

**JOHN STEINBECK'S ECOLOGICAL
CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE GRAPES OF WRATH***

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Abstract

John Steinbeck(1902-1968), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, is one of the most outstanding writers of the 20th century in American literary history. Published in 1939, *The Grapes of Wrath* occupies a special position in American literature. The novel reproduces the displaced lives of migrant workers during the Great Depression, truthfully recording their fight against oppression by unity. Scholars at home and abroad have done a large number of researches on this novel, mainly from the perspectives of archetypal criticism, historicism and feminism. With the development of ecocriticism in recent years, the academia gradually discovers Steinbeck's advanced ecological consciousness in his works.

This thesis aims to investigate the ecological views embedded in *The Grapes of Wrath*, which fully reveals Steinbeck's strong ecological consciousness and his concern for ecology. It starts with the introduction to three aspects of ecological crisis, namely, natural ecological crisis, social ecological crisis and spiritual ecological crisis. Then it proceeds to examine these crises represented and revealed in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The natural ecology, which focuses on the relationship between man and nature, is suffering from a severe crisis. Long-term misuse and commercialization of the land make the ecosystem fragile, and this results in the catastrophe of the Dust Storm in the 1930s. The social ecology, which concentrates on the interpersonal relationship, is also being distorted. The migrants from Oklahoma are discriminated by both the native residents and police officers. The spiritual ecology between man and self reflects the spiritual crisis of modern people. Such a crisis is demonstrated by the loss of self, loneliness and selfishness.

This thesis will also analyze the solutions to these crises that Steinbeck proposes in this novel. He indicates that love, sharing, mutual cooperation or collectivism, and being close to nature, are the ways to tackle with the crises. The previous ecological researches on *The Grapes of Wrath* are devoted to the study of the long-standing anthropocentrism or harmony between man and nature. So far, the ecological crisis

has been largely ignored. This has important theoretical significance in understanding Steinbeck's ecological consciousness. It also has realistic significance in face of worsening environment today.

Key words: John Steinbeck; *The Grapes of Wrath*; ecological consciousness

摘要

约翰·斯坦贝克（1902-1968）是二十世纪美国文坛上最杰出的作家之一，他于1962年摘得诺贝尔文学奖桂冠。其1939年发表的《愤怒的葡萄》奠定了斯坦贝克在美国文学史上的特殊地位。小说再现了经济大萧条时期美国农业工人颠沛流离的生活，真实记录了他们团结起来奋起抗争的壮烈场面。国内外学者主要从原型批评、新历史主义批评和女性主义视角对其做了大量的研究，随着近年来生态批评的兴起，学术界渐渐发现了斯坦贝克作品中超前的生态意识。

本文主要对《愤怒的葡萄》中所蕴含的生态思想进行研究，旨在阐明斯坦贝克是一位具有强烈生态意识的作家。文章首先介绍了小说中所反映的生态危机的三个方面，即自然生态危机，社会生态危机和精神生态危机。关注人与自然关系的自然生态正面临着严重的危机。长期的土地滥用和土地商业化使生态系统变得极为脆弱，这最终导致19世纪30年代的沙尘暴灾难的爆发。人与人之间的社会生态也变得扭曲。俄克拉荷马移民不仅感受到加利福尼亚本地居民的歧视，亦遭到警察的驱赶。人与自我的精神生态反映了现代人的精神危机，具体表现为精神上的迷失、孤独和自私。

本文也分析了斯坦贝克在作品中所暗含的解决危机的方法。他表明亲近大自然、彼此间的关爱、分享、合作和集体主义是应对危机的正确之道。之前关于《愤怒的葡萄》的生态研究更多地集中于对人类中心主义的抨击或是看到了人与自然和谐相处的一面，小说中体现的生态危机在很大程度上被忽略了。因此，在生态环境日益恶化的今天，这一研究具有重要的理论和现实意义。

关键词：约翰·斯坦贝克；《愤怒的葡萄》；生态意识

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 A General Introduction to John Steinbeck

John Ernst Steinbeck(1902-1968), a Pulitzer Prize and Nobel Prize winner in Literature, is considered to be one of the most significant writers in American literary circle. He was born and raised in Salinas, a wheat and cattle town of about 2500 people. It was situated at a crossroads near the end of a narrow valley pinched longways into California's coastal mountains. Both valley and coast served as important settings for his most distinguished works. His father, John Ernst Steinbeck, was a flour mill manager and then the treasurer of Monterey County, and his mother, Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, was a school teacher in the public school in Salinas. Under his mother's influence, Steinbeck read widely and was influenced by many great authors: Thomas Sterns Eliot, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Thomas Hardy, and most notably, Thomas Malory. After graduating from high school in 1919, Steinbeck attended Stanford University majoring in literature and writing. Over the next six years, he drifted in and out of school, and eventually left without taking a degree in 1925. Then he traveled to New York City in an attempt to support himself as a manual laborer and journalist, but he failed and returned to California.

After getting back to California, Steinbeck settled in Lake Tahoe and took a job as a caretaker. It was during this time that he finished his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). Like his two subsequent novels--*The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), *Cup of Gold* brought him neither fame nor fortune from the literary world. It wasn't until *Tortilla Flat* (1935), a humorous novel about paisano life in the Monterey area, was released that the writer won popular attention and achieved real success for the first time. This novel made him win the California Commonwealth Club's Gold Medal and became an important turning point for his literary career, and he felt encouraged to produce a large number of outstanding works. In the following years, a succession of books appeared, including *In Dubious Battle* (1936), Steinbeck's most clearly proletarian novel of class struggle; *Of Mice and Men* (1937),

a story which tells the friendship of two migrant workers who long for a permanent home they will never find; *The Long Valley* (1938), a collection of short stories which contain many of his most famous tales such as *The Red Pony* (1937); and his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*(1939), a story about the migration of a dispossessed family from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl to California.

Following that tremendous success, Steinbeck left for Europe as a war correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune* during World War II. Around this same time, he traveled to Mexico to start a scientific expedition to the Gulf of California with his lifelong friend Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist. In 1941, their collaboration resulted in the book *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He continued to write in his later years, with credits including the controversial novelette *The Moon is Down* (1942), *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Pearl* (1947), *Burning Bright* (1950), *East of Eden* (1952), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962), and *America and Americans* (1966). In 1962, Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work as a whole for “realistic and imaginative writings, distinguished as they are by a sympathetic humor and a social perception” (Shillinglaw 46). He died of heart disease on December 20, 1968, at his own home in New York City.

The Grapes of Wrath was set in the historical period which was known as the Great Depression in America. The stock market crash of October, 24, 1929, financially ruined millions of people. Many companies went bankrupt. Some small companies were driven away by larger corporations, leading to the tensions between the haves and the have-nots. Numerous people lost their jobs and were left unemployed. In addition to the economic crisis, larger parts of America were hit by a severe drought in the 1930s. An area extending from the Dakotas to the Texas panhandle became known as the Dust Bowl. The drought, heavy winds, and poor soil conservation practice eventually caused topsoil to be blown away. Millions of farmers sold their land. They were forced on their road to the west and became migrants.

In the summer of 1936, George West, chief editorial writer of the *San Francisco*

News, asked Steinbeck to cover the migrant labor situation in California. As a reporter, he traveled first to Hoovervilles in Kern County and then toured to a new migrant camp named Arvin Camp. While there he gathered the first-hand material about the destitute Oklahomans. In October 1936, the *San Francisco News* published his series of six articles, titled “The Harvest Gypsies”. He examined the deplorable migrant living conditions and exposed the unconscionable practices of corporation farms. Steinbeck understood that the subject reached further beyond what he could imagine, so he made another month-long trip with Tom Collins in October and November of 1937. They went to the places where migrants gathered to work in California, and his main purpose was to “gather more research for the next version, the ‘big’ book of fiction that had been in his mind for most of that year” (DeMott xxv). Steinbeck’s journalistic assignment gave him the real experience that forms the foundation of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Shortly after the official publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, it immediately climbed to the top of the best-seller lists for most of the year, selling about 428,900 copies in hardcover. The novel won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize, which became the cornerstone of his 1962 Nobel Prize award. Because of its enormous influence, it was adapted to screen under the direction of John Ford at the same year. The book’s public reception also included some strong attacks from private groups such as The Associated Farmers of California. Many Oklahomans and Californians considered the characters to be unflattering descriptions of their states’ people. In spite of the negative voices, it gained high praise from a large majority of readers and scholars. Robert DeMott, a former director of San Jose State’s Steinbeck Research Center, commented that “*The Grapes of Wrath* has resolutely entered both the American consciousness and its conscience” (DeMott x-xi). It was a text that was thoroughly engrained in the American social conscience. It was a definitive American book—a book about movement, the dream of a new home and land, and the resilience of realigned families. Although Steinbeck continued to have a rather productive literary career, none of his later works had the influence of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Studies of *The Grapes of Wrath* Abroad

Since the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, criticisms from different perspectives have gone through three stages. Each period is divided by its distinctive concentration.

The first stage of studies on *The Grapes of Wrath* starts from 1939 to the late 1950s. Influenced by the political climate at that time, many critics speak highly of the book for its proletarian quality. They believe that it truly reflects the lives of working class and social problems. Joseph Henry Jackson claims this book as “the finest book John Steinbeck has written” (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 161). David Wyatt once makes a comment on it, “No American novel published in this century has aroused such a storm as *The Grapes of Wrath* did. One has to go back to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to witness its equal” (Wyatt 2). However, some other critics regard it as a social protest novel. Malcolm Cowley says: “it belongs very high in the category of the great angry books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that have roused a people to fight against intolerable wrongs” (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 167). In this period, critics tend to concentrate on the characterizations of the Joad family and the other migrant workers. They pay little attention to the themes or stylistic features of this novel. Among all of these critical reviews, Edmund Wilson's is the most influential. In his essay, “The California: Storm and Steinbeck” (1941), he severely criticizes that “Mr Steinbeck almost always in his fiction is dealing with the lower animals or with human beings so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level” (Wilson 42). Wilson accuses that Steinbeck does not raise the animals to the position of human beings like D. H. Lawrence or Rudyard Kipling. His comment puts Steinbeck in the rank of naturalistic writers.

The second phase roughly lasts from the middle 1950s to the middle 1970s. Scholars mainly focus on the plot, theme, language, character, structure and symbolism instead of its political or historical backgrounds. Many literary critics

highly praise this novel and claim that “*The Grapes of Wrath* is a great novel with superb characterization and moving plot” (Bloom 17), while others insist that “its structure is coherent and its language is folksy” (Bloom 17). The exploration of mythic criticism and symbolism begin to prevail after the publication of Martin Shockley’s “Christian Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*” (1956). For instance, J. P. Hunter manifests that at the end of this novel “the Bible’s three major symbols of a purified order are suggested: the Old Testament deluge, the New Testament stable, and the continuing ritual of communion” (Wyatt 7). After he wins the Nobel Prize, many critical researches and essays are published. The impact of Peter Lisca’s publications is predominant in this period. Steinbeck’s non-teleological thinking and his description of man both as a religious creature or group animal are mostly discussed.

From the 1980s, the study on *The Grapes of Wrath* becomes diversified. Many western literary critics start to study the novel from the perspectives of the contemporary literary theories, such as new historicism, feminism, and ecocriticism. Some scholars notice the fact that Steinbeck is a Californian writer. Steinbeck unconsciously feels the tension between the east and the west. Louis Owens once holds that “Steinbeck rejects the myth of American west and exposes the California dream is not only illusory but also dangerous” (Bloom 115). The most significant research achievement in this stage is marked by the publication of the book *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* in 1997. It is a collection of essays. Scholars from different disciplines, such as marine biology, the social and physical sciences, philosophy as well as environmental studies, find a common theme in Steinbeck’s writing, that is, he blends his literary vision with a special understanding and appreciation of the environment. In 2014, Susan Shillinglaw, a scholar who has been teaching and writing Steinbeck for almost 27 years at the National Steinbeck Center, publishes her latest book *On Reading The Grapes of Wrath*. This book aims to explore the cultural, social, political, ecological, and creative influence of this novel as well as its everlasting legacy.

1.2.2 Studies of *The Grapes of Wrath* in China

For the past 70 years, the domestic study on *The Grapes of Wrath* also roughly has gone through three periods. The first period lasts from the early 1940s to the late 1940s. In September, 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath* was first introduced into Chinese readers with Qiao Zhigao's translation of the first chapter of this novel. In the next few months, several excerpts were gradually translated into China. In 1941, two complete translation versions were achieved by Nie Miao and Hu Zhongchi respectively. Between these two versions, *The Grapes of Wrath--The Earth of America* translated by Hu Zhongchi was much more popular. Critical research on this novel still lagged behind.

The second phase starts from 1949 to the late 1990s. After the Chinese liberation, the government takes the "leaning to one side policy". The literary and art circles lay emphasis on the so called "international revolutionary literature", and the Soviet's "socialist realism literature" becomes the mainstream for a long time. It is until the 1980s that some scholars begin to study Steinbeck's works. For instance, Su Suocai's "John Steinbeck and His Works" (1996) mainly analyzes the plot and theme of his novel. Dong Hengxun, a leading authority in studying Steinbeck, agrees with Wilson's opinion. He thinks that the characters are considered as animals in Steinbeck's writing. He believes that Steinbeck seems to seek for a harmonious society in which people love and help each other like Willa Cather. Zeng Lingfu's "On the Revolutionary Ideas of *The Grapes of Wrath*" (1998) concludes that the novel reveals Steinbeck's radical revolution opinions. In this phase, Chinese critics chiefly center on its structure and language techniques contained in this novel.

In recent years, there has been a revival of research on *The Grapes of Wrath*, with concentrations varying from the perspectives of archetypal criticism, feminism, and existentialism. For example, Wen Jiexia's "The Allusions of The Bible and its Symbols in *The Grapes of Wrath*" (2002) analyzes that the structure of this novel is modeled on Out of Egypt in the Bible, with reference to its allusions and symbols.

Feng Xiaoying's "Subversion of the Other and a Return to Authenticity--Women Strategy and the Land Ethic in *The Grapes of Wrath*" (2011) explores the importance of female cultural values in reconstructing the harmony between human beings and nature. Although Steinbeck's works are introduced in the early 1940s, the celebrated writer has not been studied by Chinese scholars as systematically as Ernest Hemingway or William Faulkner. Up to now, there are only several monographs concerning Steinbeck's works.

The development of ecocritical theory provides Chinese critics with a fresh perspective to explore *The Grapes of Wrath*. It is encouraging that some journal papers and theses are available in the light of ecocriticism. For instance, Hu Tianfu's "*The Grapes of Wrath: A Great Work of Eco-literature*" (2006) discloses the political, social, and economical roots of the eco-disaster in the 1930s. He argues that Steinbeck severely criticizes the idea of anthropocentrism in America. Xie Jiangnan's "The Ecological Values in *The Grapes of Wrath*" (2008) maintains that anthropocentrism and the ecological values formed in the capitalist economy and culture lead to the destruction of the ecosystem in the prairie. Wang Xin's "Ecological Holism in *The Grapes of Wrath*" (2008) reveals the unbalanced ecology caused by anthropocentrism and human civilization. She concludes that Steinbeck is a writer with ecological responsibility. Feng Lin's "To Interpret *The Grapes of Wrath* from Steinbeck's Ecological View" (2014) explores the harmonious relationship between man and nature and man and man. Wang Shujing's postgraduate graduation thesis "The 'Green' Steinbeck-- A Study of Steinbeck's Ecological View and the Application In *The Grapes of Wrath*" (2008) examines Steinbeck's philosophical reflection on man and nature, the theory of organism and super-organism and his objection to anthropocentrism. After a series of careful comparisons of the above papers, it can be found that most ecological researches on *The Grapes of Wrath* are devoted to the study of the long standing anthropocentrism or harmony between man and nature. The ecological crisis is largely ignored. Based on the studies of previous scholars, this thesis aims to reveal the ecological crises and solutions to the crises from the

perspective of ecocriticism.

1.3 Significance & Organization of the Thesis

Since its publication in 1939, the novel has been analyzed by scholars and critics from different perspectives. Some researchers notice Steinbeck's ecological concern, mainly focusing on the attack of anthropocentrism or the harmony between man and nature. So far, the ecological crisis has been largely ignored. Therefore, the present study will analyze the novel from the ecological perspective. This has important theoretical significance in understanding Steinbeck's ecological consciousness. It also has realistic significance in face of worsening environment today.

This thesis consists of five parts. In the first chapter, it gives a brief introduction to John Steinbeck and his life, the literature review at home and abroad and the organization of the thesis.

Chapter two mainly introduces the theory of ecocriticism and the development of Steinbeck's ecological consciousness. The ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary theory which aims to reveal the ecological thoughts or ecological crises in literary works. Steinbeck's ecological consciousness is rooted in his early living environment in childhood, the influence of his lifelong friend the marine biologist Ricketts and the impact of transcendentalism.

Chapter three examines the three aspects of ecological crisis reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The crisis of natural ecology is embodied through the misuse and commercialization of the land, and finally nature takes revenge towards people. The crisis of social ecology is reflected through the unequal relationship between man and man, including the conflicts between the Okies and the native Californians, and the hostility between the migrant workers and the police officers. The crisis of spiritual ecology is demonstrated by people's selfishness, sense of loss and loneliness.

Chapter four focuses on the solutions to these crises. Steinbeck implies that human beings should love, be close to nature, and live in harmony with nature. People should help, cooperate and share with each other in difficult situations. The concern

for people should convert from the individualism to collectivism.

Chapter five is conclusion. The interpretation of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* through the ecological perspective can help us to explore his advanced ecological consciousness. This sheds light on the contemporary ecological problems and the construction of a harmonious world today.

Chapter Two John Steinbeck and Ecocriticism

2.1 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism as a movement owes much to Rachel Carson's environmental science book *Silent Spring* (1962). The book brings environmental concerns to the American public. It documents the detrimental effects on the environment, especially on birds because of the indiscriminate use of pesticide. In fact, now the environment is experiencing deterioration in the 20th century, such as water pollution, ozone layer damage, greenhouse effect, acid rain, species extinction and so on.

The term ecocriticism is first coined by the American scholar William Rueckert in an essay named "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. In this essay, Rueckert focuses his attention on "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty 107). In 1990, Glotfelty became the first person to hold an academic position as a professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, the place established its status as the intellectual home of ecocriticism at that time. From the 1990s, ecocriticism exerted great influence in the field of literature. Several creative research monographs were published, such as *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, produced by Lawrence Buell in 1995; *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, co-produced by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996. As Glotfelty and Fromm claim, ecocriticism is:

the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty xviii)

As a means of inquiry into the relationship between human culture and the natural world, ecocriticism chiefly studies the relationship between literature and the

physical environment. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the study of ecocriticism has made huge progress. The number of edited books or monographs on ecocriticism is increasing, such as Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco-criticism* (2000), Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004), Lawrence Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005).

In the context of globalization, the theory of ecocriticism arises and flourishes, Chinese scholars begin to take notice of this new theory. Many different voices and heated discussions can be heard. Wang Nuo, an outstanding leading scholar, introduces European and American ecological literature to China. He suggests that ecocriticism is a literary criticism which studies relationship between literature and nature under the thought of ecological holism. He deems that "the main task of ecocriticism is to reveal and spread the ecological thoughts in literary works, to expose and criticize the ideas and living styles which is against ecological thoughts, and finally build a civilized and ecologically friendly society" (Wang 24).

The basic task of ecocriticism is to awake people's ecological consciousness and cultivate the ecological humanity spirit to establish a harmonious society. At first, ecocriticism mainly concentrates on the nature writing in literary works, it studies how nature is depicted in the texts. It directly criticizes the excessive exploration of human beings and advocates the harmony between man and nature. Later it reaches out to larger areas. According to Professor Lu Shuyuan, the territory of ecocriticism is not just limited to natural ecology. It also includes social and spiritual areas. He points out that "Ecocriticism should not only analyze nature in literature, but should probe into the root of ecological crisis from the perspective of spirit, culture and society. Therefore, the theory of social and spiritual ecology come into being" (Lu 146). Social ecology pays attention to the relationship between man and man. It holds the idea that the ecological crisis stems from social problems, and these social problems arise from the unequal interpersonal relationships and structures. The hierarchy and domination among people is the root cause of social ecological crisis, "the very notion

of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (Bookchin 65). The inequality and isolation among the social members is an expression of social ecological crisis. The spiritual ecology is an exploration of the spiritual dimension between man and self. Human’s spiritual and emotional status is the subject of research in spiritual ecology. At the center of the spiritual ecology is an understanding that the present ecological crisis is a reflection of inner spiritual crisis. The interconnection between outer and inner is foundational to the individuals, and a lack of awareness within the heart of human beings will create an inner wasteland as real as any outer landscape. Worster maintains that human beings play a crucial role in causing these crises:

we are facing a global crisis today, not because how our ecosystems function but rather because how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crises requires understanding of our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding of those ethical systems and uses that understanding to reform them. (Worster 27)

Based on the theory of ecocriticism, this thesis aims to interpret *The Grapes of Wrath* from natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology.

2.2 The Development of John Steinbeck's Ecological Consciousness

2.2.1 Influence of His Early Living Environment

Steinbeck was born and raised in Salinas, a small farming town which was surrounded by landscapes of broad yellow valleys and rich green fields. He spent almost forty years living in the Salinas Valley. His fascination for nature was deeply rooted in his close contact with the splendid and fertile Salinas. He was attracted by its beauty and immersed in the splendid scenery of nature. Steinbeck spent much of his youth working on the farms and ranches around the Salinas region before moving to the nearby Pacific Grove. Its cool fogs provided a retreat from the Salinas heat. He once planted a pine tree beside the house when he was young. In a letter to Carl Wilhelmson, he mentioned the enduring importance of the tree:

You know the big pine tree beside the house? I planted it when it and I were very little; I've watched it grow. It has always been known as 'John's tree.' Years ago, in mental playfulness I used to think of it as my brother and then later, still playfully, I thought of it as something rather closer, a kind of repository of my destiny. (Wyatt 153)

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck describes the beautiful scenery of his hometown in vivid detail:

The spring is beautiful in California. Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea. Then the first tendrils of the grapes swelling from the old gnarled vines, cascade down to cover the trunks. The full green hills are round and soft as breasts. And on the level vegetable lands are the mile-long rows of pale green lettuce and the spindly little cauliflowers, the gray-green unearthly artichoke plants (Steinbeck 287).

Surely, the early years of life close to nature has great impact on the development of his ecological thoughts and gives him the inspiration to creative writing. This location becomes the setting for many of his novels and short stories. His love for natural scenes cultivates his original vision which is of great importance in forming his ecological consciousness.

2.2.2 The Impact of Edward Ricketts

In the summer of 1923, Steinbeck attended a summer course with his sister Mary at the Hopkins Marine Station near Monterey. This marked the beginning of his interest in ecology and the scientific nature of life, and such a passion for ecology later found firm development through conversations with a man whom Steinbeck met seven years later. In the autumn of 1930, Steinbeck met the marine ecologist Edward Ricketts in a dentist's waiting room in Monterey. Ricketts became his close and the most influential friend in his life. Like Steinbeck, he also had a lot of passion for ecology. After graduating from the University of Chicago, he moved to the Pacific Grove and opened the Pacific Biologicals, a company which provided marine specimens for schools and researchers. Steinbeck started to spend much time in Rickett's laboratory, and the two men would talk for hours about nature, science and philosophy. "Along the way, ideas that had been growing shapelessly for Steinbeck,

ideas about humans and their existence, began to take on definition” (Burkhead 6).

It is impossible to fully appreciate what Steinbeck is up to in *The Grapes of Wrath* without knowing something about Ricketts and the biological and philosophical ideas that knit the two men together. Ricketts acts as Steinbeck’s “leader and mentor, while Steinbeck is his follower and student” (Tian 37). It is Ricketts who brings out Steinbeck’s interest in biology and ecology. One of the most important ideas of Ricketts’s is his holistic thinking. “The whole idea of inter-relation seems actually to be pretty much the key-note of modern holistic concepts,” Ricketts notes, “wherein the whole consists of the animal or the community in its environment, the notion of relation being significant” (Shillinglaw 28). Indeed, Steinbeck shares Ricketts’s holistic vision of interdependence in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Through the depiction of the consequences of human beings’ domination over nature, he advocates that people should show respect for nature and live with it harmoniously.

Ricketts is also interested in studying group behaviors of animals. He believes that the study of animal society will bring “biological understanding to problems confronting human society in what seemed to be an acutely troubled time” (Shillinglaw 81-82). Steinbeck develops his phalanx theory from Ricketts’s notion of group behaviors applied to humans. The phalanx theory holds that “groups consisting of individuals are connected to a larger drive or spirit with a separate will and that, functioning as part of a group, individuals will work to fulfill the will of the larger entity” (Burkhead 6). During the process, there is a conversion from “I” thinking to “we” thinking. The theory becomes a major theme in his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*. The theme of the novel moves from I to we, from Tom to Ma, from the family to the Joads as part of the larger migrant saga on their journey to California. Ricketts has the strongest effect on Steinbeck’s phalanx theory. He inspires characters in many of Steinbeck’s works, including *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), *The Moon Is Down* (1942), *Cannery Row* (1945), *Burning Bright* (1950), and *Sweet Thursday* (1954). Indeed, Steinbeck and Ricketts’s mutual love for ecology led to their expedition to the Gulf of California, a voyage that was documented in

Steinbeck's book *Sea of Cortez* (1941). Even after Steinbeck moved to New York, their friendship remained very strong until Ricketts was killed by a train in 1948. Steinbeck has never completely recovered from this loss for the rest of his life.

2.2.3 The Influence of Transcendentalism

Besides Ricketts, Steinbeck's attitude towards nature is also influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalism. Emerson takes a fresh look at nature. He believes that:

the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Oversoul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other...and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom and virtue, and power and beauty. (Emerson 2)

For Emerson, nature is not just a materialistic world, it is the symbol of the God or the Oversoul. God's spirit is filled with it, and everything in the universe is seen as an expression of the divine spirit. From Emerson's viewpoint, the flowing water symbolizes the infinite movement of the universe, the alternation of seasons symbolizes life and death of human beings. Nature is God's enlightenment to human beings, it has enormous influence on human mind. Therefore, transcendentalists advocate human to return to nature for instructions and change to be a perfect person in spirit. It stresses the unity of human beings and nature. Steinbeck inherits this kind of transcendental philosophy, he connects nature with the characters in a mysterious way in order to demonstrate his reverence for the natural world and life.

Chapter Three The Ecological Crises Reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath*

3.1 The Crisis of Natural Ecology in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Natural Ecology is mainly about the relationship between man and nature, which is always a classic topic in American literary works. Human beings acquire the required material resources from nature and show great respect for nature, especially land. However, with the development of science and technology, human beings begin to treat nature as some kind of resource. The progress of man's civilization comes along with the disaster of natural ecology. Under Steinbeck's pen, nature is undergoing a serious catastrophe. The land in the Great Plains is overworked, misused and commercialized by both the tenants and large landowners. The destruction of land finally leads to the revenge from nature, that is, the Dust Bowl. The disharmonious relationship indicates a severe natural ecological crisis.

3.1.1 The Misuse and Commercialization of the Land

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the land is extremely exploited and misused. In order to make a quick profit, the tenants have shortsightedly neglected the cycle and rotation of crops. They keep planting and growing cotton instead of grass and trees repeatedly year after year. The fertility of their land can't be ensured. The constant raising of the same crop contributes to the failure of their farms and the removal of their families from their land. The tenant men finally realize that, "If they could only rotate the crops they might pump blood back into the land" (Steinbeck 28). They even expect the war to raise the cotton price and maximize the economic value, "God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars- God knows what price cotton will bring. Don't they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton'll hit the ceiling" (Steinbeck 28). Cotton actually robs and sucks all the blood of the land, thus the land is getting poor and vulnerable. The attitude of Oklahoma people to land is rapacious and utilitarian, they merely regard the land as something

useful. With the development of agriculture capitalism, the land becomes a kind of commodity which will constantly bring profits for people. The land gradually becomes the slave for man.

Some small farmers proudly proclaim their grandparents' theft of the land from the Indians, freely acknowledging that murder is their grandparents' tool. The early settlers are obsessed with the idea that the land is limitless, and they "abandoned their knowledge of kindness to the land in order to maintain its usefulness" (Beegel 312). Tom tells Casy that "Ever' year I can remember, we had a good crop comin', an' it never come. Grampa says she was good the first five plowin's, while the wild grass was still in her" (Steinbeck 27). Tom acknowledges the fruitlessness that the land yields because of the their irresponsible practices associated with the land. After five good crops, the nutrients in the land are totally used up. However, the farmers still keep on planting and expecting for another good harvest from the infertile land. Muley Graves also points to one aspect of the destruction of the land, "I know this land ain't much good. Never was much good 'cept for grazin'. Never should a broke her up. An' now she's cottoned damn near to death" (Steinbeck 42). Such an anthropocentric thinking eventually leads to the natural ecological crisis. According to George Sessions, the anthropocentric thinking refers to "a system of beliefs and practices that favor humans over other organisms; it believes that humans are entitled to make the greatest use of the surrounding natural world and humans have a superior value over animals and other beings in nature" (Sessions 156).

In addition to the tenants, the large landowners deteriorate the land to some degree. In the 1930s, the farming pattern has changed from individual farming to a large-scale farming. Most of farmland in Oklahoma is in the charge of these giant agribusinesses and deprived of its topsoil. The farm work that they used to do is replaced by machines. Steinbeck gives a vivid description about the tractors in chapter five:

The tractors came over the roads and into the fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. They

crawled over the ground, laying the track and rolling on it and picking it up. Diesel tractors, puttering while they stood idle; they thundered when they moved, and then settled down to a droning roar. Snubnosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through dooryards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses. (Steinbeck 31)

This paragraph depicts the condition of land exploited by the monstrous tractors. They have taken the place of farmers' traditional draft horses. The application of advanced technology further intensifies and expands man's domination over land. They are like brutal monsters who are not concerned about the land. The monster machines become disconnected from the land. The relentless scraping of the tractors so scarified the topsoil as to damage it nearly beyond repair. The man sitting in the iron seat seems like a cold creature who only pays attention to the plowing itself. He totally neglects the fact that the land is growing withered under his unemotional exploitation. He is a part of the monster, a robot in the seat. "He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth" (Steinbeck 32). The land is worked by a "machine man", he does not know or own or trust the land. "The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses" (Steinbeck 32). The operator only considers himself and his family and the three dollars per day that can be made from the destruction of his neighbor's lives. The tractors "not only drive the tenants away but also further exacerbate the exploitation of nature" (Xie 100).

The landholders no longer work on their farms, "They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it" (Steinbeck 197). These landowners are no longer farmers at all. They are separated from the land, and their main purpose is to earn money from it. They turn the land into wealth and big fortunes, making American agriculture more of a business than a way of life. The money-worshipping attitude of the larger reveals that they are more ruthless than the tenants.

In fact, the avarice of both the tenants and landowners deteriorate the relationship between mankind and the land. This kind of disharmonious relationship contributes to the calamity of the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma.

3.1.2 The Revenge from Nature

In the 1930s, a dramatic ecological and human disaster seriously hit the Great Plains in American history-- the Dust Bowl. The term first got its name on April 15, 1935 from Robert Geiger, a reporter from the Associated Press, traveled through the Great Plains and wrote the following: "Three little words aching familiar on a Western farmer's tongue, rule life in the dust bowl of the continent- if it rains" (Worster 19). Therefore, the word Dust Bowl immediately spread to radio broadcasts and publications. The Dust Bowl region covered one-third of the Great Plains, close to 100 million acres, including the Oklahoma Panhandle. Some people even called this time the "Dirty Thirties". This catastrophe was caused by several years of drought and decades of human being's abuse of the land. Before the 1930s, the Great Plains was covered by a large area of prairies grass, only a few people lived there. However, with the pass of the Homestead Act in 1862, more and more farmers started to settle down there, planting corn, cotton or wheat and raising cattle. During the period of heavy droughts and strong winds, the overplowing and overgrazing made the topsoil of the land extremely vulnerable and created conditions for disaster. The Dust Bowl is not simply an isolated historical or sociological event. Actually, human being's inappropriate activity and irresponsibility is the main cause for the appearance of imbalanced relationship. Just as Donald Worster notes, "The Dust Bowl was the inevitable outcome of a culture that deliberately, self-consciously set itself that task of dominating and exploiting the land for all it was worth" (Worster 4).

The powerful dust storms often carried millions of tons of blinding black dirt and swept across the Southern Plains--the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, western Kansas, and the eastern portions of Colorado and New Mexico. It "carried away twice as much earth as people had dig out to make the Panama Canal, destroying it once

again over the East Coast states and the Atlantic Ocean” (Worster 18). At the beginning of the novel, Steinbeck describes in colorful and poetic imagery the effect of the ecological disaster, “Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air: a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and a wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again” (Steinbeck 4). The dust storm sweeps away the thin topsoil of the farm land. The wind is increasing and growing stronger, carrying the dust away and gradually the sky is darkened by the mixed dust. “The dawn came, but no day. In the gray sky a red sun appeared, a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back toward darkness, and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn” (Steinbeck 4). During the day, the sky is filled with drifting dust, soon it turns into pale and gray. The color of the sun is hid by the heavy dust and becomes red. The wind cries and whimpers like the human over these dead corn.

Through all these poor images, Steinbeck depicts the real conditions of the Dust Bowl. The dust storms also make human daily life much more inconvenient, “Men and women huddled in their houses, and they tied handkerchiefs over their noses when they went out, and wore goggles to protect their eyes” (Steinbeck 4). In fact, the disaster not only ruins farmers’ daily life but also changes the wide land into “No Man’s Land”. The serious dust storms and several drought destroy everything within its reach, leaving the dispossessed farmers nothing but bankruptcy, particularly these small farmers. As Joseph Fontenrose notes, “natural and economic forces had conspired to force them off the lands which they had called home” (Fontenrose 71). The dust storms and land erosion force the tenants to leave their places and destroy their hope for a land of their own.

Through the portrayal of the disharmonious relationship between man and nature, Steinbeck truthfully presents the serious crisis of natural ecology in Oklahoma in the first part of *The Grapes of Wrath*. The misuse and commercialization of the land by tenants and large landowners lead to the imbalance of ecosystem, which is the

fundamental cause of the Dust Bowl. Ironically, what the tenant farmers get from their surroundings are only hunger, poverty and migration. As a writer with strong ecological consciousness, Steinbeck shows his worries and meditations over the disharmonious relationship between man and nature.

3.2 The Crisis of Social Ecology in *The Grapes of Wrath*

In this epic novel, Steinbeck not only reveals the natural ecological crisis but also displays the deep social ecological crisis. Social ecology mainly studies the relationship between man and man. The normal interpersonal relationship is greatly distorted. The disharmonious relationship between man and nature derives from a series of social problems between man and man. The kind of domination contains social practices such as racism, sexism and class structures such as private ownership. In this novel, Steinbeck shows much concern for this type of social ecological crisis: the conflicts between Okies and native Californians and the hostility between migrant workers and police officers. .

3.2.1 Conflicts Between Okies and Native Californians

Hundreds of thousands of farmers from the so-called Dust Bowl states, including Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Nebraska, and Kansas, like the Joads are forced to leave their native land and travel west in search of the Promised Land. However, California is not as good as they expected. They still suffer from poverty, hunger, unemployment and even prejudice and discrimination. The migrant workers from Oklahoma are called “Okies” by the native Californians. Actually, the word “Okie” is a discriminated word which implies that the Oklahomans are outsiders or intruders. There are particularly vehement conflicts between the people of Oklahoma and Californians.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Tom first hears the word “Okie” from a man who just returns from California. The man tells him, “You never been called “Okie” yet” (Steinbeck 214). At that time, Tom really does not know what this word means. Then

the man explains to him, "Well, Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum" (Steinbeck 215). Tom has never experienced such kind of epithet before, he is perplexed and astonished. The word is used to label the new arrival with a derogatory meaning. Even the respected Ma is unnerved by this epithet. Her interchange with the policeman who first uses the term on her illustrates the negative effect of this word. The policeman begins by saying to Ma, "We don't want none of you settlin' down here" (Steinbeck 223). Ma becomes very angry, she picks up an iron skillet and advances on the man. The man is very arrogant and says, "Well, you ain't in your country now. You're in California, an' we don't want you goddamn Okies settlin' down" (Steinbeck 223). Okies are not seen as the citizens in this country. Ma is astounded by these uncomplimentary words. Having lost everything, the migrant workers should receive assistance and help. To their surprise, what they get from other people is disrespect and loss of dignity. Ma's advance is stopped. It is not the gun that stops her but the effect of the name-calling. She is puzzled, "Okies?" she said softly, "Okies". When the man leaves, Ma has to fight with her face to keep herself from breaking down. The effect is so devastating that Rose of Sharon closes her eyes and pretends to be asleep.

The image of the "Okie" as beaten-down loser is so pervasive. In chapter 19, one of the interchapters, Steinbeck describes the mood of the Californians, their attitude towards the refugees is very hostile:

Okies- the owners hated them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry; and perhaps the owners had heard from their grandfathers how easy it is to steal land from a soft man if you are fierce and hungry and armed. The owners hated them. And in the towns, the storekeepers hated them because they had no money to spend. There is no shorter path to a storekeeper's contempt, and all his admirations are exactly opposite. The town men, little bankers, hated Okies because there was nothing to gain from them. They had nothing. And the laboring people hated Okies because a hungry man must work, and if he must work, if he has to work, the wage payer automatically gives him less for his work; and then no one can get more (Steinbeck 244).

From his narration, it can be seen that the Oklahomans are regarded as aliens or

foreigners, not their own countrymen. They suffer from hostility from most of the native Californians. The landowners hate the Okies. They know the newcomers are a big threat to them. They learn that if a man and a man's children are hungry enough that the man would do almost anything, even steal food for his poorly starving children. A feeling arises: the migrants are dangerous and they must be kept down or they will rise up. So the great owners cut down the wages and use the extra money to hire guards and train men to protect their property. They hope to drive these destitute migrant workers away. The shopkeepers have no respect for them, because they can not make money from them. The laboring people also hate them, because the Okies will take a job at a lower wage. The author portrays a scene where the deputy sheriff ruins the secret, small garden of one of the migrant workers. The sheriff says, "I had my eye on you. This ain't your land. You're trespassing" (Steinbeck 247). The Okies are perceived as outlanders. Even both the Okies and the Californians speak the same language, but they are not the same.

Steinbeck shows a large number of examples of the Okies being treated as less than human. When the Joads stop at a service station in Needles, the service station boy in white uniform looks down upon them and worries if the Okies can afford to pay the bill. He describes them to his helper as "a hard-looking outfit" (Steinbeck 231). The helper provides him with the stereotype, "Okies? They're all hard-lookin" (Steinbeck 230). Here Steinbeck reveals that his prejudices towards the Okies is deeply rooted in their consciousness. The service station boy laughs at the migrant people by saying, "Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas" (Steinbeck 231). They are seen as an inferior species, less human. The migrant workers are treated with lower wages, poorer working conditions. A panic starts to appear as the migrants still increase on the highways. The local Californians believe the migrants are bad invaders, they said:

These goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate,

sexual maniacs. Those goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights. They bring disease, they're filthy. We can't have them in the schools. They're strangers. How'd you like to have your sister go out with one of 'em. (Steinbeck 296)

From the perspective of these native Californians, the Okies are filthy, uncivilized and ignorant, they do not belong to California. They are not welcomed and can not be accepted as residents of the state but refugees. The locals unite together to fight against these Okies.

3.2.2 Hostility Between Okies and Police Officers

To some extent, the relationship between police officers and the Okies is very intense in this whole novel. The police officers stand for the government, the authority, or even the oppressor. The Okies are poor and homeless. They are not only oppressed by the landowners, the bankers, but also the deputy sheriffs.

When the Joad family first arrive at Hooverville, Pa asks a bearded man whether they can set out their stuff there, the response of the bearded man is very strange. Then they get to know that he is bull-simple. The cops keep pushing him around so much that he is still spinning. No one sympathizes with the impoverished migrants. They are terrified and sick.

In the Bakersfield Hooverville, a migrant named Floyd does little more than ask the contractor about his license and pay scale. The deputy sheriff shoots at Floyd when he runs away. Floyd does not commit any crime, he just tells the truth. Lawmen are taught to hold their fire in crowd, the deputy's disregard for man's lives is very indifferent. From Steinbeck's narration, it is clear that Floyd is dodging in and disappears from a crowd of people when the deputy fires. The consequence is very horrible. A woman's hand is shattered. It has no impact on the deputy, who raised his gun again. At that time, Casy kicks the police officer in the neck. The woman becomes hysterical with her blood oozing from the wound. When the rest of the deputy sheriffs come, Casy reminds them that the officer hits a woman, but they do

not show any concern at all. Even when Casy says, “They’s a woman down the row like to bleed to death from his bad shootin” (Steinbeck 279). Their response is, “We’ll see about that later” (Steinbeck 279). After Casy tells them three times, they eventually go back to take a look. They are very insensitive and irresponsible for the Okies’ lives. Soon they burn the camp which are crowded with poor migrants. These homeless farm workers are driven from one camp from another, they always suffer from pitiless discrimination.

3.3 The Crisis of Spiritual Ecology in *The Grapes of Wrath*

According to Professor Lu Shuyuan, a researcher in literature and art from Suzhou University, “The existence of man not only means in biology and society, but also means in spirit” (Lu 17). Spiritual ecology centers on the relationship between man and self. It is an essential aspect of the earth’s ecosystem. The deterioration of natural ecology and social ecology have important influence on the spiritual ecology. The spiritual world of human beings is becoming unbalanced. The serious ecological crisis gives rise to man’s alienation from nature and society. This long-term alienation leads to human’s spiritual crisis. People sense that their conventional belief is being deserted, the spirit power that they rely on is being eroded. Human beings are facing a deeper and inner spiritual crisis. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck reveals the crisis of spirit ecology which is embodied in human’s spiritual perplexity, selfishness and loneliness.

3.3.1 Spiritual Fragmentation

For the tenants, the area of Oklahoma not only means a place to live on, but also means a psychological or spiritual habitat. The formation and realization of the ecological self can not be separated from a particular place. Apparently, place plays a significant role in the lives of human beings. This kind of special relationship between man and a specific place can be described as a sense of place. The sense of place not only comes from the natural environment, but also stems from the blending of natural and cultural features in that territory. Steinbeck expresses his particular concern for

the impact of the ecological environment that people rely on for existence. In the novel, Steinbeck devotedly uncovers the tenants' spiritual perplexity which is presented by their loss of land, home, old tradition and the ecological self. Muley Graves and Grandpa serve as two good examples.

Muley, Graves, a neighbor of the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, decides to stay at his own place instead of moving away from the land. He tells Tom and Casy that families are tracted out and their homestead is abandoned. As his punning name suggests, Muley is very stubborn when it comes to being evicted from his land. His wife and children have left for California, attracted by the promise of high wages from landowners in need of seasonal workers. He refuses to leave the barren land and makes attempts to keep his attachment to the tradition, though his future is doubtful. When Muley, Tom and the preacher Casy are talking around a fire on the abandoned land where he and Tom are raised, he is becoming very excited when he explains to them his feeling about the empty houses, deserted farmlands and his left family. He says over the fire, "You fellas'd think I'm touched, the way I live" (Steinbeck 45). When he is told to drive off the place, he is getting mad.

At first, he is going to kill that flock of people, then he just wanders around, walks around, never goes too far. He looks after the things so when they come back, everything is still all right. He calls himself like "a damn ol' graveyard ghos'" (Steinbeck 15) haunting the abandoned farms, hiding in caves and fields like an animal, and periodically taking potshots at the men on the infernal machines who now control the land. He still clings to the shadows of his old life, just as he says:

Like a damn ol' graveyard ghos'. I been goin' aroun' the places where stuff happened. Like there's a place over by our forty; in a gully they's a bush. Fust time I ever laid with a girl was there. Me fourteen an' stampin' an' jerkin' an' snortin' like a buck deer, randy as a billygoat. So I went there an' I laid down on the groun', an' I seen it all happen again. An' there's the place down by the barn where Pa got gored to death by a bull. An' his blood is right in that groun', right now. Mus' be. Nobody never washed it out. An' I put my han' on that groun' where my own pa's blood is part of it. (Steinbeck 45)

These old memories are the abstractions of his family history, it is clear and fresh in his mind. This particular place, including the farmland and the houses, has an intimate relationship with his experience and memory. To some extent, the place helps to shape his identity. The place is a part of the whole ecological self, he can not separate his sense of identity and community from the place and its history of personal experiences. Once the sense of identity is lost, it will bring great pains to the heart. Muley is alienated from the original surroundings, so his spirit is seriously damaged. After the departure of his family and neighboring folks, he has no one to talk to and also feels very lonely. He continuously keeps saying he is drifting like a graveyard ghost. He hates the landowners and the bankers. He claims that “But them sons-a-bitches at their desks, they jus’ chopped folks in two for their margin a profit. They jus’ cut ’em in two. Place where folks live is them folks. They ain’t whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. They ain’t alive no more. Them sons-a-bitches killed ’em” (Steinbeck 46).

Muley clearly realizes that they are cut in two, they are not whole, they are not alive when they are driven off. The place is lost, his connection to the land is lost, he is not complete. He is quite confused and perplexed. The sentence “I been sneakin’ aroun’ like a ol’ graveyard ghos’” (Steinbeck 46) is repeated for five times in the text, which obviously displays his mental sufferings when faced with the changing environment.

Like Muley, the migrants, in one of the interchapters, express their attachment to the past to the buyers of their household goods, “You’re not buying only junk, you’re buying junked lives. And more- you’ll see- you’re buying bitterness....How can we live without our lives? How will we know it’s us without our past?” (Steinbeck 78). They lose themselves and obtain dreadful pain in their heart. Just as Paul Shepard says, “the recognition that the establishment of self is impossible without the context of place gives an entirely different significance to the non-human, and reveals the identity-define function of place” (Evernden 101).

At the beginning of the novel, Grandpa is immersed in the dream of experiencing the Promised Land of California. But when they are about ready to leave, Grandpa

says he is not going. He tells them that he will live just like Muley is living, and "I'll just stay right where I b'long"(Steinbeck 98). He wants to hold on to this place where he clears. The place constitutes his whole spirit, the sense of belongingness is gained here. In order to move on, the family has a conference, they decide to give him some kind of sleeping medicine that Ma once had for one of the kids. They give him a big dose, then he soon falls asleep. When they stop on the first night of the westward journey, Grandpa has a stroke and dies immediately. Casy's funeral speech clearly shows that "An' Grampa didn' die tonight. He died the minute you took 'im off the place" (Steinbeck 127). Grandpa belongs to that place, thus as soon as he is taken away from the land, he is dead mentally. The removal from the land makes him incomplete. The loss of land will definitely causes the fragmentation of spiritual self. The recovery of the damaged man spirit is as significant as as the reconstruction of the exploited nature.

3.3.2 Domination of Individualism

The damage and destruction of the land in Oklahoma make people lose themselves, their spiritual dependence is broken. Some people only care about themselves, they are self-centered and selfish. Joe Davis's boy, one of the drivers who works for the banks that are driving the Okies away from their land. He is much more concerned about his self-survival, earning three dollars a day. He says to the tenants, "Get your three dollars a day, feed your kids. You got no call to worry about anybody's kids but your own" (Steinbeck 33). He succumbs to the temptation of the almighty dollar and becomes insensitive to other personal needs. 'Willie Feeley, another driver, is hired by the landowners to tractor out the Joads out of the land. When his ruthless behavior is confronted by Muley, Willy explains to him, "'Fust an' on'y thing I got to think about is my own folks, 'What happens to other folks is their look-out "' (Steinbeck 50). From his words, it can be seen that he only cares about his own family and little about other people's sufferings. His family's needs take precedence over those of the his former friends.

Connie Rivers, Rose of Sharon's husband, is an unrealistic and selfish dreamer. He joins the family migration for the lack of anything better to do. On their way to California, he often weaves some fantastic dreams for their future. He and his wife plan to live in the city and build a small white house and settle down there. His own dream is to study at night through a cheap correspondence school. He hopes to open a repair shop and become a real electrician and thus become successful. His faith is absorbed in the values of getting more money, in an abstract goal. These are all his wonderful and unrealistic dreams. He only has empty talk, he does not make any contribution to help the Joad family. After he gets a glimpse of the poor conditions of California, he feels disappointed and disillusioned.

Shortly after the Joads reach the Hooverville, Connie begins to resent, "If I'd of knowed it would be like this I wouldn' of came. I'd a studied night' bout tractors back home an' got me a three-dollar job. Fella can live awful nice on three dollars a day, an' go to the pitcher show ever' night, too" (Steinbeck 213). He wishes to stay at home and tractor out other farmers for a stable salary like Joes Davis's boy and Willy. Later he abandons his wife and the unborn child to defend himself. As an expectant father, he is too irresponsible and immature. He rejects to take the responsibility for his pregnant wife and the Joad family when they need him most. Pa clearly knows that Connie is not a good man, he does not have the courage to do something, Pa insists, "All the time a-sayin' what he's a-gonna do. Never doin' nothin'. I didn' want ta say nothin' while he's here. But now he's run out-" (Steinbeck 230). The harsh conditions contribute to unveil his nature spirit, he is too weak and selfish. Connie is a "Judas betrayer of commitment and brotherhood" (Railsback 317).

In addition to Connie, Noah Joad is another selfish character. Noah is the oldest brother in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He has the same name as the Noah who takes the social responsibility for saving the entire world in the Genesis of the Bible. Noah Joad gives up the struggle to survive and deserts his family halfway. Unlike any of the rest of the Joad family, he has no passion for life. He is very strange. He speaks little and always carries an odd look on his face and probably suffers from brain damage at

birth when Pa frantically pulls him from his mother's agonized body. He is misshapen in appearance and isolated from others. He is silent and calm and seems to follow his family blindly. When the family arrive at the Colorado River, he is unwilling to leave this place and tells Tom he likes to stay in the water all life long, "I was in that there water. An' I ain't a-gonna leave her. I'm a-gonna go now, Tom- down the river. I'll catch fish an' stuff, but I can't leave her. I can't" (Steinbeck 177). In pursuit of his own interest, he insists on staying by the river and leaving the family. Noah's desertion further demonstrates the spiritual crisis of modern people.

Chapter Four Solutions to the Crises

4.1 Being Close to Nature

In the novel, Steinbeck presents the unbalanced relationship between human and nature, which fully reveals his advanced ecological consciousness. As mentioned before, Steinbeck's intimate contact with nature in childhood, his influence from the marine ecologist Ricketts, and his preference for transcendentalism help to shape his ecological vision. He realizes that the destiny of human beings is closely and essentially attached to the natural world. Their alienation and exploitation of the land finally results in their eviction from their hometown. The tenant farmers should love and respect and be close to the land, not seeing the land as a commodity.

The best way implied by Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* to deal with the natural and spiritual crisis of human beings is to be close to nature and turn to nature for help. In his eyes, nature has the great power of purifying and comforting the soul of human beings. Therefore, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck not only depicts the beauty of natural scenery, but also makes suggestions on how to heal the confronting crises. At the beginning of the novel, when Tom and Casy approach the Joad house, Tom recognizes Muley, Muley goes into a long explanation and tells them his family is pushed off from the land. After being deprived of his own place, Muley is drifting like a graveyard ghost, he has to seek for some kind of wild animals to eat, such as frogs, squirrels and prairies sometimes. In order to be safe, he hides himself in a small cave around the bank, "I like it in here, I feel like nobody can come at me" (Steinbeck 54). Evidently, the cave can protect him from being found by the deputy and give him a sense of security. He can never survive without the cave. He can feel relaxed and enjoy freedom without the burden of fear when he is put in the natural environment.

What is more, Steinbeck successfully shows his ideal attitude towards nature by the former preacher Jim Casy. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, there are many descriptions of his insight and enlightenment from nature. When Tom is released from the McAlester

Prison and on his way home to Sallisaw, he meets Casy who sits on the ground leaning against the trunk of a tree. Casy tells Jim that he is not preaching any more, he seems "Got a lot of sinful idears" (Steinbeck 17). He tries to figure out what holy spirit is. He is thinking where he can lead the people in the hills like Jesus who walks into the wilderness "to think His way out of a mess of troubles" (Steinbeck 72). He gets messed up with all these troubles and can not figure nothing out. He is tired and worn out in spirit, so he goes off into the wilderness to seek for the possible answers, he says,

I ain't sayin' I'm like Jesus, But I got tired like Him, an' I got mixed up like Him, an' I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin' stuff. Nighttime I'd lay on my back an' look up at the stars; morning I'd set an' watch the sun come up midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country; evenin' I'd foller the sun down. Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was prayin' to or for. There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy. (Steinbeck 72)

It is in the wilderness that Casy finds the answers about man and God, he moves to a kind of transcendentalism. He gets the spiritual insight in nature like Emerson portrays in his masterpiece *Nature*:

Standing on the bare ground--my head bathed by the little air, and uplifted into infinite space--all mean egotism vanished. I became a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (Emerson 270)

Casy receives a Thoreauvian or Emersonian revelation from nature that human beings are inseparable from nature. He finds a direct relationship with truth in the wilderness. Casy lives close to nature and draws a spiritual wisdom from it. To some extent, nature plays an important role in communicating wisdom with human beings. In the end, Casy discovers the truth, like Jesus Christ he brings the gospel back to its beloved people. He gets the answer to the Holy Spirit, that is love-love for the people, "Maybe, I figgered, 'maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit- the human sperit- the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" (Steinbeck 21). He delivers his message of love and is ready to

sacrifice himself for his people. The unorthodox Casy experiences a kind of religious feeling of identity from nature. He pays close attention to the natural world and considers nature as a source of wisdom. Casy expresses his deep reverence for the natural world.

Another character, Tom also gains wisdom and virtue by the means of communing with nature. When the cops attack Casy fiercely and murder him, Tom becomes irritated, he crushes the cop's head and revenges Casy's death in turn. He escapes from the camp and has to hide himself in a small cave near the creek. Like Casy, he recreates and refreshes himself by being close to nature, he gets enlightenment from it:

Lookie, Ma. I been all day an' all night hidin' alone. Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me. But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remember- all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn' think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't no good alone (Steinbeck 344).

Tom appears to have drawn his spiritual inspiration in the wilderness. He discovers that one's own soul is just a part of a great big soul. He tells Ma that he must go out and help all men. He will become the disciple who will carry on Casy's unfinished work. There is a suggestion that Tom will become the leader for the migrant workers. Steinbeck portrays his spiritual growth under the influence of nature. He looks upon the natural world as a source of knowledge. Nature teaches and inspires Tom how to be kind, generous and dedicated. Nature is an active participant and has powerful impact on the human heart and mind. Steinbeck calls upon human beings to return and be close to the natural world and thus keep healthy and wise both physically and mentally. Dr. Brian Railsback, a scholar from Western South Carolina University, is determined to correct an oversight in his field. He sees Steinbeck as the first eco-critic writer though the ecocriticism theory was not formulated in his time. "It's surprising he's not a central figure," Railsback says, "It's the best way to read

him. The medium of nature exists throughout his work” (Railsback 82).

4.2 Mutual Cooperation and Sharing

During the course of the novel, the impoverished Okies's migration to California causes intense hostility and conflicts between the locals and the Okies. The interpersonal relationship has headed into a crisis. Steinbeck points out a possible solution to deal with the problem which is demonstrated by his ecological philosophy, that is “phalanx theory”. It reveals his own views on ecological holism. His phalanx concept is deeply rooted in his work in marine biology and his intimate association with Ricketts. He discovers that there are similarities between the life of human beings and that of sea creatures: every species competes as well as cooperates, their existence relies on the orderly cooperation and interdependence of the parts. Similarly, human beings should learn to share and provide help for others instead of only caring for the individuals. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck displays the noble spirit of sharing and cooperation among migrant workers, they are in a harmonious relationship no matter what social class they are in or what difficulties they meet.

In chapter two, Tom Joad, who just releases from the Oklahoma penitentiary after a conviction and on his way home, asks a truck driver for a ride though he notices the “No Riders” sign on the truck. The driver thinks for a while and kindly helps him at the risk of losing his valuable job. In turn, Tom offers to share his whiskey with him. When Tom and Casy encounters Muley, Muley offers to share his meager catch of snared rabbits with them, saying “if a fella got somepin to eat and another fella's hungry-why the first fella ain't got no choice” (Steinbeck 43). Steinbeck lays stress on the significance of sharing even under the most desperate circumstances.

Before the Joads cross the Oklahoma border, they are forced to stop because of Grampa's serious illness. The Wilsons, another migrant couple, offer the shelter of their tent to the old man though they do not know each other before. Grampa dies of a

quick stroke in the tent. The Wilsons help prepare the body for burial, offer their quilt to wrap the body in and contribute a page which is torn from the Bible to be used as the last words spoken over a loved one. The Joads also provide help for the Wilsons once they encounter difficulties. When Wilson's automobile is broken down, Tom and Al do their best to find the needed spare and fix the car. The harmony begins to grow, based on mutual assistance and joint efforts. "This multiplication of single souls into a universal soul is creative, not destructive, and undergirds all of mankind's progress" (Schultz 95). The combination of the two families forms a constructive force which helps them overcome obstacles during the westward migration. Before they cross the desert, the Wilsons tell the Joads that they are not able to go along with them, because Mrs Wilson is too weak to travel any further. The Joads generously leave most of their cash and the rest of the food for the Wilsons.

Mutual help not only exists between the two families, but also among other migrants. They huddle together, talk together, share their lives and food together, "In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream" (Steinbeck 166). The new sense of identity and community help the migrant workers survive. Those who do not share, who continue to be selfish, "worked at their own doom and they did not know it" (Steinbeck 238).

In intercalary chapter 15, along Highway 66 there is a small roadside diner, a poor migrant and his two sons come to buy a bread, but they do not have enough money. The waitress Mae ultimately sells a large slice of bread and two candies to them at a reduced price. Mae and the cook Al's generous actions are rewarded by the truck drivers with some tips left.

When the Joad family arrive in California, they experience the miserable plight, but they display great concern and love for the poor people. The most notably and touching scene occurs when Ma feeds a group of hungry children in the Hooverville, though there is not sufficient food even for her own family. Steinbeck emphasizes the value of sharing, he continuously illustrates his advocacy of caring for others.

In the government camp, the helpful Wallaces not only share breakfast with Tom, but also share their work with him, although they know it will not last very long. Sharing becomes a common trait among these suffering people. Mr Thomas, a small farm owner, is quite sympathetic with the plight of the migrant workers. He secretly tells his three workers the impending fight which is planned on Saturday night dance at the camp. Like Mae and Al at the truck stop, he is really thoughtful and unselfish.

At the end of the novel, Rose of Sharon shows a development from a selfish nature to a sharing nature. She stops whining and helps the family to pick the peach, she wants to contribute to the survival of the family and protecting Tom from the law. Even after losing her baby, she still gives life to an unknown starving man. Her action extends beyond a concern simply for herself.

Steinbeck holds the idea that people should learn to share and cooperate with each other in hardships. The harmonious relationship between man and man is the key to solving the ecological crisis.

4.3 Conversion from Individualism to Collectivism

Throughout the novel, it is obvious to the reader that Steinbeck's main characters also experience some kind of conversion, which helps them to find the ecological and social consciousness from Casy to Ma. Just as Warren French says, "the novel results in a change from the family's proudly isolating itself as part of a self-important clan to its accepting a role as part of one human family that, in Casy's words, "A fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one" (French 77). The westward journey is also a journey from the individual concern to a larger concern for the entire human beings. This change is accompanied by a change in the Joad's economic situation. As the Joads deteriorate economically, they seem to enlarge their view of humanity.

Jim Casy, a modern Christ-figure but without the Christian doctrine. He becomes confused and then goes into the wilderness to think things out. When Tom first encounters him, he has not figured out these problems yet. Casy starts to question the

entire notion of sin and comes to the conclusion that “There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do” (Steinbeck 21). According to Casy, the holy spirit has nothing to do with God or Jesus, “Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of” (Steinbeck 33). He wants to give up preaching because of his deep doubts and decides not to be a preacher any more but just live with the common people because people are holy. Therefore, Casy joins the Joad family to California so he can stay with his people and help them when they are in need. During the trek to the west, he finds inspiration in Emerson, “There was the hills, an’ there was me, an’ we wasn’t separate no more. We was one thing. An’ that one thing was holy” (Steinbeck 72). At the California Hooverville camp, Casy takes the blame for the deputy’s beating and gives himself up in order to save him from prison. Now he moves from thought to action, his willingness to make the sacrifice is his way of helping the Joad family, but in a larger sense, he is now leaving the individual family in order to devote himself to the larger family of mankind.

When Casy is put in prison, he gradually comes to a complete understanding of his previous mediation. It is in jail that he sees the effectiveness of the oppressed organizing and working together to achieve the same goal. He has learned to apply his ideas to the task of organizing the migrant workers. His doctrine has taken shape and his mission is to put it into practice. He is trying to organize the people to carry on the strike. He becomes a Christ-figure and learns to apply his gift of speaking to aid in uniting the migrant workers, inspiring them to rise up against the injustices done to them. However, Casy arouses the antagonism of the policemen in authority. He is brutally killed by the cops, like Jesus, his last words are: “You fellas don’ know what you’re doin’. You’re helpin’ to starve kids” (Steinbeck 319). It is only after his death that the full meaning of his ideas reaches people, he eventually sacrifices his life for others. His act shows a great concern for the common people. Casy becomes the spokesman for the conversion from individualism to collectivism. It is Casy who enlightens Tom Joad. Casy makes Joad realise the power of an individual and how each individual is a part of the universal entity. His action taught Tom the duty of an

individual in a group.

At the beginning of the novel, Tom seems somewhat self-absorbed and concerned only with living everyday life. His idea is limited in the interest of his own, especially his economic situation. When he and Casy are repairing the car for the Wilsons, Casy explains his worries and beliefs to Tom, but Tom refuses to discuss with Casy's concern about all the people moving to west. He expresses his individualistic thoughts on the west movement:

Goddamn it! How'd I know? I'm jus' puttin' one foot in front a the other. I done it at Mac for four years, jus' marchin' in cell an' out cell an' in mess an' out mess. Jesus Christ, I thought it'd be somepin different when I come out..... This here little piece of iron an' babbitt. See it? Ya see it? Well, that's the only goddamn thing in the world I got on my mind. (Steinbeck 149)

Tom cares only for the present day, the future is out of his consideration. He is indifferent to the business of others, he seems like a self-centered prisoner and an individualistic farmer.

Owing to his individualistic thought, he doesn't trust other farmers, so they don't unite together and fight for their rights and dignity. It is until in the government camp that Tom starts to accept Casy's concept. In the Weedpatch camp, he participates in a committee to stop the troublemakers from starting a riot effectively. From this experience, Tom learns the collective forces by unity. Unity will empower them to overcome difficulties. In the face of adversity, the livelihood of the migrant workers depends on their union. After gaining many new experiences and seeing new perspectives, he begins to think more of others and the group than just himself. The concept becomes complete when Tom later meets Casy during the strike at the Hooper Ranch, Casy explains the significance of uniting together.

After Casy's violent death, Tom undergoes a conversion in his heart. As French suggests, "Casy serves as the vehicle for the transformation of Tom Joad from a selfish, violent individual concerned only with the survival of his touching clan into a visionary operating selflessly in the background as an inspiring influence to his whole

community” (French 76). This is demonstrated when Tom is talking to Ma in the cave about the possibility of revolting against the rich owners:

I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinki' about our people livi' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch-. (Steinbeck 345)

This paragraph displays Tom's desire for equal status between social classes and his determination to achieve economic equality and collective interest, he decides to work for the welfare of the poor migrants. It is only after this kind of deep thoughts that he really becomes one of the most faithful disciples of Casy. “He is reborn as a new kind of leader who, like Casy, is committed to the people as a whole and to the place these people inhabit now, be it good or bad” (Owens 139). He devoted himself to helping the oppressed and fighting for their rights, Tom's consciousness shifts from an individualist to a collectivist.

The same concern for all the humanity is also seen in Ma Joad. In the novel she functions as the living embodiment of the ideas of Casy. At first, in her every action there is concern for her own family, she tries her best to keep the unity of the whole family with every effort. Ma seems to enclose the family in a huge embrace and tries to deny various rebellious attempts by its members. She clearly recognizes that they are dispossessed and with nothing to depend on, and what they have is only the family. The initial hope to start a new life is soon replaced by a much less appealing reality. The miserable reality seems to shatter their dream, it becomes necessary to change the previous expectation and revise the thoughts of family by contemplating the power of collectivity and kinship. For instance, at first her concentration is only the unity of a single family, as is exemplified in her words, “All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up” (Steinbeck 146). To some degree, Ma still extremely focuses on the kinship ties.

There is a subtle change in her mind when she buys some sugar at a store, the

checker sells her some sugar at a low price at the risk of being punished by his boss. She learns one good thing, "If you're in trouble or hurt or need- go to poor people. They're the only ones that'll help- the only ones" (Steinbeck 311). The poor people refer to the unity of her fellow migrants, Ma starts to realize an individual's need for an intimate connection with the people beyond her family.

The real conversion of Ma takes place after Rose of Sharon's delivery during the flood. The acceptance of collectivism can be seen in her conversation with a neighbor whom she thanks during Rose of Sharon's delivery, she says, "Use' ta be the fambly was fust. It ain't so now. It's anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (Steinbeck 365). She usually puts her family in the first place, but now it is anyone who needs help. Ma has come around to Casy's views, she has become a part of a greater human society than is represented solely by the family. As Railton says, "one of the ways that Ma is made to change in the course of her pilgrimage is by replacing her acquired faith in God and the next world with the belief in the people and in this life that she gradually learns from Casy" (Railton 38).

In the final scene of the novel, the notion of collectivism comes to its full meaning. In the barn where the family discovers a dying stranger, she tells him not to worry. Her unstated advice that Rose of Sharon giving her milk to a starving man carries the unselfish love into practice. The boundary between individuals or families vanishes, the inherent feeling of Manself "transcends isolated families" (Owens 34) and "forges an irresistible we" (Lisca 91). To Ma, the course of moving westward is a process of changes from the unity of the family to caring for the overall humanity.

Through the description of the character's conversion from individualism to collectivism, Steinbeck reveals his idea that everyone's soul is a part of one giant soul and that no one can get by on their own; each person's soul must be connected to the collective soul in order to prosper, or even just survive. Collectivism occupies a significant role in overcoming the selfishness and perplexity of human beings. It helps the distressed migrants find their spiritual sense of belongingness. Steinbeck's advocacy for collectivism in human heart indicates a new direction for modern

people who are in the spiritual ecological crisis. This is the real road to reconstruct the harmony among people.

Chapter Five Conclusion

John Steinbeck, as a prolific writer, shows great concern for ecological problems in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He profoundly reveals the crises of natural, social and spiritual ecology during the 1930s. The novel demonstrates his deep care for the future and destiny of human beings through depicting the Joads's difficult journey to the west.

Based on closing reading of *The Grapes of Wrath*, this thesis has examined the crises of natural, social and spiritual ecology reflected in *The Grapes of Wrath* from an ecocritical perspective. The natural ecological crisis is represented by the disharmonious relationship between human beings and nature. The dust storm sweeps over the great plain, and the fierce wind takes away the thin topsoil of the land in Oklahoma. The tenants ignore the cycle and rotation of crops and regard land as a commodity which will make a quick profit. The landowners' indifferent and utilitarian attitude towards land also contribute to the natural calamity. The devastation of the land is subjected to nature's revenge upon man--the Dust Bowl. Actually, it is not merely a natural phenomena, it is a result of man's ignorance. The tenant farmers are deprived of their lands and evicted from their hometown. Many migrant families like the Joads move to California, only to find the Promised Land is another miserable place. They are being looked down upon by native Californians. They are also expelled and oppressed by the police officers. The relationship between man and man is intense and hostile. Along with the crises of natural and social ecology, the spiritual world of human beings is eroded by the flaw of sense of loss and selfishness. The migrants' detachment from the original place leads to the spiritual fragmentation. Some characters put their own interest in the first place when faced with difficult conditions.

Steinbeck has implied the solutions to the ecological crises. He advises people to respect and be close to nature. Nature provides man with protection and inspiration. Being close to nature is the right way to heal the natural ecological crisis. Steinbeck

probes into the harmony between man and man through advocating the ecological significance of mutual cooperation and sharing. Besides, through the main characters' conversion from individualism to collectivism, Steinbeck indicates that collective awareness is the key to solving the crisis of spiritual ecology.

The exploration of the relationship between man and nature, man and man, man and self shows Steinbeck's expectation of a harmonious world. Through the ecological reading of *The Grapes of Wrath*, it can be found a new joint between the novel and the modern theory of ecology. It can be concluded that Steinbeck is a writer with advanced ecological consciousness. This sheds light on the contemporary ecological problems and the construction of a harmonious world today.

Although the significance of the study is obvious, there are certain limitations. As ecocriticism is still a new critical theory under development, the present study on it may be inadequate. Apart from this, the author's understanding and vision of Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath* may be incomplete and limited. The author of this thesis does hope that the limitations will encourage more studies in this filed.

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