



## Analysis of the Characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*

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**Abstract:** John Steinbeck was a famous American writer in the 20th century. His novels, with high accomplishment, combine realism and fantasy harmoniously. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. His classic work, *The Grapes of Wrath*, a great documentary literary work of American society, is an epic full of the blood, tears, resentment and struggle of American farmers, and a legendary work that warns people to be kind and full of hope in poverty and suffering. In this works, Steinbeck has created many vivid characters longing for a better life and has depicted their inner struggle and powerlessness in face of reality, which deeply touch us. Based on the analysis of the representative characters like priest Jim Casy, farmer Tom Joad, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon Rivers, this paper depicts their miserable life and psychological development, revealing the connotation of human kindness and benevolence. At the same time, through the analysis of the growth of these characters and the profound reflection on the value of humanity, this paper aims to eulogize their spirit of unity, struggle and sacrifice so as to enlighten the readers: only by unity can the poor people fight for their right to survive and pursue social fairness and justice firmly.

**Key words:** *The Grapes of Wrath*, human nature, characters

### 1 Introduction

John Steinbeck is a famous American writer. Born in a middle-class family, he grew up in the country and on ranches, and his love of farmers and fields served him well in his later writing career. The novel *The Grapes of Wrath* describes the bloody and tearful struggle between groups of farmers in the United States. As a work that enjoys a unique position in the history of American literature, the novel is praised as "one of the great American novels of the 20th century" by the later generations.

#### 1.1 Research Background

*The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the representative works of John Steinbeck. It shows the hard living state of immigrant workers in California with profound historical background, rich characterization and heart-shaking emotional description. The author depicts all kinds of characters whose desires, contradictions and heavy psychological burdens vividly reflect various characteristics of human nature. Their inner struggle, sense of powerlessness, and desire and pursuit of life have deeply touched us. Thinking about the present, although the background of the times is different, people are still facing the same situation as they were. The development of industrial civilization, the progress of technology, the increase of productivity, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the imbalance in the distribution of resources, the exploitation and being exploited do exist now. In recent years, due to the domestic economy, many people have lost their jobs in the downsizing or closure of enterprises, so we have moved to big cities, but only to find that no matter where we are, it is difficult to find jobs. There is no denying the fact that unfavorable environment makes many people feel overwhelmed, but they should move forward rather than give up, and one day, they can keep the clouds open and see the moon.

#### 1.2 Purpose and Significance

As a literary work with the significance of the times, the book writes about self-redemption, personal growth, the dignity of the poor, the resilience of women, injustice and justice, the exploration of human nature and so on, which brings us a lot of different aspects of thinking and understanding. Although the whole book describes suffering, it brings indelible power to people. It makes us deeply reflect on the weakness of human nature and the injustice of society. In the book, the author gives voice to the dignity and rights of the underclass with sincere feelings and profound insight. He successfully portrays the protagonist's anger at social injustice and his vision for the future. This appeal lets us profoundly feel the author's concern for social justice and humanitarian care, and also make us pay more attention to the situation of the bottom of society and the pursuit of social justice and fairness. Life is so cruel and unmerciful, but there is beauty in sorrow. The ending of the novel explains it best. As long as there is the ability not to be discouraged, be brave, compassionate and loving, this is where hope lies in the long war against weakness and despair.

### 2 Literature Review

*The Grapes of Wrath* is the pinnacle of literary masterpieces. Since its publication, it has received great attention from the literary community and has become the number one bestseller at the time. It is a historical novel that reflects a turbulent period in American history through the story of the Joad family.



## 2.1 John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck was born in California on February 27, 1902 and died on December 20, 1968. As one of the best-selling American writers of the last century, his writing style is light, funny and simple, but never lacking in depth. He focused on reality and the people at the bottom. This was something that many other contemporary writers lacked. Their understanding of life was limited to their shallow comprehension of life as writers, and they only stayed in their own spiritual world. Steinbeck, on the other hand, went deep into the peasants' life and deeply described their lives. He did a variety of jobs to earn a living, during which he met many poor people and went through all kinds of hardships. Therefore he drew inspiration from trivial affairs and situations at that time, and he didn't make up stories, but found them. John Steinbeck's works basically adopt the way of "bottom narrative" to reflect the real side of the life of the bottom people. There were idyllic ecologies, depictions of people struggling in life, as well as desires to escape the misery of poverty. There were sad, but humorous characteristics, which made his works blossom an immortal glory in the American literary world of the 20th century. Because of its realism, Steinbeck's works are loved by a large number of readers. Steinbeck's success was also due to his diligence and bravery. He went to the Vietnam War as a war correspondent. His diligence and bravery won him the Nobel Prize for Literature. But work continued to blight his health, and in December 1968, Steinbeck died of a heart attack. Steinbeck's great significance in the history of American literature can be witnessed, and many later writers have paid tribute to Steinbeck in their works, including many great writers, which reflects Steinbeck's high status in American literary world.

## 2.2 *The Grapes of Wrath*

*The Grapes of Wrath* is a novel that has strong social significance, depicting the ecological disaster, economic panic, the plight of farmers fleeing the Great Plains of the southern United States, and their plight in California. The novel reflects the real side of American society in the 1930s, showing the life, thoughts and social reality of people in that era. With profound description and emotional expression, it inspires readers to strongly protest and think about injustice and social system. The novel takes the difficult escape of 12 members of a peasant family as the main line, and shows the pain and helplessness of farmers in that era by depicting their encounters and struggle. The novel follows the Joad family, convinced by a leaflet that California is full of grapes and a paradise, heading west in an overloaded old truck. On the way there, grandpa and grandma died one after another and brother Noah left along the river. Bad news constantly came one after another. But they still continued to move on. Along the way, they encountered all kinds of difficulties and setbacks, bore the heavy pressure of life, but still adhered to their own beliefs and values, and constantly strived to fight. However, when they arrived in California, unemployment, hunger and hardship still awaited them. Through the experience of the Joad family, the novel reflects the living state and spiritual outlook of the whole American society in the period of economic crisis.

In the novel, Steinbeck presented the social reality of the 1930s in the United States through the description of farmers. The scenes of ecological disaster, economic depression and peasant flight on the southern Great Plains depicted in the novel showed the poverty and backwardness of rural America at that time. Due to natural disasters and man-made destruction, poor farmers had to accept the fate of the great migration in order to survive. Experiencing hunger, cruelty, barbarism, pain, death and so on, individuals were left floundering helplessly under the umbrella of grand narrative. The novel revealed the deep-seated social problems of the United States at that time, such as land ownership, industrialization, wealth distribution, social justice and so on. At the same time, the novel also showed the strength and courage of the peasants in that era, expressing their strong protest against the unfair system and their indomitable struggle spirit.

The main theme of the novel is a protest against social injustice. In the novel, the farmers are treated unfairly and forced to leave their land and home, suffering the hardships of life. But as long as fear can be turned into anger, people will never break down. The "anger" in the novel reflects the peasants' indignation and anger against this injustice. In the novel, farmers show great unity and strength. They help each other on the way to escape famine, fight injustice, and unite to resist oppression and exploitation. The novel reveals the source and solutions of social problems through the struggles of farmers, and appeals for social justice and fairness.

## 2.3 Previous Researches

Since the publication of the novel, many scholars at home and abroad have made insightful comments from different angles, but there are few papers on the main characters of the Joad family from the perspective of personality. Some domestic writers mainly focus on the ecofeminism, such as the connection between women and nature. Through textual analysis, the ecofeminist perspective that the author endeavors to articulate is explicitly conveyed on the page: in a patriarchal society, nature and women share the same fate, so the ecofeminists and the feminist movements are inextricably linked. There is no moral distinction between male and female, human and nature, because all living things on Earth are interconnected. Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* from the perspective of ecofeminists not only reminds us to face the serious environmental problems in today's society, establish the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and protect nature and environment, leaving a blue sky for future generations. At the same time, we should also realize that nature is also a friend of women, advocate equality between men and women, and also realize that in real life, people need to take care of each other and survive the hardships together, and they are not independent individuals. We should fundamentally eliminate the discrimination caused by gender differences and establish a new mode of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, so as to promote the harmonious coexistence between people and between man and nature, and then promote the harmony of the whole world. While the current situation of foreign research mainly includes the analysis of articles from the ecological perspective. These views attempt to find a comprehensive ecological perspective combining whole eco-system. The ecological perspective of *The Grapes of Wrath* extends to the content and form of the novel. An evaluation of these texts also calls attention to Steinbeck's progress and his own ecological ethics,

as well as extends ethics beyond personal relationships with other individuals, society and with the land.

### **3 Analysis of the Characters**

In shaping character images and describing human nature, *The Grapes of Wrath* does not divide characters into good and bad in a characteristic way, but uses dialectical thinking to create a series of characters full of contradictions and struggles at the beginning. And through some events as touch points to activate the positive side of the human nature of these characters such as priest Jim Casy, farmer Tom Joad, Ma Joad and Rose of Sharon Rivers. The novel uses them to present a relatively idealized social outlook.

#### **3.1 Male figures**

The novel mainly depicts two male characters who try to escape in the face of the reality dilemma: Jim Casy, a pastor who took on the role of enlightenment but tried to escape the Bible world; Tom Joad, who grew up under the influence of Jim Casy and finally decided to escape from the former poor life. In the past, they frequently faced conflicts between their aspirations and the actual situation, enduring hardships, but courageously discovering a path to regain vitality, securing freedom and genuinely realizing the value of their lives. In this novel, the dissatisfaction of the general public towards the real society is mainly reflected in the character Tom Joad, who was one of the oppressed laborers. He had a simple personality and a strong sense of justice. When faced with difficulties, he was always very calm, and his subconscious was filled with a spirit of resistance. On the other hand, Jim Casy represented the highest level of cognition. He transformed his thoughts into action and sacrificed his precious life for it. He used his life to deduce an irrefutable truth: there has never been a savior in the world, and the poor can only achieve equality and mutual love between people by uniting and fighting.

##### **3.1.1 Jim Casy-A Leading Priest**

The author portrayed Jim Casy, a character who belonged neither to the upper society nor to the lower society, hoping that the contradiction between the two classes could be alleviated through Jim Casy's human value. He was a former country priest who was always thinking about where people were going. Tom Joad's first impression of Jim Casy was that "he was a more traditional man in appearance and behavior." (Chen, 2021:44) Indeed, before he left Christianity, Jim Casy was devout and devoted to preaching. However, after seeing people displaced and homeless, his faith collapsed, he could no longer preach the gospel to people, and he seemed to find no answers in God, so he gave up his pastoralism and followed the Joad family on the road to exile, moving to California. The book describes that he saw families shivering in the cold wind by the roadside. The children were crying from hunger, and the mothers had grief-stricken faces. These families had all been hard-working farmers, but due to the land being annexed by landlords and the ruthless plundering of the banks, they lost their means of livelihood. Jim Casy had been thinking. He saw people willing to be oppressed and not thinking of resistance. Everyone was just trying to feed themselves, and he was the only one who was still trying to wake people up and unite against this injustice until they died. He was undoubtedly a wise man who saw the real contradictions of this society before anyone else did. In his view, a truly harmonious and happy society should not start from the perspective of an individual, nor should it start from the perspective of a certain group, but should stand in the perspective of "people" and return to the most fundamental issues. Jim Casy believed that the real life should be to get spiritual satisfaction, and only those who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of everyone could get real happiness. This wilderness thinking made Jim Casy realize how to solve this fundamental contradiction, and he began to devote himself to it.

As long as people were willing to unite, they could eventually pursue the life and freedom they wanted. After being released from prison, Jim Casy saw that under his own appeal, farmers and workers began to unite as one, know how to face their own value, and know how to use the power of unity to fight injustice. Deeply moved, Jim Casy joined them, constantly fighting for the collective good. The book vividly depicts the scene of him organizing the strike. In the stuffy and crowded labor camp, Casy stood on a makeshift platform. His eyes scanned the tired yet expectant faces below with unwavering determination as he shouted, "Brothers, we can no longer be butchered like this! The fruits of our hard-work have been snatched away by those greedy people. Our families are suffering from hunger and cold, while they are living a life of luxury. We must unite and fight for our rights!" His words were like a spark, igniting the long-suppressed anger in people's hearts. The workers responded one after another, and the strike thus began. He organized strikes and taught church workers to fight for their wages. He not only successfully led the farmers to play the first shot against injustice, but also profoundly affected Tom Joad in the struggle, making Tom Joad be a person with great love, who knew how to recognize himself and was willing to devote himself to the "whole" as Jim Casy. Tom Joad was not an ignorant farmer's son any more. Although in the novel, he died under the baton of the police, Jim Casy, like Jesus, sacrificed himself to set an example for more people. Jim Casy spent his entire life proving the humanity value of loving the "whole". He doubted God and questioned humanity on the escape road, but it made him even more qualified to be a priest. Although the economic crisis had led to corruption and other problems, peasant groups could still unite and bravely made their voices heard. In fact, the novel also expresses the author's helplessness to the society at that time and people's pursuit of real freedom in "going west".

##### **3.1.2 Tom Joad-A Pure Farmer**

Tom Joad was the central character of the book. Compared with Jim Casy, Tom Joad's character was closer to real life. At the beginning of the novel, Tom Joad was like all young men, with a straightforward personality, loyalty, and willingness to endure hardships, but he couldn't control his emotions. He and his family were simple farmers with a strong attachment to the land and their hometown. After they were forced to come to California, and found that California was also a hell,

Tom Joad naturally began to abandon himself and became an angry homeless man. Tom Joad was found guilty of manslaughter. Originally, he thought his life will end and he could no longer live the ideal life. But at this point, Jim Casy came forward, confessed Tom Joad's guilt and went to prison in Tom Joad's place. This action deeply shocked and moved Tom Joad, so he began to reflect on his past and his family, as well as all the difficulties he faced. He began to think about everything that had happened, then Tom Joad's consciousness was gradually awoken, especially after Jim Casy was released from prison. Tom Joad met Jim Casy again, and he began to follow Jim Casy to work and struggle for the interests of farmers and workers. Before he met Jim Casy, Tom Joad was full of pride and was always on the rampage. But at the same time, he was honest and brave enough to fight against all acts of oppression. In a society run by the logic of capital, such a brave man is of the essence. Later, Jim Casy taught him to be a more mature person. Tom Joad was deeply influenced by Jim Casy and eventually became one of his staunch followers. In the process, he also actively pursued his own freedom. Tom Joad began to feel that although he was still economically poor, his life was getting better and better to some extent, and this change came from his recognition and dependence on the collective.

As Tom Joad experienced more and more things, he continued to grow. Jim Casy was killed by a policeman, and he killed a policeman. He said: "A man does not have his own soul, only a part of the soul". In the experience of being expelled again and again, he finally woke up and took Jim Casy's place on the road of unity and struggle. "wherever there are hungry people fighting to eat, there is me. Wherever there are police beating people, there is me." (Steinbeck, 1939:182-195) In the social context of that time, Tom Joad directly witnessed the loss of dignity of many ordinary people in this crisis, who were displaced and needed to fight for their rights. Tom Joad realized that he had to do something for the family and ordinary people. When he was determined to do more for the common people and chose to serve the people, he gained freedom and spiritual enlightenment, and realized the true sublimation of self-worth.

### **3.1.3 Their Growth**

Jim Casy is not the main character of the novel, nor is he a member of the Joad family, but his spiritual leading role in the whole work cannot be ignored. Indeed, before he left Christianity, Jim Casy was very devout and passionate about preaching. But when he saw farmers displaced and hungry by the economic shock, and especially when he arrived in California and saw oppressed farmers everywhere, he began to question his devout faith. The kind-hearted Jim Casy wanted to help these poor farmers, but his strong religious beliefs in the past could not allow him to make a difference. The real change in Jim Casy's mind came after his arrest. He took the place of Tom Joad, which was to repay the Joad family's kindness and for a real "whole". It was also this action that made him truly realize that sacrificing himself for the benefit of the "whole" was the most correct path. As a result, he went on the campaign to improve the living conditions of farmers, teaching them to fight against unfair treatment. After the further development of Jim Casy's thought, his great love spirit was also shown incisively and vividly. To some extent, the image of Jim Casy represents the author's expectation and yearning for human nature.

At the beginning of the novel, Tom Joad was like all young men, frank, loyal, and willing to endure hardships. Because of poverty and helplessness, Tom Joad began to become more and more self-abandoned, and even killed someone because of fighting with others. (Li,2016:95) But gradually Tom Joad inherited his mother's simple and selfless virtues, and also received inspiration and guidance from Jim Casy, all of which contributed to a leap in Tom Joad's understanding. For example, during a conflict with a rancher, the rancher came with a group of thugs, aggressively trying to drive away the workers who hadn't completed the picking task on time. When Tom saw this, he immediately clenched his fists, ready to rush forward and argue with them. Casy quickly grabbed him and said in a low but firm voice, "Tom, don't be impulsive. We need to come up with a comprehensive plan. We can't just suffer losses in vain. There are many of us. Only by uniting can we be powerful." Although the anger in Tom's heart was still burning, he held back after hearing Casy's words and followed Casy's arrangements. He, together with the other workers, calmly negotiated with the rancher. This experience made Tom understand that impulsiveness couldn't solve the problem, and unity and wisdom were powerful weapons against injustice. He strengthened his faith and realized that even at the lowest levels of society, life could be changed through mutual help and friendship. In the end, he was determined to inherit Jim Casy's unfinished career and regarded himself as one with the hardworking masses. Steinbeck places hope for the future of the poor in Tom Joad, which means that as long as there is someone like Tom Joad who is brave enough to think, act, and sacrifice, the future will not be dark forever. The value of human nature revealed by the image of Tom Joad is that people cannot predict their future in the society, but they can decide how to face difficulties. During the Great Depression, perhaps an individual or a collective cannot change the course of history, but people can work together and fight for what they deserve. Only by self-determination and unremitting efforts can we realize the value of life.

### **3.2 Female Figures**

All the individuals in the book have undergone varying degrees of ideological changes, and the changes of several female characters in the novel are particularly significant: the rise of Ma Joad, and the metamorphosis of Rose of Sharon Rivers. Ma Joad was potentially the most important character in the whole novel who could represent the fundamental human nature. Generally speaking, the author's purpose in shaping the image of Ma Joad, who had a great maternal nature, is to tell people that kindness is an inherent quality of human beings, and this kind of kindness should go beyond little themselves, get rid of all the constraints and dedicate themselves to the realization of the "whole" harmony. Only in this way can the value of human nature be truly highlighted. (Zhang,2014:9) In the author's works, Rose of the Sharon Rivers is a new woman who is self-reliant and independent, representing an independent and invincible new female image. Embodying fearless love, she has truly accomplished the growth of a woman. The novel tells readers that the true value of human nature lies in examining the meaning of life and striving to achieve the elevation of human nature by creating positive female character images.

### **3.2.1 Ma Joad- A Kind Mother**

In this displaced famine, Tom Joad's father wavered, and his younger brothers and sisters were confused. The backbone of the whole famine process was a woman, Tom Joad's mother, a housewife, but the soul of the family. Lying beside dead grandmother all night while crossing the desert, she knew that if she let everyone know that grandmother died, the desert would definitely be impossible to cross. Therefore, she chose to bear it by herself. Ma's spirit of leadership ran through the whole story. She buried grandpa, stayed with the dead grandma all night, retrieved uncle, sent her son away, and helped her daughter deliver the baby. For instance, when she saw the police breaking into their home, she didn't hesitate for a second. She grabbed the iron pot and rushed out, her eyes filled with anger and fearlessness. She shouted loudly at the police, "What gives you the right to break into our home? We haven't done anything wrong!" It seemed like that she could do anything, but she was just an ordinary mother who took care of daily life. The uncertainty of the unknown future and the shortage of food in the famine did not shake her determination, and she always emphasized the orderly family. She believed that the path of the poor was widening because "Everything we do is to move forward." Being decisive and brave is her most charming character. She not only took good care of her family, but also never turned down a request. She agreed to let Jim Casy flee with the family, and helped the children of the neighbors who were hungrier than they were, showing the selfless and noble qualities of working women.

The mother not only had the softness of a woman, but also had a fearless revolutionary and fighting spirit. On the eve of departure, old Tom asked his wife if he could take missionary Jim Casy with them. Ma Tom Joad cleared her throat and said "The question is not whether we can do it, but whether we want to do it. If the focus is on capability, we're not going to get anywhere. We're not going to California, and we're not going to get anything done. However, if the focus is on the will, we can accomplish any tasks we are prepared to undertake." Human beings exist in the world, robbing and killing each other, and everyone seems to be swallowed up by an invisible order, and does a lot of things that are not meant to be done from the heart. But the kind gentleness rooted in Ma Joad's body made this civilization to move forward in such an uncontrollable background a little closer to the light. She persuaded Tom not to go after them alone but to participate in collective actions. When Tom killed them and was about to flee, she firmly supported his decision. Looking at Tom, her eyes were full of trust and encouragement as she said, "Son, I know you did the right thing. Go ahead. For the sake of us suffering people, live well and keep fighting." She had a powerful presence, maintaining the integrity and dignity of the family. She believed that the path of the poor "gets wider and wider" because "everything we do is to move forward." She had a strong aura to maintain the integrity and dignity of this family; at the same time, she had an extraordinary ability to accept suffering. In extremely difficult conditions, many people were shaken, but she was always full of hope. No amount of suffering could break her spirit, and it couldn't break this family, either!

### **3.2.2 Rose of Sharon Rivers-A Great Woman**

Rose of the Sharon Rivers was the eldest daughter of the family. However, contrary to her beautiful name, she was a self-serving figure at the beginning of the novel. She just wanted to be alone with her husband in California and enjoyed life. She was a delicate little lady, because she just got married and pregnant. She was once extremely selfish, and only concerned about herself and the fetus in her abdomen. Later, her husband ran away alone on the way to exile, and she began to complain and felt extremely depressed. When her grandfather died, she seemed selfish and heartless. Moreover, she was wayward on the road, and even became neurotic because of a little external stimulation. But after she was mercilessly abandoned during her pregnancy by her husband, she had to face life alone, bear the burden of life, and become the woman who carried the burden of the family. When she gave birth to a dead baby in a battered van, her identity had changed dramatically, her heart had gradually matured, and her behavior had become more cautious.

At the end of the novel, when the whole family was in despair, they met a man who had been starving for six days. Rose of the Sharon Rivers saved the dying old man without a moment's hesitation by lifting her clothes and feeding him with her own milk. Her surprising behavior changed all the personalities the author set up before, which gave readers a great shock and made people unable to calm down. She did not lose her goodness in the depths of despair, fear and anger. At this point, the baton of kindness was slowly passed from the hands of parents to the next generation. Outside the barn, the night was cool, and maybe the next day was still howling, but it would pass, and everything miserable would pass. The struggle, especially the struggle against death, is the essence of life, which is unshakable. We should cherish life, no matter what kind of state we encounter, we should embrace hope.

### **3.2.3 Their Growth**

In the novel, Ma Joad was portrayed as an almost perfect female figure. She always faced life optimistically. She was not only a kind and simple housewife, but also the backbone of the whole family. From the day when she decided to move away from their hometown, the person who made the decision became the mother of the family, and she held up the emotional support of the entire family. She knew the personality of each member of the family, and she was like a different person when making decisions, but there was no refutation. Of course, this was only one aspect of her character. Besides, she was also a strong and resolute woman. When she or her family were treated unfairly, she rushed in like a man. When she disagreed with her husband, she found a wrench and struggled with him. When she saw the police breaking into the house, she rushed out with the iron pan. During the process of migration, Ma Joad's character continued to develop, gradually growing from a housewife who only knew how to take care of the family's basic necessities of food, clothing, housing, and transportation to a family leader, and from a dedicated, gentle and kind housewife to a strong, bold, loving and assertive woman. Because she realized that the men in her family were exhausted after experiencing the pain of being far away from home and the long journey of migration, at this time women had to be strong enough to become the pillars of the family. Ma Joad was a bright spot in the book, resolute and decisive, bright and tough. In the famine she became the support of the family. For her, all the changes and setbacks were just tributaries in the long river of life, which

would eventually trickle into the flood of life. In this river, there were tiny eddies and waterfalls, but she always kept going.

The book meticulously depicts her transformation. When she gave birth to a still - born baby in the dilapidated truck, at first, she stared blankly at the deceased child, her eyes empty and unfocused, as if she had lost her sense of direction. Shortly after, tears streamed down her cheeks. She held the baby tightly in her arms, her body trembling slightly as she wept silently. At that moment, her identity underwent a huge transformation. Her heart gradually matured, and her actions became more cautious. Rose of the Sharon Rivers was originally a selfish young woman who only knew how to enjoy life. She was the person with the most fantasies in the Joad family. She always considered herself far more than others, which elaborated the fact that her level of consciousness was lower than the rest of the Joad family. However, under the influence of her mother and after losing her child and experiencing hardships, her spirit was baptized. In addition, when various crises and problems occurred, she could use a more rational attitude than men to deal with related problems. Her inner world changed strongly, and she had a new understanding of herself and others. Even for such a seemingly insignificant little and weak woman with such low consciousness, at the end of the novel, the author still described that she saved an unknown old man who was about to starve to death in the barn with her own milk. She "gradually closed her lips and smiled mysteriously." Her sudden change illustrates that adversity can facilitate the transformation of people at all levels. She finally showed unprecedented sympathy and concern for others, as well as her mysterious smile, indicating that she received great satisfaction while giving something to others. At the moment of life and death, the great maternal nature of Rose of the Sharon Rivers was awakened and became a symbol of survival and life. In this way, she was transformed from an extremely selfish girl into a great mother. She transcended the narrow-minded selfish "individual" and did what she could to help others. Following the example of her mother, Ma Joad, she eventually integrated herself into the "collective".

#### 4 Conclusion

*The Grapes of Wrath* seems to describe not just a story, a family, but a history, an era, and all kinds of suffering, death and pain that human civilization must encounter on its way forward. In a trailer made of scrap metal and decorated as a destination filled with grapes, the Joads piled up all their belongings and headed west, longing for a life where they could be fed well, dressed warmly and not go hungry. On this long journey of 3,000 kilometers, they had experienced many incredible things, and also lost one family member after another who were no longer able to move forward together. However, the seed of anger took root in their hearts, but what grew was a huge branch of kindness and hope. In poverty and hardship, although people cannot change their fate, they have the desire to change. The characters and stories in the book reveal people's deepest helplessness and longing, while also highlight their indomitable spirit and faith in the future. Even in the most difficult times, people need to keep their pride and courage to support themselves to go through the difficult times. Farmers complain and protest at being labeled losers, arguing that their efforts are not recognized but overshadowed by class and economic injustices in society. This spirit of resistance is a powerful response to social injustice today.

The people at the bottom of society have experienced hardships and are very helpless, but they cannot find a way out and can struggle in the society. But at the same time, they have not given up the pursuit of life and humanity. This also makes the readers deeply aware of social inequality, and calls on the society to give more attention and support to these vulnerable groups. Each of us searches for our own purpose and meaning in life. Perhaps it is because of its truth and cruelty that we are more deeply aware of the difficulties of life and cherish what we have. *The Grapes of Wrath* can not only make us feel the hardships of life, but also make us full of hope and courage for the future. The novel contains a complete story and a vivid world composed of multiple characters. In the process of understanding and empathizing with these characters, people will realize the real literary connotation under the deep meaning of the story. *The Grapes of Wrath* is set against the background of the Great Depression in the United States, because during this period, social resources were scarce and class contradictions intensified, and people began to examine the society calmly. Through the portrayal of positive characters, the novel tells readers that the true value of human nature lies in examining the meaning of life and striving to realize the sublimation of human nature.

Based on the analysis of the main characters, limited by my own cognitive level and understanding ability when writing, this paper also has certain limitations. First, the paper doesn't elaborate what has exactly caused Ma Joad's change. Second, the paper only makes a brief summary before Rose of the Sharon Rivers's transformation, lacking some concrete examples. The further study on this theme will focus on such aspects in the future.

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