

# A Tentative Study of John Steinbeck's Morality in *East of Eden*

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**Abstract:** *East of Eden* is one of the most famous novels by American author and Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck. The title of the novel, "East of Eden," is taken from the Bible, a place where sin and hope coexist. Although the book has been criticized by many literary critics, Steinbeck's unique moral ideas in the book are worthy of careful study by future generations. Based on *East of Eden*, this paper will analyze some important characters and metaphors in the novel from the two levels of "Free Will" and "Guilty Inheritance", and analyze Steinbeck's moral concepts and gain inspiration from them.

**Keywords:** *East of Eden*, Morality, Free Will, Guilty Inheritance, Steinbeck.

## 1. Introduction

Morality, a social ideology, is the sum of the behavioral norms that can regulate relations not only among people but also between individuals and society. It can measure and evaluate people's thoughts and actions with concepts such as sincerity and hypocrisy, goodness and evil, justice and injustice, impartiality and partiality. Through various forms of education and the power of public opinion, people gradually form certain beliefs, habits and traditions. In today's modern life, morality has become more important in balancing the relationship between human and nature and educating people to pursue goodness.

Steinbeck, the Nobel Prize winner for Literature, was born in California. He is an American writer in the 20th century, with representative works, such as *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Moon is Down*, *East of Eden*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, etc. Steinbeck's work shows a strong sense of morality. Unlike the moral teachings of traditional American literature, he does not simply make moral judgments, but presents the contradictions and pains of people's moral choice in modern American society, while emphasizing the key role of "Free Will" in moral choice through vivid narratives. The Organizers of the Nobel Prize praised him for being a good teacher to the world by teaching people kindness and a defender of human values.(as cited in R.S.Cai, 2014:229) At the same time, however, the critic Arthur Mizener published an article in *The New York Times* titled: "Should we award the Nobel Prize in Literature for the morality of the 30s?" (as cited in R.S.Cai,2014:229) The article questioned Steinbeck's award for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Meanwhile, John H. Timmerman (2005:33) describes it in his work named *John Steinbeck: An Ethics of Fiction* that "Steinbeck was always a moral writer. He concerned with the choices of goodness as well as evil and the consequences of those choices." It is clearly that critics are divided on Steinbeck's morality.

Of his works, *East of Eden* was his most proud one which, however, was widely criticized by many literary critics mostly because of the loose organization of structures and materials. Owens(1989:108) expressed that In *East of Eden* Steinbeck turns into an unequivocal moralist, and in this manner Steinbeck moves away from the force of his best composition, the force of introducing subtlety that generates its own moral.

Harold Bloom essentially advances that this novel does not merit reading again.(Bloom,1987:introduction). He turns into "the author of any third-rate best-seller" (McElrath,1996:399) when he manages moral issues.

In fact, with its in-depth discussion of the struggle between Guilty Inheritance and Free Will, *East of Eden* is still a masterpiece that manifests his morality while inspiring his readers to think about the importance of free choices.

The title of the novel "East of Eden" borrows the allusions of the Bible. In the Bible, Cain killed Abel because he was jealous that Abel's tribute was favored by the God and was banished to the east of Eden by God. But Cain was still protected from harm by God in this land. Hence, the name of the work "East of Eden" represents both the evil land and the land of hope.

In this book, a destroy-rebuild-redestroy process of an ideal homeland "Eden" can be seen, reflecting the real society at that time in America when people were facing a moral crisis for making a choice between good and evil under the drive of materialism. This thesis will focus on making a systematic analysis on Steinbeck's Morality based on three main characters: Cal, Cathy and Charles and two images: the image of *East of Eden* and the new definition of "Timshel".

## 2. Literature Review

By now, most of the studies on Steinbeck all over the world focus more on Steinbeck's other famous works such as *The Wrath of Grapes* and *Of Mice and Men*. As for *East of Eden*, there are still many questions left unsolved. In order to exemplify the gaps in researches, data from main Chinese database, namely CNKI, may help. Simply using "斯坦贝克" and "伊甸之东" as searching words and the results are showed that 1,931 results from "斯坦贝克" and 116 results from "伊甸之东". In all of the thesis uploaded to CNKI, the reference to the keyword "斯坦贝克" is more than seven times the reference to the keyword "伊甸之东". Using "伊甸之东" as searching words, and the column diagram of CNKI's analysis on keyword comparison can be found. The following parts intend to show the previous studies of Steinbeck and *East of Eden*.

### 2.1. Previous Studies of Steinbeck

John Steinbeck is the sixth American Nobel Laureate in

Literature. In his lifetime, he wrote four full-length novels, more than 10 middle-grade novels, and more than 60 short stories. Many of them became American bestsellers as soon as they were published. The famous American literary critic Joseph Fontenrose once pointed out: "For twenty-five years, if anyone asks who the greatest novelist of today is, three names usually come to mind: Faulkner, Hemingway and Steinbeck." (as cited in J.W.Tian, 2012:102) There are numerous studies of Steinbeck both at home and abroad. But compared to foreign studies, domestic studies are a little behind.

### 2.1.1. Foreign Research

Over the past few decades, scholars in Western countries have studied Steinbeck's intellectual dimensions from the perspectives of ethics, politics, ecology, religion, globalization and comparison with other writers, and the results of these studies are collected in Steinbeck international conference proceedings.

The first doctoral dissertation on Steinbeck was written in the 1940s by Freil in the United States. The International John Steinbeck Society was founded in 1966, and the Steinbeck Quarterly was established. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was ranked twelfth among the "20 Books That Changed America" by Book magazine, the largest bookstore chain in the United States, in its joint publication. The Steinbeck Literary Award was also established in England in Steinbeck's honor.

The Steinbeck Society in Japan has also been in existence for nearly 40 years. Although it is a private organization, it is very formal, and its constitution stipulates that the society is to engage in all research on Steinbeck and related matters, and to collect materials on him in Japan.

Tian and Wang (2005:20-23) summarize the research on Steinbeck abroad, especially in the United States, in their thesis. They divide the American studies of Steinbeck into four major categories according to critical perspectives: case studies, social criticism, biographical criticism, and comparative literary criticism.

To this day, Steinbeck's works still have a large readership in the United States and around the world. Foreign studies of Steinbeck have not ceased.

### 2.1.2. Domestic Research

Compared with foreign studies of Steinbeck, there are significantly fewer results of his research in China. In the 1940s, the translation of American literature went through an important period in China, and Steinbeck was introduced one after another with the works of such famous authors as Ernest Hemingway, Jack London and Whitman. However, in the recent studies on the history of modern translated literature in China, Steinbeck has not been able to attract enough attention from scholars. Although Steinbeck's works were introduced to China at a relatively early stage, domestic scholars have not achieved the same results in their research on Steinbeck and his works. Thus, compared with foreign Steinbeck studies, domestic Steinbeck studies are not only weak, but also in a state of scarcity.

In the past 70 years or so, most articles have focused on analyzing the political tendencies in Steinbeck's works, and the focus has almost always been on the political progressiveness of two works, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*, lacking innovative points. With attention focused on the themes and characters of the works, and few

articles have studied the writing techniques or ethics of the works. However, in the past thirty years, domestic scholars have paid much more attention to Steinbeck and achieved certain research results. The number of articles and works published in journals on Steinbeck's research is increasing, and the quality is also improving.

In recent years, in addition to more than 280 academic papers on Steinbeck and his works, there are also 66 master's thesis. And they have studied Steinbeck's novels from different perspectives, which are refreshing and have greatly encouraged many domestic Steinbeck fans in China.

## 2.2. Previous Studies of East of Eden

*East of Eden* is a realistic and symbolic portrayal of the struggle between good and evil, expressing Steinbeck's concern about the spiritual crisis in America. The book was an epic novel from Steinbeck's later years and was well received by many readers. Steinbeck took the book very seriously. From planning to publication, it took nearly 20 years. Once published, *East of Eden* topped the bestseller lists and was translated into many languages, making it extremely popular around the world. The book was also adapted into a movie of the same name in 1955, directed by Elijah Kazan, who was famous and won the Academy Award for Best Director twice, making *East of Eden* a classic in American cinema. Steinbeck himself was fond of his novel, saying, "Almost everything I have is in there, but it's not full yet. There is pain and excitement, joy and anguish, evil and goodness - the joy of conception and a little disappointment, and the indescribable joy of creation."

Looking back to the previous and current studies, the studies based on literary ethics criticism usually interpret moral responsibility in *East of Eden* from the perspective of the Bible. Jiang (2019: Abstract), for example, investigated and made a comparison of moralities displayed in figures and characters living in *East of Eden* and their originals from "Abel and Cain" and "Exodus" to take advantage of moral lack, moral choice, and salvation and uncover current upsides of the work. Deng (2012:177-178) thought about that the Bible has applied a profound impact on the advancement of the western culture. In her theory, by outlining the social foundation based on which the suggestions to the Bible is determined, she pointed toward assisting individuals with understanding the substance of the English language and western culture better.

In British and American literary circles, however, scholars usually analyzed it from the perspectives of naturalism, feminism, ecology, mythological archetype and collective unconsciousness. For example, Xie (2012: Introduction) explored the naturalistic inclination in *East of Eden* by analyzing the determinant factors for the characters' tragic destinies and the novel's stylistic features. In general, these results showed that studies on *East of Eden* are only a small portion of the whole studies on Steinbeck, which provided indirect evidence for the feasibility of the study of this thesis. Furthermore, there were even fewer thesis research in *Guilty Inheritance* from the perspective of finding out Steinbeck's morality. On the purpose of helping Chinese readers to further understand and appreciate *East of Eden* as well as Steinbeck's morality, this thesis will try to figure out Steinbeck's moral views by analyzing three main characters and two images in the book. This thesis hopes to show the readers that just as Eva Kralova(2013:57) understood Steinbeck's profound ethics through the plot of *East of Eden*: "Human beings have

the ability to defeat evil, because good contains great power, which is far beyond evil, and everyone has the ability to resist evil, it is these personal choices that shape his/her fate.” Steinbeck not only indicates that people’s destiny are in their hands but also manifests his strong belief that good must triumph over evil and light must triumph over darkness.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Methodology of the Research**

Before writing the thesis, a literature research will be made to study the previous literature and summarize their opinions. Besides, analyze the individuals to draw the conclusion and explore the pragmatic function of the conclusion by combining examples. Procedures are collecting data, using examples and analyzing implications from characters and images and finding out the inlaid morality. The above research methods and research procedures are adopted to help the thesis answer three questions: 1. What are Free Will and Guilty Inheritance in the book? 2. What kind of Morality did Steinbeck embodied in this book? 3. What lessons can we learn from it? Based on East of Eden, this thesis starts from the two levels of "Free Will" and "Guilty Inheritance" discussed in the book, analyzes three important characters and two major images in the book, and then analyzes Steinbeck's moral concept and the enlightenment we can get from it.

#### **3.2. Introduction to the Free Will and Guilty Inheritance**

According to Steinbeck, every man will inherit the sins from his ancestors, which we call Guilty Inheritance. That is, every person is likely to sin. Free Will is the belief or philosophical theory that humans can choose their own behavior. For example, in the context of religion, Free Will may mean that an omnipotent god or some mysterious force does not control one's will and choices by its power. In ethics, Free Will mean that individuals are morally responsible for their own actions. In psychology, it means that the mind controls some of the actions of the body. In science, Free Will may mean that the actions of the body, including the brain, are not all determined by physical cause and effect.

Chapter four will interpret the main characters based on Free Will and Guilty Inheritance. According to Dong et al. (2012:1873), the issue of Free Will and Moral Responsibility has been a central part of the development of Western philosophy throughout its history. It has attracted much attention and discussion among philosopher and occupies a central place in contemporary Western philosophy. Most philosophers believe that Free Will and Moral Responsibility are closely linked. Only if our actions are in some sense of free can we be said to be responsible for our actions.

At the same time, Xiao(2021:109) also says that only acts based on Free Will can the issue of Moral Responsibility exist. A truly moral act is the result of an individual's own choice. Besides, any external factors, including physical factors, can influence one's moral beliefs and feelings, but they can not determine one's moral choices. A virtuous person can also make a wrong decision at any moment.

That is, the morality can be found through his actions. Hence, in chapter four, Steinbeck's moral perspective will be explored through an analytical comparison of the characters' actions.

### **4. Steinbeck’s Morality Embodied in the Characters**

Steinbeck had composed 27 books, including sixteen novels, six verifiable books, and two assortments of brief tales. His bountiful working encounters assisted him with noticing others' lives so he could spread out a hapless picture look about how individuals neglected to endeavor and battle for living during the dull time. He saw many individuals enduring during two World Wars and the Great Depression, which he viewed as "reality" and turned into a significant piece of his composing materials. After War II, a great many people in the United States had a lost and powerless outlook on their future, which stimulated their mental choppiness and bewildering. Seeing that the most critical need was to modify their home and reshape their American dream, Steinbeck turned his sword toward this difficulty and completed one of his amazing East of Eden.

East of Eden, as Steinbeck's most satisfactory work, although criticized by many literary critics, lit a beacon for the American people with Steinbeck's unique moral thoughts in the book.

#### **4.1. Charles’s Guilty Inheritance**

In Genesis, Cain and Abel were both sons of Adam, the former a farmer and the latter a herdsman. Cain sent the Lord a tribute of some of the new fruit from his field, and Abel brought some of the firstborn in his flock. As a result, Cain killed Abel for the sake of the Lord's preference to the Abel's tribute.

In East of Eden, the same tragedy was repeated. Cyrus was the father of Adam and Charles. Charles, only a little younger, grew up with his father’s assertiveness. When talking to Adam, Cyrus had this to say about Charles: "Charles is not afraid so he could never learn anything about courage. He does not know anything outside himself so he could never gain the things I’ve tried to explain to you." (John Steinbeck, 1979:70) In fact, Charles not only inherited his father's strong body and courage, but also assertiveness and violence. For example, when Adam complained that Cyrus never punished Charles, but let him live his life, praised him and let him stay out of the army. After the complaint, he stopped, frightened at what he had said, afraid of the rage or the contempt or the violence his words might let loose. At the same time, Adam had to watch and feel his brother’s mood. Cyrus favored Adam and his gift, pressing Adam to join the army. For Cyrus's preference and nonchalance, Charles was harmed and turned his clenched hand to Adam, replaying the first sin from Cain. Also, Charles, as his dad anticipated, couldn't advance any illustration from his mix-up lastly neglected to win his sibling's absolution.

With careful observation, it is interesting to draw a conclusion that Steinbeck played a little trick in naming his characters in East of Eden. Abel, Adam, and Adam's most youthful child Aron all beginning with "A". However, Cain, Charles, Adam's most seasoned child Cal, and even Cathy all beginning with a "C" meaning the destinies of these characters are unsurprising. That is, individuals whose names start with a "C" are destined to sin. Due to the preference of his father, Charles beat Adam and lost Adam's trust and love forever. Meanwhile, Cal continues this old routine and tells Aron the cruel and heartbreaking truth that their mother is still alive but works in a brothel, causing Aron's death. Besides, Cathy, the typical representative of "Free Will" tempted two

14-year-old young men very much like the snake that allured Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. As people, they all convey similar blood as our predecessors and therefore inherit the same sinful humanity. Through the Eastern Eden, readers can learn that what Steinbeck firmly believed is that all of us can inherit guilt from our ancestors, and when it comes to us, there is no way but take it and commit the same crime.

## 4.2. Cathy's Free Will

There have been different opinions on Steinbeck's view of women. People considered that Steinbeck is a misogynist because of the lack of female characters in his works, or even some works without any women. Chen (2010:150-154) thought that Steinbeck has the rare "female consciousness" of that era to some extent. People have suggested that Steinbeck had a love-hate ambivalence toward women, while Cai (2011:22-26) has suggested that Steinbeck's attitude toward women changed from apathy and indifference to compassion and concern, optimism and respect, to disappointment, anxiety and hope.

Admittedly, the proportion of female characters in Steinbeck's works is far lower than the male characters. However, it's different in *East of Eden*, where the author spends a lot of time describing Cathy. Steinbeck understood and valued the power of women. During the previous stage, he has prevailed with regards to depicting numerous noteworthy female characters with different characters. Solid and strong as Joad's mom in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Liza Hamilton in *East of Eden*; Slut and dumb as the Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men*; Dependent and compliant as Elisa in *The Chrysanthemums* and Rosasharn in *The Grapes of Wrath*. But he took the bold step of creating an evil and charming Cathy in *East of Eden*, who had a special sense of crime and evil ever since childhood. The author accepted that Cathy was brought into the world with the propensities, or absence of them, which drove and constrained her every last bit of her life. She was not like other people, never was from birth. There is a sarcastic the way that others looked Cathy was exactly what she considered others: "Cathy is a monster to those of conventional morals and mores, but, from her perspective, those who judge her are monsters". (C.L. Hansen, 2011:310-319) And just as a cripple may learn to utilize his lack so that he becomes more effective in a limited field than the uncrippled, so did Cathy. Using her difference, Cathy made a painful and bewildering stir in her world.

Cathy was different from other children in many ways which can be divided into three categories. Firstly, Cathy had from the initial a face of blamelessness. Her hair was gold and wonderful; wide-set hazel eyes with upper covers that hung made her look mysteriously sleepy. Her attractive appearance made her different from others. Most children abhor differences and want to look, talk, dress, and act exactly like all of the others. She never did that. However, the result turned out that quite often other children imitated her. Although she was strange, people wanted to look at her every time, which indicates her mystery. Secondly, she did not think like the children on her age. She loved telling lies, not in the way that her peers always did. Cathy's untruths were rarely guiltless. Their motivation was to get away from discipline, work, or obligation, and they were utilized for benefit. When she lied, she mixed truth, which made her a dangerous liar. Furthermore, she never forgot her former liars and it helped her to be more convincing. Thirdly, she acted differently. Instead of obeying others' rules or orders, she was her own

master. She began to learn about sex impulse at ten and she has perceived the sex power from an extremely youthful age. However, her inability to adjust to the untouchable on sex shows how different she genuinely was. Dissimilar to other physically detached characters, for example, Alice Trask and Liza Hamilton, Cathy was physically certain and involved sex for delight and control rather than multiplication. In short, sexuality turned into Cathy's weapon against her confusion about the world. "Sex was unmentionable and unmentioned" (John Steinbeck,1979:215) but Cathy utilized realistic pictures of sexual activities to coerce conspicuous men. But she hid her evil well, which can explain why she could be innocent enough to escape from any punishment as well as suspicion after seducing two fourteen-year-old boys old and making her Latin teacher suicide at 14 years old while herself, still sitting quietly, delicately eating and smiling. When she was 16, she no longer wanted to go to school. After being flogged by her parents, she intended to consume her parents to dead. However, no one felt a little skeptical about her and she actually left a pleasant fragrance in the entirety of individuals' brain.

Her Free Will laid in her behaviors, dealing with things in her own mind. She had not only vigilance of sensual desires but also ignorance of moral responsibility. She never regretted or was sorry for seducing others to suicide or killing others. Through her actions, we can easily draw the following conclusion that she was guilty, but at the same time, she was completely free. Through this legendary girl Cathy, we can explore Steinbeck's moral views. Did she inherit this evil humanity from the beginning? In fact, she lived and grew up in a middle-class and orthodox family, but she clearly chose her own evil ways to show her independent and strong inner world and Free Will. As an old saying goes, there is no absolute freedom. For girls like Cathy, there is a path that is meant to be taken, which is that they are required to behave well, get a job as a teacher, marry a man and take care of the whole family. Dissatisfied and disappointed by the path she should take, Cathy was free to follow her own path. We can see that although she committed so many unforgivable crimes, she still lived her ideal life, which shows that people can get what they want by controlling their own lives. And that is the power of humanity. From Cathy, we can learn that on the one hand, no matter who you are, a good man or a bad person, you have your own Free Will. You can think in your own way, act in your own way and even choose the way of life since it's your choice. On the other hand, it also shows that not every guilty person will be punished. However, when Cathy knew that Aron was her son and he was really kind, she went to see her secretly. Like all mothers, she also cares for and loves her children and has her own strengths. (W.Wei,2018:161-163) Steinbeck tries to use Cathy to illustrate that original sin and evil exist in every human being. Furthermore, the end of Cathy, with all her money given to her kind son Aron, still indicates Steinbeck's belief: good will defeat evil even though it does not eliminate the evil by punishment.

## 4.3. Cal's Struggle between Good and Evil

According to family morals, the fraternity, similar to the relationship of father and child, is relative connection and is one of the most essential connections of a nuclear family. (L.Ming,2016:16-17) Brothers imparts to normal predecessor; normally they have a similar blood and appreciate caring relations. Siblings should be agreeable to one another and help one another.

In *East of Eden*, Cal and Aaron were twin brothers who grew up together. They should have enjoyed a brotherly relationship, loving and respecting each other. However, Cal felt unbalanced due to his own character defects and his father Adam's preference for his younger brother Aron, which led Cal to take revenge on Aron. For Cal, in his family, his mother was absent and his father was not responsible. Cal's mom, Cathy, showed no maternal warmth when the twins were conceived. After the twins were conceived, she was anxious to seek after a free life, so she abandoned her two lovely children and left. Their father was so wrapped up in the pain of his wife's departure that he didn't want to face the reality of life. Thus, the two brothers were cared for by a housekeeper named Lee. Although they were twin brothers, they differed in appearance and character. Aron was affectionate and sincere. However, Cal was cunning and selfish and wanted to change the world. Everyone loved Aron more. Cal was jealous, but he didn't show it.

Cal actually liked Aron, but he felt lonely compared to his brother. In many ways, he was inferior to his older brother. However, his father, Adam, had always preferred to Aron. Even when they grew up, they both have different aspirations, Adam only saw Aron's progress and ignored Cal. After Adam failed in his frozen lettuce shipping business, Aron decided to take the entrance exam a year earlier and got into Stanford University because he couldn't stand the teasing from his classmates. Aron's excellence made his father Adam prefer him. And Adam even decided to give him a nice present. But Cal, in order to make up for his father's loss and eager for his father's recognition and praise, Cal and Wilson sold soybeans together and successfully made all the money his father lost. When Thanksgiving Day came, Cal wanted to take the opportunity to give his father the money. During a celebratory night of drinking, Cal gave the money to his father, hoping to win his father's approval. However, Aron, who was studying at Stanford, also came back, and all of Adam's attention was on Aron. He was so proud of Aron's achievements that he even misunderstood Cal's good intentions and assumed that the money had come from a shady source. Finally, he hurt Cal deeply with his words. He said, "If you could give me -- well, like your brother did -- pride in what he's doing and joy in his progress, I'd be happy. Money, even clean money, is nothing like this." (John Steinbeck, 1979:1688)

Cal's childhood was already devoid of maternal love, and his father's indifference made him feel unwanted. He was consumed with self-hatred. Because he already knew his mother's condition, he doubted every day that he had inherited his mother's blood and devil personality. Cal was tortured. Not only at home, but also outside, people like Aron more. Cal became even more upset and jealous of Aron, and even vengeful. Finally, he broke his promise to his father and told Aron about his mother. Because he knew that Aron was very innocent and his imagination of his mother was very beautiful. Aron would have gone mad if to be told that his mother wasn't dead and was even running a brothel. Sure enough, after Cal told Aron the truth, Aron lay about his age to join the army and lost his life in the war. Hearing of Aron's death, Adam suffered from a stroke.

In fact, Cal was partly responsible for Aron's death. He felt very guilty and remorse for it. But luckily, he had the strong support of Abra and Lee. Abra was there for Cal when he felt guilty and depressed, and helps him find a rational way to deal with reality. When he planned to go to the willow tree to hide the truth about Aron's death, Abra convinced Cal to come

home. When Cal struggled with his moral confusion. Lee also gave him a lot of help. He has been guiding him spiritually. He began to think about telling his father the truth, begging his father to forgive him, and also wanting to purchase a bunch of roses to his mom's grave. He understood that he was beginning to think like Aron, demonstrating a progress from "C" to "A" in his internal world. In the end, they manage to help Cal overcome his inner demons. In fact, Cal was born with original sin and is a complex character, both kind and cruel, strong and vulnerable. It was his complex character that made him ethically confused. Thanks to Lee, the kind housekeeper who never gave up on him, Cal was saved.

Their Chinese servant Lee played an important role in Cal's transformation. Lee is Steinbeck's metaphor of morality. As a humble servant, Lee has a basic understanding of what is going on in the family, not only helping Adam get out of Cathy's shadow, but also enlightening Cal on the question of how to fight evil. We can do something wrong, it's in our nature, because we are born with the same scars of sin, and that's what we can't help with. However, you have a decision. It is a strong sentence that Steinbeck needs to pass on to readers through this book.

Through *East of Eden*, we can clearly see the different choices made by three different but vivid characters, and their different lives resulting from the choices. Charles did not fight back against his Guilty Inheritance, so he did not receive true forgiveness from Adam and died alone on his farm. Making use of her Free Will, Cathy fought doggedly and got everything she wants—power and money. Cathy's son—Cal, who struggled between Guilty Inheritance and Free Will, was more fortunate than Charles for he got the help of Abra and Lee. Finally, he bravely faced up to his mistakes and admitted them, freed himself from the struggle and was forgiven by Adam. As human beings, we all inevitably inherit the sin of our ancestors or commit the same sin like our ancestors unpredictably and inevitably. But there is one thing that we can control—ourselves. And we all have our own Free Will. Only by following one's own Free Will and exercising proper control can a person pursue the life he or she wants, not being afraid to confront what he or she has done before, and being able to start over. In this sense, *East of Eden* is of irreplaceable value as a moral guide for saving the lost Americans.

## 5. Steinbeck's Morality Inlaid in the Images

In spite of the three distinct characters, two images have also been used by Steinbeck to further express the theme. In Western literature, it is clearly that most books are in two branches of the classics: the Bible and Greek mythology. The characterization of scriptural allusions can be fundamentally isolated into four sections, in particular, allusions to characters, animals, plants and events. Striking biblical allusions are one of the most impressive features of Steinbeck's works. As a result, many people study the inlaid religious ideas while few try to explore the moral ideas behind. The following discussion aims to analyze the two images in *East of Eden* and explore the author's morality.

### 5.1. The Image of Eden

As mentioned above, the title of *East of Eden*, comes from the Bible. *East of Eden*, the land of Nord, is where Cain lived after killing his brother Abel and being punished by God. But Cain was still protected from harm by God in this land. So we

can say that on the one hand, the east of Eden was a place where God punished his people. It's all about pain. But on the other hand, it's also a place of hope. In this book, Adam decided to build an ideal Eden with his goddess Cathy. At that time, the word Eden was referred for many times. As they were on their way to look for water, Adam told Samuel, his great and warm-hearted neighbor, "Look, Samuel, I'm going to plant a garden on my land. Remember my name is Adam. So far, I haven't had a garden of Eden, let alone been kicked out." (John Steinbeck, 1979:500)

Adam thought he has found his true love and was full of confidence and hope for their future. However, after settling down in their homeland Eden and having their two children born, his wife Cathy shot him and ran away, breaking Adam's Eden for the first time. When Adam met Cathy, he saw only the "beautiful side of Cathy and ignored the evil side of her (Meyer 2000:417) Luckily, with Lee's help, Adam spent a long time healing the scar that Cathy left not only on his shoulder but also in his heart. Then he recovered financially and started to revamp his Eden with his two youngsters. Tragically, he misstepped the same way as his dad - - inclining toward one of his children, Aron, which made Cal's envy and outrage and drove Aron's passing. This marked the second destruction of Eden.

As for Cathy, she also built her own Eden after leaving her husband Adam. She changed her name to Kate, got a job in a brothel, and soon became close to the owner, Faye, who treated her like her own daughter. However, Cathy was never satisfied with others' kindness, so she poisoned Faye and made the brothel her own business. Over the next few years, she used the brothel as a vehicle for her criminal activities to earn whatever she wanted. Unfortunately, she was plagued by illness and eventually committed suicide. Her death was a sign that her Eden was bankrupt.

Eden's two bankruptcies indicate that sometimes our hard work and determination just don't get us to live the life we want, since men are ill-fated to commit errors for our Guilty Inheritance and in this manner we ought to address a cost and pass on East of Eden to be rebuffed. Steinbeck needed to assemble an Eden in his motherland. Back in 1948, the year Steinbeck began writing his book, America was in the process of rebuilding. Americans had just suffered from World War II and did not know how to adjust their moral principles to the new postwar way of life. As a result, they started to lose trust and trust throughout everyday life. Thus, this profound emergency has turned into the most significant issue in the public arena. Simultaneously, there showed up in American writing a gathering known as the Beat Generation, who proclaimed war on traditional values and the oppressive social order and dropped a bomb on American literature and society. Under such harsh conditions, Americans urgently need to find their way and restore order. John Steinbeck realized that people can't start a new life unless they rebuild their moral code. To some extent, East of Eden can strike a chord and raise awareness of the quest to build a common Eden in America. Perhaps this moral capacity makes East of Eden Steinbeck's most forceful work. And that's why Professor Tian Junwu(2011:66-69) from Beihang University applauded Steinbeck as an ethical artist.

## 5.2. The Image of 'Timshel'

It is obvious that all the content of this book revolves around one word from the Bible, and that is 'Timshel'. Author Steinbeck has created a brand new Chinese character, Lee.

Lee is not only intelligent and good with people, but also as familiar with the Bible as Steinbeck himself. In East of Eden, by breaking down various renditions of the Bible, Lee discovered that in the translation process the Hebrew word "Timshel" was incorrectly translated as "Thou shalt", and that signifies "you should" in the King James interpretation, and "Dothou", and that signifies "you should" in the standard American interpretation. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word "Timshel" signifies "Thou mayest", for example "you may". Thanks for that. Cain was given an opportunity to be able to make a way to rule himself even after he had committed a heinous sin. Steinbeck believes that man is the master who should be in charge of his own destiny, a right given to us by God because of the promise of the most primitive of crimes. After Carl told his brother Aaron the truth, he was lost and regretful, and he carried the guilt that this impulse to sin. The guilt, inherited from his mother, is something he is incapable of resisting. But Lee understands Carl's struggle and tells him there is another option that will allow him to figure out this dilemma. The person Carl needed to beg for forgiveness was Carl himself. If he would accept the Lord's idea and give himself a choice, he could start his new life with his Free Will, just like his mother Cathy did. All in all, Timshel allows individuals one more opportunity to dispose of their corrupt legacy and pick Free Will.

The power of the human will is literally strong, and this can be clearly expressed through this book. Although Yahweh turned the east side of Eden into a place of punishment, he used the word 'Timshel' in order to leave the choice in the hands of his people. In this book, Steinbeck does not deny the existence of evil, nor does he construct a dream world for his readers. On the contrary, he boldly asserts that making mistakes is inevitable. But at the same time, he actively finds a way to deal with making mistakes, while also teaching the right way to all his readers.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Major Findings of the Study

This thesis first briefly introduces Steinbeck's works and achievements, briefly reviews the research on Steinbeck and his works, and then introduces the subject of this thesis -- East of Eden, and briefly discusses the feasibility of exploring Steinbeck's moral outlook through this book. In fact, there are few empirical studies on East of Eden, and even fewer from a moral perspective, which provides excellent opportunities for research.

Based on the three characters and two images, this thesis tries to summarize Steinbeck's moral outlook by discussing and analyzing the characters and ending. Steinbeck's work has been so influential that he deserves a Nobel Prize and a Pulitzer Prize. Steinbeck was a good reader of the Bible, and he believed that all men were born with the same blood of sin, and that sin began with the very first act. But he also believed in the power of Free Will. He believed that human Free Will has great power, and it is Free Will that allows people to control their own lives. And he continues to indoctrinate the reader with the importance of Free Will. In addition, "East of Eden" repeatedly mentioned the Garden of Eden, it is not difficult to see that he is very obsessed with a warm and comfortable, kind and simple folk customs, vibrant, vibrant Eden. At the same time, he was keen to advocate the transformation of human beings from evil to good. In Steinbeck's view, god's mills grind slowly but surely, and

between good and evil, the saying "good and evil must, at last, have their reward," always applies. Although life is full of disputes between good and evil and there are always those who throw their weight around, whether it is the material world or the spiritual world, good will triumph over evil.

Steinbeck does not believe that evil is an absolute negative that should be eliminated from human beings altogether. On the contrary, Steinbeck believes that it is the struggle between good and evil that drives the development and progress of human history. For Steinbeck, precisely because good and evil are hard to distinguish, good "needs evil in order to maintain its balance, and vice versa. Moreover, bad people are not always bad people, and they can be redeemed and eventually embraced by good. Steinbeck is like an irreplaceable beacon, guiding people to a bright life, east of Eden is his far-reaching beacon.

## 6.2. Limitations of the Study

Firstly, with the purpose of looking for Steinbeck's morality, this thesis focuses on three characters and two images of East of Eden, which is insufficient. In spite of these three characters from the Trask, there are still many characters, the Hamilton included, who are worthy of exploring. Secondly, this thesis analyzes only two images instead of all the connotative images in East of Eden. Thus, this thesis isn't comprehensive. A study of more characters and images will help to make this thesis more convincing and Steinbeck's ideas closer to its readers.

## 6.3. Suggestions for Further Study

East of Eden is a masterpiece of Steinbeck and it contains almost Steinbeck's everything. Many scholars from different backgrounds and cultures have studied the work from different perspectives. And studies are still developing. However, studies from this aspect are far from sufficient. In future studies, studies on East of Eden from more perspectives are needed and the author believes that, in the future, scholars will conduct more comprehensive and systematic studies of East of Eden and dig out more thought that Steinbeck embodied in the book.

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