On the analysis of Imperial diaspora awareness of white South Africans in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

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Abstract. As Alice Ridont and Susan Watkins remarked in their symposium *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings,* born in Persia, raised in Rhodesia and living in her parents' hometown---England postwar, Doris Lessing's experiences of space border crossings has an important influence on the thematic and cultural border crossings of her literary creations. Lessing's experiences of border crossing both physically and spiritually are in a great degree her diaspora experiences. Influenced by her parents and sense of personal identification, Lessing had an awareness of imperial diaspora in her early years, reflected by the white South Africans in her work *The Golden Notebook*. This sense of imperial diaspora is embodied in idealizing the motherland, treating the culture of the resident country as the "margin", whereas taking that of native land as the "centerpiece", and having a partiality for the lifestyle from motherland, and meanwhile longing for a return to the motherland. This preference to the "myth of roots" is not an exception but a common feature of the imperial diasporas.

Keywords: The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing, diasporic literature.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

"To scatter" originally meant that seeds or pollen were 'spread' so that plants could reproduce. [1] Since the advent of the Old Testament, "diaspora" has been capitalized and used only in the singular form, "referring specifically to the condition in which the Jewish people were driven from their native land after the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC". [2] As an ancient social phenomenon, diaspora bursts out dazzling brilliance again in the era of globalization. "diaspora" is "any person or a group of people living outside their traditional homeland. "[1] In the 21st century, it has become a remarkable social phenomenon and a hot topic of anthropology and sociology.

With the bulge of the diaspora phenomenon, diaspora writing has developed rapidly. As a novelist born in Persia, raised in Rhodesia and living in London postwar, British writer Doris Lessing is a typical diaspora writer in the era of globalization. The diaspora awareness refers to the "feeling of stepping on two continents", [3] that is, the diasporas' understanding of their crossborder existence between the "home country" and the "resident country". James Clifford graphically compares the diasporas' border crossing situation to being "between the root and the road"[4]. According to Robin Cohen, imperial diaspora refers to the diasporas, represented by British and Russian colonists, who left their homeland for residence countries for sake of colonialism. [5] As a descendant of South Africa's British colonists, Lessing was born in Persia and came to Africa with her parents at age five. For as long as she can remember, she saw her parents' efforts to "escape the farm, escape Africa". This desire to return to England was also passed on to Lessing. Although Lessing refused to accept her parents' daydreams and foolishness, she still believed in her heart that Africa was not her true home." As the critic, Ruth Whitaker noted, "Africa was Lessing's home. But at the same time, she was a white colonizer in Africa, a foreigner". [6] Her parents' "expectation of returning home" had Lessing inherit the "root" complex for her native land from elder generation. She did not regard the country of residence as a real home but a sojourn. She was "always haunted by the idea of returning to a home they had never seen". [6] Lessing is, therefore, a writer with imperial diaspora awareness.

As a "highly autobiographical writer", Lessing's imperial diaspora awareness is reflected in her diaspora writing, which will inevitably influence the characters of her creations.

As one of Lessing's early representative works, *The Golden Notebook* is "the main event of English literature in the 20th century"[10] and a great pioneering work of literary art form. It is divided into chapters and consists of a story and five notebooks. A story titled "Free Women" is divided into five parts by the author, with black, red, yellow and blue notes inserted between each part; Between the last two sections appears “the Golden Notebook” that makes up the title. Among which, “the Black Notebook” concerns with the protagonist---Anna Wulf’s recollections of her life in Africa, including her experiences and reflections on working and living with the members of a local communist group when she was in diaspora there. “The Black Notebook” also contains a novel called *Edge of War* written by Anna wulf, based on her life experiences in Africa.

When Chen Caiyu, the translator of the Chinese version of *The Golden Note*, visited Lessing in Britain, he talked with her about Anna, the book’s heroine. Later, Chen Caiyu recalled in his article *My Association with Lessing*, "Her (means Lessing's) words convinced me that Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* was a shadow of herself" [7].

Thus, whether the life experiences of Anna Wulf, the heroine of *The Golden Notebook* in Africa, or the lives of other white South Africans depicted in *The Golden Notebook*, they embody the empirical diaspora awareness of their creator Doris Lessing.

This paper aims to analyze the reasons for the formation of Lessing’s imperial diaspora awareness under the influence of her elder generation and explore the expression of the imperial diaspora awareness of the white South Africans in her work *The Golden Notebook* through literature research methods and textual close reading.

1.2 Research status of Lessing at home and abroad

1.2.1 Research status of Lessing at home

In the mid-1950s, Doris Lessing was translated into China as a progressive "communist writer". In 1988, Lessing's masterpiece, The Golden Notebook, was translated into Chinese (at the time as The Crisis of Women). The Second Sex (1986) by Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) and Betty Friedan (1908-1986), two of the most important works on feminist theory at the time, The Feminine Mystique (1988) was translated into Chinese in 1986 and 1988 respectively. In the following long period of time, the domestic research on Lessing's The Golden Notebook accounted for a large proportion of feminist research. Sun Zongbai published a paper---Doris Lessing, a Sincere Female Writer in the 3rd issue of Foreign Literature Studies in 1981, which was the first domestic paper devoted to studying Lessing. It put forward that anti-racial discrimination and fighting for women's rights and interests were the two major themes of Lessing's works. Wang Jiaxiang published the paper Doris Lessing in Foreign Literature in the 5th issue of 1987, and proposed that the themes of the Golden Notebook were the relationship between life and artistic creation and the female issues. Zhong Zi published The Fifth Child in the 8th issue of Reading Magazine in 1988, and proposed that the two main themes of Lessing's works are political and women. In 1993, Lessing visited China as a member of a delegation of British writers, visiting several Chinese universities and research institutes. Since then, the translation and publication of Lessing's novels, the introduction of monographs on literary history, and the study in university classrooms have led to the development of domestic studies on Lessing. In 2007, Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature, which further promoted the rapid development of domestic Lessing studies.Since then, the perspective of Lessing's work has broadened. In addition to the political perspective, feminism and the form of the work, the Golden Notebook has been studied from the perspectives of Sufism, cognitive themes, philosophy of life, psychoanalysis, cultural studies (spatial studies), the relationship between the individual and the collective, human nature, etc.

1.2.2 Research status of Lessing abroad

Lessing studies abroad began in the late 1950s and early 1960s. On the whole, there are few research achievements of Lessing during this period. Most of them are the introduction of Lessing herself and her works, including book reviews, interviews and so on, which mainly focus on the

themes and characters in Lessing's works. In 1971, the Modern Language Association of America held the first seminar "Feminist Literature and Female Consciousness", "Doris Lessing studies" was one of the topics, since then feminist criticism has become the focus of Lessing's studies. In particular, *The Golden Notebook* has become the protagonist of feminist critical studies. In addition, there were also some studies from the perspectives of narratology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and deconstruction. Since the 1980s, the academic community has gradually begun to systematically study Lessing's artistic forms and explore the relationship between form and theme in her works. In the 21st century, research on Doris Lessing has matured into a worldwide academic activity. On the whole, foreign scholars pay attention to the comparison between Lessing and other female writers, and begin to study Lessing in the feminist literary tradition.

About *the Golden Notebook,* the foreign research mainly includes the following ten themes: the relationship between the individual and the collective, the feminist theme, the political theme, the psychoanalysis theme, the organic holistic view theme, the Sufi thought theme, the human nature theme, the cultural research theme, the ethics theme, the identity theme.

1.3 Research status of Lessing diaspora at home and abroad

1.3.1 Study on Lessing's Diaspora experience

About Lessing's diaspora experience, there have been some biographical and introductory achievements that provide detailed information about Lessing's life.

In 1978, Michael Thorpe published the book *Doris Lessing's Africa.* The book provides information about Lessing's early experiences, pointing out that the African experience has an important influence on her writing, arguing that "the power of Lessing is mainly that she is an African writer, an African-born writer." Thorpe pays particular attention to Lessing's groping white diaspora, noting that "no matter how strongly they seek to own Africa, they will always remain strangers."

In 2000, Carol Klein published a monograph, Doris Lessing: A Biography, which analyzed Lessing's diaspora experience. "Lessing's early writing grew out of her African experience, reflecting both her love of the country and her painful feelings of not belonging there," the book notes.

In 2009, Alice Redoute and Susan Watkins co-edited the critical collection Doris Lessing: "Transboundary" summarizes Lessing's spatial transboundary and its literary performance, pointing out that "Born in Persia, raised in Rhodesia, and living in London after the war" such spatial transboundary experience has an important impact on the transboundary of Lessing's literary creation theme and background.

In 1994, Lessing published an autobiography, "Under My Skin," which traced the life experiences of her grandfather, her grandfather's generation, her parents' generation, and her own early life in Africa.

By comparing and contrasting the above biography with Lessing's autobiography and non-fiction essays, we can get more objective information about Lessing's diaspora experience.

1.3.2 Study on Lessing's Diaspora type

In 1994, Dolores Gail Tayko published her doctoral dissertation *Narratives of Exile: Doris Lessing's 'Golden Notes' and Isabel Allende's' House of Souls' and 'Eva Luna'* and' Eva Luna ', 1994), It mainly analyzes "Lessing's African exile identity and the important role of her writing in her rootless, homesick exile experience."

In her 1984 essay "Doris Lessing" (1984), Susan Osborn noted that "The Golden Note is a book of exile."

In 1985, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar edited and published the *NORTON Anthology of Women's Literature: The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* (1985) proposed that "Lessing suffered a 'double exile'". The book points out that "in Africa, Lessing spent her childhood among people who were bent on returning to England; When she returned to England, she found herself longing for Africa again. "In other words, Lessing is a British exile from the United

Kingdom who lives in Africa. After returning to Britain, Lessing became an "African exile" from Africa.

In 2010, Susan Watkins also proposed that "for Lessing, the concept of 'home' is always closely linked to her other 'exile'."

However, current studies on Lessing's diaspora mainly focus on the African diaspora of her African identity. At the same time, in her works, little attention is paid to the reflection of the imperial diaspora consciousness of the young Lessing as the descendants of imperial colonists. In Lessing's early work *The Golden Note*, young British people living in Africa, to some extent, reflected her early imperial diaspora consciousness. There has been no systematic analysis of this.

2. Research contents

Robin Cohen points out that the key role of the homeland should be considered in defining the diaspora, as the diasporas have a homeland tendency, that is, they committed themselves to seeking, restoring, and constructing an ideal home. [3] For the elder generation of white South Africans and the imperial diaspora in *The Golden Notebook*, this ideal home was the old country England left behind. Therefore, their diasporic consciousness is reflected in their adherence to the "root" of their native England and their alienation from their native Africa. With this diaspora in mind, although they are in Africa, they marginalize Africa and regard it as "the other". They pursue their "root" culture, cling to the British life pattern and cultural customs, and adopt a mindset of being a settler. Holding on to the desire to return.

2.1 The myth of "roots": Garden of Eden there, place of exile here

Lessing grew up listening to her parents' talk about the good, rich paradise of England. [8] In his parents' eyes, England was the perfect paradise, the Garden of Eden, while Africa was poor and ugly, a temporary "place of exile". Lessing's parents remembered England as "green grass, spring flowers, cows as gentle as cats." [8] At the opposite end of the world are Africa's wild-eyed, sharp-horned cows, reminding them of England's irreplaceable homeland.

Lessing's parents, who came to live in Africa in search of a better life, were disillusioned with the real natural and social environment in Africa. Still, they were unable to change it due to poverty. In the strong contrast between memory and reality, the halo of their native Eden became clearer and brighter, and the myth of "root" was beautiful but remote. "The real Emily (Lessing's mother) died," Lessing wrote in a biography of her parents, "of a nervous breakdown shortly after settling down on a farm in Africa". [9] When the dream stopped in Africa, the active "migration" became the painful "exile".

In *The Golden Notebook*, the protagonist Anna also uses the word "exiles" to describe the members of the white South African Communist group in Africa. "This group is like a group of exiles. There are about twenty of us, and all of us are exiles. " [10]

Many of the members of this African Communist Group were young pilots who had been transferred to Africa for war or work. Although they had respectable jobs representing the British Empire, they refused to fit in. Instead, their minds were filled with an idealization of England, expressed through personal habits. Jaime, a white South African, is Scottish but "speaks in a pretentious Oxford drawl" that is "hilarious". But he thought, "As soon as the war is over, he can get me bread and butter." It shows Jaime's idealized expectation of England and his firm belief that England can bring him a better life.

2.2 The myth of "roots": The "centerpiece" there and the "periphery" here

The imperial diaspora awareness of white South Africans is also embodied in egocentric pride and prejudice. They hold the stereotype towards the resident people and regard them as the "other" who are different from them. "The Black Notebook" in *The Golden Notebook*, set in South Africa, notes that "in about half of the African land, Hitler's claim that some people are ethnically superior to others

is very popular." And “During the war, newspaper bulletins were filled with talk of the danger of black people, " such as “any African soldier might turn his gun on his white master." And came to the biased conclusion that black people are not safe to keep guns. " They must understand that there is a line between the white and black that they must not cross," said Mrs Boobies, a quintessentially British cultural centrist in *The Golden Notebook*, as she chatted with Paul. It all shows the of pride and prejudice of white South Africans of the creation towards the native people. They push the culture of their residence country to the periphery.

In addition, Willy mocks the indigenous white people in Africa, such as Mrs. Boobis and Mary Rose, with words such as "queer” , "dishonest", "inconceivable" and "indigenous", to distinguish them from the white Britons who live in Africa provisionally.

The contrast between the depiction and the ending of the white people living in Africa and the native people also reflects the imperial diaspora awareness to some extent. Willy is a European refugee who came to Africa to escape the war. He is a white exile there. As a member of "the upper English middle class," he is described in the book as having "the spirit and physique of a well-bred, old-fashioned family" and is "extremely intelligent, his parents were well-bred." Even he describes himself unmodestly: "I have wisdom, breeding and background -- all I lack is money." His ending is “went to East Germany and became a powerful government official". By contrast, in describing the Aboriginal June Boobis, the words used in her were "awkward", "dull hair", "dull manner," and "lack of any attractive features". In addition, when Peter, a white South African pilot, bade farewell to the local African "progressives" before returning to England, "his contempt for them was evident in his eyes”. And his black lover's outcome is tragic, not only abandoned by Peter, but also ended with marriage dissolution, and finally "back in the dark city of the brothel, in the arms of a man laughing liberally."

2.3 Home on the Other Side: Pursue the life patterns and customs from homeland

White South Africans’ imperial diaspora awareness is embodied in pursuing their homeland's life patterns.

As Eric Boehmer puts it, Britons has been working very hard to replicate their images in places ruled by white people. [11] In South Africa, white people do so, too. Lessing also mentions in her biography that the South African city of Salisbury is the African replica of an European city, with an ambience reminiscent of England. Even at the sports games held by his younger brother's school, success was judged by how well the players mimicked their English counterparts.

In *The Golden Notebook*, the Communist group can't stand the boredom of Gainsborough's dormitory-style living conditions. When Paul finds out that the pub at the Masheby Hotel has "a ready supply of darts and coin-playing tables, and steaming steaks and loin pies kept at 90 degrees" -- traditional English games and delicacies, Ted enthusiastically suggests a visit. "It seems the Mashebe Hotel is the best place in life." Eager and jubilant, the group checked into the Mashebe Hotel. Its owners, Mr. And Mrs. Boobies, were English colonists. They can cook English food. “Perhaps the Boothby have never been out of England before,” Paul conjectured cheerfully. [10]

White South Africans’ imperial diaspora awareness is also embodied in pursuing their homeland's cultural customs.

Lessing's mother, Maud, worked hard to maintain the dress conventions of the English middle class in her daily life. Years later, Lessing often recalled her mother's strict dress code, noting that her mother went to the station dressed very formally, complete with hats, gloves and socks, even though there were only three small buildings in town and a butcher's shop. This reflects the South African white women's adherence to the British Victorian dress culture in the African land. Lessing notes the meticulous dressing of the first British women to Africa:

The women arrived, too, covered from head to toe and nearly weighed down by their clothes. In Victorian times, no respectable woman could go out without leaving an ounce of her dress behind whether it's a fake collar, a petticoat, or a cinched waist. Mary Kingsley was the model of these

explorers. When she travels in hot, humid Africa, she dresses as if she were going to an afternoon tea party.

Moreover, according to the marriage customs of white South Africans at the time, marrying a black woman was an unforgivable "act of depravity". So, when Peter, a British pilot in Anna's novel *The Edge of War*, falls in love with a black girl, Mrs. Boobs, a character in the novel, is "furious" and reports the affair to the commander of the Royal Air Force Garrison, who promises to remove Peter from the colony for violating the precepts and customs of the white quarters.

2.4 Home on the Other Side: Living with a sojourner mentality

The white South Africans' adherence to the "myth of roots" of their native England is also reflected in their desire to return to England. William Safran notes, "To be sure, the myth of return was not exclusive to the Jewish diaspora. Just as the Jewish diaspora prays' next year in Jerusalem, 'so do other diasporas..... Vietnamese in France kept their suitcases in their hands every day until the mid-1970s, hoping to return to their homeland. [12] From the moment Lessing's parents set foot on the African continent and settled down, escaping from Africa became a lifelong pursuit of her mother and even her whole family. When Lessing was a teenager in South Africa, she longed for her native England. According to scholar Alice Redout, Lessing was a "third culture child".

The key point in the diasporic experience of the so-called "third culture children" is that they are still children when they move between different cultures and have not yet developed a mature sense of identity about the native culture, which is formed in the process of moving between "two or more" cultures. The second important aspect is that there is usually some expectation for these children that they will return to their "home"... Third culture children are taught to be careful not to be too happy in residence culture because their real home is somewhere else. Finally, a special note: this term refers to the privileged migrant children in the world. [13]

Ridout points out that third culture children are still children when they travel between countries and have not yet developed a mature sense of home. At the same time, influenced by their parents' "expectation of returning home", they inherit the "root" complex for the motherland from their parents and harbor the desire to return, "always haunted by the idea of returning to the homeland they have never seen". [13] As a descendant of British colonists, Lessing is a third-culture child.

The white South Africans described by Lessing, who grew up as a "Third culture child", also have similar expectations of returning home. For example, Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* told herself that she must book a plane ticket to go home every day when she was in Africa. Paul also planned to go back to the City of London as soon as the war was over and muttered to his companions, "Ten years ago, I claimed England as mine. I know it!" Peter, a white pilot in Anna's novel *The Edge of War*, agreed with his black lover to reunite in England as soon as the war is over, though "everyone knows it's just hot air." [10] In the end, Peter did not take his black mistress with him but hastened to return to England alone as soon as he could, reflecting white Africans' eagerness to return home.

3. Summary

Through analysis, this paper finds that Lessing of early ages and the white South Africans in her work *The Golden Notebook* are full of longing for their homeland. With a mentality of a sojourner, they regard the homeland behind them as a perfect Eden, full of longing for return. While sticking to the "root" culture, they keep themselves far away from the culture of the residence country and "centralize" themselves, treating Africa as "the other". This is an expression of white South Africans' imperial diaspora awareness, which is not the exception, but the universal feature of the imperial diasporas.

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