

New Life, New Language: Ecological Identity in the Work of Morisaki Kazue¹

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1. Environmental Imagination and Ecological Identity

Environmental crisis involves a crisis of imagination.² This well-known maxim implies that the fate of the environment is subject to how the human mind conceives of the surrounding world. As we know from experience, it is not easy to imagine something which we cannot relate ourselves to. All too frequent news reports of wars and murders, for instance, cannot stimulate our imagination unless these stories are perceived, empathically, as being in relation to us. Likewise, human perception of the nonhuman world as well as how individuals and societies treat it is determined to a large extent by the degree of their relationships with the environment.

In examining one's relationship with the environment, an idea of "identity" may provide a helpful reference point. In *Ecological Identity* Mitchell Thomashaw describes "ecological identity" as it "refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self" (Thomashaw 3). He further explains that "ecological identity describes how we extend our sense of self in relationship to nature" (3). Paraphrasing it, the idea of ecological identity can work as a gauge of the extent of one's relationship to the environment, which in turn plays no small part in fashioning one's identity.

In a society in which technocratic rationality dominates and everyday life requires few physical interactions with, and therefore little sense of connection

to, the natural environment, we cannot assume that an ecological identity could be attained naturally, but rather that it would necessitate conscious and reflective efforts. Being *reflective* is in fact a key concept in Thomashaw's *Ecological Identity*: a "reflective capacity is the core of ecological identity work--the integrating capacity to make knowledge whole" (Thomashaw 173). A number of activities identified in the book as helping promote a reflective capacity are mostly designed as class work for environment-oriented courses and classes; however, Thomashaw suggests, there are many chances to animate a reflective capacity in our daily lives. Nor are such activities limited to take place in nature but can include an ordinary place like a supermarket. As an example of how an event in an ordinary setting stimulates the reflective capacity, Thomashaw tells the story of how his Tanzanian colleague, to whom a megasupermarket in the US is "a giant museum" exhibiting so many "strange artifacts" that he has never seen, made him conscious of what he usually ignore: "I know that . . . I should be aware of the amount of packaging that is used, whether the product is grown locally But my Tanzanian friend showed me that my habits run even deeper. . . . His 'beginner's eye' were filled with a different kind of wisdom, allowing me to understand the extent to which I take material wealth and security for granted" (Thomashaw 177). As this anecdote demonstrates, daily life can offer a new understanding of how one relates to the world, thereby contributing to an ecological identity.

There are many different means, activities, and situations which could promote an understanding of how we are relating to the world. Reading literature is one of them. With its poetic capacity to represent that which has little room for articulation in a dominant discourse, literary works often provide us a fresh look at our familiar environment: just as Thomashaw's Tanzanian friend did for him, literature gives us a "beginner's eye" and makes us realize how our perception is culturally and politically structured. Among the many domestic and foreign writers whose works make us critically reflect on human

interactions with the environment, Morisaki Kazue, a Japanese contemporary writer and poet, has been exploring what can be termed as ecological identity. As I will discuss later, Morisaki's work addresses perceptions of life in many ways: her early works examine an integrated way of life in which the social self does not conflict with the erotic self; then her focus moves to an alternative understanding of life and death; and in recent years her interest lies largely in her perception that there is a mutual enhancement that exists between a sense of life and ecological sensitivity. By examining Morisaki's diverse approaches to the issue of life, I wish to discuss in this essay how her work introduces a "beginner's eye" with which to conceive of human and nonhuman alike in a more engaging way.

Having publishing more than fifty books of nonfiction essays, poems, and oral history, however, Morisaki has not yet received enough critical attention. Such underestimation of her work is clearly sensed when held in comparison with her contemporary, Ishimure Michiko, who is the single best known Japanese environmental writer. Both Morisaki and Ishimure were born in 1927 and each has a literary base in Kyushu. They even worked together in a Kyushu-based literary group called the "Circle Village" (*sākuru mura*) in the late 1950s, a group of which Morisaki was one of the three founding members and to which Ishimure regularly contributed her work. Since the 1969 publication of her *Kugai jodo: waga minamata byo* [Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease], Ishimure's work has attracted social and literary attention; especially in the last decade or so, her work has increasingly earned a reputation as a major Japanese moment in environmental literature both domestically and internationally (see Allen for detailed information). Three of her works, *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease*, *Story of the Sea of Camellias*, and *Lake of Heaven* are available in English translation. On the contrary, none of Morisaki's works have been translated in English except for six short pieces of essays and oral history. As for scholarly

study, there are at least a couple of monographs as well as three book collections of critical essays on Ishimure's work, whereas there is yet to be a scholarly book focusing on Morisaki's work. Such difference in scholarly interest is also reflected in the social recognition of their literary achievements: Ishimure received prestigious literary prizes including the Philippines' Magsaysay Award and Japan's Asahi Prize, while Morisaki is the recipient of locally known literary prizes only.³

Given such little knowledge of Morisaki's life and work, in what follows, I wish to offer a general introduction to her life and work before examining how Morisaki's work provides a framework within which to reconsider our relationships with the environment consciously and reflectively.

2. Life and Work of Morisaki Kazue

Morisaki Kazue was born in 1927 in Korea during Japan's occupation. According to her memoir, she was brought up in a family which seems unusually liberal at that time. It reflected her parents' liberal philosophy, especially that of her father who worked as a junior high school principal in the colony. Morisaki was the oldest of three children, two girls and one boy. That she was raised in a liberal, nuclear family seems to have helped her develop as an independent, autonomous self, which would have been difficult to nurture in the more patriarchal society of Japan. Morisaki's mother died of cancer at the age of thirty-six when Morisaki was a high school student; in her memoir, she looked back to her gentle yet strong-willed mother, who sneaked a bottle of wine into her daughter's suitcase when she moved to a boardinghouse near her high school. In 1944 during World War II, Morisaki followed her father's advice and attended a women's college in Kyushu; in her own words, it was not so much *going back* to Japan as *studying overseas*. She spent her first seventeen years in Korea; though she was living in a prestigious residence for Japanese, she recalls that she was "raised" and "fed" by Korea (Morisaki, "Two Languages" 153).

Upon her arrival in Japan, Morisaki fell into a dizzying cultural confusion and began to suffer a total loss of her sense of self, language, and home. As Fujimoto Kazuko succinctly describes, “[a]lienated by the Japanese mentality, which labeled her arrival on the archipelago a ‘homecoming,’ Morisaki Kazue sustained a sense of loss that has been the source of much of her work to date” (Fujimoto 151). Not being able to identify herself as a Japanese, much less as a Korean, she began a series of travel to socially neglected places such as coal mining towns. In such travels she hoped to find and understand an integrated sense of self, one which would have survived in spite of imperial, patriarchal, centripetal ideologies or the rapid technocratic modernization forces that were sweeping throughout Japan. She married in 1952 at twenty-five, had a daughter and a son, and divorced by age around thirty. Her decision to divorce was not so much a desire to be free from her spouse but rather to be free from institutionalized marriage and family. Even during her years of marriage, Morisaki made conscious efforts to create a cooperative, non-patriarchal family with her husband, and after they divorced and each started a new life, they became an extended family. In the late 1950s Morisaki began to create a communal network with not only her fellow Kyushu-based poets and activists but also local workers, with the publication of the monthly journal *Sākuru akuru mura* [Circle Village] starting in 1958. It was a short-lived burst of literary activism, but it had a large impact on Japan’s intellectuals, especially because of its (re)presentation of the living voices of ordinary people as well as that of oppressed laborers. Using a present-day concept, it had an aspect of environmental justice. Exhausted and disappointed by the male-centered discourse of their activism, however, Morisaki left the group and started to write dedicatedly (there was a practical reason for it as well since she had to support her two children). She also started to travel, mostly to marginalized place, where she felt most at home. Morisaki has been living in Fukuoka in northern Kyushu, first in a coal mining town, and since the late 1970s, in a

small town near the Genkai Sea which lies between Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula.

Morisaki's first book, *Makkura* [Pitch Black] which was published in 1961, collects the oral stories of female coal miners. Writing oral history is characteristic of Morisaki's early work; it is as though, having suffered a loss of identity, she tried to find her voice in those who appeared to her as integrated beings, whose erotic self was harmonized with the social self. From the late 1950s till the mid 1970s, Morisaki's primary interest was in the "underground culture" of coal miners, which she depicts as being in stark contrast to the "ground culture" of Japan's imperial, agrarian, and mono-ethnic ideology.

The 1976 publication of *Karayuki-san* [Sold Overseas] marks Morisaki's literary transformation: her focus began to shift from the history of unknown people to her own history. *Karayuki-san* is a hybrid text of oral history, literary and journalistic researches, and creative writing, which opens with the story of Morisaki's acquaintance--who was the daughter of a former *karayuki-san* [girls who were sold overseas during the Meiji era]--trying to show the physical reality of life and death by making Morisaki witness her abortion. This story has been told again and again in slightly different versions, and in 2001 it was crystallized as a short story entitled "New Life." I will discuss this story later in detail; for now I just wish to suggest that perhaps the story of abortion which questions the commonly shared opposition of life and death gave an expression to what Morisaki seems have been seeking: an all-inclusive sense of life. Also, Morisaki's resistance to the presupposed opposition between life and death or between self and other seems to resonate the deep affection to one's fellow humans that Morisaki finds in *karayuku-san*, who were and still are merely labeled "prostitute" and looked down on. In addition to the focus and the theme of her writing, Morisaki's literary style changed as well; given expression, the hard, obscure language that dominates her earlier works began to be replaced by a more emotionally engaging language.

After moving to the coast of the Genkai Sea in the late 1970s, Morisaki directed her literary interest to the life of women abalone divers who maintain traditional diving methods. Why abalone divers? According to historian Amino Yoshihiko, Japan's imperial ideology has been supported by an agrarian myth which claims that Japan is traditionally a mono-ethnic rice-farming country with an Emperor as its center; because of this myth, Amino suggests, diving/fishing culture has been largely marginalized and neglected (Amino 261, 267-68). Paying attention to coastal society, perhaps Morisaki's literary insight intuitively grabs what is systematically neglected by Japan's widespread ideology. Neglected and yet not apparently victimized. That fascinated Morisaki. She perceives the women abalone divers as materialization of an unconstrained, integrated being in their resistance to social, political and ideological manipulations. As I have discussed, in the lives of coal miners, especially those of women, and in *karayuki-san*, Morisaki finds a socially neglected discourse operating, in which the erotic self *is* the social self. Recently, there is an awareness that her language resonates with the vocabulary of the environmental age, showing that her interest in issues of life expands and deepens to the extent that the life of humans are discussed in a way that is intricately connected to that of nonhuman world.

As such, Morisaki's work examines issues of life from many different approaches, and perhaps that makes it difficult for scholars to categorize her work into a certain area such as feminist writing or environmental literature. This may be one conceivable reason why Morisaki's work has not frequently been under scholarly critical examination. In the case of literary environmentalism, Morisaki's seemingly opposing position to popular environmental notions also complicates evaluation of her work. Morisaki often refutes such popular notions in environmental discourse as a pastoral sense of home and harmonious relationships between one's sense of self and that of place. A statement like "I will make it a principle not to have a so-called home

and try to explore home-place” shows her recognition that sentimental ideas of home and place simply conceal their political implications (Morisaki, “Ankoku” 61). Resisting the prevailing environmental discourses on “home” and “place,” Morisaki questions and dismantles conventional notions of family, home, country, nature, language, and life, towards a new imagining and understanding of an intricate world in which life continues.

3. At an Intersection of Postmodernity and Nonmodernity: Morisaki’s Exploration of Ecological Identity

Morisaki’s exploration of ecological identity is postmodern in that she resists a major ecological discourses including those based on ideas of home and locality-oriented sense of place. This is partly because of her sense of being a diaspora, incapable of having a sense of belonging either to Japan from which her “nationality” comes or to Korea which she claims “raised” her (Morisaki, “Two Languages” 153). In an essay entitled “Two Languages, Two Souls,” Morisaki demonstrates her entangled sense of self, suspended between feeling guilty at being Japanese in colonial Korea and feeling at once owed and intimate with Korea:

Sensing that your birth—not the way you lived your life, but the fact of having been born—was in itself a crime is not something you speak about easily. Ordinarily I try to maintain my equilibrium by telling myself that the fact of my birth is linked to the nucleus of history. Ever since defeat I have been living lost among the Japanese, but unlike them I am not allowed the comfort of believing that the crimes of Japan’s colonial policy were committed at the national level, while we common folk, etc. It does me just as little good to think that I was only a child, that I wasn’t born in Korea because I wanted to be. It is the very fact that I was born in that land without having chosen to do so, that I absorbed its culture, which in turn gave shape to my being, that gives rise to my dilemma. I find it

impossible to remain objective about Korea or the activities of Koreans; I lose my composure. The hair of my *omoni* and nanny who carried me on their backs sticks to my lips. It fills my mouth with memories I never would have had had we parted in a different way. . . . Korea raised me, fed me at its breast. (Morisaki "Two Languages," 153; a minor change is added to the original translation)

Morisaki goes on to discuss how "[t]wo different and overlapping cultures color my perception of 'I'" (154). It does not imply, however, so much her being cosmopolitan as her reflective and ever-questioning sense of self caused by internally experienced cultural conflicts. In the same essay, for instance, Morisaki describes how her "Korean" sense of independent self made her critical of the Japanese group mentality, being rather frustrated by their inability to establish individual autonomy, a feeling which upsets her as well due to her sense of guilt at being Japanese.

In addition to a political identity, Morisaki also dismantles the conventional sexual identity. A conventional idea of self, Morisaki claims, does not reflect the continuation of life in which we not only experience birth and death but also giving birth. This relates to her literary exploration of a language of life, which she suggests is strangely missing in any society where death becomes a philosophical issue but life remains simply lived. In "New Life," Morisaki tells of the shock she experienced when she became pregnant and felt awkward in using the first-person pronoun "I": "I never expected to have such a shocking experience as the loss of the meaning of 'I' It suggested that there was no place for a person like me in this nation's language. Moreover, I realized that this language—written or spoken—had never reflected a female body" ("New Life" 185). In other words, this anecdote illustrates her recognition that the modern sense of self is not situated in a continuation of life, which would include birth, birthing, and death. The commonly held notion of self begins with birth and ends with death. By introducing the idea of birthing,

which does not refer to the physical act of a woman giving birth but to the human quality of femininity or of openness to and acceptance of life, Morisaki tries to revise an institutionalized sexual identity. Femininity is not an exclusively female prerogative but rather a shared quality in men and women, young and old, and those who have bore a child as well as who haven't. A femininity-based sense of self would value life above all things; life which is one's whole and raw being, not that which is coated by institutionalized conceptions.

In a continuation of life, life does not oppose death; likewise, a language of life should be inclusive in a way which is able to talk about death and life without opposing either. In fact, Morisaki writes "New Life" in a way which perceives livebirth and stillbirth, or wanted life and unwanted life, without putting one against the other. In a translator's note to "New Life," I once touched upon this point, saying that the language of life "should be encompassing enough to recognize all life, even life that is taken or unwanted. Abortion and childbirth appear to be incompatible, yet in either case the passage is the same—the birth canal. Morisaki urges us to shift our focus from a binary abstraction of life and death to the birthing itself, a point from which to explore all-inclusive concepts of life" ("New Life" 187). Such a shift in focus would lead to a complete transformation of self-image. Take a moment to imagine the idea of a continuation of life attracting intellectual discussion. How would it change our perception of ourselves? What sort of image would we develop in the recognition of a continuation of life? Certainly it would not be a fixed, self-concluded "I" simply because the process of birth, birthing, and death cannot be self-concluded. It would necessitate the others with whose relationships one's sense of self would be incessantly renewed. It would be characteristically erotic.

Nature--both the external nature of a physical environment and the internal nature of a human body--serves as a point of reference for Morisaki's

exploration towards an integrated being. As described in “New Life,” Morisaki’s recognition of her *unnatural* sexual identity came of her recognition of a grape vine’s *natural* and integrated way of being: “I saw grape vines climbing up to the balcony roof. On the vines were some grapes. Looking up at them, I shed tears. Vines, I envy you: your leaves and fruit are all yourself” (“New Life” 185-86; minor changes added to the original translation). Nature is always in flux, in process, and in continuation; it will never be fixed. A grape vine is a grape vine either as a young vine or a matured one laden with fruit. From her contact with and observations of the natural environment, Morisaki learns how to accept change, which is the major characteristic of a continuation of life.

Morisaki’s recognition of nature in flux creates the foundation for her postmodern attitude towards life. Her literary environmentalism actually stands out for her resistance to popular environmental discourses and concepts. She refutes the idea of home in her recognition of its being nostalgic, retrospective, nationalistic, and ideological. Her resistance to any given environmental discourse seems to be characteristic of her resolution against being ideologically fixed.

In addition to her postmodern trait, Morisaki’s literary endeavors show an orientation towards the nonmodern as well. The idea of nonmodernity creates a fresh perspective in critical reexaminations of modernity, as Patrick Murphy discusses:

One of the limitations of postmodernist critique is the reliance on binary oppositions as the fundamental mechanism of analysis. As a result, the response to modernity can only be postmodernity, and everyone must respond to modernity because it is the dominant mode of economic, scientific, and cultural organization in the world. What is ignored by such oppositions is the continuation of a nonmodernity—including various

paramodern formations—that cannot be defined by the parameters of postmodernism. (Murphy 90)

For Morisaki, nonmodernity is represented by “a way of living irrelevant to the power on the ground,” a lifestyle which she first encountered in coal mining towns and later in secluded coastal communities (“Ama no kazoe uta” 43). Not only are they far away from the centers of power, but also they are neglected. In an oral history entitled “Tough Girls,” one woman ex-coal miner recalls that the “people who worked the mines were usually those who had lost their fields and their homes and had no other choice. . . . There were so many people there without the normal family registration that they didn’t even bother to report the deaths. No priest ever came for the dead, either” (“Tough Girls” 171). Some would call them derelicts, others would call them the oppressed, and Morisaki saw them as integrated beings who appear to be less conventional and more raw and *natural*. As an example, see how the ex-miner portrays herself and her fellow miners in an oral history gathered by Morisaki: “We were girls, all right but we were strong enough to work carrying those heavy coal baskets, too. In the pit there’s no difference between men and women. We did everything. On top of that we weren’t about to take any nonsense from anybody. There aren’t girls like us around these days. We threw everything into whatever we did” (“Tough Girls” 169-70). This illustrates what Morisaki describes as “a history of women without any tinge of a history of victims” (“Shisha” 76). In other words, Morisaki does not perceive those “tough” women in a conventional feminist context. She sees those women not as the oppressed but as erotic and *natural* beings.

Aside from the risk of being identified as a biological fundamentalist, there is a twisted logic to this natural/unnatural distinction. The fact that those who seem to possess a sense of naturalness were living in an unnatural “underground culture” acts only to emphasize the unnaturalness of the “ground culture” which presents itself as natural. This echoes historian Amino’s

argument that, by shifting the focus from land culture to sea culture, the prevalent notion of Japan as an agricultural nation is turned to be the nationalistic ideology which helps legitimize the imperial system. Similarly, marginalized cultures tend to emphasize ideological manipulation—its unnatural status—prevalent in a dominant culture.

The underground culture appears to be nonmodern for its resistance to being evaluated by modern values. The term “nonmodern,” however, is not what Morisaki uses to describe the underground culture she observes. It is my suggestion to use the term in order to characterize the underground culture which helped establish Morisaki’s attitude towards life, in stead of using “premodern.” If we perceive the underground culture of coal miners as premodern, that will inevitably reflect a modern discourse of progressism. By introducing the idea of nonmodernity, we may be able to learn to perceive different cultures without imposing our values, which is exactly what Morisaki’s work urges us to do.

Morisaki’s literary exploration towards an ecological identity leads us to an intersection between the postmodern and the nonmodern, where conventional ideas of identity are dismantled. Situated in a continuation of life, how do we envision ourselves? What should we identify ourselves with? Morisaki’s work provides us with some of the insights needed to start asking such questions.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at The Fourth Tamkang International Conference on Ecological Discourse which was held at Tamkang University, Taiwan, on May 23rd and 24th in 2008.

² As far as I understand, this idea was widely shared among those who are

interested in literature and environment since the American literary critic, Lawrence Buell, in his 1995 book entitled *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Harvard UP) stated that “If, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysic and ethics need revision before we can address today’s environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity’s relation to it” (2).

³ In addition, Ishimure’s work is being compiled in seventeen-volume “complete” work, whereas Morisaki’s work has not been available in such a consolidating way until recently when it starts to be published in a five-volume “collection.” Both Ishimure’s and Morisaki’s compiled works are from the same publisher, Fujiwara shoten based in Tokyo.

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新しいのち、新しい言語

—森崎和江の作品におけるエコロジカル・アイデンティティ—

結城正美

要旨

小稿の目的は、エコロジカル・アイデンティティという概念を参照しつつ、環境との関わりのありかたを探究する文学実践を考察することにある。具体的な検討対象は森崎和江の作品である。森崎作品は国内外を問わずあまり学術的議論の対象とされてこなかったが、その要因と目されるこの書き手の文学的ハイブリッド性を視野に入れながら、既成のアイデンティティ概念を揺さぶり世界とのあらたな関係性構築の方向性を示す森崎の思想とヴィジョンを分析する。炭鉱夫に代表される「地下の文化」が逆照射する農本主義的・国家主義的「地上の文化」のイデオロギー性、からゆきさんの個々の生のあり方と彼女らの社会的受容のギャップに象徴される生・性概念の近代的変容、そして〈産〉の概念を導入することによって生と死の二元論的思考を打開しようとする森崎特有の包括的な生観念、そのような森崎の文学的関心と実践の軌跡をたどり、環境との関係性およびアイデンティティの再構築をめぐる森崎作品の試みを分析する。