his ancestors lived and finds out his true identity, and Florens in *A Mercy* writes down all his emotional experiences on the wall of the empty room after through a bumpy journey so that she can completely release herself. Those individuals have achieved the process of discharging themselves and retrieving themselves back through spiritual purification.

1. Self-Recovering and Spiritual Belongs in *Home*

As discussed earlier, humans are part of nature, and relying on nature for healing is also a manifestation of self-healing. However, the African religious beliefs are "quintessential to understanding traditional healing systems and medicine" (309). The traditional method of treating the sick includes "an enormous variety of medical preparations made of mixtures of roots, leaves, barks, fruits, and parts of animals and birds" (310), which are often accompanied

by incantations that fill the medical preparations with power.

Moreover, healing is a sustained and integral ritual process designed to correct "the disequilibrium generated by spiritual, natural, psychological and social factors" (309), which often manifest themselves in the form of physical or spiritual problems. Healing practices are also part of the complex conceptual framework that makes up people's religious beliefs.

In reality, most of Morrison's work revolves around the psychological and physical trauma left behind by the human-centered injustice suffered by black people. The characters in the novels are burdened with the ravages of history and reality, and they live in painful mental anguish, to name but a few, such as Frank Money and his sister Cee in *Home*, who have suffered childhood trauma, and as an adult, Frank's post-trauma from his participation in the Korean War, all of which cause him great psychological damage to him. As an experiment, his sister Cee was subjected to life-threatening reproductive painful torture by a white physician and eugenicist at home.

With the purpose of writing for black people, Morrison used her words to point her characters to the places of healing, which also suggests that African Americans should try to find a way out of their pain and oppression in real situations, that is, by returning to nature, and healing themselves in nature, which conforms to the natural way. Indeed, in the novels, Morrison depicts free places that belong to the characters, such as Suggs' Clearing in *Beloved*.

Lotus is not only the name of Frank and his sister Cee's hometown, but also is a kind of pure and beautiful flower, with an oriental and western mystery of legend. Morrison's choice of this name has a deeper meaning, as a kind of cleansing for those who have experienced trauma. As a kind of flower, in addition to its showy appearance and fragrant aroma, it can also give people a warm and soothing feeling. According to Jennifer Potter in *Seven Flowers and How They Shaped Our World,* "Of all the flowers that have inflamed human societies, the lotus has to come first" (3), and it further "demonstrate[s] the fundamental power of flowers in helping early civilizations to grasp and express the world around them" (4). It is worth mentioning the

environment in which a lotus grows. A lotus is rooted in muddy water and it "rises from this murkiness, without being marked by it, and emerges as a showy, fragrant blossom". Just as a poem written by classical Chinese poet Zhou Dunyi (周敦颐) in Song Dynasty, "I love only the lotus for rising from the mud but is not stained, bathed by clear waves but is not seductive".[64] Lotus's noble quality of being untainted by mud is highly praised by lots of poets and scholars in China.

The flower is also endowed with spiritual enlightenment and rebirth, which is entirely consistent with Frank's healing in the novel. It serves as one of the highest practices in the Buddhist world: "The lotus is one of the eight auspicious symbols, and every important deity is shown sitting on a lotus, standing on a lotus, or holding a lotus." (Potter 20) The representative God is Guan Yin (觀音) in mythology and legend. She preaches sutras and spiritually universalizes all sentient beings. Morrison takes this richly symbolic flower, revered in both Eastern and Western cultures, for its spiritual connotations, as a metaphor for home. It is likely that the author sees this flower emerge from the mud every day and bloom brilliantly, which is a good analogy for the spirit of African Americans in their situation and struggle for a better future.

In Frank's eyes, Lotus is truly a place of healing. He felt like he was entering a world of colors, immersed in a sea of flowers, plants, and trees. His previous defamatory remark that "there is nothing to do but a breath in Lotus can be reread as an acknowledgment of the breathing space that he is affordable there" (Wardi 87). Obviously, this "breathing" is now a completely new sensation for Frank. Morrison also deliberately chooses the title of the second chapter of the novel "Breathing".

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64 "On Loving the Lotus" by Zhou Dunyi in the Song Dynasty, translated by Feng Ximeng. http://www.tsoidug.org/Literary/Lotus_Simp.pdf.
予独爱莲，出淤泥而不染，濯清涟而不妖。

If the mythical lotus represents a member of the natural family and plays a healing role, breathing means the Chinese the flow of qi (氣) which can be said to constitute life. In Chinese philosophy, the flow of qi exists in "two distinct but related systems: the first is the physical landscape as a system through which qi flows, and the second is the human body. From the interaction of these two systems it is possible to construct an ecological theory of qi." (James 44) Thus, the relationship between man and nature is connected through natural qi, which has an irreplaceable effect on human healing and keeping healthy, or "cultivation of health to achieve long life (through breathing techniques, dietetics, gymnastics, and sexual techniques). (Goossaert 1617)

For a human body, the term qi "denotes the entire process of inspiration and expiration of breath" (55), and keeping one's qi in its pure state is believed to have a salutary effect. Zhuangzi elucidates clearly on this subject. "Cultivate your mind, that's all. Follow the natural course of events and do nothing, and all things will transform by themselves."[65] This description by Zhuangzi is actually the Taoist method of maintaining health—*qi gong* (氣功) and also outlines the basics of practicing it. The Taoist practitioners, by the control of qi flow inside the body, can reach a deep understanding of the world and Tao, and they are immersed in the natural world. "In Taoism, the body is an energetic network of breathing-in and breathing-out that expressed a basic dialogical pattern of the cosmos. Through this process, individuals open themselves to the inner meditative landscape that represents a path of organic unity with the cosmos." (Tucker 2605)

Frank returns to his hometown, takes a deep breath of fresh air and soothes his trauma, but the memories that flash through his mind from time to time make him feel suffocated. The trauma in his mind forces him to think of the past, and the monotonous black-and-white color

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65 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*,Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:173.

意！心养！汝徒处无为，而物自化。

of his hometown come to his brain: “Everybody, everything. Outside the window—trees, sky, a boy on a scooter, grass, hedges. All colors disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen.” (23)

Although the sun or sunshine warms the people and brings a little hope, the landscape under Morrison’s pen is more melancholy and desolate. Mankind is crazy about exploiting natural resources at any cost for the sake of their own desire. Everything in nature loses its splendour, which should belong to them. The whole world of the small town is just like a canvas without any picture on it except the black and the white.

The monotonous black and white color is a melancholy color of mourning. It also shows Morrison’s remembrance of the past relocation of Lotus by the violent actions of the whites, resulting in the miserable situation of the blacks and even the appearance of the dead. Frank witnesses the killing of an elderly black man, Crawford, one of Frank’s neighbors, who refuses to move to another place, and he is “beaten to death with pipes and rifle butts and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the country” (10), whose eyes have been brutally carved out from their sockets. In fact, in the novel, Morrison’s discourses on Crawford’s attachment to his house are no more than the elaboration of his unrequited love for the old magnolia tree that was planted by his great-grandmother. What a tragic scene in bloom! Under the tree, full of white and purple flowers, he is finally buried under the blossoms.

The Lotus is no longer what it once was in his mind. The new scene really unfolds before Frank’s eyes in his hometown. Rather than having “no future”, it is a small town of “safety and goodwill” (119). The colour of the town changes from the precious black and white to the current colour-saturated world, which is particularly significant for Frank due to his psychological trauma and lack of color. He sat in his seat in a good mood. “He was quiet, just sitting next to a brightly dressed woman. Her flowered shirt was a world’s worth of color, her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk.” (23)

As well as providing Frank with a pleasant natural environment in which to heal from his trauma, the Lotus also offers Cee, who is seriously ill, a chance to recover. His sister Cee was rescued by Frank from the home of an eugenicist, where the whiter doctor was performing a life-threatening reproductive experience on Cee. Frank quickly took the dying Cee back to her hometown and found a famous local woman known for her botanical practice. Like her forebears, Miss Ethel grew her own medicinal herbs and plants for curing and healing. In *Slavery and the Origins of African American Environmentalism*, Stewart states like that:

> Slave knowledge of herbal medicine was akin to their knowledge of everything else in the plantation environment—discrete, detailed, and close to the ground. It was also conditioned by experience; slave women, especially, went out in the woods and wetlands to find supplies for household manufacturing and healing. They also cultivated common medicinal herbs in their garden patches. In turn, they taught others what they learned, both by practice and by storytelling. (15)

From this perspective, Miss Ethel's way of healing is to fully inherit the ancient earth-based knowledge of her African ancestors, as well as the collective wisdom of all old-aged women embodied in Lotus. "Two months surrounded by country women who loved men has changed. The women handled sickness as though it were an affront, an illegal invading braggart who needed whipping. They didn't waste their time or the patient's with sympathy and they met the tears of the suffering with resigned contempt." (121) Especially, "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham soothed and strengthened her the most." (125) With everyone's concerted efforts, she was gradually recovering.

But unfortunate news was told to Cee, and her "womb can't bear fruit". Hearing the news, Cee was like "a Burpee seedling overcome by marauding rabbits" (128). Obviously, Miss Ethel associates Cee's barren body with the seedling that will not reach the age of fruitfulness but

will be destroyed by the white eugenicist doctor for whom she once worked as a maid. There are many ways in which Morrison's intention is to expose human behavior towards the deteriorating environment, especially the disharmonious acts of white men towards nature and, to some extent, black people. It really does violate the laws of nature, which is also inconsistent with the Taoist idea of the non-action. In reality, what spoils the natural state of things, like Cee as a seedling that should grow and give birth naturally, is the act of a malicious doctor, which is exactly a moral violation of using people as experiments.

But Cee's approach to healing is also a natural one: the "sun smacking". This treatment requires Cee to lie in the sun with her legs wide open. As Miss Ethel makes it clear that the sun's heat and light can penetrate Cee's body and "rid of her of any remaining womb sickness" (124). It is a graphic trans-corporeal exchange between man and nature. Sensibly, the sun-smacking functions of his recovery and reclamation of his reproductive body. She gives her body completely to the sun, absorbing what the sun, as the Mother of nature, nourishes all living things in the world.

The fact is that Morrison's emphasis on the elements of nature in *Home* is not just a literary writing means of consoling and healing from racial discrimination and trauma, but also a panorama of the integrity of man and nature. Perhaps what leaves the deepest impression in *Home* are Cee's words "I ain't going nowhere… This is where I belong" (126), which also brings a nature writer Scott Russell Sanders' sayings in *Staying Put*, "I cannot have a spiritual center without having a geographical one; I cannot live a grounded life without being grounded in a place" (126).

2. Returning and Self-Identity in *Song*

Cee has found a truly free home of her own, and Milkman in *Song of Solomon* also possesses a family, but one full of material pursuits and strong patriarchal power. The desire to

have a real home and to retclaim his family's footprints leads Milkman to complete his self-transformation and self-awareness in his ancestral town of Shalimar. As said in *Tao Te Ching*, "The myriad things take shape and rise to activity, But I watch them fall back to their repose. Like vegetation that luxuriantly grows but returns to the root (soil) from which it springs."[66] Everything originates from the Tao, or the root, which is the starting point of self-transformation.

The characters in Morrison's novels live in an earthly world, experience social injustice, and are bound and troubled by race, gender, as well as familial and economic factors. Either because of the objective reality or because of the subjective awakening to recognize the earthly truth, they desire to search for themselves and go back to their own origins. Morrison has also deliberately created a geographical space in her novels for these characters to return to, where they can find their own roots. Her novel *Song of Solomon* explores the complicated interaction of a black American, Milkman or Macon Dead III, with his hometown, a southern woodland in the wilderness, "learning his family history and experiencing a newfound sense of rootedness in the place", and narrates "an affirmative relationship of African Americans with a landscape in a language recalling discourses of regeneration through the wilderness." (Berry 134)

Usually, in literary works, wilderness is described as "a destination, a playground where a person can be freed for a while from the mathematical progression of modern civilization". (ibid) According to William Cronon, he regards wilderness as a place that "represents a flight from history": "Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be rejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin…Seen as the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it is the place of youth and childhood." (135)

In the works of American minority writers, wilderness is often linked in some way to their

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66 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:109.

万物并作，吾以观复。夫物芸芸，各复归其根。

cultural and historical memory, which is also an inescapable reality. In *South of Haunted Dreams*, Harris recounts an experience in the South that is both psychological and physical challenging from the perspective of black history. Travel to the South operates within the rubric of masculine exploration, potentially fraught with danger. And Harris's cultural memory shapes his experience of the physical environment.

In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison also explores how Paul D creates imaginary connections between himself and the rural landscapes of the South. He escapes from the shackles of slavery once and for all, and travelling to places in the South such as Georgia, Kentucky, and Delaware, "and in all those escapes he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water, and tried not to love it." (268) By emphasizing Paul D's reluctant departure from his southern hometown, Morrison also expressed the weight of African American native culture through Paul D.

Similarly, the novel *Song of Solomon* explores a similar theme by describing the protagonist Milkman's journey back to a rural community in the South, the Blue Ridge Mountains, a lotus of his ancestry. However, many critics have focused on Milkman's journey south in search of mythical gold and the discovery of his family's oral history. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos insists on Milkman's journey in quest of gold as an "archetype of the hero leaving home to seek his fortune," (93) and his following "ego death" (ibid) as a point of enlightenment. She confirms that even after his ego death, Milkman can "connect authentically and deeply with his own anima". (ibid) Gurleen Grewal argues that Milkman becomes the representative of some African Americans' existence predicament, "Milkman had grown up within the specific cultural discontinuity created by migration from the South to the urban North and by the black middle-class's repudiation of a stigmatized past." (73) His journey to the South brings about a reversal of this state of being through a new awakening to his family history and his connection to the local community.

Milkman begins to experience a change in his attitude when he visits his ancestral home,

and this change has to do with his discoveries—an understanding of his family's cultural heritage—that was not there before. In a way, Milkman's regenerative moment in the Virginia woods is a sincere expression of his ancestral culture with its mysticism of nature. Indeed, Milkman is a dynamic figure, and Morrison portrays his growth by depicting his progressive awareness of the surroundings in the South where he temporarily lives.

In the initiatory phase of arriving in the South, he is only a passive observer, and even blind to the variety of species and local life around him. He is "oblivious to the universe of wood life that did live there in layers of ivy grown so thick he could have sunk his arm in it up to the elbow" (220). And of course, he cannot find such vibrant neighborhoods, where nature and life make sense, under the atmosphere of the northern cities,

However, after his exertions in the countryside, he has a subverted vision, "The low hills in the distance were no longer scenery to him. They were real places that could split your thirty-dollar shoes." (256) On his way through the woods, he falls into a stream and tears the sole off a leather dress shoe. His screaming frightens the bats in a cave, and then he is chased out with the show's sole. Subsequently, on a bus approaching Pennsylvania, he recalls a very different memory from the one his father has described, the scenery "as merely green, deep into its Indian summer but cooler than his own city, although farther south…For a few minutes he tried to enjoy the scenery running past his window, then the city man's boredom with nature's repetition overtook him." (226-27)

For Milkman, the journey to the town of Shalimar, which is a "no-name hamlet…so small nothing financed by state funds or private enterprise reared a brick there" (259), ultimately liberates him to be independent. In Shalimar, Milkman is treated with warmth and respect by the local community. Indeed, his experiences in these southern places prompt him to think of why black people like his family even left the South, "Where he went, there wasn't a white face around, and the Negroes were as pleasant, wide-spirited, and self-contained as could be" (260).

However, the episode of the night hunt with some local men in the woods of Shalimar sets

up the ego dissolution that shows his growth and maturity. The night hunt in the woods, in which Milkman takes part, is a crucial point that connects him to nature and his original roots. The hunt tests Milkman's courage and endurance, which he has not previously had in his rich northern town. During the hunt, Milkman experiences a kind of baptism and rebirth, which gradually inspires him to rediscover his primordial connection with plants, the earth, and nature. In the process of night hunting, Milkman's modern materials do not help him but hinder him. "His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance." (278) Milkman has to relinquish his material belongings, which will become his heavy burden on the hunt, but what he must possess is the special language used in the woods. It is a special and natural way for the hunters to communicate with their dogs, and with the nature they read: the tiny tracks on the bark of trees and every footprint on the ground. Indeed, it is just "Language in the time when men and animals did talk to one another when a man could sit down with an ape and the two converse; when a tiger and a man could share the same tree, and each understood the other; when men ran with wolves, not from or after them" (ibid). Interacting with nature's flora and fauna, Milkman has a strong sense of harmony in the primeval forest of his homeland.

Distancing from the noisy city, in the hunting forest, Milkman finally retrieves what he inherited from his ancestor, which is a step towards his further growth and maturity. When Milkman sits down by the tree, he loses himself in thought for a moment, reflecting on his many experiences from childhood to the present. He thinks of Thoreau and Edward Abbey, the naturalists who lived in the wilderness, and discovered something about humanity. He thinks of Guitar and understands that what he lacks is to isolate himself from nature, not to see the natural beauty of harmony: the communication between humans, animals, and plants in the most primordial way. To fully understand Guitar is in a way responsible for his spiritual maturity and growth. In fact, Guitar's problem lies in his deep racial politics, engraved with bitter hatred. In the beginning, Guitar, along with Seven Days, is hostile to the whites and

murders them to balance the black/white ratio. He tells Milkman before the southern trip, "The earth is soggy with black people's blood. And before us Indian blood… and if it keeps on there won't be any of us left and there won't be any land for those who are left. So the numbers [the ratio of black to white people] have to remain static" (158).

If Milkman shows us growth and maturity in his recognition of Guitar, love begins to sprout in Milkman's heart as he attempts to touch the plants that approach him. The description in the novel is "Down either side of his thighs he felt the sweet gum's surface roots cradling him like the rough but maternal hands of a grandfather. Feeling both tense and relaxed, he sank his fingers into the grass" (279). However, it is clear that Milkman comes to realize that he can talk freely with the plants, just as the hunters do in the forest. We know that nature is selfless and dedicated to any living thing with love, and will embrace anyone who treats it kindly. In return, she reaches an understanding with Milkman, signifying the fact, "If anything, the earth had to say, and it told him quickly that someone was standing behind him and he had just enough time to raise one hand to his neck and catch the wire that fastens around his throat" (ibid). Undoubtedly, it is Guitar who wants to kill him for his betrayal, for getting away with all the gold in Guitar's idea, but not really. Through this event, nature seems to awaken one of his ancestral gifts, highlighting his convergence with his Afro-American heritage. Joyce Irene Middleton notes in *From Orality to Literacy: Oral Memory in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon*, "Milkman's immersion in this auditory experience awakens his dormant listening skills to new language experiences and ways of knowing" (35). In the woods, what he experiences is "move him to use his preliterate imagination to reclaim his unlettered ancestor's skill for listening" (ibid). Nature provides him the chance to have the ability to protect himself from being killed by Guitar, not only by listening, but by sensing and touching what happens, at that time danger comes near him, which Milkman gets out of in order to reincarnate himself. On the other hand, Morrison seems to underscore this point, the potential force of pushing Milkman to regenerate in the woods within the discourse of black-on-black suicide, to associate

"the wire around his neck with the lynching that has bloodied southern ground" (Grewal 71).

Critics say more about Milkman's rebirth in light of his union moment with the tree and his exhilarated time with the local people. According to Melvin Dixon in *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature*, he thinks Milkman's journey with the southern landscape is real regeneration for him, "He develops a more effective relation to the land when he confronts the wilderness… Milkman's participation in the hunt gains…fraternity and friendship [of local men].… Milkman has to earn kinship by enduring the woods, the wilderness" (Dixon 167). Dixon regards the landscape as "wilderness", emphasizing its primitive traits for Milkman's eager return to nature. Likewise, in *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African American Fiction*, Philip Page comments that Milkman's night hunting is tied to his seeking African heritage, initiating "him during the hunt and offer him the bobcat's heart, thereby inducting him into his past and his racial identity and midwifing his rebirth in harmony with himself, his family, his community, and nature" (15). This kind of estimation is rational; Milkman feels refreshed after his transitory intimacy with the southern woods. On the way back, together with the local people, Milkman "found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth" (281). It is like the case of "the Phoenix Nirvana, a new lease of life", a kind of rapture recovered from terminal diseases, or survived from natural disasters, or probably Milkman's euphoria is an important transformation, from a strayed man with luxurious life to a man intimated with nature, emerging into the local community. In his ancestor's land, Milkman eventually finds his root, his mother tree, and his perception of affiliation, "as though there was some cord or pulse or information they shared. Back home [in the city] he had never felt that way, as though he belonged to anyplace or anybody" (293). One cannot separate himself from his roots, although being an adult tree from the sapling, he is still cared for by his mother tree, similarly, his heart forever belongs to the land of his forefather.

Milkman's change not only provides a self-ideology of finding his cultural heritage but also makes an evident contrast to his father's pursuit of property as the material center to build

and consolidate his social status. Even before Milkman's journey to the South, his father Macon Dead promises, "You'll own it all. All of it. You'll be free. Money is freedom… The only real freedom there is." (163) His father hopes to pass all his property to Milkman and simultaneously indoctrinates his ideology of materialized-center into him consciously. So Milkman's initial purpose of the southern journey is a quest for gold with his friend Guitar. Gradually he comes to realize his spiritual worship from intimate association with local culture and virgin woods and alters his ideology quickly. In the process of conscious conflict and convergence, he discovers he can be revitalized by self-contemplation, not material satisfaction as previously. As Valerie Smith notes, "Through[Milkman] story, Morrison questions Western conceptions of individualism and offers more fluid, destabilized constructions of identity." (Smith 13)

Distancing from the construction of Western conception, Morrison and writers of American naturalism seek a destabilized or natural mode of identity. Milkman's relaxed moment with the sweet gum's bark, the time of sublimation in spirit, deconstructs his stereotype inherited from the urban society and perfects his adaptability from touching the plants in the forest. Edward Abbey states in *Desert Solitaire a Season in the Wilderness*, a certain desire to distance Western perception modes. He himself enters a Utah wilder area, being isolated in self-relied conditions, Abbey says, "I want to able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description." (6) Perhaps Abbey's integration into the desert nature is a constructive attempt to immerse himself in an entirely non-human environment and dealing with animals and plants on a daily basis. Even when he sits in silence on the sand and suddenly sees two snakes crawling towards him, he is almost in danger like this, and at some points he will concern scarcity of water and food. Despite this, Abbey remains mentally intact and satisfies his temporal life in such a pure environment. Hence, as Abbey and Morrison, other writers love nature, they do more attempts

to go near nature for life, less considering material cherished.

As Lawrence Buell, one of the most important eco-criticisms, in his canonical book *The Environmental Imagination*, states: "'Nature' is more than a mere backdrop; it is a force shaping and being shaped by human action. Accordingly, African American writing about the more-than-human environment is seldom separated from cultural and historical context." (7) In both novels, Morrison constructs the main characters and plots within the vegetal world, highlighting their intimacy, while at the same time linking culture and heritage to the history of injustice. Humans can find their identity by realizing the healing potential of nature, which is fraught with historical violence. In the racial society, although white culture asserts dominance over nature and the regulation of social and cultural rules, literary constructions provide counter-narratives to destabilize the dominance and control of white exclusive national identity for return to nature and its roots.

3. Self-Expression and Self-Understanding in *A Mercy*

Self-expression is also a form of self-transformation, changing oneself in order to adapt to society in the face of a harsh reality that cannot be changed. Changing oneself is a process of self-transformation, like "I do nothing and the people are reformed of themselves".[67] The emphasis on self-transformation without interference from the outside world or severing ties with outside influences is to achieve the state of "I do nothing". Therefore, self-expression can serve the purpose of being "reformed of themselves".

In contrast to the internal dialogue, the self-expression between Florens, as the main character in *Mercy*, and herself takes a visible form and occurs mainly in a separate space.

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67 Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House, inc., 1948:266.

我无为而民自化。

Florens' choice to carve words on the wall with a nail in a closed room, rather than storing them in her heart, is a form of dialogue between her body and her self. It is a crucial detail in *Mercy* in terms of Florens' ultimate spiritual freedom or growth.

For Florens, the primary aim of writing is to kill the pain of losing her lover, the blacksmith, after a great quarrel between them, and Florens strolls back to her master's house. Her original "feet of a Portuguese lady" (4) which were "too tender for life" and never had "the strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires" (ibid) are finally changed, as she now runs with bare feet, "the soles of my feet are hard as cypress" (161). Yet, the process of writing is equally painful to this girl. "Confession we tell not write as I am doing now. I forget almost all of it until now. I like to talk." (6) "The walls make trouble because lamplight is too small to see by. I am holding a light in one hand and carving letters with the other. My arms ache." (160) However, the bigger ache is in her heart, "You won't read my telling. You read the world but not the letters of talk. You don't know how to." (ibid) In fact, it is the writing that gets Florens back to the way of "returning her self" (ibid), as she realized, "If you never read this, no one will. These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves." (ibid) She envisions that these words need the air outside so that they can dance in it, "through clouds cut by rainbow and flavor the soil of the earth." (161) At last, her "monologue" on the wall, as another form of little narratives, has become a sublimation of her consciousness of herself. "I become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last." (167)

With the above inscribed words "In full" and "Free" on the wall, or through her bodily conversation with her mind, Florens, despite her enslaved status remaining unchanged, finally attains her true in her spiritual liberation after the hard process of being "unforgiven" (by the blacksmith) to "unforgiving" (to the blacksmith as well), just as Florens' words, "That it is the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild. I know my withering is born in the Widow's closet." (160) Rather than the external world, the true enslavement comes from

the mind, so Florens' problem lies in her "empty mind", her lack of judgement, in which case she needs to eradicate the concept of "women belong to men and for men" before she can achieve freedom.

Unlike Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, whose meditation on how to lead her life is still a vague question to himself, Florens, though a few years younger, conducts a clear self-reflection through her bodily writing, which is a marked improvement on Pilate and crucial to her self-awareness. In Florens, a complete elucidation of her self takes place in a thorough-going reflection after she has arrived at an awareness of herself as well as of its results. In order to transcend Descartes' impregnable *Cogito*, it is necessary not only to adopt a reflective attitude, but also to reflect on this reflection, to understand the following situation as a part of its definition and to realize the transformation that it will bring about in the spectacle of the world and in human existence.

This spiritual self-transformation allows Florens to take full control of herself, free from all emotional entanglements, accomplishing "Purity without foreign substance, concentration without wavering".[68] There is no mercy in her consciousness, no class distinction, and no forgiveness, because she has nothing to forgive and is not subject to her social status. She writes her story on the wall, with or without an audience—she writes it because it is an outpouring of the freedom she has gained through self-transformation, and for that reason alone.

Some may see Florens' desperate storytelling as a desire to reconnect with the blacksmith she mentions at the beginning of the excerpt, but this quickly shifts as she continues on. It's not the audience she needs to reach but her story. While her audience is rapidly changing, her need to unleash her inner voice remains the same. However, some may still wonder what the point of

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68 Zhangzi, *Zhuangzi*. Trans. Wang Rongpei. Changsha: Hunan Peoples Publishing House, 1997:251.

纯粹而不杂，静一而不变。

writing without an audience would be, but this idea denies the fundamental power of self-expression. Perhaps the blacksmith will eventually read her message; maybe her words will disappear with the house; perhaps she will set the whole place on fire in total rebellion against the man who thought he could buy her. It's unclear what will happen to Florens' words, but it doesn't sense because they've symbolically achieved a greater purpose in the service of her self-transformation. The words she carved on the wall lead to her complete liberation in the form of self-transformation.

Moreover, Florens' self-expression is shared by many others who have experienced American slavery, as can be verified in the slave narratives of the 19th century. In contrast to the established the dualism of the nineteenth century, the classical slave narratives have both direct and intended readers: their own black Americans and the whites who are convinced to join the abolitionist movement. This emphasis on white readers creates a certain nuance to the slavery narrative, forcing the authors to continually focus on designs that will win the approval of the whites.

As mentioned earlier, Florens' spiritual self-transformation is no longer bound by duality at all, but only writing for herself. Morrison gives Florens the freedom of self-expression as a narrator and also weaves into Florens' body exceptional features borrowed from the slave narrative, such as her words "that it is the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild" (187), revealing the wildness of the rebellion against the early slavery. The wild characteristics of Florens' narrative focus on the raw power and freedom of reading and writing, and refuse to specifically address white readers, who were important in nineteenth-century slave narratives.

Yet, literate slaves in the 19th century were a potential danger to slave owners and to slavery as a whole, and their fear of losing control magnified slavery's growing economic and social importance in North America, just as Henry Louis Gates, writes that "the command of written English virtually separated the African from the Afro-American, the slave from the

ex-slave, titled property from fledgling human being" (4). For Florens and her family, the ability to read and write means a chance to carve out the future, and Florens' sensible mother pleads that "I hoped if we can learn letters somehow someday you could make your way…What I know is that there is magic in learning." (191) In the same way, the priest who teaches her states that "it was what God wanted no matter if they fined him, imprisoned him or hunted him down with gunfire for it as they did other priests who taught us to read" (ibid).

Thus, Florens' powerful ability to express herself roots her wilderness in a frenetic freedom that allows the readers to understand her self-liberation, which also breathes life into her freedom. Freedom is only the ultimate goal of this self-transformation, as James Miller expresses, the ultimate goal of the Tao is to find the natural instincts of "the people" (民) for themselves, "the goal of the Daoist is, to put it positively, to catalyze creative transformation within things, in this case, the 'people' (民)." (39) For black Americans, the natural instincts to be pursued at that time is the desire for individual freedom.

Florens' greatest strength in the quest for freedom, given by Morrison, is the use of words to tell her story and the stories of black people. In his first autobiographical and abolitionist work, *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass discusses literacy and freedom. Similarly, Douglass and Florens both experienced freedom and self-expression through writing. Davis Blight comments on Douglass' work:

> … his ability to speak and write not only allowed him to tell his story but gave meaning to his life. By his own account, it was a literacy that opened Douglass' mind to the possibility of freedom…He learned that words could mean power and persuasion and alone could provide sustenance to live, give it purpose, and give off hope. (89)

Both Douglass and Florens find their strength and freedom in words because of their literacy, which defines them both in their lives and in their understanding of the world. The

process of explaining their creative writing is not the direct cause of their freedom, but a natural overflow of their instincts to increase their inner strength through their newfound self-ownership. Perhaps the main difference between the two is that Douglass' account of himself and the story that led to his freedom is carefully crafted in his autobiography. Florens' words, on the other hand, are haphazard and lack the persuasiveness of Douglass, who is a great guide in this regard. Furthermore, the difference between the two narrative styles is mainly due to Florens' lack of intention for her discourse, and her lack of intention and intended readers is a major factor of deviation from a slave narrative genre into which she does not fit smoothly.

Florens differs from the typical slave narrative in which she does not use the highly contrived writing style that most slave narratives follow. They are very skillful in adapting their writing to appeal to their white readers. Instead, Florens writes in a frenetic manner to please her readers. This deviation does not detract from the contagiousness of Florens' story. On the contrary, her words are enhanced by their sincerity and genuine emotion. Nevertheless, nineteenth-century narrative works do not focus on the narrator as the key to the plot, but on the readers as the center. According to Andrews in *To Tell A Free Story*, he argues that "the most reliable slave narrative would be the one that seemed purely mimetic, in which the self is on the periphery instead of at the center of attention, looking outside not within, transcribing rather than interpreting a set of objective facts." (6)

But Florens' account is an expression of true feelings, she confesses that "In the beginning when I come to this room I am certain the telling will give me the tears I never have. I am wrong. Eyes dry. I stop telling only when the lamp burns down. Then I sleep among my words. The telling goes on without dream and when I wake it takes time to pull away." (185) Her language exudes a sense of honesty and intimacy that is lacking in later narrative works. Her words are for her mother, and she understands her initial decision to be traded to the farm, and ultimately expresses it in words laced with emotion. She writes to the blacksmith, telling him

of her strength, determination, and self-transformation, and she also speaks of the restricted slavery too. She pours out all her emotional hoardings in language, as Morrison said, "…we do language. That may be the measure of our lives".[69]

Overall, Morrison understands the bleakness of marginalized people and maximizes the space she creates for her traumatized characters to live in seclusion for spiritual transformation and upliftment. What Morrison wants is for her characters, through self-adjustment and self-transformation, to become better adapted to the needs of society, in order to finally achieve harmony between the individual and society.

[69] From Nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/Morrison/lecture/

Conclusion

Black American literature finds its full and complex flowering in the art of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. She leads the way in bringing black American culture back into the mainstream discourse and also speaks the unspeakable about the truth of the juxtaposition of white and black history. Like Cixous and Clement's statement in *The Newly Born Woman*, "When 'The Repressed' of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before." (23) Morrison's texts represent this kind of "shattering" and "explosive" return through her language.

Indeed, Morrison speaks in her language of the stories woven from black history. The history bears witness to the sweat of the men who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World to lay the foundations of this country, and also glimpses of these girls of different races, including Rebekka, the owner's wife from England as a mail-order bride, working together on a farm in *Mercy*, owned by an Anglo-Dutch landowner Jacob Vaark in southern Virginia, showing the equality and friendship between people in the primitive days, when their only goal was to survive in the uncivilized wilderness.

However, society alternates between uncivilized and civilized, while blacks are treated in an uncivilized manner. Sweet Home Plantation in *Beloved*, does not observe its owner, the Schoolteacher, working in the field with other men but rather witnesses the scarred tree that his whip has left on Sethe's back. Man and trees are thus closely linked as intimate partners, sharing the harmony and uniformity of a civilized society.

Yet, Morrison borrows the magic of reality to link the fate of black Americans to heaven and God, so that the spirits of the persecuted dead can enjoy their spiritual freedom while also returning to the Convent in *Paradise* to fertilize and water the peppers in the backyard. It is an inner hope, to be free from all kinds of earthly matters, and to complete the spiritual and

physical connection between man and nature. Also, *God Help the Child* has a new expectation. Like the spirit of the fire that is ceaselessly descending, a new life has been conceived and sprouted in the womb of Bride.

And the expectations Morrison outlines are the ideal places like Milton's Eden, and people of different races living self-sufficient and prosperous lives of self-government in the Convent of *Paradise*. The black community in *Beloved* can gather in Baby Suggs' Clearing to seek self-transformation. Similarly, Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, standing where his ancestors have left their footprints, makes contact with the African culture of self-transformation to reclaim the true self, and the little girl Florens in *Mercy* still has expectations of her affection and new self-orientation through her self-expression in words.

Through the combination of Taoism and Morrison, this dissertation goes through three aspects to interpret the concrete embodiment of ecological thought in her work. The Tao exists as the Creator of all things and possesses many special attributes of its own, such as the Tao's subjectivity, the Tao's eternity, and the Tao's self-creativity, combined with the values of equality, freedom, and harmony which are concretely expressed in Morrison's work. These ideas are also universal and consensual in today's society as ideals to be pursued and aspred to by all humanity.

In the dissertation, many cultural contextual findings are further explored. One of these is the universality of the culture. The author explores in depth the idea that Taoism and Morrison's thought have their roots in the notion of the equality and harmony of all things, embedded in primitive African religious culture. For example, the Taoist "On the Uniformity of All Things" (齊物論) and the animistic nature of African religious thought is a correlation that has influenced and developed to some extent. The other is the relevance of literary works to the cultural roots of their authors. Through the study of Morrison's novels, it is shown that to fully appreciate her mind is to systematically understand her cultural roots. For example, almost all of the supernatural and mystical forces in Morrison's work are associated with African

religious cultures.

As a point of innovation, this dissertation demonstrates an ecological encounter between Morrison and Taoism. Despite the fact that both Morrison and Taoism belong to different languages and cultures, all human cultures have something in common. As Susan Bassnett discusses different kinds of literature as objects of comparative research, which "was based from the start on ideas of interdisciplinarity and universalism" (33). This universalism essentially stems from the idea of similarity in the historical development of human society, which implies the harmony in the development of literature.

Taoism is a green philosophy that embraces the ideas of equality, harmony, and naturalness. These ideas are also expressed specifically in Morrison's work. It fits in perfectly. Moreover, Taoism is inherently applicable to today's ecological reality. Taoism claims the way of naturalness. The governors and the sages don't say a single word, they just follow nature. People live their own lives naturally; Taoism practices the principle of equality, taking away from the haves to compensate for the have-nots, giving subjectivity to all things in the world; Taoism advocates the harmony between Heaven and Earth, male and female, the living and the dead, the visible and the invisible, even between the individual and society.

In addition, Morrison and Taoism are similar in their respective historical situations. Taoist philosophy arose in an era of upheaval and war, where people were not only displaced, but where "a hundred of schools of thought" were competing. Unlike the Confucian ideal of the wise ruler, who actively used his personal or moral charisma or lead by example to engage his people, Taoism advocates allowing people to live and behave naturally. Nor is it like Legalism, where rulers rely on stringent laws to establish a totalitarian kingdom and often a very effective war machine to win the wars of the time. Although Confucianism and Legalism came into being after Taoism, such thoughts and attempts by various kings to attract more people and build a stronger kingdom were always prevalent in Lao Tzu's time. Clearly, Lao Tzu had different ideas in mind from other schools of thought when he advocated a natural rule, and a

close-to-nature lifestyle for both kings and ordinary people. However, Taoism was seen as a non-mainstream thought at that time, but gradually it was developed into a complete philosophical system, from the ontology of the origin of the universe to the world view of the unity of all things, to the human view of life and death, and then to its own unique methodology of the non-action (無爲).

Since the 1970s, Toni Morrison, has became an integral voice in black literature, but as a black American, she has been marginalized and differentiated along with other blacks, both socially and in terms of her literary identity. For the "other" in society from a white perspective, Morrison dedicated herself to an art imbued with aesthetic power and political responsibility, through which she cried out for her ethnic and personal equality, and wrote for social justice. Thanks to her family upbringing and the inheritance of African traditions, she expresses through myths and legends, the symbiotic relationship between man and nature in ancient cultures and the communion of human beings with their ancestral spirits, with deep sympathy for the misfortunes of black Americans throughout history. Meanwhile, Morrison pins her hopes on the future of true harmony and beauty for humanity.

Certainly, this dissertation needs to be improved in some aspects. From an objective point of view, the Taoist philosophical system is in sufficiently deep and comprehensive, but its language is obscure and difficult to understand. For Morrison, her work often contains allusions to ancient legends, which can lead to some misunderstandings due to the lack of relevant African cultural context. From a subjective point of view, the author's understanding of theory and its application is still somewhat inadequate, the related background knowledge is not comprehensive, and his language is not precise enough.

It is noteworthy that the essence of Taoist thought and other authoritative interpretations still require further in-depth study, with a detailed understanding as the main direction of research, as well as a comprehensive understanding of different cultures and a deep exploration of the relevance of literary works to culture.

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Appendix

Abbreviation for Toni Morrison's Novels

The Bluest Eye (1970): abbreviated to *Bluest*

Sula (1974): abbreviated to *Sula*

Song of Solomon (1977): abbreviated to *Song*

Tar Baby (1981): abbreviated to *Baby*

Beloved (1987): abbreviated to *Beloved*

Jazz (1992): abbreviated to *Jazz*

Paradise (1997): abbreviated to *Jazz*

Love (2003): abbreviated to *Love*

A Mercy (2008): abbreviated to *Mercy*

Home (2012): abbreviated to *Home*

God Help the Child (2015): abbreviated to *Child*

Acknowledgements

I am honored to have the opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me in the writing of this dissertation.

Firstly and foremost, I am very grateful to my supervisor, Professor Cheol-soo Kim, who constantly and kindly guides me with his intelligent energy and inspiring advice. His encouragement and support throughout my study abroad in terms of cross-cultural communication, lifestyle, and study are invaluable. His academic attitude and love of life really appeal to me and help me to understand how to deal with research issues and more importantly, to appreciate the true meaning of life.

Secondly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Xu Pan of Harbin Normal University. Her wise advice and selfless devotion during the process of writing this thesis help me to know the shortest distance between the complexity and simplicity of literary writing. And I am also grateful to Professor Zou Weihua of Chendu Normal University for his kindness and devotion during this time.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my colleagues who have helped me tremendously during my Ph.D. studies and have given me comfort in writing.

The last is reserved for my family. To my wife, who has worked hard in her career and taken care of our nuclear family, and to my son, Roy, who, in the short time he has been away from me, has moulded the most valuable qualities of his life: self-reliance.