

River Ethics in Marguerite Duras' *The Lover*

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River, especially the Mekong River, is an important image in Marguerite Duras' writing. The Lancang-Mekong River links six Lancang-Mekong countries as the common mother river, thus China has always paid close attention to the building of the Lancang-Mekong Community with a shared future. In the water writing of the Lancang-Mekong basin, *The Lover* written by Marguerite Duras has a wide influence. Based on the interactions between human beings and rivers, this paper analyzes rivers' roles as supporter, offender and witness, and three ethical relationships in the community between men and rivers, that is relationship among mother-child, family as a unit, and inter-generation. River writing in *The Lover* provides a model for the water writing in Lancang-Mekong culture, and provides advice for telling good stories of the Lancang-Mekong basin in the new era.

Keywords: Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, river ethics

In the literary world of Marguerite Duras, the river is a central location on which various stories unfold. The tokens are of strong regional colors, saturated with the writer's personal growing experience and cognition of life. It is the mighty Mekong River that plays a prominent role in Marguerite Duras' *The Lover*. *The Lover* was published in 1984 and was a best seller not only in France and throughout Europe, but in the United States as well. It also won France's most prestigious literary award, the Prix Goncourt. It is an autobiographical novel about an illicit relationship between an adolescent French girl and a wealthy Chinese man set in 1920s French colonial Saigon. In the novel, rivers not only move the plot forward but also witness the tragedies and joys of characters.

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The research on *The Lover* has achieved a lot so far and has its characteristics in different periods at home and abroad. First of all, international academic circles paid attention to its form in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly to her work's style, creative techniques, structure, language, narrative, etc. Then, with the publication of new works by Duras and the theoretical boom in Western cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, more and more researchers conducted studies on feminism, traditional analytic psychology, post-structural analytical psychology, etc. Later, with the attention of Western academic circles to nature and river landscape, some scholars gradually began to focus on the study of river elements in literary works and the relationship between natural elements such as rivers and people. The Chinese research on Marguerite Duras started later than that in the West. Meanwhile, some studies have been done on *The Lover*. Mu (1994) holds the opinion that *The Lover* is influenced by the "le nouveau roman (new novel)", and he argues from four perspectives: the first-person narrative, the disintegration of characters, the non-tragic structure, and the lack of depth. Zhang (2004) believes that Duras combines her own experience with the creation, constructing a mock world to deconstruct male power, challenge the social order, and celebrate youth and love from the perspective of old age. Later, some scholars began to notice the water image in Duras'

work. For example, Zhu (2012) believes that water imagery has a dichotomy, namely “reproduction” and “destruction,” and that water imagery serves the themes of desire, love, and destruction in Duras’ works. In Yang’s (2014) opinion, rivers in Duras’ works present binary opposition meaning. Zhao and Yang (2015) find that rivers are the beginning of the story and symbol of life. However, research on water image in Duras’ novels still has some limitations. It can’t be ignored that rivers are representative of the ecological ethic of human beings and nature. Thoreau puts forward the concept of “nature’s health or sound state” in his explorations (Sayre, 1985, p. 35), and “nature” here includes rivers. This is in line with the concept of “river health” proposed by contemporary scholar Fairweather (1999). Wu (2006) points out in his paper *Let Us Cross the River: Discussion on the Possibility of Taiwanese River Writing/Literature* that literary works usually categorize the river into three cognitive paradigms of supporter, offender, and victim, so as to provide the basis for understanding river literary works. Meanwhile, McMillin (2011) believes that rivers are flowing through land and history, and great changes have taken place from source to end. They connect interior and exterior, past and present. But they also separate countries, subcultures, and families, and finally enrich the social relationship between landscape and rivers. In *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras also depicts the historical characteristics based on the real history of the land. Thus, instead of being a victim according to Wu Mingyi, Duras here depicts the river as a witness. To sum up, the river in the novel acts as a supporter, offender and witness. This paper pays attention to the interactions between human beings and rivers in the novel by using the river ethics theory.

This paper starts with the image of the river, and focuses on the subjectivity and life meaning of the river as an important element in nature, so as to explore the interaction between the two subjects of men and rivers, as well as the ethical relationship formed in this process by using the river ethics. Nie (2020, p. 23) points out: “Since mankind entered the civilizational process of ethical choice, ‘what should be the relationship between man and nature’ has become an important question. How to answer this question? The ethical choice theory of ethical literary criticism can provide enlightenment for us.” River ethics was first proposed by a group of Chinese scholars studying the Yellow River. Drawing on ethics and Western deep ecology, they have collectively constructed river ethics by combining the governance experiences of the Yellow River and other rivers in the world. In February 2003, Chinese experts on the Yellow River first put forward

the concept of establishing a “life-sustaining basic volume of water for rivers” at the High-Level Roundtable organized by Global Water Partnership China, which for the first time regarded rivers as living organisms. “Rivers are alive”, naturally, socially, and culturally. Aldo Leopold, the founder of ecological ethics, wrote as early as 1949 in the preface to *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, “That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.” Based on the concept of river life, replacing Leopold’s “land” with “river” leads to the basic definition of river ethics, namely, to love and respect the river, and to form a harmonious life relationship between human beings and rivers. Thus, river ethics is a comprehensive theoretical account of the relationship between human beings and rivers, and it is an applied ethics that applies ecological ethics to rivers. Human beings and rivers form a relationship with energy movement. This paper finds three kinds of human-river ethical relationships constructed in the novel. First, the river exists as the mother in a family, who has authority over the young girl, keeps showing concern for her relationship, and also interacts with her. In the meanwhile, the girl also challenges the authority in the river space. The river can be regarded as a supporter and forms a mother-child ethical relationship with men. Second, the relationship between rivers and people is dialectical. Floods and the disorder of rivers do damage to human society. Crazy characters also appear near the river basin in the novel, which is closely related to the irrational state of rivers. They influence each other in the community and form a family ethical relationship. Third, rivers witness the history of Southeast Asia as colonization and the two families and document the characters’ identity dilemma. Rivers are witness and form an inter-generational ethical relationship with the two generations. Besides, river writing in *The Lover* also provides a good example of how to tell the Chinese river story in the new era.

Rivers as Supporter and Mother-Child Ethical Relationship

Water is the source of life, and rivers, as a form of water, multiply and nourish the birth of many livings. In *The Lover*, the river first signifies the place where lives are born and stories begin, and it flows up and down with the characters’ fate and emotions. It interacts with various characters, and they constitute a mother-child ethical relationship. Then,

the river in nature acts as the mother in a family, who has authority over the children. In addition, since witnessing is the embodiment of the function of motherhood, as a place of witnessing love, the river plays the role of a mother. At the same time, the young French girl tries to challenge her mother's authority, and the action of crossing the Mekong River forms an initiation through which she develops a new identity.

The river not only interacts profoundly with Duras herself, but also has an ongoing emotional resonance with the characters in her novels. For Duras, rivers matter in her childhood memories, and she has a deep affection for rivers, especially the Mekong River. As a baby, Duras could hear the flow of the Mekong River and the whistles of ships every day. There are descriptions and hints of that free joy and wild sight in *The Lover*: "Never in my whole life shall I ever again see rivers as beautiful and big and wild as these, the Mekong and its tributaries" (Duras, 2014, pp. 260–261). For Duras and the French girl, the vital relationship between human beings and rivers is formed when humans experience the river. "The girl in the felt hat is in the muddy light of the river" (Duras, 2014, p. 271). She is so struggling and humble that she is to the family what sludge is to the river. However, the girl dresses herself in a felt to symbolize her own identity, and at the same time the river also shines to interact with her. "It flows quietly, without a sound, like the blood in the body" (Duras, 2014, p. 271). Just as the human blood circulation system is a result of the long evolution of life, the river system on Earth is also the product of the long evolution of Gaia (Liu & Su, 2009). The river is compared to the blood flowing through the human body, which establishes a direct link between the river and human life. In addition, "A barely discernible distress suddenly seizes her, a weariness, the light over the river dims, but only slightly" (Duras, 2014, p. 284). The scenery on the river changes with the ebb and flow of "my" mood, and when "I" am depressed, the river's light darkens. These descriptions reflect the energy exchange and emotional transmission between human and the river. The Mekong is no longer an environment or backdrop for human activity but has become a community of life with which people exchange vital energy.

In *The Lover*, rivers get cultural life by entering human spiritual life as a backdrop. The river's cultural identity is thus expressed vividly through its integration as the natural backdrop of the story in the love interaction between the French girl and her Chinese lover. Qiao (2009) mentioned that the cultural life of rivers originates from the interaction between man and river. The river symbolizes the French

girl's first exploration of desire, and it nourishes and fuels the two characters' affection. Since ancient times, rivers have represented a force of divine intervention power in nature. Just like the mother plays a reproductive and supporting role, the sacred water of the river nourishes life and promotes reproduction. In Duras' literary working, the incestuous love between the French girl and the Chinese lover takes place in watery Southeast Asia, "there are no seasons in that part of the world, we have just the one season, hot, monotonous, we're in the long hot girdle of the earth, with no spring, no renewal" (Duras, 2014, p. 255), and the humidity and heat there create an ambiguous atmosphere for the story. Besides, as Chen (2016) points out in her essay, the river is fluid and extending, which is in line with maternal characteristics of inclusiveness and delicacy. Anyone can come and cross the bridge, take a boat, swim, pace by the river, and sit on the riverbank, etc. Thus, the river provides an open place that can contain anyone. A public and dynamic scene not only supplies activity space for characters in the novel but also creates an opportunity for them to meet. In *The Lover*, the story between the French girl and the Chinese lover, from meeting to loving to separating, always has the river as its backdrop. They meet on a ferry on the Mekong River, "when I'm on the Mekong ferry, the day of the black limousine" (Duras, 2014, p. 276). The room where they date was "on the other bank of the river. As soon as you've crossed to the other side" (Duras, 2014, p. 325). Finally, the girl leaves on a boat departing from Saigon River for France. From the beginning to the end, the river, like a mother, is keenly concerned about the girl's relationship with the Chinese man.

The Mekong River signifies the female protagonist's rite of passage (Gray, 2013). Under rivers' nourishment, the French girl continues to clarify her perception and feelings of love, as well as her rebellion against her family of origin. In her geographic descriptions, Duras employs a rich water metaphor. Initially, the crossing of the Mekong is the event that starts her turbulent adolescence: "I'm fifteen and a half. It's on a ferry crossing the Mekong River" (Duras, 2014, p. 255). During the crossing, the girl leaves her childhood and enters adulthood. As she explains: "I think I'm beginning to see my life I've never been alone any more since I left childhood behind" (Duras, 2014, p. 353). This crossing symbolizes not only her imminent initiation into adulthood in the physical sense but also the instant during which she becomes aware of the changes occurring in her life. "She's excluded from the family for the first time and forever. From now on they will no longer know what becomes of her Neither her mother nor her

brothers” (Duras, 2014, p. 285). As the youngest child in the family, the French girl is under the control of her mother and the oldest brother. The river is the embodiment of the mother, and it is the process of crossing the river that enables the girl to escape from her family and gradually pursue freedom. “As usual, my mother came to see me off, and put me in the care of the Saigon bus drivers ... I get off the bus. I go over to the rails. I look at the river” (Duras, 2014, p. 259). The bus is a shelter that her mother has provided for her on this journey, and the girl gets out of the bus and onto the ferry that is sailing freely on the river. These actions symbolize that the little girl comes out of the mother’s protection and control.

A closer look at the rivers featured in *The Lover* reveals that these rivers in some way assume the role of mother rivers. The Yellow River has been known as the Mother River in China since ancient times. The Yangtze River, which runs through the southern part of China, provides people along the river with essential water and biological resources. The Mekong River also continues to serve the function of transporting supplies and navigating. Duras portrays the vivid interaction between human beings and rivers. Like mothers, rivers pay close attention to people’s emotions and react accordingly, thus the mother-child ethical relationship between human beings and rivers is gradually established and clarified in *The Lover*.

Rivers as Offender and Family Ethical Relationship

The relationship between human beings and water is a unity of opposites, which contains an inherent contradiction, and that in turn drives the development of the relationship between human beings and water. In addition to the supporting role as mother mentioned in the previous chapter, rivers can also offend local lives. As Li (2009) points out, rivers are alive in the concept of river ethics. The law of river development has a great counteraction and standardization to human behavior. While outlining the life and fluidity of rivers, Duras also portrays the rivers’ offense against humanity and the resulting contradictions between river systems and human beings. On one hand, the flood season of the Mekong River is a key factor that threatens the livings of people and the survival of towns in the basin. On the other hand, the rushing state of rivers renders human beings crazy and insane. Rivers and human beings constitute a community, in which the offense of rivers is shown as the madness of characters in the river basin, at the same time people’s madness is related to rivers. This chapter

will unfold on three levels, which are the physical aspect, the order aspect, and the emotional aspect.

In terms of the physical aspect, rivers offend human society, bring damage to people’s homes, and block their economic resources. The image of “mother” appears in many of Duras’ works. In order to live a stable life, the mother struggles in the colony through renting a piece of concession land by the Pacific Ocean in the south of Indochina from the cadastral authority. Every year when the flood season comes, the seawater would submerge her land and not a single grain of rice could grow there. She mortgages her house, buys mahogany, and hires farmers to build a dike, but eventually, the dike is still broken by the tide. Here, the conflict between the “river health” and human beings threatens the life of the latter, and this is a struggle between the mother and the nature represented by the river. From the perspective of river ethics, the disorder of the river in Duras’ work means that the river asserts its integrity and right to life. At the same time, the issue of environmental pollution and ecological protection had already caught people’s attention at that time: “The river has picked up all it’s met with since Tonic Sap and the Cambodian forest. It carries everything along, straw huts, forests, burned-out fires, dead birds, dead dogs, drowned tigers and buffalos, drowned men, bait, and islands of water hyacinths all stuck together. Everything flows toward the Pacific, no time for anything to sink, all is swept along by the deep and headlong storm of the inner current, suspended on the surface of the river’s strength” (Duras, 2014, p. 272). It is not a one-way influence of river on human culture, but the result of the relationship between them. River and human beings influence each other (Qiao, 2009). Human activities break the law of the river’s development, thus correspondently rivers fight back and punish them for their destruction.

From the point of view of order, rivers are irrational, and this irrationality wreaks havoc on cities, life, faith, etc. As Qi (2012) mentioned in her essay that Basra and Foucault both consider water to be anti-rational. Water is unstable, so it presents a state of disorder, which is the opposite of mature and stable rationality. This instability confers to water various properties: unconsciousness, madness, etc.” The river is a relentless destroyer, and the destruction it brings is obvious and terrifying. “The current is so strong it could carry everything away—rocks, a cathedral, a city. There’s a storm blowing inside the water. A wind raging” (Duras, 2014, p. 261). The hard and heavy rocks, the cathedral that symbolizes faith, and the city that represents order and rules, all these are insignificant in front of the power of the river. In Duras’

personified descriptions of the Mekong, the river becomes a monster that the traveler must respect lest the river devour the girl: "The river has picked up all it's met with since Tonic Sap and the Cambodian forest. It carries everything along, straw huts, forests, burned-out fires, dead birds, dead dogs, drowned tigers and buffalos, drowned men, bait, islands of water hyacinths all stuck together. Everything flows toward the Pacific, no time for anything to sink, all is swept along by the deep and headlong storm of the inner current, suspended on the surface of the river's strength" (Duras, 2014, p. 272). Rivers keep challenging the order of human society, and it is during the process that rivers and human beings deepen their interactions and form a life community more profoundly.

From the perspective of emotion, the madness and insanity of the characters are closely related to the rushing state of the river. It is at the opening part of this novel that Duras describes the local climate in Saigon, which is influenced by a dense network of rivers to a great extent. Throughout the whole novel, Duras emphasizes the importance of the river, which not only forms the main environment but also renders the emotions and feelings of the characters. Besides, the love between the girl and her lover always has a gloomy tone, and the monotony and depression come from the girl's dark life in the family of origin. On one hand, the elder brother is the representative of the patriarchal society, who constantly torments the mother, the little girl, and the poor little brother. The mother, on the other hand, always condones the actions of her eldest son. She is smoothed out by the feudal society and has gone through enough poverty and misery in her life. The tide overturns the dam that she builds to protect the land again and again. The little French girl also lives in despair and fear, whose life is as dull and tormented as her surroundings, and everything is in danger of being destroyed at any moment. According to Lauer-Cheenne (1991), her irresponsibility, discouragement with life, and endless money-making projects hint at derangement. Towards the end of her mother's life, the narrator recognizes her madness: madness circulates in the family blood and implicates the young girl. Whether hereditary or acquired, madness is incorporated within life, circulated, and passed on silently similar to the river's flow. Thus, both the river and the local climate cast a damp, sullen filter over the girl and the affection between the two, frequently conveying to the reader the struggles and sorrows of this incestuous love. In addition, water itself is a paradoxical metaphor. Although it is necessary to sustain human life, it also possesses the power to take life from the individual. In *The Lover*, the river and the madness are also

closely linked together. "I" meet a madwoman of the region on a long avenue in Vinh Long, which "leads down to the Mekong." On the bank of the Mekong River, there are female beggars, and "along the Ganges the lepers laugh." The place of the activity of female madmen, female beggars, and lepers is still not far from water.

The life nourished by the river is delivered to the river, and in Duras' writing, lives and rivers mingle in such a haunting way. In *The Lover*, rivers flow incessantly through the city, carrying trash, madness, grief, and disappointment along the way. Beside these flowing rivers, and in the raging and relentless sea, countless desperate or demented lives are wandering. The stories in the novel, whether the sorrow of parting, the madness of disorder, the joy of meeting, or the sweetness of love, all contain profound metaphors of the river and life.

Rivers as Witness and Inter-Generational Ethical Relationship

Wu (2006) identifies three cognitive maps of the river which are supporter, offender and victim, but it should be pointed out that the river's victim image is replaced by a witness image in Duras' work. Duras reminds us of a whole new type of river's role, which bears witness to the history of the river basin. In the novel, the author draws a map of Indochina highlighting the main geographic locales that are paramount in her journey from childhood to adolescence, and finally, to adulthood: the Mekong River, the city of Cholen (Cholon), and her homeland of France (Gray, 2013). The Mekong River connects different places like a bond, and it has witnessed the colonial history of the land, as well as the change and development of families of the French girl and the Chinese man. The river witnesses the meeting of two people, one is from a downtrodden white French family living in an Asian colony, and the other is from a traditional Chinese family that has soared to greatness through trade in Indochina. The colonial history of early twentieth century flows with the water of the Mekong to the present. Thus, rivers and human beings constitute an inter-generational ethical relationship. The river space, as three spatial types of colony, wealth-making place, and multiracial place, bears witness to three inter-generational relationships, the histories of the French family, the Chinese family, and their shared diasporic condition.

What do rivers witness in the basin? Firstly, the development of the elder generation of the two families. The

convenience of the river provides opportunities for many people to obtain wealth. The Chinese lover's father, who made his fortune on the embankment, "built three hundred of these 'compartments,' cheap semidetached dwellings let out for rent. Owns several streets" (Duras, 2014, p. 297), and he "had the villa in Mekong with the blue tiles" (Duras, 2014, p. 338). In contrast, the French girl's mother has struggled with poverty. "When she drives up to the school in her old Citroën B12 everyone looks" (Duras, 2014, p. 273). The French family's poverty makes its members more racially and economically proximate to the local peasants than to the colonial bourgeoisie.

Secondly, rivers witness the love status of the young generation of the French girl and the Chinese man and the young women's idea of love there. Duras observes the impact of the river on the town from a delicate perspective and records the appearance and change of the city through a love story. In Duras' explanation, daily life beside the river presents an urban landscape intermingled with magnificence and tragedy. Although this lover from China "belongs to the small group of financiers of Chinese origin who own all the working-class housing in the colony" (Duras, 2014, p. 283), he is still fearful and weak when he has to face the racial differences between him and the white girl, and submits to the marriage arranged for him by his father under the feudal patriarchy. "His hand is trembling. There's the difference of race, he's not white, he has to get the better of it" (Duras, 2014, p. 282). This is the reason why the Chinese man's hands were trembling. "He often weeps because he can't find the strength to love beyond fear ... his cravenness is his father's money" (Duras, 2014, p. 299). The man is essentially just a puppet dependent on his family. When faced with love and wealth, he tacitly chooses his father who can provide him with a superior life, and bows his head in front of the marriage arranged by his father for the right family. While carrying the history of the city, the river also serves as a double-edged sword in their love story. The wealth it brings is the reason why the Chinese man attracts the young girl, but also leads to the man's choice to leave her under the background of feudal patriarchy. Then look at the women of the colonies. The women in the streets of Saigon "are very beautiful, very white, they take enormous care of their beauty here ... save themselves up for Europe, for lovers, holidays in Italy, the long six-months leaves every three years" (Duras, 2014, pp. 268–269). Many local women have the fantasy of seducing Westerners to escape Saigon and live a perfect life.

Thirdly, rivers witness the formation of the multiracial

character of the basin and the diasporas faced by people there. Both the Chinese family and the French family as a whole cannot be separated from the historical and social context at that time. The story *The Lover's* narrator recounts in the novelistic "present" takes place in the context of a watershed moment in the development of Vietnamese nationalism, when a premature uprising in 1930 inaugurated a period of unsurpassed cruelty and bloody repression. This effectively clears the stage of moderate nationalist leaders, paving the way for the official assertions of Vietnamese power and open warfare after World War II. Significantly, Duras' story of racial boundary crossing is set at this pivotal juncture in Vietnamese history, especially in light of its apparent challenge to a tightening of the French colonial grip with an accompanying reaffirmation of role, status, and power determined by race (Yeager, 2001). In *The Lover*, the young French girl's family lives in the colony and is struggling with their identity dilemma. Saigon itself is produced in the text as a territory inscribed with the flows of colonial desire (Ruddy, 2006). The girl's mother, however, continually attempts to reassert their privilege in Indochina. The family seeks to secure its racial supremacy by strictly following the conventions of European colonial households. "Children like little old men because of chronic hunger. But us, no, we weren't hungry. We were white children, we were ashamed, we sold our furniture, but we weren't hungry, we had a houseboy and we ate ... we indulged in the luxury of declining to eat" (Duras, 2014, pp. 256–257). In the colony, white lives reign supreme. Their seats are even distinguished from those of the natives. "As usual the driver had me sit near him in the front, in the section reserved for white passengers" (Duras, 2014, p. 259).

In the context of history, people from different countries came to Indochina for searching opportunities, including Chinese and French. The river basin had thus become a multiracial place. People living outside their traditional homeland, represented by Duras are "imperial diasporas" who have mixed feelings about their living region, that is, they are both dependent on the land and contemptuous of it (Chen, 2021). To read this novel is to experience, in a sense, a history in which internal and external colonial forces intersect and contradict each other is witnessed by the river. In the post-colonial era, imperialist expansion and aggression led people of multiple races to embark on a journey of uprootedness and displacement. They are the minorities, and they are the ones who live forever on the margins, and who have lost their voice. The white people represented by the French family and the yellow people represented by the Chinese family bear

the embarrassing marks of identity branded by the times. It can't be ignored that growing up in Indochina in a decadent French colonial family living beside the river, Duras' poverty prompted her to identify with the colonial people and to rebel against the French colonial regime. However, she is also a member of French colonial society, and her fear and contempt for non-Westerners, including the Chinese, have become part of her unconscious (Tong, 2007). At the same time, the lover's huge wealth seems to become their solid dependence at that time. While the Chinese man possesses great wealth, his solid identity is a Chinese, a social and political outsider to the Vietnamese, and he is also an Asian, an outsider to the French colonizers. The French girl's relationship with the Chinese lover thus becomes a complicated variant of this "exotic" emotional dynamic (Yeager, 2001). As a witness of history, rivers flow from the times of the elder generation to the younger generation and flow through the colonial history of Southeast Asia.

It is undeniable that in *The Lover*, whether it is the girl's superiority and pride as a white person, the discussion for her poor family and tortuous fate, or the hopeless love with her Chinese lover, all the happiness or unpleasantness bears the weight of the history of the time.

Conclusion

From the story's background to the communal relationship with the characters' destiny, and finally to the interaction between the river and the historical era, Duras, through river writing, has shaped a special geographical space while placing personal experiences, individual historical memories, and emotions in rivers. These rivers witness the ups and downs of different people, as well as the endless flow of history and the intricate historical variations of the times. The Mekong River not only tells the story of Duras and the characters in her literary workings, but also takes the reader through centuries, revealing the historical memories of these families, the land, and the region to them. The interactions between rivers and human beings have constructed mother-child, family, and inter-generational ethical relationships, and the perspective of this paper ranges from the small community to the large one, as the river flows from a small family living on the bank throughout the history of the colony there.

In recent years, people have paid more attention to the meaning of life carried by rivers as a critical existence in nature and gradually realized that to preserve rivers is to

preserve human beings themselves. Using river ethics to analyze Duras' works provides a cross-age and cross-cultural literary note for people to reconstruct the harmonious life relationship between human beings and rivers nowadays. River ethics, which takes the study of the relationship between men and rivers as its basic content, is both an innovation and development of traditional ethics and an inevitable stage for men to get along with rivers. The fate of a river symbolizes the destiny of a nation, and the unending life of a river represents the prosperity of a country. In the face of the profound changes unseen in a century, and in order to gather spiritual strength to realize the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation, understanding rivers' full historical significance and the value of the times can help us tell the millennium story of the community of people and rivers well in both China and Lancang-Mekong River Basin, and demonstrate the wisdom of Chinese governance in the new era from the Chinese river civilization.

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