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**Degrowth in American Ecofiction:
An Ecocritical Study of Joyce Carol Oates’s *The
Falls*, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and Edward
Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*
—With A Comparison of A Chinese Ecofiction:
Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem***

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

The ideology of development and growth has dominated the world since western societies entered the capitalist age. The imperative of development and growth has become the primary political and economic objective in capitalist and even socialist countries. At the same time, the public debate has been colonized by economism, growthism, productivism, scientism and consumerism. The world has been greatly transformed by the techno-economic activities of human beings. So some critics name the current era econocene or technocene. This kind of techno-economic development has caused serious ecological deterioration and many social problems. As a representation of this social reality, many literary works thematize these transformative activities of nature and ecological deterioration. Ecofiction, as a specific literary genre focuses upon ecological deterioration and social inequalities. It also promotes the politicization of the public debate on development and economic growth and decolonizes economism, productivism, scientism, and consumerism. So degrowth is an important motif of ecofictions. It is of great theoretical and practical significance to explore the degrowth discourses in ecofiction in an era of worldwide ecological deterioration. By using a series of concepts and theoretical hypotheses of degrowth theorists among others such as Giacomo D'Alisa, this dissertation investigates on the degrowth ideas and discourses embodied in three American and one Chinese ecofictions. Four canonized ecofictions have been chosen as research objects: *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) by Edward Abbey, *White Noise* (1986) by Don DeLillo, *The Falls* (2004) by Joyce Carol Oates, and *Wolf Totem* (2008) by Jiang Rong. This dissertation demonstrates that the chosen novels all decolonize the imaginary of development and express negation of developmentalism (growthism), economism, scientism and consumerism, and thus promote the dissemination of degrowth values and contribute to the transition to degrowth society, which is based on environmental political beliefs such as environmentalism and social ecologist values. This exploration mainly adopts environmentalist, Marxist, and social ecologist strategies as well as rhetorical analysis for the interpretation of the selected novels. This dissertation reveals

the critique of economism and development obsession in American ecofictions, the exposure to dehumanizing effects of modern runaway technologies, and the deconstruction of ideology such as anthropocentrism and consumerism of the productivist societies. This dissertation also highlights the worldwide characteristics of these contemporary problems.

Key words: growth, development, degrowth, decolonization, politicization, autonomy, happiness, conviviality, simplicity

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Ecocriticism, as a newly emerging literary research method, has become more and more important in literary interpretation of fictional and non-fictional works (nature writings). At the same time, Ecocriticism has greatly inspired many writers and promoted the evolvement of environmental literature since its emergence, and today it also continues to push forward the evolvement of this genre. This could, in turn, greatly enhance the practitioners' consciousness of the creation of environmental literature. As an important genre among environmental literature, ecofiction is the most prominent voice in conveying ecological concern in several eras, especially nowadays. Many ecofictions have appeared in the past. As degrowth is a significant motif in ecofictions, this dissertation will focus on the degrowth ideas and discourses contained in some contemporary ecofictional canons which typically embodies this theme.

Nowadays, we have entered the era of the Anthropocene. Human activities, especially industrial production and the consumption of industrial products, have greatly changed the ecosystem in the world. Ecological deterioration becomes a worldwide problem faced by every country; among these ecological problems, climate change and environmental pollution including ocean pollution are the prominent ones. Because of these, ecological concern form one of the permanent key issues of every nation that demand close attention in the present world. These call for an expression in our culture and literature, and Ecocriticism was a response to this call. With the emergence of Ecocriticism in international literary scholarship, post-industrialist productivism and consumerism in current world will not be the dominant discourse in the construction of the human future because ecological concern is gradually rooted in public consciousness. In this situation, a critical examination of the ecocritical ideas such as degrowth in literary works will be of both great academic and practical importance. Horace, the ancient Roman poet, has noted the instructional function of

poetry which was a representative of literature in that ancient period: “poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life [...] He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader” (Horace 1942, 479). The instructional function of poetry Horace pinpointed here is, in fact, the practical significance assumed by literary works. To examine the ecological ideas in environmental literature is just to realize the practical function of these works. In our age, Hubert Zapf’s theory of Cultural Ecology also indicates that literature “gains not only a special, irreplaceable status as a distinct form of cultural textuality, but an indispensable relevance for the continuing evolutionary potential of the culture as a whole” (Gersdorf and Mayer 2006, 49). To ecocritically examine the literary canons will contribute to the cultural evolution of our society towards a better future with benign adaptations to the changing social and physical environments. At the same time, since we are facing a critical situation in global ecology and unfortunately we are “in an age of post-democratic de-politicization” (D’Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015, 121), it is very important to politicize ecological discussion, to be more exact here, degrowth discussion in our social life. It is one part of the politicization of degrowth to explore the degrowth representations in ecofictions. To begin the explorations of degrowth ideas in American ecofictions (though there will be an English version (with some changes) of a Chinese ecofiction by Lü Jiamin, it is only an extension to the American ecofictions on the relevant topic), it is essential to give a definition of ecofiction.

1.1 What is ecofiction?

1.1.1 Ecofiction

To begin the dissertation, I refer to Jim Dwyer’s definition of ecofiction. To define ecofiction, Dwyer tries to establish a reference frame. William Howarth’s definition of ecocritic is such a reference for Dwyer’s definition of ecofiction. He has defined an ecocritic in “Some Principles of Ecocriticism,” as the following: [An ecocritic is] a

person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action (Dwyer 2010, 2). This definition calling for activism becomes a useful reference in defining ecofiction. Though most literary texts can be interpreted from an ecocritical point of view, some are more inherently ecocritical than others. In the genre of fiction, one may call this kind of fictions as ecofiction. Referring to this definition of the ecocritic, Dwyer defines ecofiction as “fiction that deals with environmental issues or the relation between humanity and the physical environment, that contrasts traditional and industrial cosmologies, or in which nature or the land has a prominent role” (Dwyer 2010, 2). This definition does not include animal-focused novel. Maybe Dwyer intends to include animals in the realm of “nature”. In a later section, he has listed novels about animals as one kind of ecofiction. Ecofiction sometimes can also be called environmental fiction, green fiction, and nature-oriented fiction. The earliest use of this term appears in the title of John Stadler’s anthology of *Eco-fiction* published in 1978 which contains science fiction and short stories.

Ecofiction is a subgenre composed of many styles including realism, modernism, and postmodernism, and may belong to various genres such as romance or speculative fiction. Speculative fiction may include science fiction and fantasy. Ecofiction is also a subgenre of two kinds of nature writings which are termed “nature oriented literature” and “environmental literature” by Patrick D. Murphy. According to Murphy,

Nature oriented literature is limited to having either nonhuman nature itself as the subject, character, or major component of the setting, or to a text that says something about human-nonhuman interaction, human philosophies about nature, or the possibility of engaging nature by means of or in spite of human culture. (Dwyer 2010, 4)

At the same time, Murphy proposes that environmental literature

does not stop at describing the natural history of the area, but instead, or in addition, discusses the ways in which pollution, urbanization, and other forms of human intervention have altered

the land or environment. It treats human action in defense of, or in behalf of, wild and endangered nature. (2010, 4)

Another subdivision of ecofiction is the differentiation between true and false ecofiction. False ecofictions, like some disaster fictions,

emphasize our separateness from nature, our vulnerability to the great and morally blank forces of the universe [...] False ecofiction is based on the fear that something will go wrong [...] But true ecofiction is based on an integrative view of reality. It is emotionally oriented toward creating a whole world. The true ecofictionist wants to play God. The false ecofictionist wants to play Satan. (Dywer, 2010, 4)

The standard for identifying true or false ecofiction may vary. One's standard of judgement for true or false ecofiction may not necessarily be others'. For example, Patricia Greiner considers that ecofiction like Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is "false" since it rejects traditional power and authority, while other critics widely accept that it is a perfect ecofiction since it aims to promote the environmental preservation. To judge if an ecofiction is "true" one method is to evaluate the author's values about ecological preservation. In other words, the intended effects of the fiction are positive or negative in promoting the ecological awareness.

1.1.2 About American Ecofiction

Since I will explore American ecofiction in this dissertation, I first make a brief introduction to the development and current situation of American ecofiction. It is generally believed that American ecofictions began to appear in the early 20th century. In the early canons, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) is an ecofeminist utopian novel famous for its unique imagination. Upton Beall Sinclair Jr. (1878-1968) was also a master of ecofiction; his series of ecofictions focus on the capitalist industrial evil and are ready for eco-socialist interpretation. Willa Cather's ecofictions focus on the American western frontier life. Nobel Prize winners William Faulkner and John Steinbeck also wrote some ecofictions.

1970s witnessed the real flourishing of ecofiction. Many ecofictions in this period

contribute a lot to the exploration of ecological problems and the increase of public ecological awareness. Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) (to name a few) are famous works. Later, contemporary period, the genre of ecofiction became diversified.

According to Jim Dwyer, the contemporary ecofiction can be categorized into eight major subdivisions: philosophical/spiritual ecofiction, ecofiction about animals, ecofeminist fiction, environmental action/ecodefense fiction, ecofiction about food and drink, ecotopias, contemporary pastoral, cautionary and dystopian fiction. Some of these categories are overlapping and may be grounded under speculative ecofiction. For example, ecotopias, part of cautionary and dystopian fictions, and some ecofeminist fictions may also belong to speculative ecofiction. In fact, this kind of categorization is also applicable to American ecofictions. To focus on the research objects of this dissertation, I just mention a few of them. In this period, Edward Abbey continued his ecodefense motif and wrote a sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* novel, the *Hayduke Lives!* Among contemporary American literary practitioners, Don DeLillo is a prolific writer of a series of ecofictions including *White Noise* and *Underworld*. Another versatile female writer Joyce Carol Oates also wrote a wonderful ecofiction entitled *The Falls*, which is based on a real life event. Since other contemporary ecofictions are not the research objects of this dissertation, I do not introduce them. In the following, I will introduce the theories and interpretative methodology that will be applied in the development of this dissertation.

1.2 Ecocritical theories, degrowth philosophy, and methodology

1.2.1 Ecocriticism

With the industrialization and development of science and technology, humankind owns more and more material means to change and exploit nature. At the same time, the material desires of humankind are growing with each passing day. Humans' remaking of nature expands from a macroscopic field to macroscopic world.

Contemporary technology approaches the limits of nature, and nature is forced to open completely to humankind. The result is that the natural resources are diminishing, and the ecological balance is destroyed, and the environment is polluted. Some ecological problems, such as global warming, desertification of land, energy crisis, began to appear. Under this situation, more and more scholars began to think about the relationship between humanity and nature and the position of human beings in the whole ecological system. In this situation, ecocriticism, as a new method of literary study, develops gradually and is accepted by more and more people.

Ecocriticism is a new subfield of literary and cultural enquiry that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and is devoted to the investigation of relations between literature and the natural world and to the rediscovery and reinterpretation of “nature writings” such as those of H. D. Thoreau and the poets of Romanticism (sometimes categorized as “environmental literature”) in the light of recent ecological concerns. Ecocriticism is not a method of analysis or interpretation but a redefined area of research and rediscovery (Baldick 2001, 101). As Greg Garrard points out, “ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production, from Wordsworth and Thoreau to Disney and BBC nature documentaries. It is inspired by, but also critical of, modern environmental movements” (Garrard 2004, I). Garrard’s definition emphasizes the cultural attribution of Ecocriticism.

Although some ecocritical works such as *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson were published in the 1960s, theorization on ecocriticism started in the next decade. In 1978, the term “ecocriticism” was proposed for the first time by American ecocritic William Rueckert. He encourages a combination of literature and ecology, and stresses that critics must have an ecological view, Rueckert also thinks that literary theorists should construct a system of ecological poetics. But hereafter, this term disappears temporarily. Only in 1989, Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty used the term “Ecological Literary Criticism” and call for applying it to the studies of nature writing in the literary criticism in her conference paper “Toward an Ecological Literary Criticism” (Glotfelty 1989).

Her voice for ecocriticism is echoed immediately by Glen A. Love in his published speech “Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism” (Love 1990). In this paper, Love proposed to focus on environmental degradation and establishing eco-consciousness. He had a great influence on the circle of ecocriticism. In 1991, Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty endeavored to define ecological criticism in her unpublished paper as “Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between the material world and human culture, specifically the cultural artifacts language and literature [...] Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. While in most literary theory ‘the world’ is synonymous with society - the social sphere” (Glotfelty 1992, 196). This may have been the first attempt to define the term “ecocriticism,” and this definition is not rigorous and perfect.

As a new literary critical approach, ecocriticism only began to flourish in the 1990s. In 1990, *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* was published to introduce the nature writing in America and Europe since the 18th century. In October 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded by an intrepid and engaged group of scholars and writers at the WLA Conference in Reno, Nevada. It is aimed at promoting the exchange of ecocritical literary ideas and relevant information, the creation of ecological literature, and the research on ecological literature and interdisciplinary ecocritical studies. ASLE is an international academic organization of ecocriticism. In 1995, the first conference of American ecocritical study which is usually considered by people as the sign of the form of ecocritical trend in literary critical theory was held in Fort Collis, Colorado, and it holds biannual conferences.

In 1993, the first journal of ecocriticism, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* was issued. In 1995, Lawrence Buell, a professor of Harvard University, published his monograph in which he reexamined American literature and American culture and tried to construct ecocentric literary conception, namely emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature. It is praised as the “milestone of ecocriticism.” In 1996, the first collection of papers on ecological literature was published. It is usually recognized as the best choice for preliminary study of ecocriticism. In 2000, Jonathan Bate’s

monograph on ecocriticism *The Song of the Earth* expands the critical vision from romanticism to the whole western literary period, namely from ancient Greece to 20th century. In the new century ecocriticism develops by leaps and bounds. In September, 2002 the British branch of ASLE held the third biannual conference with the theme of “Creation, Culture, and Environment.” The focuses were ecocriticism, ecological poetics, and eco-feminism.

After more than twenty years of development, ecocritics have made many achievements. Some scholars advance “environmental ethics” which studies the moral relationship between humankind and natural environment. Non-anthropocentrism maintains that nonhuman beings such as various animal species, and the ecosystem also have a moral status and humankind has direct obligation to them. Ecofeminism, as a special variety of ecocriticism, explores the relationship between human being’s oppression of nature and patriarchal oppression of women. Albert Schweitzer’s theory of reverence for life and Paul W. Taylor’s biocentrism enlarges the objects of moral care to all living things, and establishes an ethical system with the ultimate moral idea of respecting nature. Their biocentric ethics is a negation of anthropocentrism. J. Baird Callicott’s theory of multicultural environmental ethics, Holmes Rolston’s theory of objective intrinsic value of nonhuman beings, especially the deep ecology advanced by Arne Naess and other critics are all theoretical bases of ecocriticism.

Deep ecology, like Aldo Leopold’s land ethics, is a kind of ecocentric theory. Its philosophical guru is Arne Naess. Naess sets out eight key points of the deep ecology platform in George Sessions’s definitive anthology *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* (1995). The crucial one is that human and non-human lives in the world have independent value (Sessions 1995, 68). According to Greg Garrard, “‘shallow’ approaches take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature” (Garrard 2004, 21). Its theoretical cores are two fundamental principles, namely “Self-realization” and “ecocentric equality.” Self-realization is the realization of every member in the ecosystem instead of only human beings. Ecocentric equality

means that all things in the ecosystem have equal right to survive and develop. In fact, deep ecology is difficult to carry out completely in practice. The intrinsic value of nature is perceived and defined by human beings. In this sense, nature will not be completely equal to human beings. This point will be further explained in later part of anthropocentrism.

The above is the general introduction to ecocriticism. As a newly-emerged literary critical theory with vitality, ecocriticism not only produced ecological ethics theory such as deep ecology, but also provided suitable theoretical soil for degrowth theory.

1.2.2 Degrowth theory

Besides the above-mentioned theoretical trajectory of ecocriticism, there is also another more practical branch of ecocriticism (due to its direct appeal for the transformation of economic policy) named degrowth critical theory. Degrowth is inspired by and originates from environmentalism and ecological critique, and most of its fundamental thoughts comes from ecocritical theories including multiple currents of environmentalism, social and political ecology. The strategies of degrowth such as eco-communities and post-normal science (will be explained later) all aims to preserve ecology and establish social equality. This indicates that degrowth is green in theory and practice. Degrowth, as a research field and a social movement, burgeons from France. Out of political ecological concern, French social philosopher André Gorz began to use the French word “décroissance” which means “degrowth” in English in a public debate in 1972. But it was not fully equal to the current term “degrowth”. In the same year, an Italian academic organization, The Club of Rome, published a report with the title “The Limits to Growth”. This publication brought about more active discussion in French about the term “décroissance”. In the early years of the debates on décroissance and the limits to growth, Gorz’s inspirer Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and the editors of his articles, Jacques Grinevald and Ivo Rens, were influential figures. Some years later the oil crisis passed, and neo-liberalism began to prevail in the world in the 1990s. These, to great extent, extinguished the rising enthusiasm for the debate on degrowth. Nonetheless, French scholars still insisted on continuing this academic

exploration on this topic during the 1990s, which became a transition to the real flourishing of degrowth research and the rise of degrowth social movement in the 21st century. In 1993, Jacques Grinevald was invited to contribute an article with the title of “Georgescu-Roegen: Bioeconomics and Biosphere” which involved the discussion of degrowth to the Lyon magazine *Science*. In 2001, another two Lyon activists, Bruno Clémentin and Vincent Cheynet registered the term “sustainable degrowth” officially for later exclusive academic use. Generally speaking, these above-mentioned degrowth explorations are preliminary and have different focal points compared with today’s degrowth paradigm. To some extent, they are considered as the preparative stages for the later evolution of degrowth scholarship and relevant social movement.

It is not by chance that degrowth philosophy originated from France. In fact, in my opinion, degrowth is based on the modern western philosophical tradition of utopian socialism mainly represented by two French philosophers, Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Charles Fourier (1772-1837), and Welsh philosopher Robert Owen (1771-1958). At the same time, degrowth is also inspired by Karl Marx’ Marxist Communism in terms of its design of future degrowth society. Of course, degrowth philosophy is anti-economism, which is different from Marxism. France is also the birthplace of deconstruction philosophy. Degrowth, in nature, is a deconstruction of the growth economy, politics, and culture.

Current degrowth movement started in 2002 when Miguel Bernard’s magazine *Science* devoted one complete issue to the topic of degrowth. This issue sold well and successfully reawakened the public attention to the topic of degrowth. The academic conference held in Paris in this year witnessed the alliance between the Lyon degrowthists such as Bernard and the post-developmentalists in Paris such as Serge Latouche under the banner of degrowthism. In the same year, the Lyon-based academic organization “Institute for Economic and Social Studies on Sustainable Degrowth” was established, and in 2003, this organization hosted an international symposium on the topic of sustainable degrowth which attracted many European degrowth thinkers including Serge Latouche, Mauro Bonaiuti, Paul Ariès, François Schneider and Pierre

Rabhi. As a social movement with direct appeal to transforming economic policy, degrowth also involved protests for better well-being, communal activities, and the establishment of relevant cooperatives advocated by degrowth intellectuals. These degrowth ideas originated from Lyon and spread to Italy in 2004 and to Spain in 2006 with the same slogan. In France the degrowth movement became more popular under the promotion of social activities and a newspaper founded by degrowth activists. Degrowthier François Schneider's donkey trip through southern France intended to promote degrowth ideas was one of these activities. This trip received great public attention at that time.

François Schneider, together with two other researcher-activists, then established one of the most influential academic organizations dedicated to degrowth research: Research & Degrowth in France in 2007. In the next year, this organization hosted the first international academic conference on degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity in Paris. It was in this conference that the English term “degrowth” was officially accepted and put into academic use. The subsequent several international conferences on degrowth were held in the following venues: Barcelona, Spain in 2010, Montreal in 2012, Venice in 2012, Leipzig in 2014, Budapest in 2016, and Malmö (Sweden) in 2018. Also there were complementary international conferences held in Mexico City and Brussel in 2018 with different themes; they are **The First North-South Conference on Degrowth: Decolonizing the social imaginary** and **Degrowth in the EU Parliament: Post-growth conference to challenge the economic thinking of EU institutions with influent EU policy-makers**. From these past international conferences it can be seen that the degrowth movement has spread to many countries including American countries such as Canada and Mexico from France; it is becoming an international academic research area and social movement. In fact, it has already become a subject in many western universities.

As I have talked about degrowth so much, what does it exactly mean? “Degrowth is a rejection of the illusion of growth and a call to repoliticize the public debate colonized by the idiom of economism. It is a project advocating the democratically-led

shrinking of production and consumption with the aim of achieving social justice and ecological sustainability” (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 1). Degrowth is a philosophical framework inspired by ecological critique combined with a corresponding social movement aiming at socio-economic transformation. From the 1970s to now, degrowth has evolved into a complex system that consists of a series of theoretical claims, concepts, and strategies of action.

Degrowth, as a research area and social movement, has its own theoretical system and discourses and practical strategies. The most direct theoretical origin of degrowth is anti-utilitarianism. According to Onofrio Romano, “anti-utilitarianism is a school of thought that critiques the hegemony of the epistemological postulates of economics in the humanities and social sciences” (2015, 60). One of the degrowth intellectuals, Serge Latouche is an important participant of the anti-utilitarian movement MAUSS – Mouvement anti-utilitariste dans les sciences sociales (Anti-utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences) initiated by the French sociologist, Alain Caillé, and the Swiss anthropologist, Gérald Berthoud in 1981. As an achievement of this movement, Latouche proposed his degrowth theory in which he criticizes the current imaginary and the capitalist ideology of development that pursues unlimited economic growth under the postulation that economic growth is the exclusive origin of well-being and happiness. This theory is anti-utilitarian because it tries to decolonize the capitalist logic of reductionist economism and rediscover the multiple dimensions of social well-being.

Serge Latouche notes that the methodological wisdom originated from decolonizing theory and Cornelius Castoriadis’s imaginary theory (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 190). Based on Castoriadis’s social imaginary theory, Latouche advances that “social reality is the implementation of ‘imaginary significations,’ that is to say representations that mobilize feelings” (2015, 190). In fact, social reality is the implement of imaginary and also social ideology on which an economic or political system is based and countries, nations, or social members base their actions. For example, consumerist ideology is very important in establishing the social reality in capitalist society. Latouche continues to conclude that

If growth and development are beliefs, and therefore imaginary significations like “progress” and all founding categories of the economy, then to get out, to abolish and go beyond them (the famous Hegelian *Aufhebung*), means that the imaginary must be changed. The achievement of a degrowth society therefore in part, means to decolonize our imaginary; to really change the world before the change of the world condemns us. (2015, 190)

This paragraph just illustrates the core methodology of degrowth theorization: degrowth philosophy is to decolonize our imaginary of growth and development.

At the same time, political ecology and anti-capitalism of degrowth also require decolonizing the ideologies which are endowed and fostered by our politics and culture, which will be expounded in the coming part. In this aspect, first and foremost, degrowth is devoted to decolonize the economist ideology which creates necessary conditions for growth and development in our society; it is a “cultural/institutional criticism of the society of growth” (2015, 68). On the issue of development, the current prevailing ideology is that economic development is progress of our society. “The incredible ideological resilience of development is based on the no less astonishing resilience of progress” (2015, 191). To realize degrowth necessarily involves decolonizing the ideology of development hegemony. In fact, nowadays economically advanced countries have entered an age of “critiques of development as a cultural discourse” (2015, 72), and in line with poststructuralism, to question “the core cultural assumptions of development, including growth” (2015, 73) is the most important aspect of the theoretical discourse of degrowth. This degrowth discourse accords with the environmentalist assertion: “the most striking and perhaps unpalatable part of the Green message has been a rejection of both economic growth and growth in human numbers. Greens are opposed to simple notions of ‘progress’ and economic expansion” (Wall 1994, 109). Wall’s words just illustrates the conflation and identity between degrowth and green movement, namely environmentalist movement.

Political ecology, as an important theoretical source for the formulation of degrowth philosophy, also indicates that sociopolitical system is the source of current growth addiction in the fields of production and consumption and the consequential

ecological problems. Political ecology is a field that studies the relation between political economy and ecology, the interaction between the sociopolitical system and environment, and the function of power and political system in the production of commodities, discourses, and socioecologies. One branch of degrowth theory just originated from the socio-ecological movement “l’écologie politique” prevailing in France and Europe from the 1970s in which André Gorz, Ivan Illich and other degrowth intellectuals were participants. In light of political ecology, the current development mode and the corresponding ecological crisis originated from the power operational system, both material and intellectual, naturalized by cultural mystification. Through being internalized into social culture, the political material and ideological system works. This illumination is of epistemological significance since it identifies the ideological roots of the productivist obsession including development ideology, scientism, etc.

Based on political ecology, some degrowthists proposed a politicization of socio-ecological discussion. British scholar Erik Swyngedouw uses the term “the political” to refer to the forum of political democratic discussion of socio-ecological issues. According to Swyngedouw,

‘The political’ is the contested public terrain where different imaginings of possible socio-ecological orders compete over the symbolic and material institutionalization of these visions. Indeed, the terrain of struggle over political-ecological futures – a terrain that makes visible and perceptible the heterogeneous views and desires that cut through the social body – and how to achieve this is precisely what constitutes the terrain of ‘the political’. The political refers, therefore, to a broadly shared public space, an idea of living together, and signals the absence of a foundational or essential point (in nature, the social, science, the cultural, or in political philosophy) on which to base a polity or a society. The political is an immanent domain of agonistic practice. (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 154)

His definition of “the political” indicates that in the current monopoly of growth ideology, one needs an ideological revolution which can disseminate the degrowth values. It is a process of decolonization and politicization, and “the political” just

provides the appropriate environment and social spaces for this politicization.

Degrowth also disapproves of capitalism though it does not challenge it in its present stage. “The consensus among critical scholars is that capitalism is inherently compelled to grow. Continuous self-expansion – ‘accumulation for accumulation’s sake’ – is regarded as a structural feature of capitalism” (2015, 112). In other words, capitalism is a motor of growth which continues to accelerate the social metabolism. On the surface, capitalist expansion is a result of economic policy, but actually it is supported by cultural and political colonization of social ideology. Among the capitalist ideological systems, consumerist culture is a distinct form. For degrowth, another important task parallel to criticizing development and growth is to decolonize the market values, logic, and discourse prevailing in the social domain and get out of the “iron prison of consumerism” (2015, 135); what is needed is a society “in which economic values have ceased to be central (or unique), in which the economy is put back in its place as a mere means for human life and not as its ultimate end, in which one therefore renounces this mad race toward ever increasing consumption” (2015, 191).

As an ecocriticism-inspired philosophy and a socio-ecological movement, degrowth not only questions the cultural mystification of development and growth, but also devotes itself to the elimination of environmental injustice which is the accompanying twin of economic growth. In the ideal of a degrowth society social justice and ecological sustainability are the necessary elements, which is embodied in the definition of degrowth. Environmental justice is an important theoretical discourse of degrowth parallel with the critique of development and growth. “Environmental justice is about the right to remain in one’s place and environment and be protected from uncontrolled investment and growth, pollution, land grabbing, speculation, disinvestment, and decay and abandonment” (2015, 76). In fact, development and economic growth in productivist society, especially in capitalist society is also a process of producing environmental inequalities. Investors, upper class, and their cultural and political alliances who push forward the growth machine benefit from the unrestrained

extraction of resources and economic expansion, while the grassroots bear the environmental degeneration caused by the commodification of commons and suffer the environmental pollutants produced by industrial production and consumption of commodities. So it is inevitable to oppose environmental inequality while opposing development and growth. For degrowthists, to degrow is insufficient in building a society of degrowth, to be equal in the production and distribution is also indispensable.

Besides these theoretical discourses, there are also some basic concepts in the philosophical framework of degrowth that are used to support these discourses. These may include categories of autonomy, happiness, conviviality, commodification, commodity frontier, simplicity, commons, etc. Cornelius Castoriadis defines autonomy as “the ability to give laws and rules to ourselves independently and consciously” (2015, 105). Its antonym is heteronomy which refers to “conditions in which laws and rules are imposed by others (mainly meant as the discourse and the imaginary of the others inside of us)” (2015, 105). Happiness is “a component of subjective well-being and a construct which somewhat overlaps with life-satisfaction, given high correlation levels between reports on life-satisfaction and happiness” (2015, 184). Life satisfaction may come from material and non-material domains. In the following chapters, I will show that economic growth, to great extent, cannot bring about higher level of individual happiness. The term conviviality in degrowth theory is proposed by Ivan Illich. To Illich, “the word ‘conviviality’ does not mean joy or light-heartedness; it refers to a society in which modern tools are used by everyone in an integrated and shared manner, without reliance on a body of specialists who control said instruments” (2015, 138). Illich thinks that in growth industrial society, social institutions exclude individuals from wellbeing. Due to this kind of exclusion, conviviality is proposed as “an alternative to productivity” (2015, 138) valued by growth ideology.

Commodification is a popular economic phenomenon in the present world. “The notion of commodification describes this phenomenon and can be defined as the symbolic, discursive and institutional changes through which a good or service that was not previously meant for sale enters the sphere of money and market exchange” (2015,

123). The relevant concept to commodification in degrowth theory is commodity frontiers which is defined as “the locus where extraction geographically expands, colonizing new land in search for raw materials (oil, minerals, biomass etc.)” (2015, 127). Commodity frontiers is an important indicator of the degree of commodification in a country. It usually extends from physical resources to intangible resources such as science and technology. Simplicity is also an important advocacy of degrowth. In broad terms, voluntary simplicity refers to “a way of life that involves consciously minimizing wasteful and resource-intensive consumption. But it is also about reimagining ‘the good life’ by directing progressively more time and energy toward pursuing non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning” (2015, 211). This kind of lifestyle often points to but is not limited to some traditional preindustrial way of life including nomadic life. The commons is a kind of state or collective ownership and corresponding management method usually connected to socialism and communism rather than capitalism. In degrowth theory,

the commons consists of a vast array of self-provisioning and governance systems that flourish mainly outside of both the market and the State, on the periphery of mainstream politics and economics. While functioning as a social glue and embodying a different logic than that of market fundamentalism, commons are essentially invisible.

In capitalist society, it is, to some extent, difficult for the commons to exist permanently due to the possibility of commodification and privatization. In a socialist society such as China, most social infrastructures and natural resources are commons. This point is embodied in *Wolf Totem*, the Chinese ecofiction.

The discourses around these above-mentioned categories serve as the epistemological support to and proofs of those theoretical propositions of degrowth theory.

As an activist theory, degrowth also involves some strategies for action such as disobedience, post-normal science, cooperatives, and ecocommunities. In these strategies, some have scientific significance and can be used to solve some current

environmental problems such as global warming and nuclear industrial risks. A case in point is post-normal science. Funtowicz and Ravetz defines post-normal science as a new epistemic strategy to deal with the situation “when facts are uncertain, values are in dispute, stakes are high, and decision urgent” (2015, 280). Post-normal science is opposed to normal science such as applied science. It provides us a standpoint to identify the deficiencies of current science and technology. Except for the epistemological usefulness of this strategy, in the present stage, in my opinion, only a few of them are practicable in reality; many of these strategies are impracticable, or even unrealistic, at least presently. So most of them are only of utopian significance. But this does not hamper the overall progressiveness of the degrowth theoretical discourses.

As a distinct discourse of ecocriticism, degrowth theory has already influenced literary production in a subtle way because of the transmission of ecocriticism, on the one hand, and the continuing deterioration of global ecology caused by industrialized economy, on the other. The reality that humanity is facing more and more serious conventional and non-conventional threats arising from various kinds of ecological crisis caused by the obsession with development and growth is, to a great extent, expediting the production of environmentalist literary works as an expression of humanistic concern for socio-ecology. Among these threats, global warming, recent locust plague in Africa and south Asia, quick transmission of virus of bird flu in America, and newly-emerging viruses released by melting glaciers in Tibet are a few cases. At the same time, developmentalist industrial production brings about local environmental pollution and environmental inequalities which evoke social conflicts. The most notorious example is the Love Canal case in America. These events have directly inspired literary practitioners to create fictional works on ecological themes. The USA, as the most developed country in the world, is one of the earliest industrialized countries. It never stopped its economic expansion due to the imperative of development inherent in capitalism. Its economic growth is also a process of the expansion of commodity frontiers accompanied by environmental degradation and

consequent social conflicts. Some of the American ecofictions focus only on these socio-ecological facts and try to deconstruct the cultural myth of development and growth through literary representations of the disasters or social inequalities caused by growth and call for political and cultural resistance to the cult of development and growth. In other words, these ecofictions try to suggest or even advocate an alternative to the growth-laden development formulas, even though some of the authors may not clearly realized this intention.

As this thesis will involve an English version of a Chinese ecofiction published in the US, I need to say something about the transmission of degrowth theory in China. In fact, according to my research, degrowth movement has not exerted any influence on the scholarship in China yet at this stage. But this does not mean there is not any presentation of degrowthism in Chinese ecofiction. Degrowth theory also share some philosophical thoughts with traditional Chinese philosophy such as Taoism. For example, degrowthist advocacy of voluntary simplicity accords with Lao Tzu's philosophical idea. Samuel Alexander argues that Lao Tzu's argument "He who knows he has enough is rich," offers the philosophical support for the degrowthist voluntary simplicity because it means "they who have enough, but who do not know it, are poor" (2015, 211). Moreover, after all, practice always precedes theorization, and theorization comes from accumulated practice. Thus, literary practices breed literary theorization. This is a truth.

1.2.3 Methodology of Interpretation

This thesis will explore the presentation of degrowth values and beliefs in American ecofictions. Latouche notes that degrowth theory derived intellectual inspirations from ecocriticism, social imaginary theory of Cornélius Castoriadis, and the anthropological critique of imperialism (2015, 190). In my opinion, imaginary here is not enough because one needs to extend it to the philosophical realm of "ideology". The fact that degrowth is at odds with capitalism which is established on a series of ideology and power relations is good evidence of this argument. In the three intellectual origins, ecocriticism provides the main theoretical bases for degrowth philosophy, while the

other two are of methodological importance. This point is proved by degrowth's core claim of ecological sustainability and social justice, the demand of social ecology. In this examination, the theoretical discourses and some basic concepts of degrowth theory will be applied. As degrowth derives inspiration from ecocritical theories, the interpretative discourses of this thesis may involve relevant ecocritical theories supportive to my argumentation besides the discourses and concepts unique to degrowth theory at the present stage. This may also be considered as a helpful experiment to perfect the theoretical framework of degrowth as it is still developing. This means I will use multiple interpretive strategies, and the theories involved are various.

Because degrowth strategies and actions involve very complex economic issues that may involve technical explorations, they, to a great extent, are less fit for literary presentation; so few ecofictions touch upon this aspect of the degrowth topic. More commonly most ecofictions try to demonstrate the philosophical discourses of degrowth such as critique of development, growth, and their supporting ideology, namely anthropocentrism, developmentalism (growthism), etc. It is worth mentioning that Marxist criticism, Psychoanalytic criticism, and some rhetorical analyses including narratological and Bakhtinian considerations will be used in the specific elaborations.

1.2.4 Other Relevant Concepts and Theories

1.2.4.1 Two Environmental Ethics: Anthropocentrism, Ecocentrism

“Anthropocentrism is a system of beliefs and practices that favors humans over other organisms” (Garrard 2004, 183). It holds that human beings stand at the center of the biological circle and have intrinsic value; the human being is the origin and yardstick of all kinds of values, the only ethical subject and moral agent; his moral position is superior to other substances. According to this world view only the human being has intrinsic value as a rational subject and other things have only instrumental value instead. Other things are excluded from human ethical consideration and the moral community. Anthropocentrism has a long history in the western world. It can even be argued that the core of western civilization is just anthropocentrism. Christianity, as the

important origin of western civilization, is anthropocentric in essence though some ecophilosophers such as John Passmore considered it “the mild anthropocentrism of the established Christian ‘stewardship’ tradition” (Garrard 2004, 88). As the Holy Bible claims, people are created to master the earth: “And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth” (4). Another anthropocentric origin of western civilization is philosophy. It gives a theoretical basis of the central position of human being. This anthropocentric thought can be traced back to ancient Greece. In the eyes of ancient Greek philosophers the human being is defined as rational existence. The difference between human and animals lies in his reason and human being can get to the essence of the world by his reason. Aristotle not only prescribed the hierarchy and affiliation of creatures in which human beings are placed on the top of the pyramid, but also thought that nature exists for human beings instead of all animals. Anthropocentrism, as “a form of species chauvinism, of privileging humanity in all conflicts of interest with non-human species regardless of how ‘trivial’ these human needs may be” (Humphrey 2002, x) is generally identified as a root cause of ecological crisis and extinction of many species by ecologists.

Different from anthropocentrism, “[a]n ecocentric ethic is grounded in the cosmos. The whole environment, including inanimate elements, rocks, and minerals along with animate plants and animals, is assigned intrinsic value” (Merchant 2005, 75). It enlarges human ethical consideration and the moral community from human being to animals, plants, creatures, earth, rock, and the whole ecological system. It cares for ecological community instead of organic individuals. It emphasizes equality among all things within the ecological system and blames discrimination against non-human creatures and nature.

Ecocritics who hold ecocentric ethics think that everything in nature exists for its own sake. They object to the dominance over nature and advocate coexistence and harmony between human beings and nature. They hold that nature is a living entity with intrinsic value and all objects in nature have their right to exist; nature’s contribution is

a kind of selfless dedication and in return human beings should treat nature respectfully as an equal subject. Aldo Leopold, the ecocritic appeals to humankind to change itself into a common member of the ecosphere and respect other members (Leopold 1949, 204).

Ecocentrism usually serves as the theoretical basis for the preservation of nature in various kinds of green movements. But since it may be attacked as misanthropic and thus is apt to be resisted in the implementation, ecocentrism is usually modified by many of its social and literary practitioners in their green and environmentalist literary practices. So ecocentrism may be to different extents manifested as humanist ecocentrism instead of radical ecocentrism. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is such an example and in the next chapter I will illustrate that though Edward Abbey is an ecocentrist, at the same time, he also argues for the significance of ecological integrity for humanity.

In fact, humanism and ecocentrism are by no means contradictory; on the contrary, they are compatible. Humanism originated from the Renaissance period and its philosophical scope has extended greatly in the time that followed up to the present. Corliss Lamont defines twentieth-century humanism as “a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy” (Lamont 1997, 13). This definition emphasizes humans’ connection with the natural world and is open to a holistic world view, and advocates moderate methods of “reason, science, and democracy” instead of radical reductionist extremism such as anthropocentrism. Lamont contends that in the contemporary era of continuing ecological crisis,

Humanism emphatically rejects, as psychologically naïve and scientifically unsound, the widespread notion that human beings are moved merely by self-interest. It repudiates the constant rationalization of brute egoism into pretentious schemes on behalf of individuals or groups bent on self-aggrandizement. It refuses to accept the reduction of human motivation to economic terms, to sexual terms, to pleasure-seeking terms, or to *any* one limited set of human desires. It insists on the reality of genuine altruism as one of the moving forces in the affairs of human beings. (16)

So, it can be asserted that humanism refuses to exploit and harm nature for the unreasonable benefit of mankind and rejects economic reductionism. This point accords with ecocentric ecological ethics. So in the age of worldwide ecological degradation, one needs to advocate ecocentric and humanist values and abandon anthropocentrism in our social practices. This is the only effective way to alleviate today's worldwide ecological crisis.

1.2.4.2 Developmentalism and Scientism

As I have mentioned above, industrialization, science and technology are the roots of contemporary ecological deterioration. When western societies entered into the capitalistic stage, industrialization was or became an inevitable result for most countries. Industrialization was also an ideal for western countries for a fairly long time in the past two or three centuries, and as it is today for most developing countries. Connected to the pursuit of industrialization supported by modern science and technology, a kind of addiction to limitless economic growth, namely developmentalism, became prevailing in most area of the world. To a great extent, this kind of growth addiction is still dominant in the contemporary era, even in the face of a deepening ecological crisis. Developmentalism generally refers to an activist state engaged in selective industrial policy (Khan 2011, 4). H.L.T. Quan points out that “[a]t the heart of savage developmentalism is structured otherness. By savage developmentalism I am referring to a type of developmentality that centers on expansionism, order, and antidemocracy” (2012, 10). Generally speaking, developmentalism cannot be separated from the values on development and the worship and intoxication of technology. Development often serves as a synonym for progress and a disguise to cover social inequality.

In the contemporary world, “it is almost irresistible to ‘enframe’ or perceive ourselves as subject to technological problems, or waiting for technological solutions to our problems and technological enhancements to our lives. It is as if technology has become the sweeping metaphor of our age” (Robinson 2015, 2). It is not an exaggeration to say that science is unavoidable in our daily life. But it is problematic to

understand science in a scientific way.

Scientism “is to be understood as meaning the belief that science, in the modern sense of that term, and the scientific method as described by modern scientists, afford the only reliable natural means of acquiring such knowledge as may be available about whatever is real” (Wellmuth 1944, 1-2). There are some core features in scientism which include mechanistic metaphysical principles towards the world. The environmental ethics behind mechanistic view is egocentric rather than ecocentric.

Mechanistic science is often dualistic. Philosophers such as René Descartes and scientists such as Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton posited a world of spirit separate from that of matter. Nature, the human body, and animals could all be described, repaired, and controlled, as could the parts of a machine, by a separate human mind acting according to rational laws. Similarly, in the rhetoric of the founders of the American constitution, democratic society is a balance of powers as in a pendulum clock, and government operates as do the well-oiled wheels and gears of a machine controlled by human reason. Mind is separate from and superior to body; human society and culture are separate from and superior to nonhuman nature. Just as mechanistic science gives primacy to the individual parts that make up a corporeal body, so egocentric ethics give primacy to the individual humans who make up the social whole. (Merchant 2005, 70-71)

So, scientism is a reductionist philosophy which takes a hierarchical view upon the relationship between nature and culture. It is one of the metaphysical roots of contemporary ecological problems.

The most obvious detrimental effect of developmentalism and scientism is the continuous ecological degeneration since the industrial revolution. Owing to some malignant environmental pollution which hurt the local residents seriously the public more and more realize the danger of industrial products. Development of ecology also promotes the public ecological consciousness. Consequential “environmental social movement may have dramatically increased the industrial public’s consciousness of the limits of economic growth” (Kassiola 1990, 33). By attacking the industrial and technological sources of the different forms of pollution, the dangers of nuclear

radiation or indicating and protecting the limited quantities of nonrenewable natural resources, animals and plants, “the environmental movement addressed the significance of unlimited economic growth as a foundation of industrial culture, and publicized the many damaging social consequences resulting from this basic industrial value” (1990, 33). Of course, “investigations of limits to growth must consider not only the quality of the biophysical environment, but the comprehensive quality of human life for all members of society” (Sale 1982, 22). The crises in advanced industrial society may include:

Deteriorating cities, megalopolitan sprawls, stifling ghettos, overcrowding, traffic congestion, untreated wastes, smog and soot, budget insolvency, inadequate schools, mounting illiteracy, declining university standards, dehumanizing welfare systems, police brutality, overcrowded hospitals, clogged court calendars, inhuman prisons, racial injustice, sex discrimination, poverty, crime and vandalism, and fear. [...] The growth of loneliness, powerlessness, insecurity, anxiety, anomie, boredom, bewilderment, alienation, rudeness, suicide, mental illness, alcoholism, drug usage, divorce, violence, and sexual dysfunction. (Kassiola 1990, 5)

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the negative effects of developmentalism and scientism not only lie in the biophysical side, but also in the cultural and psychological aspects. The mechanism of formation of the cultural and psychological effects may concern the research of Cultural Ecology.

1.2.4.3 Cultural Ecology and Ecological Justice

Cultural ecology, as a branch of Human Ecology, is “the study of the ways in which culture is used by people to adapt to their environment” (Sutton 2014, 3). Society and human spiritual world are important contents of human culture. Human cultural adaption to their environmental change normally involves social and spiritual adaption. Carolyn Merchant says that “not only do humans transform nature, but nature also transforms humans.” (Merchant 2005, 150). This means that humans and nature are mutually influenced.

In this research, it may also involve the concept of environmental inequality which belongs to the field of social ecology. “Environmental inequity refers to a geographic reality, a pattern in which hazardous waste sites, polluting industries, nuclear waste dumps, and other environmental threats are more likely to be located within or adjacent to communities of color or poor communities.” (Newton 2009, 3). It originates from the social inequality. For social ecologist Murray Bookchin, “social ecology is rooted in the balance of nature, process, diversity, spontaneity, freedom, and wholeness. His ideal society would eliminate all hierarchies in ecology and in society.” (Merchant 2005, 148). A main goal of social ecology is to eliminate dualisms such as dominance and hierarchy. Environmental inequality is one paradigm of the hierarchies.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

1.3.1 The Corpus

Many ecofictions feature ecological degeneration in various ways. Some of them are speculative fictions which may include science fiction and fantasy, some are ecotopias or climate change fictions. The speculative fictions I refer to here include science fiction, eco-utopia, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels, and green fantasy. Jim Dwyer considers that

Speculative fiction is extremely wide ranging and inclusive in presenting a variety of alternatives regarding philosophy and cosmology, political and social organization, applications of technology, environmental thought and practices, the relation between humans and other animals, and the relations between genders, races, and individuals. (Dwyer 2010, 129)

In my opinion, these kinds of ecofictions are not suitable to exemplify degrowthist critique of the developmentalist, growthist, scientific, consumerist fallacies of our age since they are usually set in different socio-ecological tempo-space distant from ours. In these circumstances, it is difficult for them to reflect the real situation of our society

and expose the problems in growth society. Theoretically some of them such as ecotopias can invent an ideal world where some degrowth actions are realized, but unfortunately the degrowth actions usually seem too common and unattractive to be presented in fantasies; so they usually fail to enter these sub-genres. Due to this reason, few fantasies present advocated actions by degrowthists at present. In fact, only those realistic ecofictions are powerful presenters of degrowthist critiques of the development, growth, and the ideology supporting them such as developmentalism, growthism, consumerism, or scientism. Usually set in contemporary socio-ecological space, they directly address degrowth topics such as development, environmental justice, political economy, or cultural discourses. These direct presentations can vividly demonstrate the actual effects of development and economic growth promoted by capitalist ideology, and make the ecological damage suffered by our eco-communities “immediately visible” (Keller 2017, 8). Due to the effectiveness of realistic ecofiction in projecting degrowthist political and philosophical messages, I will exclusively focus on this style of novels. Another principle for the selection of corpus is that I try to choose post-1970 ecofictions. Since real ecocritical canons only appeared in 1960s, generally speaking, post-1970 ecofictions are more influenced by ecocritical currents and thus they are more typical ecofictions with more environmental consciousness. In addition, they are closer to the socio-ecological realities in our contemporary world. So they are more powerful in presenting ecocritical discourses and politicizing environmentalist politics such as degrowth.

According to these principles, I choose three canonized American ecofictions with degrowthist beliefs and discourses for my research. They are *The Falls* (2005) by Joyce Carol Oates, *White Noise* (1986) by Donald Richard Don DeLillo, and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) by Edward Abbey. As growth, development and corresponding ideology are prevailing worldwide and they have been used and misused so far in various economies and cultures, development and growth issue is a global problem; it transgresses national boundaries. In China, the worship of development and other ideologies of productivist obsession are also threatening the local ecology and brings

about many social problems, just like in the rest of the world. Even though China is a socialist country, at present it is still in a productivist stage. At the same time, as a member of the world, it cannot avoid the economic, political, and cultural influences from other advanced capitalist countries which dominate the international discourses. These determines that for a long time China will be as subject to the ideology of productivism as other capitalist countries. In addition, to some extent, socialism is a kind of national capitalism that also requires accumulation and values GDP growth which is considered as development and progress. Based on the consideration above, as a Chinese, I intend to expand the corpus by including a famous Chinese ecofiction, *Wolf Totem* (2004) by Jiang Rong, which was translated by American scholar, Howard Goldblatt, and published in the USA in 2008 for an ecocritical analysis. By this, I want to note the transnational dimensions of the problem that my dissertation addresses, rather than to do a comparative analysis of American and Chinese ecofiction or a cross-cultural extension of the degrowthist exploration of American literature.

The first ecofiction, Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was written in middle 1970s, and *it* truly documents the early westward economic expansion of the United States. The western part was the new territory in America untouched by industrialization early on. This situation was gradually changed when the development cult extended to this virginal world. The development of the southwest part, the hometown of Edward Abbey, was a process of advancing the commodity frontier westward from the east of America. This expansion was accompanied by environmental pollution and thus social conflicts with local people. The monkey wrench gang are the representatives of the local people which resisted the modification of their land. The second ecofiction, DeLillo's *White Noise* was written about a decade later than *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. With the development of its economy, the US entered a postindustrial era. Economic growth more and more turned to rely on technology since the conventional resources for commodification were exhausted. At the same time, some environmental and social problems began to surface. *White Noise* just demonstrates the ecological risks and social sickness which scientific and consumerist

America faces. Similar to *White Noise*, Oates's *The Falls* which was published in 2004 also focuses on the ecological risks and social sickness brought about by the development and progress extolled by American society. But it highlights the evil and cruel side of the growth machine which promotes and supports the development at the price of environmental pollution, social darkness, and spiritual deterioration.

Different from the above three ecofictions, the fourth novel, *Wolf Totem*, published in 2008, reflects the utilitarian worship of development happening on Inner Mongolia grassland in north China which can be considered as an epitome of the development progress of the whole country. This ecofiction spans more than forty years, ranging from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 2000s. In fact, the economic development on the pastureland is a process of commodifying the grassland on which the herdsmen live. This is also a process full of conflict between the local herdsmen and the outsiders supported by the development-worshipping authority; of course, it is also a process of environmental injustice, to some extent. This development ended up with the complete destruction of the ecosystem of Inner Mongolia grassland and the oblivion of the nomadic culture in 2000s. Generally speaking, this is a story about the productivist obsession and its destructive consequence. It serves as an extension of the three American works to show the universal critique of development and its supporting ideology in the world.

According to my research, the exploration of the representations of degrowth philosophy in American ecofictions is a completely new topic in literary criticism. This determines that there is no existing paradigm to follow in this area. On the one hand, it also follows that this thesis will only be a starting point in this research instead of a final culmination because of the complexity of the degrowth topic and the evolvement potential, on the other hand. At the same time, due to the schedule of this research, I can only choose these four ecofictions relatively more appropriate for this topic as the corpus for this research. So this does not mean an exhaustive conclusion in the topic; in other words, this is only a pioneering work calling for more creative follow-ups. There is an idiom in China: to throw away a brick in order to get a gem.

1.3.2 Outline of Chapters

Before proceeding to the next chapter, I intend to introduce the structure of the remaining part of my dissertation.

Chapter 2, “Edward Abbey’s Degrowth Discourse and Strategy in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: Critique of Development, Ecocentrism, and Ecodefense” will introduce and analyse Edward Abbey’s masterpiece *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Edward Abbey is famous for his calling for ecodefense, and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is a literary exemplar of his degrowth discourse. After the introduction I will expound his critique of development, commodification, and developmentalism with instances of textual evidence from *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and other relevant works or literature. Then in the third part, I will elaborate on Abbey’s decolonization of anthropocentrism with his ecocentric claim of the intrinsic value of nature. The fourth part will discuss Abbey’s advocacy of Ecodefense and Ecosabotage in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in order to resist the commodification and economic development. This chapter ends with a conclusion.

In Chapter 3 I will explore the politicization of modern technology and decolonization of consumerism in Don DeLillo’s toxic novel *White Noise*. First comes the introduction to DeLillo and his famous novel featuring daily wave radioactive pollution and an ecological crisis: an airborne toxic event. In *White Noise* it is a capitalocenic world where one can find runaway modern technology and their products, for example, television, radio, microwaves, computer, camera, refrigerator, etc. The technology of mass media is permeating in daily life and brings about wave pollution. The Dylar is a kind of high-tech-based medicine with exquisite design and workmanship. But it turns out to be an unlicensed hazardous medicine. The chemical waste, Nyodene Derivative, spilled in the airborne toxic event is also a byproduct of pesticide chemistry, a kind of modern chemical industry. The runaway modern technology is the root of ecological deterioration and crisis. The television and radio bring about wave and radiation. The airborne toxin of chemical waste causes an ecological crisis threatening human health, life and wealth, regardless of lower class or

higher class. The use of microorganism to eradicate the toxic cloud is another high-tech attempt without knowing its consequence to the environment. In such a polluted environment, individuals usually have low happiness.

Besides the environmental degeneration caused by modern science and technology, there are also other dehumanizing effects of the runaway technology. Modern technology may cause individuals to lose autonomy. People living in postmodern period suffer a lot from psychological problems such as crisis of belief and distrust to families, human alienation, fear of death, technological fetishism, and incompetent behaviors. Consumerism presented in this novel also causes heteronomy and commodity fetishism. Last but not least, I will give a conclusion to this chapter.

Chapter 4 will take a close look at Joyce Carol Oates's ecofiction: *The Falls*. The first part will be an introduction to Oates (1938—) and her ecofiction, *The Falls*. In this novel, Oates interweaves the fictional story with the real-life environmental scandal occurring in the US, mercilessly exposing the ecological crisis and other problems resulted from economic development. By this she expresses her critique to the economic development in American society and thus decolonizes the imaginary of development. The first part of my exploration focuses on Oates' disclosure of the physical harm caused by the economic development in *The Falls*. Economic development destroys the local ecology and causes most local people's health to be impacted or damaged. The second section explores the social and political problems accompanying the economic development in the Niagara Falls area. In capitalist society development is a process of producing inequalities and political and judicial injustices. The third part examines the negative effects of economic development on the individuals in *The Falls*. The characters in the novel usually suffer from psychological problems and live without happiness, autonomy and conviviality. The last section is a conclusion.

Chapter 5, "Politicization of Economism in Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*: the Expenses of Development in Inner Mongolian Grassland" will explore the English version of Chinese writer Jiang Rong's ecofiction *Wolf Totem* which was translated by American

sinologue Howard Goldblatt. The first part is an introduction to Jiang Rong (author), Howard Goldblatt (translator), and the *Wolf Totem*. The second part will enumerate the economic exploitation based on homocentrism and egocentrism in *Wolf Totem*: homocentric (or anthropocentric) over-farming, and blind mechanization on Inner Mongolia grassland, overhunting of wolves including wolflings and marmots, and consequential egocentric despoiling of nature: hunting swan and wild geese and ducks. The third part will focus on the aftermath of the humans' despoiling of the grassland: wolf's attack on the herd of warhorse and livestock, mice and rabbit disaster caused by wolf reduction and extinction, human spiritual decadence and other spiritual morbidity caused by wolf extinction, desertification by farming and grassland regression, drying-up of thousand-year-old river, sandstorm in Beijing, and the most important: extinction of the nomadic herding society in Inner Mongolia. The fourth section is the holistic idea in *Wolf Totem* expressed through Chen Zhen, Bilgee, and Uljii. The fifth section will elaborate on the degrowthist actions of Bilgee and Chen Zhen including their protection for the wolves on the grassland against corporate hunting, Bilgee's endeavor to protect the grassland from over-grazing and over-farming, and Yang Ke's attempt to protect swan from being overhunted. The last part will be a conclusion.

In the conclusion part, Chapter 6, I will give a summary to all the degrowth discourses embodied in above-mentioned works, and compare their rhetoric features in conveying these discourses. I will also discuss the necessary premise of the degrowth enterprise and the effective strategies and approaches.

Chapter 2.

Edward Abbey's Degrowth Discourse and Strategy of Monkeywrenchings in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: Critique of Development, Ecocentrism, and Ecodefense

2.1 Introduction to Edward Abbey and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Edward Abbey (January 29, 1927 — March 14, 1989) is an American writer famous for his radical environmentalism. He was born in Indiana, Pennsylvania and spent most of his time in southwest America. Due to their poverty and the Great Depression, his family moved frequently in his early childhood; only at the age of nine, they began to settle down in Home, a town full of primitive natural charm. It is this period of life that fostered Abbey's love and reverence for nature and the wilderness. Unfortunately, several years later, Home was exploited with economic development, and the forest was razed to the ground and the clear stream turned into yellow liquid with poisonous bubbles. This made Abbey distressed and disgusted and laid the groundwork for his future objection to development ideology and his support for ecodefence. In 1951 and 1956, Abbey obtained a B.A. and a M.A. at the University of New Mexico. During his life, he finished writing twenty-seven works including several environmentalist fictional and nonfictional works. *Desert Solitaire* (1968) is his most famous nonfictional nature writing work which is an autobiographical account of his own life experience as a park ranger and conservationist at Utah's Arches National Monument. His novels need to be mentioned are *The Brave Cowboy* (1958), *Black Sun* (1971), *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and its sequel *Hayduke Lives!* (1990). Significantly, these novels all have environmentalist themes and can be called ecofictions.

The Monkey Wrench Gang is the most famous one in Abbey's ecofictions. It was written thirteen years after the Glen Canyon Dam which was an important infrastructure in the southwest part of the US was built. When published in 1975, it evoked strong

response in the American society, and won remarkable status for Abbey in American literary history due to its unique expression of the environmentalist theme. It is an ode to the ecological defenders. Through this novel, Abbey activated and popularized the strategy of “monkey wrench” against the economic exploitative activities though it was not his invention. To some extent, it is unique in all the ecofictions owing to its special theme and plot: there is no precedent and successor works representing monkey wrench except its sequel *Hayduke Lives!*. Because of this, it is controversial in its interpretation in critical circles. As Jim Dwyer points out, “*The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) was praised as a literary masterpiece by some and castigated as a mere comic book by others, but it is neither. It is a compelling adventure story that, like Abbey’s subsequent fiction, requires some suspension of disbelief” (2010, 50). This comment reflects the diversity of interpretations of this novel. Although environmentalism is the consistent thread in Abbey’s series of works, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and its sequel *Hayduke Lives* are most radical in the assertion and promotion of environmentalism since they openly advocate semi-violent resistance (with weapons) to official-endorsed economic development activities.

The novel opens with the official opening ceremony of the Glen Canyon Bridge which was built in recent years. The people and governors of the two adjacent states are immersed in their happiness of the successful conquest of the nature, and they are waiting for the opening ceremony of the bridge. In fact, “the bridge has already known heavy commercial use for six months” (Abbey 1975, 1). The officials and the onlookers think that this bridge is a significant achievement in promoting the development of the local economy, and the governors want to boast of the great bridge as an achievement of the economic development. Just after the Governors cut the barrier ribbon and the firecrackers were ignited, the bridge is exploded from the middle. It was carried out by a group of environmentalist activists named the Monkey Wrench Gang who have done various kinds of monkeywrenchings so as to protect the wilderness of American Southwest from economic exploitation. The members of the Monkey Wrench Gang are Doc Sarvis, Bonnie Abbzug, George Washington Hayduke, and Seldom Seen Smith,

and their ecosabotage activities include roadside billboard burning, removing survey stakes, destroying construction machinery, burning cattle guards, tearing geophones out of the ground, damaging unmanned drilling rigs, tree spiking, blowing up the railroad for transporting coal to the power plant, cutting power lines, ruining high-voltage transformers, and the most daring project — exploding the Glen Canyon Bridge. Besides the four of them, there are also other anonymous ecological warriors such as the group Hayduke meets at night when he destroys the bulldozer of the lumber plantation in Chapter nineteen. In the denouement, the anonymous one-eyed ecological saboteur with a bandanna mask visits Doctor Sarvis with Hayduke at the Doctor's houseboat. The popular existence of ecological fighters in this novel seems to suggest that environmental integrity and originality of the western land is the American southwest local people's common concern in the American southwest. But just like other ecofiction such as *The Falls* and *White Noise*, the developmentalist adversary is a stronger existence in this novel, as a dominant ideology and social institutional force. The representatives of the development force in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are Bishop Love, Sam Love, their Search and Rescue Team, and the local governments. What they pursue is the so-called economic development in the American southwest and material profits. To realize this development and economic growth they spare no expense of nature and environment such as despoiling the land, contaminating the air, and desecrating nature. In the struggles of the Monkey Wrench Gang against the development policy of the local government, the Gang are the disadvantaged side. During their damaging the Glen Canyon Bridge, they are detected by the Search and Rescue Team of Bishop Love. Then the Love brothers begin to chase them, and later police join the chase. In their way to escape to the Maze, Doctor Sarvis and Abzzug are trapped by Sam Love, and Seldom Seen Smith is caught by the National Park Service rangers due to his theft of some women's food. The backbone of the Gang, Hayduke, is found by the police when he tries to get food from the hidden cache near the police camp. He escapes to the edge of a canyon and hides in a deep crack in the rimrock. In his fight with the police he is believed to be shot into pieces and falls into the deep

canyon. But it is proved later that he survives the gun battle. Doctor Sarvis, Abzzug, and Smith are brought to trial and sentenced to six-month confinement in the San Juan County Jail and four and a half years' probation. During their trial, Doc Sarvis and Abzzug are married, and later they live in a newly-bought houseboat moored beside Smith's ranch. One consequence of this conviction is that Seldom Seen is divorced from his first and second wife, only Susan remaining loyal. One night in their second year of probation, the Sarvis couple, the Smith couple, and their communal probation officer, Greenspan are playing poker, and a stranger wearing a bandanna mask visits Doc Sarvis and leads him to a friend of his. Doc Sarvis immediately recognizes him as Hayduke. Hayduke tells him that he made a scarecrow which was shot into pieces in that gun battle and now he has a new identity and a new job as a night watchman.

Not only because of its radical environmentalist philosophy, but also because of its skillful characterization and vivid description of the natural scenery of the American Southwest, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* has become an attractive literary work. Since its publication, many critics have commented on this novel. David Thomas Sumner focuses on the ethical imperative presented in this novel and another monkey-wrenching novel *Hayduke Lives!* In his paper "The Limits of Violence: People and Property in Edward Abbey's 'Monkeywrenching' Novels," he proposes that "*The Monkey Wrench Gang*, while advocating the destruction of property in defense of wilderness, draws a clear ethical line between people and property" (2013, 167). This means that the ecodefense activities only aim at property, excluding people. He also thinks that "in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey uses this tension — the tension between destroying property and hurting living things — to move the plot forward" (2013, 169). Abbey carefully keeps the line between damaging property for promoting economic growth and hurting people in every sabotage activity while establishing suspense in the process of the narrative. In some sabotage activities, it seems that human injury or death will be inevitable, but it turns out to be an unnecessary worry. The derauling of the automated coal train is one of them. It may not be an intended murder, but it most probably causes human injury or even death. But at the critical point of the

explosion, Abzzug delays her ignition of the explosive, and the young engineer aboard escapes unhurt. Sumner points out that Abbey's ethical imperative in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* only becomes explicit in the last chase. Doctor and Abzzug give up their approaching escape in order to save Bishop Love's life though he is the hostile side, and Smith is arrested during his escape. The most uncertain factor, Hayduke, who is armed with weapons does not hurt any chasers though he shoots the helicopter. The ethical imperative of Abbey turns out to be a strict distinction between properties and human beings as the target of ecosabotage: only destruction of properties without hurting people in monkeywreching. While Sumner focuses on Abbey's ethical imperative in the ecosabotage activities, other scholars usually pay much attention to the environmental dilemma and the institutional power behind the exploitative economic activities.

John Opie illustrates the modern environmental dilemma in this novel with the histories of two Greek mythic heroes, King Agamemnon and Odysseus. They all returned home after the Trojan Wars as conquerors, but they had different attitudes to their triumphs. Agamemnon was arrogant and acted as a conquering master, showing off his feats and trophy when entering the city. This made his wife Clytemnestra feel totally justified in carrying out her original plan of murdering monstrous Agamemnon. "It was Agamemnon's hubris that put him and all his powers at mortal risk" (Opie 1988, i). In contrast, Odysseus practiced civility to regain his wife and throne when he returned to his kingdom. "Civility meant the discovery and proper use of the rules of hospitality, decency, and respect for others" (1988, ii). Opie then applies these mythic allusions to modern ecological consideration:

In environmental terms, hubris involves the unthinking use of humanity's irresistible power over nature, irresponsible even in human terms. Environmental civility involves the capacity to learn the rules of nature's community in which humanity lives, and judiciously to exercise overweening power for the good of both the community and humanity. (1988, ii)

He points out that in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey realizes human beings

subconsciously act Agamemnon to nature instead of Odysseus, and “Abbey’s tragedy was that he recognized in himself, and in Everyman, hubris where civility should have been” (1988, ii). In fact, Opie fails to identify the anthropocentrism and consequential developmentalism in the authority and most of the upper class.

In his review of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Thomas J. Lyon contends that the theme of the novel is “allegiance to the earth” (Lyon 1976, 335). Abbey here dramatizes his beliefs fearlessly with pleasant plot. On the one hand, Lyon focuses on the power of opponent of the monkey-wrench gang. He classifies the Love brothers and their team as power-desired or only profit-desired would-be politicians who are selling out their home country and pilloried by Abbey. On the other hand, he also recognizes the institutional power behind the ecological-shortsighted activities: “Behind them, more sensed than described, are the vast impersonal forces of electricity, and generalized greed, the powers of the time, which decree the dams, roads, strip mines, and transmission lines, burying the free wilderness” (1976, 336). Like John Opie, he also fails to theorize these “generalized greed” and “the powers of the time”; in fact, these “generalized greed” and “the powers of the time” refer to the dominant ideologies in American society such as industrialism and other cultural forces that justify development. Lyon also perceives the ironies in Abbey’s narrative: the monkey wrench gang use and enjoy modern technological products such as jeep, explosive, and thermite, and Hayduke habitually throws beer cans out on the roadside. Moreover, Abbey pays much attention to these ironical aspects. To some extent, the design of Hayduke’s cynicism demonstrates his awareness of the deep-rootedness of the development values and Abbey’s sense of helplessness in changing the development culture in the social system.

2.2 Edward Abbey's Critique of Development

2.2.1 Abbey's Anti-development Morality in the Novel

As I have elaborated in the Introduction part, development is considered as the necessary and good thing in most countries including the United States; development is equal to progress. This is the mainstream ideology in the contemporary world. In the consciousness of most people, development is economic growth which brings about wealth accumulation, more job opportunities, and more social well-being, and thus more happiness to individuals. So one needs to promote economic growth and develop continuously and rapidly. To think critically, this is a utilitarian proposition since it evaluates things in terms of its economic usefulness. In modern society like Abbey's age, to develop is to promote the growth of the GDP with industrial production. The pursuit of industrial productivity may lead to an radical economic policy. Usually this radical economic state is called developmentalism. As Shahrukh Rafi Khan defined, developmentalism generally refers to an activist state engaged in selective industrial policy (Khan and Christiansen 2011, 4). In this state, all the considerations of the national policy focus on utilities, or economic outcomes. The central pursuit of the society colonized by the dominant ideology promoted by the capitalist government, is economic growth, the increase of GDP as a symbol of social progress. In philosophy, this development model is utilitarian insofar as it reduces the goals of human life: pleasure, interest, duty, and dissipative liberation from all aims into only interest (D'Alisa, Damaria, and Kallis 2015, 62). As economic interest becomes the only consideration of social progress, the negative sides of development are grossly overlooked. This kind of development is inevitably based on some sacrifices: "the daily worldwide death toll as a result of malnutrition, disease, state-organized violence, and environmental degradation are, by and large, displaced by stories about technological and financial innovations, and other fantastic tales of modern progress" (Quan 2012, 10). In these sacrifices, environmental degradation is the greatest harm to the world since it is a permanent damage to the whole ecosphere, not only nature, but human

beings as well.

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey expresses his critique of economic development and his social values such as humanist ecocentrism through his presence in the story narration, description, characterization, and dialogues. Through an external focalization and third person narration, Abbey describes the industrial economic activities for development, namely the commodification of the lands of southwest America. These economic activities include building reservoirs, military industrial bases, infrastructures such as bridges, mining, etc.; the development activities signifies an expansion of commodity frontiers from eastern America to western and southwestern US. These economic activities usually bring about land pollution, deforestation, hydrogeological destruction, just to name a few. The local people witness and experience the change and pollution of their hometown and the loss of local culture. To protect their land they begin to resist the commodifying activities. Thus, there will be social conflicts between the investors, their political and cultural coalitions and the local people. In the novel, the monkey wrench gang and other anonymous monkey-wrenchers are the representatives of the local people of the American southwest.

At the beginning of the novel, Abbey gives a vivid description of the development-worshipping state of the authority represented by the Governor through his speech on the ceremony of the official opening of the Glen Canyon Bridge between the two southwest states:

this proud state of Utah [bleeeeeeeep!] glad to have this opportunity [ronk!] take part in opening of this magnificent bridge [bleeeeeeeet!] joining us to great state of Arizona, fastest growing [yiiiiiiinnnnnnnnng!] to help promote and assure continued growth and economic [rawk! yawk! yiiiinnng! niiinnnnnnng!] could give me more pleasure, Governor, than this significant occasion [rawnk!] of our two states [blank!] by that great dam.
(Abbey 1975, 2)

It is worth noting that there is strong satirization and detestation in the description of the technical details and the delivering of the Governor's speech, which shows Abbey's strong disapproval and confrontation to the development-worshipping ideology

exuberating in the Governor's speech. The loudspeakers look ugly and the voices sound so bizarre as aliens due to the technical failure: "There seem to be spooks in the circuitry. The loudspeakers, black as charcoal, flaring from mounts on the gooseneck lampposts thirty feet above the roadway, are bellowing like Martians. A hash of sense, the squeak and gibber of technetronic poltergeists, strangled phrase and fibrillated paragraph, boom forth with the hollow roar, [...]" (1975, 2). At the same time, he emphasizes the futility of the speech since to the audiences on the spot there is "hardly a word intelligible" (1975, 2). In this description, Abbey shows strong negation towards the official fascination of technological progress and economic growth. The pursuit of "fastest growing" and magnificent infrastructure is the salient feature of development worship, or we call it growth addiction.

Then the bridge is parted from the middle by the explosion carried out by the monkeywrenchers. Different from the negative depiction of the opening speech, the delineation of the explosion and destruction of the canyon bridge is more neutral and non-derogatory.

The bridge was gone. The wrinkled fragments at either end still clinging to their foundations in the bedrock dangled toward each other like pendant fingers, suggesting the thought but lacking the will to touch. As the compact plume of dust resulting from the catastrophe expanded upward over the rimrock, slabs of asphalt and cement and shreds and shards of steel and rebar continued to fall, in contrary motion from the sky, splashing seven hundred feet below into the stained but unhurried river. (75, 5-6)

This delineation, compared with the derogatory depiction of the Governor's speech, forms an implicit approval for the monkeywrenching activity.

In the following, there is a calmer, and to some extent, symbolic description of a vulture in the high sky and the general scene overlooked by it.

[...] up in the sky, the lone visible vulture spirals in lazy circles higher and higher, contemplating the peaceful scene below. He looks down on the perfect dam. He sees downstream from the dam the living river and above it the blue impoundment, that placid reservoir where, like waterbugs, the cabin cruisers play. [...] He

notes in passing the dark gorge of the master canyon, the shattered stubs of a bridge, the tall yellow pillar of smoke and dust still rising, slowly, from the depths of the chasm. (1975, 6)

This forms a cosmic view. It is worth noting that the image of the vulture appears repeatedly in the novel. For example, in chapter 28, the vulture appears again when the Love brothers' rescue team chase the four Gang members. "This vulture soars above the Fins, the Land of Standing Rocks. Soaring is the vulture's life, death his dinner" (1975, 325). This repeated appearance endows the vulture with a symbolic meaning—a mysterious and deified natural being, and "the passionless gaze of the cosmos" (Slovic 1993, 60). Abbey's authorial comment proves this symbolic meaning of the vulture; he calls it "[b]ird of the sun," "[t]he contemplator," and "[t]he only known philosophizing bird" (Abbey 1975, 325). In this sense, the vulture is a representative of the cosmic force that witnesses the conflicts between the pro-environment gangs and the pro-development authority. The function of the vulture in the novel is similar to the one of the gigantic blue eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg over the ashheaps, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which serves as the eyes of the God regarding the dark side of human nature in the USA in that era.

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Several members of the Monkey Wrench Gang are reliable characters. Reliable characters are those whom the readers can suppose to take as authorities. The reliable characters convey the author's voice and values, and they are usually the key elements to present the motifs of fictional works. Wayne C. Booth contends that "The author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability" (Booth 1983, 18). Abbey just presents his degrowth values and condemnation of economic development through the description of the inside views, speeches, and actions of the focalized, these gang members including Seldom Seen Smith and Doc Sarvis.

Dominated by this developmentalist ideology, the authority continuously promotes the industrial and infrastructural construction and urbanization in southwest America, which is a process of commodifying the land of the southwest states. When Seldom Smith and his friend drive between Kanab, Utah, and Page, Arizona, they pass

Glen Canyon City which is, in fact, “one ramshackle assemblage of tar paper shacks and cinder-block containers” (1975, 30) at present. But in the future, “it may become, as its founders hope and its inhabitants dream, a hive of industry and avarice [...]” (1975, 30), and in the planning “Fourty Million \$Dollar Power Plant To Be Built Twelve Miles From Here Soon” (1975, 30). To promote economic growth, many canyons and some remnants of the ancient age — “the strange great amphitheaters called Music Temple and Cathedral in the Desert” (1975, 31) are walled in by bare rock to form a reservoir. All these things were once very familiar to Seldom Smith, and now they are all laying under the dead water of the reservoir named the blue death by Smith, buried by the descending silt and slowly disappearing. For the blue death, like Hayduke Smith’s heart “was full of a healthy hatred” (1975, 31). Through the inside views of Smith, Abbey expresses his detestation to and hatred for the commodification of these commons by the so-called social elites including the Love brothers and the local government.

Growing up in the southwest US, Seldom Seen Smith loves the pristine, non-commodified land of his hometown; though not much educated, he can see much clearly the greed for profit of the social elites such as the Love brothers and the officials of the local government who are obsessed with development and economic growth. Having witnessed much unscrupulous exploitation of the coals, minerals and other natural resources, he is full of hatred to the economic-growth-addicted authority. Indignantly he curses their profit-thirstiness in commodifying the commons of local people: “I mean those people like Love and the Governor got no conscience. They’d sell their own mothers to Exxon and Peabody Coal if they thought there was money in it; have the old ladies rendered down for the oil. Them’s the kind of folks we got runnin’ this state, honey: Christians; my kind of folks” (1975, 329).

Abbey also shows his condemnation to the developmentalist authority through another character, Doc Sarvis who is going for a boat trip down the river with his office clerk, Bonnie Abzug. As usual, they do their highway beautification job — destroying the advertisement boards on the roadsides — as they drive along the highway. In fact, eliminating the advertisement from public spaces is an initiative of degrowth aimed at

lowering materialist impact on individuals and thus improving individual well-being and happiness. In this sense, the advertisement boards are stimulants to consumerism which promotes consumption, production, and social metabolism, and they actually function as the boosters of economic growth. To destroy them is to decolonize the growth imperative permeating the public life. At the same time, the doctor is talking about the exploitative activities happening in the southwest with Abzug:

[...] Did you know that a consortium of power companies and government agencies are conspiring to open more strip mines and build even more coal-burning power plants in the same four-corners area where all that filth is coming from now? Together with more roads, power lines, railways and pipelines? All in what was once semi-virginal wilderness and still is the most spectacular landscape in the forty-eight contiguous bloody states? [...]

Did you know that other power companies and the same government agencies are planning even bigger things for the Wyoming-Montana area? Strip mines bigger than any that have devastated Appalachia? Have you thought about the nukes? Breeder reactors? Strontium, plutonium? Did you know that the oil companies are preparing to disembowel vast areas of Utah and Colorado to recover the oil in oil shale? Are you aware of what the big logging companies are doing to our national forests? Of what the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation are doing to our streams and rivers? The rangers and game managers to our wildlife? Do you realize what the land developers are doing to what's left of our open spaces? Do you know that Albuquerque-Santa Fe-Taos will soon become one big strip city? The same for Tucson-Phoenix? Seattle to Portland? San Diego to Santa Barbara? Miami to Saint Augustine? Baltimore to Boston? Fort Worth to --
(1975, 49-50)

Doc Sarvis, with a heavy heart and a tone of deep concern, expresses his worry about the exploitative economic activities raging in the southwest states. These expansive extraction of coal, minerals, and oil, logging and water exploitation, in essence, are the indicators of the increasing social metabolism, the moving of the commodity frontiers, and the growth drive inherent in the capitalist social system of the United States. These extractive activities are accompanied with massive construction of infrastructures like road, railway, and pipelines which facilitate the input of the extracted raw materials into

the industrial production. All these activities serve the imperative of development on the macro-economic level. On the micro-economic level, these exploitative economic activities are all pushed to make profits for the capitalist groups, on the one hand, and deprive the local people of commons, cultural identity, and even home.

Doc Sarvis's long speech, with a fluency and the various technical terms, show us what are happening exactly in southwest America in the pursuit of economic growth pushed by the local government and the elite group. His long speech just shows the essence of economic development and the long-term consequence of this kind of development. In this circumstance, the local people will soon suffer ecological and cultural losses caused by the expansion of commodity frontiers. The final consequences of development activities will be undermining the hydro-geological structures of this territory, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and reduced ability of self-regulation of the local ecosystem. The worse thing is that the local people have to lead a different life so as to adapt to these environmental changes. But obviously, blinded by the fascination of economic growth and tempted by the prospect of economic interest, the authority fails to realize these ecological and social problems, or even tries to deliberately ignore these potential ecological and social risks.

As an educated intellectual, Doc Sarvis is more ecologically conscious and is able to comprehend the harm of present economic expansion. So Abbey chooses him as the character to address the development addiction and industrialism in the dominant ideology of American society. The four members of the later Monkey Wrench Gang meet for the first time in Chapter Five and begin their boat trip down the river. Doc Sarvis uses several vivid metaphors and a simile to expound his views on the present economic policy of the government to the other three gang members; it can be perceived that in his words there are some philosophical properties.

“We are caught,” continued the good doctor, “in the iron treads of a technological juggernaut. A mindless machine. With a breeder reactor for a heart.”

[...]

“A planetary industrialism”-- the doctor ranted on -- “growing like a cancer. Growth for the sake of growth. Power for the sake of

power...” (1975, 61)

The words show the doctor’s accurate insight into the growthism of the present economic activities; his remarks exactly hit the point: the illusion of growth, namely that the economic growth itself rather than the ecological integrity serves as the ultimate purpose of human life; this is the typical tenet of the development-worship ideology. To achieve economic growth as effectively as possible, the developmentalist government is obsessed with technological and industrial progress which turns out to accelerate the environmental deterioration in southwest America.

After reaching an agreement, the four of them prepare to begin their first monkey-wrench activity at Comb Wash. On their way south at night, they ran into an anthill; Smith and Abzug go around it, but Doc Sarvis fails to elude it and stumbles into the anthill. Stirred up by the doctor, one of the big red ants bites him on the calf. Touched by the anthill, he delivers a mini-lecture which is slight humorous but profound at the same time:

“The anthill,” said Doc, “is sign, symbol and symptom of what we are about out here, stumbling through the gloaming like so many stumblebums. I mean it is the model in microcosm of what we must find a way to oppose and halt. The anthill, like the Fullerian foam fungus, is the mark of social disease. Anthills abound where overgrazing prevails. The plastic dome follows the plague of runaway industrialism, prefigures technological tyranny and reveals the true quality of our lives, which sinks in inverse ratio to the growth of the Gross National Product. [...]” (1975, 79)

In the four members of the Monkey Wrench Gang, Doc Sarvis is the most penetrating one in understanding the essence of superficial phenomena such as the emergence of the anthills, which endows him with a quality of a philosopher. By this quality, he is able to have an insight into the essence of development obsession: runaway industrialism, technological addiction, and the worship of the Gross National Product..

2.2.1.1 Disclosure of Ecological Deterioration

Following the expansion of commodity frontiers and relevant industrial production, the

wilderness of American Southwest is receding and the local environment is degenerating. When Hayduke returns to the American Southwest from the Vietnam War, he only finds that his hometown, Tucson is no longer in the original state of “the clear and classical desert, the pellucid sky he roamed in dreams” (1975, 15) before he left three years ago. It is changed by “someone or something” (1975, 15), namely the local government, the military technology, or the industrial production. Now Tucson is surrounded by “a circle of Titan ICBM bases” (1975, 15). The plants in the open desert are all removed by bulldozers, and the machine-made wastes accumulate in tumbleweed and shabby prefabricated buildings. Noxious animals such as toads, rats, Gila monsters and coyotes inhabit here. The air is also seriously polluted by the exhaust fumes emitted by the copper smelters such as “Kennecott, Anaconda, Phelps-Dodge and American Smelting & Refining Co.” (1975, 15). The clear blue sky once out of reach becomes a dump for the gaseous waste. “A smudge of poisoned air overhung his homeland” (1975, 15). It is the same situation with the other areas. When he drives through the Indian country, he finds that the so-called economic exploitation is also shocking here: “A blighted land, crisscrossed with new power lines, sky smudged with smoke from power plants, the mountains strip-mined, the range grazed to death, eroding away” (1975, 24-25), and also the Indian population has increased about tenfold in the past eight decades. This makes Hayduke realize that the Indians are also short-sighted and “just as stupid and greedy and cowardly and dull as us white folks” (1975, 25).

As a doctor, Doc Sarvis has access to patient cases and has professional knowledge of environmental pollutants. So Abbey can expose the environmental degradation through the doctor’s point of view. Doc Sarvis once has a tricky lobectomy case of a boy who contracts pneumonitis compounded by the scars of bronchiectasis as a result of the air pollution in Southwest “after the old-fashioned nineteenth-century air had been replaced by modern scientific thinking”(1975, 213), and later by coccidioidomycosis, “a fungus infection associated with alkaline soils and carried far and wide by the winds wherever the desert surface is disturbed by agriculture, mining or construction” (1975, 213). Obviously, as Abbey points out, the boy’s case is an

“expanding-economy disease” (1975, 213). Abbey exposes more truth about the expanding-economy disease through Doc Sarvis’s knowledge.

Doc thought he knew where the poison came from that had attacked the boy's lungs, the same poison eating into the mucous membranes of several million other citizens including himself. From poor visibility to eye irritation, from allergies to asthma to emphysema to general asthenia, the path lay straight ahead, pathogenic all the way. They were already having afternoons right here in Albuquerque when schoolchildren were forbidden to play outside in the “open” air, heavy breathing being more dangerous than child molesters. (1975, 214)

Here Abbey discloses the air pollution almost as serious as that in the Niagara area in Joyce Carol Oates’s *The Falls* which is also caused by industrial production and economic expansion. Though there is a thirty-year time difference¹ between these two novels, they share direct representations of daily air pollution caused by industrialism, to some extent.

Another disastrous effect of economic development is the loss of wilderness; in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey contributes many words to disclose the destruction of the wilderness caused by human economic expansion. The blue death floods many canyons with names or without names; the Glen Canyon Dam plugs up the Glen Canyon, the heart Smith’s river and floods “the most beautiful canyon in the world” (1975, 64). The natural forest is cleared away and the industrial forester plants seedlings like planting crops to form lumber plantations so as to make profit from timber. What it brings about is the shrinkage of forest. The power plants, coal mines, metal mines, and lumber plantations deprive the west wilderness of integrity, purity, and serenity. Abbey expresses his cherishing of the wilderness through the doctor’s comment: “The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life,” [...] “Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness.” [...] “Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal.” [...] “And the universe goes mad” (1975,

¹ *The Falls* was published in 2004, and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was published in 1975.

60). But at the same time, it seems that the wilderness destruction is an inevitable result of the worship of economic growth. So, Abbey devotes himself to the enterprise of preventing the economic-development-worship prevailing in the American Southwest. He once said that “if we wish to save what is good in our lives and give our children a taste of a good life, we must bring a halt to the ever-expanding economy and put the growth maniacs under medical care” (List 1993, 150). Thus, the task he designs for the four ecowarriors in his novel is that “one way or another they were going to slow if not halt the advance of Technocracy, the growth of Growth, the spread of the ideology of the cancer cell” (Abbey 1975, 207) and launch “a counter-industrial revolution” (1975, 211). “Monkeywrenching is one of his antidotes for industrial cancer” (List 1993, 150).

2.3 Decolonizing Ideologies Supporting Development: Critique of Anthropocentrism, Abbey’s Ecocentric Ethics, Environmental Citizenship Idea

Degrowth theorists such as Ivan Illich and Cornelius Castoriadis conclude that “the fundamental reasons for the social and ecological unsustainability of the Western model must, in the final analysis, be attributed to cultural premises and their corresponding institutional mantle” (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 68). This indicates that the cultural roots behind the development-obsession economic policy are the deep reasons for the socioecological problems faced by human beings. In these cultural assumptions, some are epistemological fallacies in dealing with the relationship between humans and nature, while others are ideological fallacies dealing with the social relations. The epistemological fallacies may include anthropocentrism which justifies the privilege of human exploitation of nature.

Anthropocentrism, in fact, is a philosophical doctrine of occidental origin which may be traced back to the Holy Bible. In modern times, it is embodied as the hierarchical binary of man vs nature in the logocentric philosophical system. Marxism is also influenced by this doctrine and considers that productive power is the ability of

man to conquer and transform nature. Following the transmission of western culture due to its progressiveness in the world, anthropocentrism also became popular in the world. In fact, anthropocentrism only exerts its real power when the capitalist society began and industrialization was realized. From then on, humanity has become more capable of transforming the natural world. Anthropocentrism assumes that humanity is the master of the world and all the things in the world are subject to human exploitation. The social production is a process of inputting raw materials and outputting final products. The raw materials in capitalist society come from the continuous privatization of commons such as land, water, minerals: this is a process of commodification of nature. Following the ceaseless accumulation of social capital, the frontiers of commodity continuously expands into the new pristine land. A recent report shows that in the past two decades, that is, from the early 1990s to the early 2010s the remaining wilderness on the earth has been reduced by human exploitative activities. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey expresses violent objection to the wanton exploitation of the land, the mineral, and the forest and the consequent pollution of the environment of the southwest US. This is a strong denial of the alleged human rights to exploit nature. On a philosophical level, Abbey is against anthropocentrism and shows great disapproval to utilitarian egocentric ethics prevailing in the mainstream culture which usually emphasizes the economic interest of humanity.

To examine the ecological ethics embodied in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, it is proper to say that Abbey's environmental philosophy is Ecocentric Ethics rather than others. In fact, he has extended the moral consideration to the nonhuman world which includes plants, animals, canyons, and rivers. As Carolyn Merchant's defined in her monograph entitled *Radical ecology: the search for a livable world*, "an ecocentric ethic is grounded in the cosmos. The whole environment, including inanimate elements, rocks, and minerals along with animate plants and animals, is assigned intrinsic value" (2005, 75). For proponents of ecocentric ethics, it is fundamental to keep the dynamic balance of the ecosystem and maintain the integrity, biological diversity, and self-recovery ability of nature. The survival of animate and inanimate members of the world

is the foremost consideration of ecocentric environmentalists. All things in the ecosphere including humans should be taken into moral consideration. Aldo Leopold theorized ecocentric ethics first in his work of deep ecology, “The Land Ethics,” in which the nonhuman world including rivers and animals becomes the members of the ecological community. It relocates the human being from the center and conqueror of the world into the position of being a common member of the ecological community. The ecocentric ethics has inspired many environmentalists, especially radical environmentalists, and offers them theoretical endorsement. Some critics have identified the ecocentric philosophy — deep ecology as the theoretical root of radical environmentalism. Donald R. Liddick argues in his work *Eco-Terrorism: Radical Environmental and Animal Liberation Movements* that:

If the ideologies surrounding the radical environmental movement are diverse and sometimes conflicting, it is also true that there is a central core of ideas embodied in the notion of deep ecology. Posited by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, deep ecology is a philosophy that promotes the idea of biocentrism as opposed to anthropocentrism, removing human beings from the philosophical center of the world. Instead, deep ecology considers all elements of the ecosystem when formulating amoral calculus regarding right actions. (2016,19)

Of course, deep ecology asserts the intrinsic value of every member in the ecosphere, and it “espouses an ecocentric rather than a homocentric (or anthropocentric) ethic” (Merchant 2005, 93). So in fact, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess’s assertion that “deep ecology is a philosophy that promotes the idea of biocentrism as opposed to anthropocentrism” in the quotation above is improper since biocentrism only refers to an organistic democracy among all living beings including humanity. But no doubt, Liddick’s comment establishes the internal connection between ecocentric philosophy and radical environmentalism. In fact, as a radical environmentalist, Edward Abbey has explicitly expressed his ecocentric ethics in his foreword to *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. In this foreword, Abbey’s claims that self-defense against attack is an inalienable right of not only human beings but also other lives, and now American

wilderness is under this kind of attack and has been greatly reduced. Based on this argument, he asserts that:

That wilderness is our ancestral home, the primordial homeland of all living creatures including the human, and the present final dwelling place of such noble beings as the grizzly bear, the mountain lion, the eagle and the condor, the moose and the elk and the pronghorn antelope, the redwood tree, the yellow pine, the bristle cone pine, even the aspen, and yes, why not say it?, the streams, waterfalls, rivers, the very bedrock itself of our hills, canyons, deserts, mountains. (Foreman 1993, 3-4)

Here, he equates the human being to other animate and inanimate citizens of the land community: the bear, the lion, the redwood tree, the yellow pine, the streams, the bedrock of canyons, etc., and endows them the same status as humans in the ecological community.

Abbey, in the foreword, also claims that

For many of us, perhaps for most of us, the wilderness is as much our home, or a lot more so, than the wretched little stucco boxes, plywood apartments, and wallboard condominiums in which we are mostly confined by the insatiable demands of an overcrowded and ever-expanding industrial culture. (1993, 4)

Even though he seems more radical in preserving the pristine environment of southwest America than most people, this claim really makes sense. No one will deny the charm of a serene and pleasant natural environment and prefer an alienating industrial world. Even the land developers are willing to live in a unpolluted natural world. It is a publicly-accepted fact that humans cannot survive without a natural, healthy environmental community with biodiversity. Abbey emphasizes the interdependence between human being and the nonhuman world of the American southwest through Doc Sarvis's words: "The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life," [...] "Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness." [...] "Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal." [...] "And the universe goes mad" (Abbey 1976, 60). These words reflect Abbey's humanist ecocentrism, namely preserving nature for "the greater good of all humanity" (Lamont 1997, 13).

Aldo Leopold's ecocentric ethics considers the human being as a common member of the whole ecological system. Abbey just tries to promote and practice this ethics in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. He blames the hubris of human kind and advocates public resistance to the wanton appropriation and commodification of the American southwest land. When the canyon is buried by silt and the forest is cut by chainsaws and the mountain is mined by miners, Abbey calls on Americans to exercise ecodefense against the ecological destructive activities. He asserts that "if the wilderness is our true home, and if it is threatened with invasion, pillage and destruction-as it certainly is-then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, by whatever means are necessary" (Foreman and Haywood 1993, 4). As a believer of ecocentric ethics and an advocator of the fundamental identity of the human being as a common member of the environmental community, he avers that ecosabotage such as spiking trees "is good for the trees, it's good for the woods, it's good for the earth, and it's good for the human soul" (1993, 4). In the light of this belief, Abbey designs various monkeywrenchings for the four gang members so as to promote his philosophy and popularize his politics of ecodefense.

2.4 Degrowth Values Embodied in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and Abbey's Strategy of Degrowth: Ecodefense and Ecosabotage

Abbey's ecocentric ethics and his idea of humanity's environmental citizenship give birth to his degrowthism. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang* he launches a scathing attack on the development addiction incarnated in industrial expansion which has commodified and is commodifying the southwest land of the US. As I have analyzed in previous section, Abbey has identified the symptoms of development addiction: the plague of runaway industrialism, the growth of the Gross National Product (Abbey 1975, 79), the growth of Growth, the spread of the ideology of the cancer cell (1975, 207), and growth for the sake of growth, power for the sake of power (1975, 61). He

also identifies the greed of the upper class as the reason and impetus of developmentalism, Seldom Smith says: “I mean those people like Love and the Governor got no conscience. They’d sell their own mothers to Exxon and Peabody Coal if they thought there was money in it; have the old ladies rendered down for the oil. [...]” (1975, 329). This is the exposure of the greed of the advantaged class which are promoting and justifying developmentalism. In *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, Abbey points out that “representative government in the USA represents money not people [...]” (Foreman and Haywood 1993, 3), and this “industrial megamachine [...] is now attacking the American wilderness” (1993, 3).

Abbey is only partially right to attribute the root of development worship to the greed of the ruling class. There is also another underlying reason which is difficult to find. Social ecologist John Blewitt and Ray Cunningham argue that “historically, growth and inequality have been partners in a macabre dance of reciprocal legitimation” (Blewitt and Cunningham 2014, 161), and “growth is used to quieten the voices of those asking for more equality by holding out the promise of an ever-bigger cake, some crumbs from which will surely find their way into the mouths of the less fortunate” (2014, 161). Thus growth addiction offers an excuse to maintain the unequal distribution of social wealth. From this viewpoint, it can be said that inequality is another hidden cause behind the growth values which provide a false prospect of better life.

Although Abbey only identified greed as the root of growth ideology, this does not hinder his degrowth values, the assertion of degrowth. In fact, economic growth, or economic development cannot bring about the real improvement of the quality of our lives which advocates of economic development have promised, and the only result will be that “the true quality of our lives, [...] sinks in inverse ratio to the growth of the Gross National Product” (Abbey 1975, 79). The growth worships prevalent in the present world “in the long term are doomed to fail and in the short term result in growing levels of inequality and environmental degradation” (Blewitt and Cunningham 2014, 155), and the only solution is “to plot a path to benign degrowth” (2014, 155). As

Rupert Read defined, “if we are to build down the economy to a size compatible with ecological limits, we are going to have (to have) some degrowth, probably a lot” (2014, 172). Abbey has witnessed the environmental degradation of the American southwest caused by the expansion of commodity frontiers and realizes that these exploitative activities must be resisted until they stop. As not being a member of policy-making class, he advocates ecosabotage so as to prevent the destructive economic developmental activities. This corresponds to his belief that human beings are common environmental citizens in the ecosystem. For him, to keep the ecological integrity is not only the right way to keep (if not improve) the quality of our life, but also the right way to carry out the duties of humans as an ecological citizens of the earth. Abbey’s idea of degrowth is certainly of great significance and importance in the pervasive worship of economic growth today regardless of whether his ecosabotage is effective and feasible in real life or not. It is unexaggerated to say that Abbey is a brave declarer and practitioner of degrowth though he did not theorize degrowth.

To prevent the commodifying activities in southwest America and snipe at the growth worship prevalent in American society, Abbey advocates ecodefense and ecosabotage instead of other degrowth strategies designed by degrowth theorists and activists. The common degrowth strategies may include civil disobedience, indinados (occupy), nowtopians, unions, etc. In these strategies, civil disobedience, indinados (occupy) are typical forms to express resistance, but they do not involve violence. Compared with these strategies, Abbey’s ecosabotage is more radical one due to its semi-violence, namely the violence against property that serve as the production means for economic growth instead of producers, organizers or the government. So to some extent, Abbey was a precursor of the modern degrowth movement since he popularized an unconventional degrowth strategy more useful than the conventional strategies I have mentioned above. Ecosabotage, in fact, is not an invention of Abbey in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; it “was widespread before *Ecodefense* was first published in 1985 and even before *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was published in 1975” (Foreman 1993, 1). Like many western Americans and different from the money-hungry western

developers, Abbey regards the southwest wilderness as his home. He feels that it is natural to defend against the predatory economic expansion which only aims at unlimited economic growth and short-term profit. He says that in the foreword of *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*:

If a stranger batters your door down with an axe, threatens your family and yourself with deadly weapons, and proceeds to loot your home of whatever he wants, he is committing what is universally recognized-by law and morality as a crime. In such a situation the householder has both the right and the obligation to defend himself, his family, and his property by whatever means are necessary. [...]Self-defense against attack is one of the basic laws not only of human society but of life itself, not only of human life but of all life.

The American wilderness, what little remains, is now undergoing exactly such an assault. [...] We are justified in defending our homes-our private home and public home not only by common law and common morality but also by common belief. We are the majority; they-the greedy and powerful-are the minority (Foreman and Haywood 1993, 3-4).

This is his manifesto of eco-defense. The eco-defense is to protect the wilderness from the destruction of industrial invasions. As a classic textbook of ecosabotage, *Ecodefense* introduces almost all kinds of common monkeywrenchings in daily life the techniques, and security, mainly based on and inspired by the descriptions in the early-published ecofiction, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. As I have mentioned in the introduction part of this chapter, the monkeywrenchings in this novel may include eliminating of roadside billboards, destroying survey apparatuses, destroying construction machinery and infrastructures serving industrial production, etc.

As eco-defense sometimes involves destructive sabotages, it is often called ecoterrorism by the government or land developers. But actually, there is an essential difference between ecodefense and eco-terrorism. Eco-defense that Abbey and other environmentalists advocate only aims at destruction of the properties which are produced by commodifying commons and which serve as the tools for the commodification of the western land; it avoids harming people's lives. Terrorism, to a

great extent, aims at harming human beings so as to produce intimidation among the public for political reasons. “Eco-terrorism” is a term coined by Ron Arnold in 1983; in his article “Eco-terrorism” he replaces ecosabotage with eco-terrorism and elevates property to the level of human life. David Thomas Sumner and Lisa M. Weidman, in their article “Eco-terrorism or Eco-tage: An Argument for the Proper Frame,” point out that “using the term ‘eco-terrorism,’ rather than a more precise and accurate term to refer to acts that do not harm or threaten human life, is not particularly objective. It reflects a bias against acts of sabotage that are committed for one political reason as opposed to another” (2013, 868). To blur the distinction between property and human life is a partial favor on the authority and industrial developers in the public discourse. Christopher Manes argues that in spite of the pressure of industrial developers, “American jurisprudence never recognized property as an inalienable right, but rather as a “bundle of rights” (to use the Supreme Court’s words) and responsibilities” (2013, 869). So to equate ecosabotage which only aims at properties with eco-terrorism is against American judicial tradition. Moreover, there is an ideological difference between ecosaboteurs and terrorists. Ecosaboteurs act according to the principle of respect for life, while terrorists disregard lives in their attacks.

Dave Foreman and Bill Haywood have explained the function and effects of eco-defense very clearly in their work *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. Ecosabotage, especially consistent ecosabotage, will increase the operating costs of the exploitative companies and consequently reduce their profits. When monkeywrenching happens, the companies need to repair the damaged machines and equipment so as to recover the normal productive activities. The repair cost is extra payment outside the normal operational activities, and the downtime will cause the extension of the project duration which brings about extra time cost and labour cost. To prevent ecosabotage, these companies may improve the security conditions such as the guard, the fencing, and lighting. This will also increase the operational cost. If some expenditure caused by ecosabotage is covered by insurance, and it occurs frequently, the insurance company will increase the premiums and the deductible so as to keep itself profitable

in its operation. This increase will also cause the loss of profit of the construction company. Suffering these extra expenditures and failing to make profit, the exploitative company may eventually give up the exploitation of the wilderness area. Thus, the ecosaboteurs will achieve their goal of preserving the western wilderness.

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the ecosabotage is carried out by the four members of the Monkey Wrench Gang, namely Doc Sarvis, Bonnie Abbzug, George Washington Hayduke, and Seldom Seen Smith. Among them, Hayduke is the most radical and determined one in preserving the southwest from commodification by the land developers, and Doc Sarvis is the ethical imperative guider of the group. He clarifies the ethical imperative of their monkeywrenchings at the beginning of the establishment of their gang: “No violence.” [...] “No bloodshed” (Abbey 1975, 69). They do various kinds of monkeywrenchings on the principle that the commodification of western land should be prevented. They destroy construction machinery of developers, infrastructures facilitating industrial production, disrupt geological exploration, and spike trees. Unfortunately, Hayduke is recognized and chased by the Love brothers and their Search and Rescue Team after he evades the capture of the rangers in the helicopter and meets the brothers in the cafe. About the brothers’ family name “Love,” there is an irony here: a person with love will be kind to other people, and rich men with love will be benevolent to others, but the two brothers are cold and cruel. The irony here is the same as the Love Canal in *The Falls* which is full of chemical and radioactive wastes and is viciously toxic to the residents living in that area. But finally Hayduke escapes mystically at the edge of the cliff. At last, when the four ecosaboteurs explode the Glen Canyon Bridge, they are found by the Search and Rescue Team. In their escape to the Maze, they ran out of food and water supplies and are exhausted. For Bishop Love has a heart attack, Doc Sarvis and Abbzug go back to save his life, and then they are arrested by the police. After Smith and Hayduke split up, Smith is arrested by the rangers when he steals food from a woman. Hayduke is believed to be shot by the state polices and falls into the canyon, but in fact, he escapes. Abbey arranges a happy end for the four ecowarriors, which shows his approval of the ecosabotage they carry out. The three of

Doc Sarvis, Abzzug, and Smith are brought to trial and only sentenced to six-month confinement in county jail and probation. Hayduke escapes unhurt and later comes back to visit Doc Sarvis. Hayduke's survival and the appearance of another ecosaboteur in the denouement predicts that the ecosabotage will continue and may be even more powerful in the future.

2.5 The Tension between Abbey's Environmental Values and the Rhetoric in the Novel

Though *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is full of environmentalist message and degrowth values, it is never a didactic work. It is a work that combines the pro-environment advocacy with the dramatized sumptuousness of imagination and artistry including the symbolism mentioned in the previous part. However, the ideological message seems relatively independent from the function of the rhetorical and narratological devices, compared with other fictional works. This difference comes from the fact that Abbey's pro-environment advocacy in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* seems perverse due to his radical assertion of the eco-defense. The moralizing in this novel is so distinct that it seems impressive even it is dramatized with perfect rhetorical and narratological forms. This is why Scott Slovic contends that

[r]ather than merging to "pronounce" Abbey's "sobering message" about the environment, the aesthetic and moral currents in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* strain to become separate, like oil and water; they produce a tense disjunction that forces us, as readers, to stay on our toe. (Slovic 1993, 58)

Slovic emphasizes here the inclination of separateness between the aesthetic forms and the publicization of the morality. This inclination of separateness produces a kind of defamiliarization and tension that are rarely presented in other fictional works.

The tension between the ideological dissemination and the aesthetic design of the plot and the language makes the readers ponder more deeply over the environmental and degrowth messages contained in the novel. This tension between the aesthetic and

moral currents in the novel comes from the aesthetics of the plot design, literary devices and language treatments which aims at establishing a textual beauty. First of all, the plot of the novel is distinctively unique since there are few novels of the same kind of subject except its sequel *Hayduke Lives!* also authored by Abbey, and the story of the novel is a series of thrilling adventures. In these adventures, the most legendary plot is the mysterious survival of Hayduke in the last roundup. Second, the colorful language of the novel also contributes to the tension between the environmentalist message and textual beauty. The humor in Doc Sarvis's several speeches in their actions is one of the charms of Abbey's literary language. At the same time, the repetition of a narrative pattern brings about humorous effect. In the text, Hayduke frequently opens a beer can and drinks the beer. So the narrator says "Hayduke opened another can of beer. He was always opening another can of beer. And always pissing" (Abbey 1975, 105). The repetition of "(was always) opening another can of beer" produces a sense of humor which may make a reader smile. The wordplays in the novel also produces humorous effects. Slovic gives an example of pun. Doc Sarvis performs a hemorrhoidectomy for a hated district attorney and charges him an exorbitant price, \$500. Abbey adds an authorial quip "Prosecutors will be violated" (Slovic 1993, 64). This quip brings about much humor to the text.

Besides these, rhyming, alliterations, and homophones also bring an aesthetic tension to the novel. In Chapter 8, when the four gang members gather at the campsite, Hayduke wants to do some thing for fun, he suggests poker to Doc Sarvis so that they can "beat the heat" (1975, 105). Later they separate and Hayduke needs to stays or travels by himself for one day. Hayduke has three days' food supply and a gallon of water, so he feels that he can "survive and thrive" (1975, 106) without doing any works. The shop where Doc buys camouflage net is named "Bob Bargain Barn" (1975, 131). These examples of rhyming and alliteration add aesthetic charm to the narration of the novel. As Scott Slovic points out there are also homophones in the text. In Chapter 10, Doc Sarvis and Bonnie go to drink in a gloomy bar, Abbey indulges himself with homophones in the description of the waitress: "[She] came between [Bonnie and Doc],

wearing only her barely there see-through flimsy, her barely anywhere expression. She too was weary of it all” (1975, 132). Slovic notes that “[t]he only purpose of the words ‘anywhere’ and ‘weary’ is to play on the sound of ‘wearing,’ a word that fits more naturally into the context of the scene” (Slovic 1993, 63). In fact, this is indeed a typical example of homophones employed in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

From these examples, it can be argued that Abbey devotes himself to the establishment of the textual aesthetics with various rhetoric devices. The aesthetics is so distinct that it forms an independent being opposite to the environmentalist and degrowth messages. Thus, a kind of antagonism and a consequential tension instead of a harmony are established. It is this kind of tension that successfully force readers to shift their attention from the adventure story to the aesthetic devices, and then to the moral messages conveyed by Abbey. Thus, the distinct aesthetic qualities of the novel succeed to enhance the reader’s attention and promote their better awareness of the moral messages in the fiction.

2.6 Conclusion

Abbey is a novelist, a radical environmentalist, and also a degrowth practitioner. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is an artistic formulation of his environmentalist idea with attractive smooth narration, vivid characterization, and ingenious plot design. The novel portrays several ecowarriors and eco-villains in a series of ecosabotage events and thus becomes a canon of ecofiction. The four characters with different backgrounds gather on a boat trip and find that they share the same environmentalist viewpoint and form a monkey wrench gang. They practice a series of monkeywrenchings including the explosion of the Glen Canyon Bridge, but they all escape the felony sentence eventually. Their words and actions can be considered as a kind of social and cultural practice of degrowth theory which promotes the dissemination of degrowth values.

In this novel, through the authorial presence in the narration, plot design, and characterization through rhetorical devices, such as inside views, Abbey vehemently

attacks the greedy commodifying activities which are depriving the southwest people of the pristine land where they belong and the anthropocentrism and development-worshipping ideology behind the economic expansion. Anthropocentrism intends to overlook the intrinsic value of the non-human organisms and the inanimate ecological members such as canyons and rivers. This denial of the intrinsic value of the more-than-human world leads humanity to dispose of these ecological members as resources for “human development,” and this provides ideological endorsement to development values (or growthism). Development values, as a worship of the growth of Gross Domestic Product, dominates the political discourse today, and it gives rise to industrialism, scientism, and consumerism which fuel and promote the exploitative use of the “economic resources” in the nature. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey violently denounces the ecological crimes committed by industrial exploitation such as deforestation, disappearance of natural canyons, air pollution, destruction of biodiversity, and disappearing of wilderness, while listing various economic activities invading the southwest territory in America. The four members of the monkey wrench gang are the embodiment and executants of Abbey’s radical environmentalism, degrowth values, and his ecosabotage. They convey Abbey’s ideas and carry out ecodefense which is advocated by Abbey in the monograph *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. Abbey depicts their dialogues and ecosabotage activities with appreciation and enjoyment, and designs a positive ending for them. Through the positive portrayal of the ecosaboteurs and their monkeywrenching activities, Abbey expresses his advocacy of ecosabotage.

Abbey’s idea of ecodefense is the embodiment of his ecocentric ethics which emphasizes humans’ plain membership in the land community. This point is not only explicitly expressed in his foreword to the textbook of ecodefense entitled *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, but is also put into practice in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. The monkey wrench gang’s ecosabotage is a counterattack on the arrogant human expansion into the nature which compresses the territory of other members of the ecological community. Through the approval of the ecosabotage and the

commendation of the four monkey wrenchers Abbey lashes the anthropocentric hubris and greed of the social elite members who ignore the environmental citizenship of humans and preach economic developmentalism.

Abbey's ecocentric ethics, environmental citizenship idea, and anti-growth-for-growth-sake stance naturally lead to his degrowth values, as I have argued in the previous part. Nonetheless, Abbey fails to identify the reasons behind the dominant development values other than the upper class's greed. Except the anthropocentric hubris of humanity, the intentional concealment of the distributive inequity is also the main reason behind the growth values which provide a false illusion of better life while diverting the public eye from the unfair arrangement of economic distribution. Though failing to identify other deep reasons for growth addiction, Abbey does find the falsity of the promise of development and economic growth: economic developmental activities are damaging the territory of the American southwest, and degrades the life quality of Americans, and also destroys the common homeland of other ecological citizens. He devotes himself to the degrowth movement to resist the runaway economic development by his advocacy of carrying out ecosabotage, an unconventional strategy of degrowth. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey depicts the monkeywrenching activities in great detail, which has inspired and given guidance to various radical environmentalist groups committing themselves to the cause of ecodefense. This novel also became the main resource for the textbook of ecosabotage, *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. It is undeniable that Abbey and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* have played a crucial role in preserving the American western wilderness and promoting economic degrowth.

From the plot design and the characterization of the novel it is easy to see that Abbey is sensitive to the environmental degradation and determined to preserve the pristine land of southwest America, the common wealth of all ecological citizens including humans. Meanwhile, Abbey's strategy to establish the tension between the distinct aesthetic devices including language treatments and the ideological dissemination is effective in lifting the reader to higher levels of awareness of the

environmentalist morality. In the 1970s, his advocacy of ecodefense and thus explicit advocacy of degrowth was of great significance. Though ecodefense could not exert decisive influence on environmental preservation and economic degrowth in that age, it is at least able to remind the public of the importance of the integrity of ecosystem and at the same time press the authority to consider the urgency of degrowth. Comparatively, in the present era the consequences of anthropogenic pollution of the environment are clearer than in the 1970s since more salient punishment can be witnessed from nature seriously harmed by human industrial productive activities; for example, we have experienced obvious global warming, and we face more difficulties in disposing industrial waste, and even the oceans have been seriously polluted by plastic waste in the past decades. So we are clearer about the hazardous environmental effects of industrial production, and thus we become willing to consider degrowth. I will discuss the implementation of degrowth in the conclusion part. Considering that the southwest part is a backward area in terms of economic level in the history, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* depicts the commodifying activities and economic expansion of early stage in the US. In this stage, the commodifying activities began to expand from the eastern to the western in the US. This novel just focuses on the environmental injustice brought about by the industrial production and the construction of relevant infrastructures and consequential social conflicts. In the novel, the investors and their coalition including the government extract the minerals, coal, water, logs and reap the benefits and profits, while common local people bear the ecological burdens such as air pollution and land destruction. Then social conflicts between the local people and the land developers and the American government begin to arise. The monkey wrench activities are the semi-violent resistance to the commodifying movement. As far as the degree of socio-ecological crisis and social development is concerned, these economic and social realities represented in the novel assume the characteristics of the early stage of economic development. But the next ecofiction in the corpus, *White Noise* will focus on the next stage of economic development, reflecting greater socio-ecological problems and risks brought about by the deepening of economic development.

Chapter 3.

Don DeLillo's Degrowth Discourses in *White Noise*: Decolonization of Scientism and Consumerism

3.1 Introduction to DeLillo and *White Noise*

If *The Monkey Wrench Gang* reflects the environment injustice and social conflicts brought about by the expansion of commodity frontiers, then some later ecofictions try to represent the socio-ecological wasteland of postindustrial society deeply colonized by economism, scientism, and consumerism. In postindustrial growth society, since the physical commodity frontiers become more and more saturated, economic growth is more dependent on science and technology. In fact, as the practical application of scientific knowledge, technology originated from the pursuit of productivity and became more and more valued after the industrial revolution in modern times. Nowadays, the cult of growth has become a dominant ideology in the world; whether in capitalist countries or in socialist countries, development has become a social ideal. In this situation, technology is expected to play a critical role in social life since it is the key element in the improvement of productivity. This emphasis on science and technology brings about the upgrading of production instruments, infrastructure and living facilities; the progress of science and technology also spawns various high-tech products. But at the same time, technology is a two-edged sword. Almost all the non-decomposable chemical wastes and poison are the products of technology, and technology and the social values on and institutions of technology also exert negative effects on culture and human subjectivity and psychology.

As the socio-ecological crisis becomes more and more serious so that human kind can never overlook it, literature becomes an important way to reflect the ecological challenges faced by humanity. Prominent writers often pay much attention to this problem that concerns the fate of human beings and the future of the world. Donald

Richard DeLillo is one of them. As a distinguished contemporary American novelist, DeLillo usually focuses on topics such as ecological crisis or disaster, consumerist culture, terrorism in his literary creation. “Seen as representing the turn to postmodernism in American literature” (Duvall 2008, 27), he often depicts the spiritual degeneration, agony, and exhaustion of contemporary America in minute detail, while presenting the opposition between human civilization and natural ecology. Obviously, DeLillo shows a pessimistic view and negative opinion on American society. So Bruce Bawer made a comment that “most of Don DeLillo’s novels are born out of a preoccupation with a single theme: namely, that contemporary American society is the worst enemy that the cause of human individuality and self-realization has ever had.” (Bawer 2003, 21). Considering the alienating effect of runaway modern technology and consumerist culture on the subjectivity in US society depicted in *White Noise*, *Underworld*, and other works, Bawer’s contention is very pertinent. Here he expresses the same opinion about the theme of DeLillo’s works as Jim Dwyer does:

They are tracts, designed to batter us, again and again, with a single idea: that life in America today is boring, benumbing, dehumanized. Not only has the American system robbed us of our individuality; the era’s despicable technological innovations have afflicted us all with a dreadful condition known as sensory overload [...] (Dwyer 2003, 22)

Because of his awareness of social responsibility and sense of mission, DeLillo not only faithfully copies contemporary American life, but also, in great depth, explores the cultural root of social crises and disastrous events. This is the representation of the greatness of DeLillo as a writer.

Don DeLillo, as a descendant of Italian immigrant family, was born in the Bronx in New York City. His immigrant identity enables him to better understand American multiple ethnic society. Immersed in this multicultural milieu, DeLillo’s later literary creation also presents this kind of cultural trait. In his student days, he enrolled in Fordham University, majoring in Communication Arts; this studying experience developed his ability to observe the mass media. After graduation, DeLillo worked in

an advertising company. These experiences exert great influences on his later literary career. In 1971, after four year's work, his first novel *Americana* was published and gradually won critical attention for him. After that, DeLillo wrote various new works, and became a prolific writer. In the following seven years, he finished writing five novels: *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Players* (1977), and *Running Dog* (1978). By these works, he won the Guggenheim Fellowship.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, DeLillo entered his peak period of his literary career. Several classics were completed during this period and DeLillo was established as a postmodernist writer. In the several years when he lived in Greece he wrote *The Names* (1982). The next work, *White Noise* (1985), won the National Book Award for DeLillo. This novel, based on American middle-class family life, vividly represents the destruction of the natural environment and the death of the humanist spirit. So there is another working title *The American Book of the Dead* for this novel. The next novel, *Libra* (1988) won Irish Times Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize for DeLillo. Another novel based on history and politics is *Mao II* (1991) which alludes to Mao Zedong and the religious and political reformation led by Bandar Khomeini, the leader of Iranian revolution. It focuses on the survival of humanity in the background of terrorism and globalization. By this work, DeLillo won a PEN/Faulkner Award and a Pulitzer Prize finalist nomination in 1991 and 1992. *Underground* (1997) traced back to nearly the fifty years' history of America in an attempt to disclose the invisible radioactive waves hiding under the American society from the point of view of an American. It is a work which won several prizes including the 1998 American Book Award. In the 2006 *New York Times*' election of the best novels of America since the 1980s, DeLillo's three works including *Underworld* are in the list.

In the new century, the rising reputation inspired his creative enthusiasm. In this period, *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), and other works were created in succession. Reviewing DeLillo's literary career, as a prolific writer, he has published 15 novels, 5 plays, and many short stories and essays.

Examining DeLillo's works, various ecological disastrous events are the consequences of the disequilibrium of the relationship between humanity and nature caused by anthropocentrism. Technological sublimation caused by scientism leads to capitalist social competition and human beings become the tools used by capital. All these result in the indifference and alienation between humanities. Consumerist culture as the result of industrialization and informatization increases this kind of human alienation. At the same time, secularization of belief causes spiritual wasteland which brings about spiritual suffering. DeLillo's novels often represent ecological crises as well as human alienation. Just as I have commented by Jim Dwyer, *White Noise* and *Underworld* are indispensable canons on the list of ecofiction (Dwyer 2010, 68). *White Noise* is an ecofiction that typically features the environmental degeneration and the relevant dehumanizing effects of modern technology.

White Noise is one in *Time's* list of the 100 best novels from 1923 to 2005. As a National Book Award winner, it not only attracted more critical attention, but also won much more audience's attention; "*White Noise* (1985) would appear to be his most popular novel." (Bloom 2003, 1). As a masterpiece of Postmodernism, "*White Noise* is very funny, and very disturbing: it is another of the American comic apocalypses that include Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man*, Nathaniel West's *Miss Lonely hearts* and Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. That is a high order of company, and *White Noise* almost sustains it." (2003, 1). It is nearly an apocalypse novel that warns people about the dangers of degenerating our living ecosystem.

At the same time, *White Noise* is a novel of comic apocalypticism different from Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* which is in essence a novel of tragic apocalypticism. The apocalypticism in *White Noise* believes in human agency and human power to eventually prevent the apocalypse from happening. Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!* are the opposite. Their advocacy of ecodefense successfully inspired a radical environmental organization Earth First! which takes the textbook of ecodefense, *ECODEFENSE: A Field Guide to*

Monkeywrenching, as their guidance. Their apocalyptic beliefs are identical. According to M.F. Lee, “Earth First! combined tragic apocalypticism and deep ecological beliefs” (Garrard 2004, 103). Though the ethos of *White Noise* is different from *The Monkey Wrench Gang*’s, they all appeal to the essential trope of ecocriticism, namely apocalypticism.

There are three parts in *White Noise*, including forty chapters. The first part is “Waves and Radiation” in which DeLillo does not design a central event like other traditional fictions, but presents a series of scenes: the sight of the opening day of the university, the conversation of Jack’s family and their watching television, their frequent visit of supermarket and crazy shopping in the shopping mall, the scene of Babette’s little son’s crying, and the scene of discussion between Jack and his colleague, Murray Jay Siskind that demonstrate the American postmodern social life. The second part is “The Airborne Toxic Event” which mainly depicts a toxic chemical spill caused by a derailing accident of a rail car which carries the chemical toxin. This part shows the disastrous consequence imposed upon the environment by modern industrialization. This chemical leakage contaminates the environment in which people live, and it symbolizes the threat to the survival of human kind. In this novel, the residents of the town of Blacksmith, including Jack’s family, are alarmed by this accident. In their escape from their hometown, Jack Gladney tries to fuel his car by himself since there are no working staff in the gas station, and so he exposed himself to the toxic chemical which is considered to be fatal. Later, when he knows the fatality of the toxin, he becomes obsessed with the consciousness of death. The last section is “Dylarama.” In the second half of twentieth century, the science and technology in the US are much advanced, which brings people both the comfort and convenience of life as well as threats and risks. The “Dylar” in the novel is a product of medical technology, a kind of medicine which aims to eliminate the fear of death. Lacking rational judgement, Jack’s wife, Babette blindly believes what the media says and exchanges her body for Dylar so as to eliminate her fear of death, but only finds that it is futile. The novel ends with Jack’s abortive attempt to revenge himself on Willie Mink.

White Noise features the postindustrial social life of America, and reveals the consumerist culture, environmental deterioration, and environmental disaster brought about by industrialization and modern science and technology. It manifests the unavoidable negative aspects of industrialization which lead to our reflection on what is the real way to eliminate the heteronomy and socio-ecological risks brought about by the industrial culture. In the following, I will review the literature on this novel.

White Noise is Don DeLillo's first main breakthrough in his literary career; this work brought him to the central stage of American literature and attract much more critical attention for him. Patricia Schneider's short book *Satire in DeLillo's White Noise* focuses on the satirization used by DeLillo in *White Noise*, including satires to ridicule human consumerist behaviors, various characters' behaviors in family life as a family member, Jack's lack of seriousness in his research, and the futility of their attempt to improve their ridiculous behavior. Another treatise on *White Noise* is *DeLillo's White Noise* edited by Harold Bloom. Tom LeClair in his paper "Closing the Loop: *White Noise*" included in this monograph points out the negative role of television: "In American television programming was a simplistic threat, a reductive conditioning agent that DeLillo associated with advertising. In *White Noise* television has more complex effects: conditioning and comforting, distorting and informing, even becoming, as I will discuss later, a source of mystery." (Bloom 2003, 15). As a modern technological equipment, television plays a role in human's alienation from the original pre-industrial state. Similar to Patricia Schneider, LeClair also thinks that *White Noise* is full of irony:

In Part II, "The Airborne Toxic Event," the Gladneys' evasions have more directly harmful and more painfully ironic consequences. Divided into three untitled sections describing the evacuation from Blacksmith, the shelter outside town, and finally the further evacuation to Iron City, this Part not only repeats elements of Part I but also repeats itself, drawing tighter and tighter the loop of irony. (2003, 16)

In this paper, Leclair also expounds the dichotomy of the novel by the ambiguities of the title of the novel and the relevant referential pattern throughout the text. In

Leclair's opinion, the ambiguities of the title, revealed by another working title of this novel "Panasonic," "indicates DeLillo's concern with recording the wide range of sound, ordered and uncertain, positive and negative" (2003, 27). In fact, this point reveals DeLillo's ambivalent attitude towards postmodern society which is built by industrialization based on modern science and technology. So Leclair says:

DeLillo's constant concern is postindustrial America in a multinational world: how different aspects of our postmodern condition unite in great knowledge and great danger. Because his perspective is that of the systems thinker, who examines value in terms of survival, DeLillo offers through his fiction a wide-ranging, original, profound, and (when his novels are read together) synthetic commentary on the destructive and reconstructive circumstances of contemporaneity. (2003, 30)

Though ambivalent, DeLillo's insight into the postindustrial era of human society is accurate. That is why LeClair says: "if we will match our actions with our knowledge, as DeLillo does in his novels, contemporary and post-contemporary humankind could survive, head off personal and global self-destruction, prevent a final closing in the loop" (2003, 32).

There are also other ecocritical studies on *White Noise* focusing on the physical harm of modern technology and the toxicity of consumerist society. The first academic achievement I want to mention is Elise A. Martucci's ecocritical interpretation of *White Noise* in her monograph *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo*. In Martucci's opinion, DeLillo's novels including *White Noise* emphasize the significance of nature and try to warn us against destroying the environment, so they are more optimistic than Leo Marx's view on the conflict between modern technology and nature. Martucci analyses the way that DeLillo's novels represent the greater role of new technologies in changing human perceptions and mediate reality than old ones. The second academic achievement is *New Essays on White Noise* (1991) edited by Frank Lentricchia, part of which focuses on the fatality of technology in the novel. Except treatises, some papers also focus on *White Noise*. Cynthia Deitering in her article "The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s" advances that

“during the 1980s we began to perceive ourselves as inhabitants of a culture defined by its waste, and that a number of American novels written during this period reflect this ontological transformation” (Glotfelty and Bloom 1996, 197) One of the two textual pieces of evidence that she uses is *White Noise*. In her opinion, the foremost characteristic of this novel is its elaboration on industrial wastes, and she gives corresponding textual example:

I jabbed at it with the butt end of a rake and then spread the material over the concrete floor. I picked through it item by item, mass by shapeless mass, wondering why I felt guilty, a violator of privacy, uncovering intimate and perhaps shameful secrets. It was hard not to be distracted by some of the things they'd chosen to submit to the Juggernaut appliance. But why did I feel like a household spy? Is garbage so private? Does it glow at the core with a personal heat, with signs of one's deepest nature, clues to secret yearnings' humiliating flaws? What habits, fetishes, addictions, inclinations? What solitary acts, behavioral ruts? [. . .] I found a banana skin with a tampon inside. Was this the dark underside of consumer consciousness? (1996, 198)

Through Gladney's scrutiny of the industrial waste, Deitering points out the underside of consumerist culture as an epitome of the anti-environmental nature of the capitalist postindustrial society.

If Deitering pays much attention to the industrial wastes, then Sompatu Vungthong pays attention to both the physical and mental harms of the postmodern consumerist society, especially the spiritual harms of the consumerist condition in *White Noise* in his paper “Postmodern Consumerist Condition and Its Effects on People in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*.” Vungthong asserts that the toxicity of the postmodern consumerist society lies in two aspects: one is the environmental toxins produced by the consumerists, another is the consumerist logic which dominates consumers. The toxicity of the environmental toxins is easy to see, while the mental harm lies in the faulty perception, a kind of schizophrenia in postmodern theory, caused by the logic of consumerism. This kind of schizophrenia, according to postmodern theories, has two main characteristics: the inability to see the proper boundaries between meanings, or in

other words, between signified and signifier (Vungthong 2011, 32) and the consequential deprivation of personal identity of the schizophrenic.

Thus, a schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, a series of pure and unrelated present moments. Similarly, in terms of consumerist practices, consumerism and the media brainwash people into believing that their identity is not fixed and can be changed at will by consuming the products, causing them to indulge themselves in the eternal present of consumerist ecstasy. Consumers in the postmodern world therefore possess a disunified identity. (2011, 32)

The only way out of the consumerist suffering for the characters in the novel is to develop a kind of self-delusion that depends on the illusive comfort consumerism offers. Vungthong concludes that to avoid the trap of consumerism that pushes our relentless purchase and the vicious circle of consumerism is the only way to save our environment and our society.

Though there are already some environmentalist examinations on *White Noise*, a further comprehensive exploration on the idea of degrowth in this work in the context of ecocritical tradition is feasible and necessary. In the following exploration, I will examine the decolonization discourses on modern technology, its underpinning values, consumerism in terms of their growth nature, heteronomic harm on subjectivity, and non-conviviality. At the same time, I will also employ relevant traditional ecocritical theories to support these decolonization discourses, referring to existent environmentalist research achievements.

3.2 Politicizing Science and Technology

3.2.1 The Effects of Modern Technology on Autonomy and Individual Psychology presented in *White Noise*

As Erik Swyngedouw points out, we now live in an age of depoliticization which

suppresses different opinions on political-ecological issues. This kind of de-politicization “takes the form of the increasing domination of a series of inter-related managerial and technical forms of governance aimed at maintaining and nurturing growth and understood as the uninterrupted accumulation of economic wealth” (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 155). Technology, as an operational instrument for the industrial economy, is an important support for the function of growth society, and the transformation of technology culture is an essential content in the transition to the degrowth society. So “degrowth calls for the politicization of science and technology, against the increasing technocratization of politics” (2015, 47). In *White Noise*, modern technology plays an critical role in the representation of the socio-ecological toxicity of growth society.

In the process of human development, science and technology are the most important pushing power that nothing else can match. In addition, they are decisive factors for the comprehensive power of a nation. Because of this, they are often aggrandized by many countries. But recently, more and more people realized that modern technology is double-edged: on the one hand, it improves productivity and promotes economic growth, on the other hand, it damages the natural environment and suffocates human subjectivity. When technology progresses, it will “overpower and control its subjects” through forming a technological world “which congeals into a ‘second nature, schlechte Unmittelbarkeit (bad immediacy) which is perhaps more hostile and more destructive than primary nature, the pretechnical nature” (Marcuse 2007, xxv-xxvi). This second nature will exert a negative power on human individuals. At the same time, the technology will do harm to nature through its production of toxins. In the postindustrial era, human beings have to consider the environmental crisis and social harms brought about by modern technology.

The Frankfurt School social theorist, Herbert Marcuse’s one-dimensional society and one dimensional man critical theory about postindustrial society shows that the conquest of nature starts from the control of social subjects. When we are fascinated by technological innovation and application, we become the slaves of technology. In

postindustrial society, people's selection has already been controlled by technology. Before natural powers such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, human beings are weak and fragile. At the same time, modern technology is also unknown, unpredictable and terrible for human beings.

In *White Noise*, the story is narrated from the first person point of view, and Jack Gladney is the first person narrator as well as the focalizer. By focalizing Jack's family life and social experiences, the novel represents the ecological risks brought about by modern science and technology and capitalist consumerist culture. DeLillo's voice is just presented in the description of a series of events including the airborne toxic accident and the characterization of the various characters such as Babbette and Heinrich. In the novel, the wave and radiation existing in the people's daily life embody the magic power of modern technology. In the postindustrial era, human beings live in waves and radiations at all times and places. With the development of technology, various kinds of electronic products appear. In *White Noise*, there are television, radio, computer, refrigerator, camera, etc. Television, as a great invention of the 20th century, is a product of modern science and technology. At the beginning of its invention, due to the low technological level, television could only screen motionless and silent pictures. Later, with the development of science and technology, television became able to transmit moving speaking pictures. This technological improvement brings about significant change to people's daily life, making people look forward to better enjoyment in future life.

In DeLillo's *White Noise*, the Gladneys' indulge themselves in varieties of television programs, enjoying the pleasure the colorful world of the programs offers them. It seems that television occupies the central stage of people's daily life and plays a leading role in their life:

That night, a Friday, we gathered in front of the set, as was the custom and the rule, with take-out Chinese. There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes. We'd never before been so attentive to our duty, our Friday assembly. Heinrich was not sullen, I was not bored. Steffie, brought close to tears by a sitcom husband arguing with his wife, appeared totally absorbed in

these documentary clips of calamity and death. Babette tried to switch to a comedy series about a group of racially mixed kids who build their own communications satellite. She was startled by the force of our objection. We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping. (1986, 64)

It even becomes somewhat mysterious and takes on a kind of magic charm. Through the transmission of television, some familiar things become strange and defamiliarized, even Babette becomes strange to her husband Jack Gladney:

The face on the screen was Babette's. Out of our mouths came a silence as wary and deep as an animal growl. Confusion, fear, astonishment spilled from our faces. What did it mean? What was she doing there, in black and white, framed in formal borders? Was she dead, missing, disembodied? Was this her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology, set free to glide through wavebands, through energy levels, pausing to say good-bye to us from the fluorescent screen?

A strangeness gripped me, a sense of psychic disorientation. It was her all right, the face, the hair, the way she blinks in rapid twos and threes. I'd seen her just an hour ago, eating eggs, but her appearance on the screen made me think of her as some distant figure from the past, some ex-wife and absentee mother, a walker in the mists of the dead. If she was not dead, was I? A two-syllable infantile cry, ba-ba, issued from the deeps of my soul. (1986, 104)

As the result of the pervasive force of television and the Gladneys' immersion in television programs all years long, even people's thinking mode will be dominated by television. One example is to imitate the action mode in television consciously. In chapter 17, Jack, the protagonist, finds that her daughter Steffie is imitating the speaking mode and the words of a television program: "We drove home in silence. We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone. A little later I watched Steffie in front of the TV set. She moved her lips, attempting to match the words as they were spoken" (1986, 84). Except conscious influences on the characters, television also builds the thinking mode of the characters subliminally. For example, Jack finds that Steffie murmurs the advertising words "Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida" (1986, 155) in

television unconsciously in her dream. According to degrowth theory about happiness, public advertisements reduce life satisfaction and thus happiness. This is because public advertisements may increase material aspiration of individuals, and thus they become dissatisfied with their current lives. In fact, characters in *White Noise* also have negative opinions about television. Murry's students express their opinion about it: "Worse than junk mail. Television is the death throes of human consciousness, according to them. They're ashamed of their television past. They want to talk about movies" (1986, 51).

Another mass media is radio which is also pervasive in the novel. Heinrich would rather believe the weather forecast in the radio than the evidence of vision (1986, 22-23); Steffie insists that water has to be boiled because she hears that on the radio (1986, 34). The radio broadcast seemingly plays an important role throughout the airborne toxic event, though some broadcasts are totally irrelevant to the event itself. These cases show the heteronomic nature of the media technologies. These technologies reduce the sense of individual subjectivity which intends to establish relations with external things by offering more convenient solutions. This just cuts off the relations between us and life and hinders our autonomy. "The more powerful a society is – in its facilities and its technological means – the more an individual feels powerless and experiences anxiety about his condition and therefore has to find someone, or better yet something, to lend himself to" (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 106). The result of the progress of modern technology is that we become less and less confident of our own ability to acquire the truth of life independently and become more and more dependent on technology. In the novel, due to the epistemic hegemony acquired by the radio and television and their pervasive existence, people are much dependent on them. To some extent, the television and radio are the embodiments of the magical power of modern technology. This power, in the context of growth society, is the unavoidable consequence of the growth requirement inherent in capitalist society and the lasting expansion of commodity frontiers from the physical domain to the intellectual domain. The commodifying activities in the intellectual area, as the impetus of economic growth, are common in the novel. Besides the mass-media technology and its products, there

are also some other types of high-technology as well as their products. Dylar is one of them.

The Dylar which claims to be able to cure the fear of death is a kind of high-tech-based medicine which can only be produced through modern technology. It is really a kind of deformed development of modern science and technology. Jack examines the tablet of Dylar which seems very different from other medicines

I sat at my desk in the office staring down at the white tablet. It was more or less flying-saucer shaped, a streamlined disk with the tiniest of holes at one end. It was only after moments of intense scrutiny that I'd been able to spot the hole.

The tablet was not chalky like aspirin and not exactly capsule-slick either. It felt strange in the hand, curiously sensitive to the touch but at the same time giving the impression that it was synthetic, insoluble, elaborately engineered. (1986, 184)

In fact, Dylar is not only special in form, but also in its design and production. Winnie Richards, the young research neurochemist is shocked by the peculiar design of the tablet. She has never seen such a tablet and does not know what it is called, and can only learn the name of the tablet from Jack. She praises it as “an interesting piece of technology” (1986, 187). She explains its technology and functional mechanism to Jack Gladney in amazement:

“It’s not a tablet in the old sense,” she said. “It’s a drug delivery system. It doesn’t dissolve right away or release its ingredients right away. The medication in Dylar is encased in a polymer membrane. Water from your gastrointestinal tract seeps through the membrane at a carefully controlled rate.”

[...]

“It dissolves the medication encased in the membrane. Slowly, gradually, precisely. The medicine then passes out of the polymer tablet through a single small hole. Once again the rate is carefully controlled.” (1986, 187)

The hole on the polymer tablet is very small and is almost invisible for human eyes “because it’s laser-drilled” (1986, 188). The ingenuity of the design lies in that “it’s not only tiny but stunningly precise in its dimensions,” so even the experienced

neurochemist Winne considers that “it’s a wonderful little system” (1986, 188). Winne comments that due to the ingenious design and technology of the tablet, it can achieve functions totally different from any pills and capsules:

“I would think the controlled dosage is meant to eliminate the hit-or-miss effect of pills and capsules. The drug is delivered at specified rates for extended periods. You avoid the classic pattern of overdosage followed by underdosage. You don’t get a burst of medication followed by the merest trickle. No upset stomach, queasiness, vomiting, muscle cramps, et cetera. This system is efficient.”

The most indigenous function of the tablet is that it can destroy itself through its own internal implosion after the medication has been released:

It self-destructs. It implodes minutely of its own massive gravitation. We’ve entered the realm of physics. Once the plastic membrane is reduced to microscopic particles, it passes harmlessly out of the body in the time-honored way. (1986, 188)

Jack also expresses his astonishment to the technological ingenuity of the design of Dylar when he talk seriously with Babette about her secret use of this kind of medicine:

Those little white disks are superbly engineered. Laser technology, advanced plastics. Dylar is almost as ingenious as the microorganisms that ate the billowing cloud. Who would have believed in the existence of a little white pill that works as a pressure pump in the human body to provide medication safely and effectively, and self-destructs as well? I am struck by the beauty of this. (1986, 190)

Though it seems like a perfect product of high-technology, it turns out to be a scientific failure: it is useless experimental medicine which is proved to be ridiculous in its mechanism. On Babette’s fear of death, it does not work, and the program proves to be “more or less unsupervised human experimentation, using a drug that is totally unknown, untested and unapproved, with side effects that could beach a whale” (1986, 300). So Dylar is proved to be an unlicensed hazardous medicine, and the project manager, Willie Mink, is kicked out, and becomes an addict and pusher. To some extent,

Dylar is an epitome of American postindustrial society, an alienated scientific material world.

One of the degrowth strategies is post-normal science which is totally different from conventional science and technology. Post-normal science scholar, Jerome Ravetz has criticized the economized normal science for being industrialized science which is entrepreneurial and produces runaway technology (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 281). In current growth society, technology, as the intellectual capital invested in social metabolism, is evaluated by its profitability instead of its quality. Ravetz contends that in the production of runaway technology, the scientific researchers lose control over the technology and eventually lose their autonomy, just like the common people lose autonomy in front of modern technology. In *White Noise*, Willie Mink loses his autonomy and becomes a victim of runaway technology in physical and intellectual senses, and eventually changes into a psychopath. Babette loses her autonomy in search of the antidote to her fear of death and is forced to commit adultery. Just as Jim Dwyer points out, "one of Don DeLillo's primary themes is the negative and dehumanizing effects of runaway technology on civilization and the individual" (Dwyer 2010, 68). The dangers of runaway technology lie in its uncertainty and potential harms to humanity as well as the nonhuman world.

This runaway-technology-laden world in *White Noise* is full of injury and hurt which may lead to death to people. Peter Ferguson points out that in a growth society "the issue of environmental security, concerning security risks stemming from or exacerbated by environmental problems, has become more prominent" (Ferguson 2018, 95). This is supposed to be one of the ambiguous meanings of the title "White Noise." When Jack asks Babette about her experience of death, "What if death is nothing but sound?" she says: "Electrical noise." "You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful." "Uniform, white." (1986, 198) Before Jack shoots Willie Mink at the Roadway Motel, he has a talk with Mink about the "room behavior," and at the same time he hears "a noise, faint, monotonous, white" (1986, 306). They continue with their talk about the mysterious medicine "Dylar," and Mink's sex experience with Babette, and the

following failure of the Dylar program and the replacement of Mink, which confirms the previous information that Jack collected from Babette and Winnie Richards. Jack tries to prove the side effects of Dylar, and tells Mink that an air crash is approaching, which makes Mink react accordingly. Jack approaches Mink gradually; at the moment he is about to murder Mink, Jack hears “White noise everywhere” (1986, 310). In this sense, the title “White Noise” suggests that in the postindustrial era more insidious life risk are lurking in our daily life. The pervasive death threats and insidious injury and hurt are the unexpected but inevitable product of modern runaway technologies that dominate the postindustrial social life.

Except the slow invisible threats, DeLillo also shows immediate and visible technological menaces represented by the chemical waste spill event in the novel. Chemical industry is an important product of industrialization. In Oates’ *The Falls*, the chemical companies which produce insecticides are one of the two sources that cause the pollution in the Niagara area; in *White Noise*, there is also a chemical industry which produces pesticides. The airborne toxic event is caused by the spill of tanked Nyodene D., “a whole bunch of things thrown together that are byproducts of the manufacture of insecticide” (1986, 131) and “a whole new generation of toxic waste” (1986, 138). The chemical industries have produced and also are producing new deadly substances that originally do not exist in the natural world. According to Heinrich’s teacher, “the original stuff kills roaches, the byproducts kill everything left over” (1986, 131). The most dangerous thing is that “no one seems to know exactly what it causes in humans or in the offspring of humans” (1986, 131). It is most probable that the result of the test of this toxic substance is too awful to publicize. Heinrich, Jack’s precocious son, who “would have an awareness of the environment” and whose “knowledge of chemistry would be fresh and up-to-date” (1986, 130) explains to the evacuees about the danger of Nyodene D.

Once it seeps into the soil, it has a life span of forty years. This is longer than a lot of people. After five years you’ll notice various kinds of fungi appearing between your regular windows and storm windows as well as in your clothes and food. After ten years your

screens will turn rusty and begin to pit and rot. Siding will warp. There will be glass breakage and trauma to pets. After twenty years you'll probably have to seal yourself in the attic and just wait and see. I guess there's a lesson in all this. Get to know your chemicals. (1986, 131)

Conor Mark Jameson focuses on the problem of chemical poisons in his work *Silent Spring Revisited* and notes that

No one denies that these chemical poisons have been valuable to farmers, but even they must be disturbed at what is happening. We know far too little about the balance of life to be able to guess what the effect of wholesale destruction of many species will be — but it might be both serious and unexpected. There is urgent need for a study of the whole problem, including the character of these poisons and the condition of their use, before the English countryside suffers an immeasurable impoverishment. (Jameson 2012, 24-25)

These words just expose the origin and process of environmental insecurity in modern society: it just originates from the pursuit of the growth of material production and technological progress.

Threatened by the new deadly chemical waste, the authority tries to eliminate the toxic cloud by microorganisms which “were genetic recombinations that had a built-in appetite for the particular toxic agents in Nyodene D.” (DeLillo 1986, 160). These microorganisms will swallow up the toxic cloud and decompose it. Obviously, this method for eliminating the toxins is also based on a kind of high technology. But like the toxic byproducts of the modern chemical industry, there are also some uncertainties about the result of this technology. Just as Jack worries, no one knows what will happen to the toxic agents and the microorganisms after the toxic cloud is consumed. Babette express her worry about the microorganism technology for clearing the toxic waste cloud and also for all science and technology though she thinks that some technologies are innovative:

“The very idea, the very existence, the wondrous ingenuity. On the one hand I definitely admire it [...] What scares me is have they thought it through completely?”

[...]

“I feel they’re working on the superstitious part of my nature. Every advance is worse than the one before because it makes me more scared.”

“Scared of what?”

“The sky, the earth, I don't know.”

“The greater the scientific advance, the more primitive the fear.”

(1986, 160-161)

In fact, Jack and Babette are talking about the unpredictability and uncertainty of the effect of modern technology. This kind of unpredictability is the necessary consequence of technological optimism rooted in modern society. Risk theorist Thomas Homer-Dixon notes the complexity and unpredictability of the result of environmental mismanagement by defining “unknown unknowns” as “a double ignorance, of (at once) ‘critical components, processes, and possibilities in complex systems surrounding us,’ but also of that very ignorance itself” (Varsava 2011, 293). Scientists may neither know the negative environmental consequences of modern technology, nor they realize this ignorance. Ulrich Beck also notes that the postmodern industrial society is also full of risks caused by science and technology

In advanced modernity the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks. Accordingly, the problems and conflicts relating to distribution in a society of scarcity overlap with the problems and conflicts that arise from the production, definition and distribution of technoscientifically produced risks. (Beck 1992, 19)

The worldwide industrialization beginning in the late 18th century and the corresponding risks it brings about are the consequence of aggrandizement of science and technology, and we call it scientism. “Scientism is the belief that science, especially natural science, is much the most valuable part of human learning — much the most valuable part because it is much the most authoritative, or serious, or beneficial” (Sorell 1994, 1). In philosophy, “scientism assumes, and requires a naturalist, materialist, rather mechanistic metaphysics” (Williams and Robinson 2015, 7). Being materialistic and mechanistic, it will pursue extreme economic growth and at the same time will overlook organic connections between nature and human cultural development. Scientism can

only lead to an exaggeration of the value of science and blind expansion of science and technology. In fact, scientism is the utilitarian presentation of growth cult: the pursuit of new commodifying resources, productivity, and economic interest. Degrowth, as an anti-utilitarian philosophy, criticizes the runaway technology because it is profit-oriented, and advocates “restoring the scientific spirit against scientism, reason against rationalism, democracy against technocracy” (D’Alisa, Damaria, and Kallis 2015, 62).

Because of the life risks caused by the runaway technology, the characters in the novel tend to become death-haunted. It is a kind of heteronomous worry over the runaway technology. As I explained, one of the meanings of the title “White Noise” is death. This connotation of the title implies the insidious danger of postindustrial society that hides under the surface of consumerist social life. Ulrich Beck has already theorized these risks produced by runaway technology in the postmodern age. Sompatu Vungthong also thinks that “[i]n *White Noise*, Don DeLillo presents a vivid picture of the postmodern toxic world that provides people with no real certainty, but rather a fear of death and fatal diseases” (Vungthong 2011, 28). In the novel, the concept of death continuously haunts the protagonist, Jack Gladney throughout the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Jack just tangles with the question that between him and his wife, Babette who will die first:

Who will die first?

This question comes up from time to time, like where are the car keys. It ends a sentence, prolongs a glance between us. I wonder if the thought itself is part of the nature of physical love, a reverse Darwinism that awards sadness and fear to the survivor. Or is it some inert element in the air we breathe, a rare thing like neon, with a melting point, an atomic weight? (DeLillo 1986, 15)

Though Jack may not be so aware of the source of his worry about death, he does realize the hiding risk of the industrialized postmodern world. His daughters’ school faces a sudden health threat unexpectedly: the children get headaches and eye hurts and one teacher rolls with pain on the ground, and his daughters have to stay at home. The most astounding thing is that one of the heavy-protected inspectors dies suddenly in their inspection of the school. Except this, some other toxic accidents also happen

frequently without any warning signs. For example, after a simulative evacuation for noxious odor, an actual toxic odor appears unexpectedly. “An irritating sting in the nostrils, a taste of copper on the tongue [...] Our eyes began to water” (1986, 270-271). All these events inevitably lead to modern people’s fear of possible death at any time.

There is more than that, of course. The most serious threat to the environment and our health in contemporary society is nuclear radiation. It permeates people’s daily life and casts a shadow in their hearts like a ghost. Denis’s real father, Bob Pardee has a job to raise the fund for the nuclear accident— the Nuclear Accident Readiness Foundation (1986, 56). The pervasiveness of these modern risks has entered the mind of the public and become a part of the contemporary collective unconsciousness. Jack’s dream of death just proves that he realizes the hidden danger in the surroundings. At the beginning of chapter 11, Jack is frightened to awake to the nightmare:

I woke in the grip of a death sweat. Defenseless against my own racking fears. A pause at the center of my being. I lacked the will and physical strength to get out of bed and move through the dark house, clutching walls and stair rails. To feel my way, reinhabit my body, re-enter the world. Sweat trickled down my ribs. The digital reading on the clock-radio was 3:51. Always odd numbers at times like this. What does it mean? Is death odd-numbered? Are there life-enhancing numbers, other numbers charged with menace? Babette murmured in her sleep and I moved close, breathing her heat. (1986, 47)

According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, “when we sleep, it is believed that our defenses do not operate in the same manner they do when we are awake. During sleep, the unconscious is free to express itself, and it does so in our dreams” (Tyson 2006, 18). Without the conscious censorship in daytime, his inner fear of death begins to show up. In fact, the consciousness of death accompanies him all the time, and when he meets the scene of death, he may associate it with himself; once he reads some obituaries, he connects them to his own situation:

When I read obituaries I always note the age of the deceased. Automatically I relate this figure to my own age. Four years to go, I think. Nine more years. Two years and I'm dead. The power of

numbers is never more evident than when we use them to speculate on the time of our dying. Sometimes I bargain with myself. Would I be willing to accept sixty-five, Genghis Khan's age on dying? Suleiman the Magnificent made it to seventy-six. That sounds all right, especially the way I feel now, but how will it sound when I'm seventy-three? (DeLillo 1986, 99)

He would rather suppose that the great man such as Attila the Hun died without any pity and fear so as to cheer himself up in the face of the environmental dangers and uncertainty of the postindustrial society. Unfortunately, doom soon falls upon him. In their escape from his home, the airborne toxic chemical waste peeps into his body and plants a death in him. This kind of death threat seems totally new and strange: there is a nebulous mass caused by Nyodene Derivative in his blood stream which may grow in the body and cause him to die. His fear of death becomes an actual threat. Murry's comment really gets the essence of the relation between modern death and postindustrial social life

We've never been so close to it, so familiar with its habits and attitudes. We know it intimately. But it continues to grow, to acquire breadth and scope, new outlets, new passages and means. The more we learn, the more it grows. Is this some law of physics? Every advance in knowledge and technique is matched by a new kind of death, a new strain. Death adapts, like a viral agent. Is it a law of nature? Or some private superstition of mine? I sense that the dead are closer to us than ever. I sense that we inhabit the same air as the dead. (1986, 150)

This comment also accounts for the increasing risk of death as well as Jack's worry over and fear of death.

This worry over and fear of death is not exclusive to Jack, the protagonist; his wife, Babette has more concern over the insidious effects of the postindustrial society than Jack though she is unaware of the source of her fear. She confesses to Jack when she cannot hide any more the fact that she was taking Dylar in the past period: "I'm afraid to die," [...] "I think about it all the time. It won't go away." [...] "It haunts me, Jack. I can't get it off my mind. I know I'm not supposed to experience such a fear so consciously and so steadily. What can I do? It's just there [...]" (1986, 196). Their

common concern about death makes them often discuss the question as calmly as a trivial matter. But they all hide their fears so well that they do not know each other's being obsessed with death until they have a serious talk about the tablets of Dylar.

Except the common fear of death in the alienated postindustrial society, there is also loss of faith. Facing the power of modern runaway technology, modern people feel their vulnerability, but many of them no longer seek religious support. American Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim notes that:

What is so new in the hopes and fears of the machine age are that savior and destroyer are no longer clothed in the image of man; no longer are the figures that we imagine can save and destroy us direct projections of our human image. What we now hope will save us, and what in our delusions we fear will destroy us, is something that no longer has human qualities. (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 106)

In the age of runaway technology, God is no longer the savior and destroyer of people. The same is true for nuns. At the end of the novel, Jack has a conversation with Sister Hermann Marie who is working on his wound in the wrist about heaven and God. She confesses with contempt that they do not believe in Christian doctrines at all: for her God, heaven, and the angels are all deception. The religious picture on the wall is just for others who are always believing that monks and nuns still believe in Christian doctrines. Their task is to pretend to believe Christianity in an age when no one really believes in it. But since humanity cannot totally desert religion, they have to defend it as the last believers; or the human spiritual world will collapse. So they are not stupid superstitious persons, instead they are the last spiritual supporters of human kind and dedicators:

Our pretense is a dedication. Someone must appear to believe. Our lives are no less serious than if we professed real faith, real belief. As belief shrinks from the world, people find it more necessary than ever that someone believe. Wild-eyed men in caves. Nuns in black. Monks who do not speak. We are left to believe. Fools, children. Those who have abandoned belief must still believe in us. They are sure that they are right not to believe but they know belief must not fade completely. (1986, 319)

From Sister Hermann Marie's words, we know that most people including nuns and monks have lost faith, thus it is a luxury for modern people to enjoy a real peaceful life in an age of runaway technology due to the lack of spiritual consolation in their religious beliefs.

In the scientific atmosphere of the postmodern society, aggrandizement of technology may also lead to technology fetishism. The most evident example in *White Noise* is Willie Mink's scientific program to perfect a medication—Dylar. This program is the product of the death threat caused by modern technology and technology fetishism, and it turns out to be a risky technological attempt. Though it is proved to be a hazardous experiment Mink insists on finishing it out of his scientific cult. He carries out unsupervised human experimentation with untested and unapproved medicine — Dylar. Babette takes many tablets of Dylar, and only finds she can forget many things except death. Mink's program fails, but he does not accept this, and still dreams that the successful Dylar will come in the future. He says that to Jack: "Dylar failed, reluctantly. But it will definitely come. Maybe now, maybe never" (1986, 308). As a kind of unapproved medication, it cannot be used by any person officially. To realize its value, Mink would rather swallow the tablets of Dylar like candies at the expense of life. He treats it like his own child, full of affection. It is obviously a kind of technology fetishism though he does not succeed in his scientific pursuit. Except Mink's Dylar fetishism, there is also authoritative technology fetishism which may reflect the fetishistic element in the postindustrial social culture. In the airborne toxic event, the authority tends to eliminate the cloud of chemical pollutants through technologically-advanced methods: "to plant microorganisms in the core of the toxic cloud" (1986, 160). The organisms are genetically recombined biotechnological products which are designed to consume the Nyodene Derivative toxic cloud, break down the toxic components and resolve them. Similarly to other modern technological products such as chemical pesticides, nuclear program, the organisms are very problematic. It may produce new greater environmental threat to the local people: "No one knew what would happen to the toxic waste once it was eaten or to the microorganisms once they

were finished eating” (1986, 60). Thus, it can be seen that the technology fetishism rooted in the public and some experts may bring about serious problems such as environmental pollution and physical harms to human beings.

3.2.2. The Physical Harms Caused by Runaway Technology in *White Noise*: Ecological Deterioration and Crisis

3.2.2.1 *The Hazard of Wave and Radiation, Industrial Waste, and Other Unidentifiable Harm Caused by Modern Technology*

As Rachel Carson points out, in the natural world there are hostile and supporting elements. In them there is dangerous radiation emitted by rocks as well as cosmic bodies such as the sun. After a long time of evolution, humanity has accommodated to the surroundings in which the intensity and quantity of the rays are at a more or less stable level. In the modern era, as science and technology progressed, some man-made waves and radiation were created. Television and radio are the electronic equipment that work through the transmission of electromagnetic waves. In the previous section, it has been shown that in *White Noise*, as the embodiment of modern technology, television and radio exist pervasively; correspondingly, people live in the invisible wave and radiation of these electronic equipment. But few people feel and realize the harm of waves and radiation, immersing themselves in the convenience and enjoyment of the fruits of modern science and technology.

Only Heinrich is aware of the potential injury of waves and radiation. Compared with the waves and radiation pervasive in our daily life, chemical spills are not the real harms. People always have close contact with electronic apparatuses such as microwave ovens and power equipment. However, the scientists tend to understate the health damage caused by the so-called low doses of radiation. He points to the connection between the radiation of the high-voltage power lines and the high suicide rate among the nearby residents, and reminds Babette of the common physiological and psychological harm that the waves and radiation may cause:

“Forget headaches and fatigue,” he said as he chewed. “What about

nerve disorders, strange and violent behavior in the home? There are scientific findings. Where do you think all the deformed babies are coming from? Radio and TV, that's where." (1986, 175)

Just as Heinrich says, radiation is the ubiquitous harm in our daily life and no one can escape from it as it is pervasive in the world. Modern technology brings us convenience and enjoyment, but at the same time invisible electromagnetic radiation. In fact, electromagnetic radiation is an important cause of many diseases, such as leukemia, cancer, senital system disease, and cardiovascular disease, since its effects can be accumulated in the body during the whole life of any organisms. It can be called an invisible slow killer of human kind and other creatures as well.

As Wayne Booth notes, "[t]he author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability" (Booth 1983, 18). The reliability of a character is judged according to whether he (she) can fulfil the norms of the implied author, the second self of the author. Booth continue to argue that "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (1983, 158). Judging from this norm, Heinrich is a reliable character of the novel, his words just represent the author, DeLillo's voice. Moreover, throughout the novel, Heinrich is the most reliable character if he is not the only one.

Heinrich is a fourteen-year old boy, but his hair has begun to recede. The reason cannot be located. Jack tries to speculate the reason:

Did his mother consume some kind of gene-piercing substance when she was pregnant? Am I at fault somehow? Have I raised him, unwittingly, in the vicinity of a chemical dump site, in the path of air currents that carry industrial wastes capable of producing scalp degeneration, glorious sunsets? (People say the sunsets around here were not nearly so stunning thirty or forty years ago.) Man's guilt in history and in the tides of his own blood has been complicated by technology, the daily seeping falsehearted death. (1986, 22)

But he never realized that most probably the accumulated electromagnetic radiation emitted from television, radio, microwave, computer, high-voltage power lines, etc. is the main cause of Heinrich's possible gene mutation during the pregnancy of his mother

for his precocious symptoms or of the acquired disease with the precocious symptoms.

The industrialization established on modern science and technology not only brings about invisible environmental hazards of waves and radiation, but also industrial wastes which cannot be decomposed or are difficult to be decomposed. The geological epoch we are in is called the Anthropocene by some ecocritics. The main point of this conception is that “Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth as a whole into planetary *terra incognita*” (Clark 2015, 1). One main content of the changes of the original Earth is that industrial production produces many man-made products such as plastics that do not exist in nature. When they are used and discarded, they will almost never disappear in nature and form permanent contamination to the environment and threats to humanity and other creatures. In *White Noise*, DeLillo describes industrial wastes and their pollution of the environment on many occasions. In Chapter 8, he gives a close-up to the garbage compactor, which serves as an epitome of the materialist side of the alienated postindustrial American society

At home Denise placed a moist bag of garbage in the kitchen compactor. She started up the machine. The ram stroked downward with a dreadful wrenching sound, full of eerie feeling.[...] Murray seemed engrossed in the incidental mesh. Whining metal, exploding bottles, plastic smashed flat. Denise listened carefully, making sure the mangling din contained the correct sonic elements, which meant the machine was operating properly. (1986, 33-34)

In Chapter 34, DeLillo further demonstrates the unpleasant dark side of the postindustrial society by a detailed description of the domestic garbage which are deteriorating the environment and endangering the survival of humanity and other creatures.

No one was around. I walked across the kitchen, opened the compactor drawer and looked inside the trash bag. An oozing cube of semi-mangled cans, clothes hangers, animal bones and other refuse. The bottles were broken, the cartons flat. Product colors were undiminished in brightness and intensity. Fats, juices and heavy sludges seeped through layers of pressed vegetable matter. I

felt like an archaeologist about to sift through a finding of tool fragments and assorted cave trash. (1986, 258)

Besides highlighting the domestic garbage, DeLillo also presents the general pollution of the towns. When Jack goes to meet his daughter, Bee, at the airport outside Iron City, he describes the Iron City as “a large town sunk in confusion, a center of abandonment and broken glass rather than a place of fully realized urban decay” (1986, 85). There he only meets his ex-wife, Tweedy Browner, who comes to wait and spends some time with her daughter, Bee. To avoid child beggars, they leave the airport temporarily. When they drive through Iron City, they travel along the railroad tracks. “The weeds were full of Styrofoam cups, tossed from train windows or wind-blown north from the depot” (1986, 87). The image of cities echoes the image of the garbage compactor well, and they together serve DeLillo’s critique of the postindustrial fanaticism and greed for economic development.

The harm of electromagnetic radiation and the industrial wastes to humanity and creatures is slow but easy to test and identify, while other environmental harm brought about by industrialization are often difficult to identify. Jack’s two daughters, Denise and Steffie’s school is victimized by unidentifiable environmental hazards. “Kids were getting headaches and eye irritations, tasting metal in their mouths. A teacher rolled on the floor and spoke foreign languages. No one knew what was wrong” (1986, 35). Investigators cannot identify where the problem is, and they can only speculate about the origin of the harm. But almost all the possible reasons point to environmental hazards caused by industrial products: chemicals such as varnish and adhesive, asbestos fireproofing, etc.; the only exception is the cafeteria food, but it is excluded later because Jack’s family and Murray “heard the first of the rumors about a man dying during the inspection of the grade school, one of the masked and Mylex-suited men, heavy-booted and bulky. Collapsed and died, went the story that was going around, in a classroom on the second floor” (1986, 40). The inspector never ate the cafeteria food, so it cannot be the food. This kind of accident is a good proof of Ulrich Beck’s theory about the risks of modern industrial society.

Though electronic radiation in our surroundings is dangerous, it is slow as well as

accumulated in harming people's health. Comparatively, the environmental degeneration is more evident and instant in the airborne toxic event in *White Noise*.

3.2.2.2 *The Airborne Toxic Event*

If the waves and radiation and other industrial harm express DeLillo's critique and worry about the ecological deterioration brought about by modern technology and industrial production, then the Airborne Toxic Event shows the real disaster caused by the runaway technology of the postindustrial society with verisimilitude. The Airborne Toxic Event is dramatic because it begins with deadly dangerous toxic spills, but ends with no extensive casualties, but this does not reduce its warning power. The event also proves the fact that ecological the crisis will eventually influence all the people regardless of their class, race and status. Just like Ulrich Beck says,

[r]isks of modernization sooner or later also strike those who produce or profit from them. They contain a boomerang effect, which breaks up the pattern of class and national society. Ecological disaster and atomic fallout ignore the borders of nations. Even the rich and powerful are not safe from them. These are hazards not only to health, but also to legitimation, property and profit. (Beck 1992, 23)

In *White Noise*, as a college professor, Jack does not believe that he will be affected by the cloud of the spilled chemical byproduct. Before the evacuation, he talks to Babette about the billowing toxic spill

These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornados. I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith. (DeLillo 1986, 114)

The evacuation shatters his illusion. He has to become one member of the ecological refugees. They start to abandon their home when it begins to snow. The mass evacuation

brings about a little confusion that leads to two traffic accidents, which accentuates the seriousness and tension of this ecological crisis.

The description of the toxic cloud vividly shows us the perniciousness of chemical industry as a representative of modern technology and industrialization

The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral wings. We weren't sure how to react. It was a terrible thing to see, so close, so low, packed with chlorides, benzenes, phenols, hydrocarbons, or whatever the precise toxic content. But it was also spectacular, part of the grandness of a sweeping event, like the vivid scene in the switching yard or the people trudging across the snowy overpass with children, food, belongings, a tragic army of the dispossessed. Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force, so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms. This was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control. Our helplessness did not seem compatible with the idea of a man-made event. (1986, 127-128)

Under DeLillo's pen, the event takes on an apocalyptic nature. But the textual narrative of the characters' reactions signify their indifference and detachment to this deadly chemical accident. In the large barrack for evacuees, Babette keeps strangely calm and tells a woman of Jehovah's Witnesses beside her: "Nothing surprises me any more," [...] "What would surprise me would be if there were no surprises." [...] "Or if there were little bitty surprises. That would be a surprise. Instead of things like this" (1986, 132). She does not care about anything, including the toxic accident; and she does not consider the toxic spills as danger even though the Mylex-suited men patrol the streets. Babette even thinks that this will be a good time to diet. Even Jack cannot help refuting her: "I think it's interesting that you regard a possible disaster for yourself, your family and thousands of other people as an opportunity to cut down on fatty foods" (1986, 132). Peter Boxall notes that:

Babette's diffident response to the disastrous, her hassled absent-minded unconcern at the apocalyptic threat that hangs over the novel's small town America, offers a model of the way that the narrative finds itself comically absent and dislocated even from its own fear – a stranger in the very midst of its own dying. (Boxall 2006, 115)

The comic narrative Boxall identifies in the novel is also embodied in the SIMVAC staff's prioritization of the game of simulated evacuation over the real rescue in the accident. On the one hand, this kind of ironic narrative of the toxic disastrous event illustrates the ecological disaster caused by modern technology, on the other hand, conveys DeLillo's negation and helplessness to the society dominated by runaway technology and scientism.

As I have said in the previous part, the chemical waste, Nyodene D., is deadly poisonous, and the most important is that it has a long-life span once it seeps into the soil, and it will form a complete pollution of the soil. When people are exposed to it in the air, they may die at any time in the thirty-year life span of this substance in the human body. In their flight, Jack gets out of the car to fuel it when the toxic cloud is just ahead of them. So a little breadth of the Nyodene D. seeps into his body and plants death inside him. Compared with common chemical and radioactive waste, the Nyodene's effect on humans is more powerful: not deadly or chronic disease, but death. In fact, to chemical toxic agents, humans are as vulnerable as other forms of life. Jack becomes the only known victim of the airborne toxic event. This fact, together with his forced evacuation, forms a structural irony since he was once fully confident that professors like him will never be affected by ecological disasters like the airborne toxic event. His view of the event differs greatly from the true circumstances recognized by the implied author and the readers.

Besides the pollution of Nyodene, the way to eliminate the toxic cloud, to some extent, also poses a risk. To use microorganisms to eat the toxic most probably brings about a new type of environmental pollutant. Just like the uncertainty of some modern technologies, genetic mutation may happen to the microorganisms full of Nyodene D. due to the lethality of this chemical waste. The aftermath of the contaminative accident

may be chronic. Just Rachel Carson, the forerunner of ecocriticism, notes that:

The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life. (Carson 2002, 4)

Chemical pollution is more pervasive than radioactive pollution, and more irreversible than other industrial pollution.

From the previous elaboration one can detect DeLillo's dissent and negation to the modern runaway technology and the technocraticism behind it in his ironic narrative and "surreal humor" (Bloom 2003, 145). Besides the critique of the politics of technocraticism, DeLillo also decolonizes consumerist ideology in his narrative of "cultural satire" (2003, 145).

3.3 Decolonization of Consumerism

In the growth society, consumerism is as important as productivism in driving economic growth. As a fundamental ideology of capitalism, consumerism plays a critical role in building the subjectivity of social individuals. "Consumerism represents the fundamental doctrine of contemporary capitalism: a cultural ideology founded on the idea and the imperative of consumption (in its common significance, but also and crucially in the sense of "using up entirely, disposing of, wasting, destroying": *consumere*)" (Xavier 2018, 2). In Marlon Xavier's opinion, consumerism, as a socioeconomic ideology, aims to build the subjectivity of individuals and the consumerist social culture on a psychic level. He calls the whole process consumerist colonization. While industrialism valued industrial production, consumerism emphasizes consumption and the production of consumers. So the essential aspect of the subjectivity in a consumerist society is to be a consumer internalizing the

consumerist values. In *White Noise*, the characters are all subjects of consumerism. Sompatu Vungthong puts forward that *White Noise* “is a world where people’s minds and behaviors are manipulated by the logic of consumerism” (Vungthong 2011, 28).

The most astonishing fact is that Steffie, Jack’s nine-year old daughter, has become a victim of consumerism. She indulges herself in television and other commercial advertisements and finds pleasure in imitating the words in the advertisements. Even in an urgent situation like evacuation in the airborne toxic event, she does not forget to read the coupon for Baby Lux. This indicates that she has internalized the consumerist ideology unconsciously. This internalization illustrates why she murmurs the words of the advertisement unconsciously in her dream. This fact even amazes Jack deeply:

The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. But how could this be? A simple brand name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child’s restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child’s brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence.

I depend on my children for that. (DeLillo 1986, 155)

Jack’s amazement, in fact, shows his own internalization of and thus victimization by consumerism. This plot is just designed to show the toxicity of consumerist ideology dominant in American society.

The most common leisure activity for Jack is to shop in the supermarket and mall with his family. They find great pleasure and satisfaction in their shopping. Jack expresses his ecstasy and increasing sense of self-respect in their shopping without any concealment

I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking and

touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it. I sent clerks into their fabric books and pattern books to search for elusive designs. I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me. We crossed from furniture to men's wear, walking through cosmetics. Our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors in security rooms. I traded money for goods. The more money I spent, the less important it seemed. I was bigger than these sums. These sums poured off my skin like so much rain. These sums in fact came back to me in the form of existential credit. (1986, 84)

Through shopping, Jack finds that he becomes more important than before and his value increases. This is the false illusion of sign-exchange value caused by consumerism. Karl Marx was the earliest philosopher to theorize the effects of commodification and consumerism with the term "commodity fetishism." "Fetishism" here means that a person has a strong liking or need for a particular object or activity which gives them (sexual) pleasure and excitement. Jack's fascination with the commodities is an example of the fetishistic effect of consumerism. It is the same situation with Jack's colleague, Murry Jay Siskind. Jack runs into him in the supermarket as many times as on the campus. It is obvious that the supermarket plays an important role in many people's lives, as a place both for consumption and spiritual consolation. Jack's words just hit the point with some ironic effects: "But the supermarket did not change, except for the better. It was well-stocked, musical and bright. This was the key, it seemed to us. Everything was fine, would continue to be fine, would eventually get even better as long as the supermarket did not slip" (1986, 170).

Consumerism will bring about damaging effects on individuals. Except for the physical harm of environmental pollutants produced by industrial production with the stimulation of consumerism, there are also psychological effects. According to degrowth theory, Steffie and Jack's victimization by consumerism will definitely cause the decrease of their life satisfaction and thus happiness. Internalizing consumerism, they usually are more materialistic and more dependent on individual wealth. This

makes them less satisfied with their living state. Thus, they tend to be more unhappy than others. Another effect of consumerism is on individual autonomy. It makes people more dependent on commodities and convenience. This dependence has gradually led to uncritical acceptance of the industrialized products and other cultural elements of capitalist society. Thus people become more and more unable and unwilling to produce goods by themselves and think independently. Jack and Murray are the representatives of modern people who have internalized consumerism and can only depend on industrialized commodities and the market. Thus they illustrate the heteronomic nature of capitalist consumerist culture. Degrowth Ivan Illich coined the term “radical monopoly” to indicate the exclusive effects of the consumerist culture:

By ‘radical monopoly’ I mean the dominance of one type of product rather than the dominance of one brand. I speak about radical monopoly when one industrial production process exercises an exclusive control over the satisfaction of a pressing need, and excludes nonindustrial activities from competition. (Illich 1975, 66)

It is through this kind of radical monopoly that consumerist culture monopolizes the production, consumption choice, and the whole process of social metabolism.

Besides the effects of consumerist culture on happiness and autonomy, consumerism may also causes disunified identity which is believed to be determined by the commodities which people consume. This problem originates from the symbolic value of the consumption of commodities which refers to the value of the consumption of commodities that indicates a special social status even though it is deceptive. Conrad Lodziak calls this phenomenon “the replacement of ‘fixed’ identities with fluid, consumption-based identities; and the de-materialisation of consumption” (Lodziak 2002, 20). This is also called the fluidity of self-identity in the consumer culture. Jack’s sense of increasing self-value is a case in point. Disunified identity may cause further self-insecurity due to the worry about the deflation of self-value. When this kind of self-insecurity cannot be repressed, then it may develop into self-delusion. This kind of self-delusion may form a stable psychic inclination after long-time existence in the mind of people. Jack would rather believe in the claimed curative effects of Dylar on the fear of

death, though Babette has confessed that it does not work after she took it. He is eager to get the four remaining Dylar tablets from Denise and persuades her: “Remember how you heard on the radio that the billowing cloud caused sweaty palms? Your palms got sweaty, didn't they? The power of suggestion makes some people sick, others well, it may not matter how strong or weak Dylar is. If I think it will help me, it will help me” (1986, 251). For him, the effect of Dylar is not objective, but subjective; he would rather admit the totally nonexistent thing. Later, Winnie Richards, his scientist colleague confirms that Dylar is “a drug that is totally unknown, untested and unapproved, with side effects that could beach a whale” (1986, 130), but Jack still wants to take Willie Mink’s supply of Dylar after killing him. That shows his self-delusion is really severe.

3.4 Conclusion

In *White Noise*, DeLillo presents a grotesque postindustrial world full of runaway technology, environmental toxins, cultural wasteland, and spiritual alienation. It is the direct result of capitalist ideology: growth cult, technocentrism, scientism, and consumerism. In them, growth cult is the core and essence, and it is the general guideline of the capitalist society. Under this guideline, the traditional society was transformed into an industrialized world which is established on the modern media industry functioning with waves and radiation, modern chemical industry producing chemicals which cause environmental pollution, nuclear industry with potential radioactive pollution, and other industries which bring about various ecological pollutants. In this process, technology is given a high status as it is the main driving force of industrial production. At the same time, in the process of consumption consumerism which stimulates the social demand dominates the capitalist culture.

DeLillo’s representation of post-industrial society and characterization of various victimized characters in this novel provides a quintessential scenario for the theorization of technocene and econocene (the age of technology and economy) in terms of its technoprogessivism and consumer culture. Through the illustration of the runaway technology and its destructive effects on the environment and individual

happiness, autonomy and psychology with a series of domestic and social events, DeLillo conveys his critique and negation of the economism and growth ideology of the US society in a comic and ironic way. In essence, capitalist runaway technology aims at profitability and economic growth rather than improving people's wellbeing. So many technological products cannot promote but personal happiness but reduce it in general. In the novel, wave and radiation caused by the media industry and power industry and airborne toxic pollution produced by chemical byproducts are the examples of the negative effects on individual happiness. With regard to the investigation of happiness, "there is a growing literature indicating that environmental degradation upsets well-being. Various studies indicate that poor air quality, for example, is associated with lower scores on happiness" (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 186). Besides the reductive effect on personal happiness, modern technology is also heteronomic, as I have argued in the previous section. Runaway technology produces dependent individuals. Thus, "the more we rely on external tools for solutions, the less we trust changes we implement independently as part of our subjective choices adherent to our values" (2015, 107). By characterizing the character of Willie Mink and depicting his life experience, DeLillo also represents another effect of runaway technology and scientism, namely technology fetishism, a special form of commodity fetishism (technology is also commodified in capitalist society).

Politicization of consumerist culture is another motif of *White Noise*. As I have argued, consumerist culture can also reduce happiness through fostering materialist aspiration and limit personal autonomy through radical monopoly. Individuals with strong materialist aspirations tends to be unsatisfied with their personal life. Consumerist culture aims to confine consumers to the market and thus limits the possibility of personal production and creation.

DeLillo's politicization of capitalist industrialization, modern technology, and consumerist ideology are realized mainly through the following devices: the comments of Heinrich, the precocious intellectual son of Jack Gladney on the modern technology such as electromagnetic signal transmission and chemical toxic pollutant in the airborne

toxic event, the negative description of the addiction of daily consumption, and two main events: the ridiculous program of Dylar and Jack's hospitalizing Willie Mink. If one argues that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* focuses on the capitalist growth cult, the commodifying activities on the physical frontiers of market economy, the consequential environmental injustice, and social conflicts between local people and developers and their political and cultural coalitions, then *White Noise* tries to represent the insidious risks and explicitly-revealed physical harm of modern runaway technology and industries in a postindustrial society. These technologies and industries may include mass media industries such as television and radio, chemical industry, and advanced technology such as the Dylar research program. Compared with *The Monkey Wrench Gang* which emphasizes the ecological and social injustice caused by economic expansion, *White Noise* pays much attention to the dehumanizing effects of capitalist culture, such as scientism and consumerism, which endorses the economic growth. This cultural examination is relatively more profound than Abbey's exposure of the capitalist economic expansion due to two circumstances. First, *White Noise* was produced later than *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; so it is possible for DeLillo to focus on the maturer stage of capitalist society. Second, the America southwest developed relatively later than the eastern parts of the USA.

Another ecofiction, *The Falls* which was published eight years later than *White Noise* also reflects the social life of the advanced stage of American capitalist society. But they have different concerns. Generally speaking, *The Falls* represents the social reality of stronger socio-ecological crisis and injustice. It discloses the perniciousness of chemical and radioactive environmental pollutants and the severe victimization of the residents in the Niagara area and the social evilness of the authorities in the development of American economy.

Chapter 4.

The Degrowth Discourses in Joyce Carol Oates's *The Falls*: Critique of Development

If one argues that DeLillo's disclosure of the environmental risks of postindustrial society and critique of the damaging effects on individual subjectivity and psychology and collective unconsciousness are, to some extent, implicit and moderate, then Oates's condemnation of savage economic expansion is explicit and trenchant. What I will do in this chapter is to concretize the detrimental effects of capitalistic development on individual happiness from degrowth and ecocritical point of view, and investigate how Joyce Carol Oates dramatizes nature in *The Falls*, and also analyse interactions between humans and the environment in her narrative.

4.1 Introduction to Joyce Carol Oates and *The Falls*

Joyce Carol Oates (1938-), the author of *The Falls*, is a prominently versatile writer in the contemporary American literary world. She was born in an Irish Catholic working-class family in Lockport, New York. She got irrefutable great achievements in areas of novel, poetry, drama, and literary criticism. She is prolific in her literary creation. In nearly fifty years, Oates has experimented with various kinds of novels, including naturalistic novels, romantic novels, psychological realistic novels, and anti-realistic novels. Many novels of Oates are set in the Mythical Eden County with the prototype of her hometown, Erie County of New York, whose name implies an ironical comment on the poor, even miserable economic conditions of its residents. It seems that in her early stage of literary creation Oates wanted to establish an allegorical setting like Faulkner's fictional Yoknapawatawpha County, a world that serves as an epitome of contemporary American life.

Oates, as a prolific female writer, not only deals with the domestic world of family

and marriage, but is also inspired from history, philosophy, psychology, and popular culture and is devoted to present subject matters including history, politics, medicine, murder, and rape. Surveying Oates's oeuvre, one can see a panoramic picture of contemporary American life. Because of her illustrious accomplishments in literary creation, she received much praise, numerous awards and honors. She was nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in literature in 2013. She won the National Book Award for her novel, *them* (1969), and she was nominated twice for the National Book Award for her two novels: *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart* (1990) and *Blonde* (2000). She also won the O. Henry Awards for her short stories, the O. Henry Special Awards for Continuing Achievement in 1976 and 1986, the Rea Award for the Short Story in 1990, the Heideman Award for One-Act Plays, the Elmer Holmes Bobs Lifetime Achievement Award in fiction, the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, 1994, and 2000, to name but a few.

Generally speaking, Oates' literary career can be divided into three stages: apprenticeship before the 1970, more mature period in the 1970s, and mature stage of her literary career from the 1980s. *The Falls*, an ecofiction published in 2004, was written in the third stage of her literary career. It is an outstanding literary work with lifelike characterization and an attractive plot. The novel of 481 pages is about the life and destiny of two generations of an American middle-class family. However, it is not only a story about a family, but it contains a vivid, detailed description of contemporary American social life as well.

The timeline of the novel's story spans from 1950s to 1980s, encompassing more than thirty years. Oates brings an actual legal case into the work and it plays a pivotal role in the storyline of the novel. The real case is that of the Love Canal scandal in US history. It is a landmark event in the social and economic development of the United States in that period which greatly influenced many aspects of American social life. This real event happened in Love Canal, New York State, America in 1978. The Love Canal is a deserted canal near the Niagara Falls, New York. It was originally dug up to build a hydro-power station, but later it dried up in the 1940s. An American Chemical

company, Hook Company bought the canal to dump chemical waste. This lasted for more than ten years and more than twenty thousand tons of chemical waste was dumped. In 1953, Hook Company filled the canal and sold it to the local Educational Council for one dollar. Later, the Educational Council built a primary school on the canal area despite knowing that it was filled with chemical waste. The government of New York State built residences in that area and sold them to local people. The result was that the residents, including many children, constantly suffered from various kinds strange diseases. In 1978, black thick poisonous liquid began to ooze out of the ground of the canal area. The residents were shocked and indignant, and filed a lawsuit against the government and the Educational Council. Unfortunately, they lost the lawsuit at first due to multiple reasons. They realized that they must unite, and later they detained the representative of the Environmental Protect Agency. The media all denounced the government. This forced President Carter to issue a prerogative writ which allowed the government to relocate the residents. In the 1980s, the residents received compensation after relevant laws were passed by the American Congress. The Love Canal Case awakened American, even worldwide attention to the danger of chemical waste. It is more important that this event witnessed the first organized and widely-covered environmental justice movement in America and the world. This environmental justice mobilization clearly aimed at environmental pollution, its toxic harm, and social injustice. In this regard, the Love Canal Case is of milestone significance.

Oates' use of this real case reflects her keen insight in choosing writing subjects as a talented writer. She interweaves a fictional love story with this case, a family misfortune with the historical event and presents an absorbing artistic world to us, in which many issues in American social life including environmental contamination, relationship between children and parents, political and judicial corruption, the wide gap between the poor and the rich, and social injustice are exposed. As soon as this novel was published in September, 2004, it became a success immediately. The praises came from the public at once. As a successful novel, it won the Prix Femina Etranger French Literary Award for Foreign Novels.

The novel begins in the early morning on June 12, 1950. The gatekeeper of the Goat Island Suspension Bridge at Niagara Falls notices that a strangely distracted individual comes directly and passes by in a hurry. The gatekeeper is ignored by the young man when he calls out. He knows that the man intends to commit suicide from his experience. The gatekeeper tries to prevent him from jumping into the Horseshoe Falls, but fails. The suicide victim is later confirmed to be Gilbert Erskine, a young priest, the new husband of Ariaiah, the heroine of the novel. While Ariaiah is waiting for further news of her husband, she meets Clyde Colborne, the boss of the Rainbow Grand Hotel where she lives and his friend, Dirk Burnaby. Dirk Burnaby, the protagonist, a distinguished attorney of the Niagara Falls area, is struck by Ariaiah. He accompanies her in the next week. A week later Gilbert's bloated corpse is found in the Whirlpool, less than three miles from the Horseshoe Falls. Ariaiah insists on going there to make the identification. After her identification she collapses. From then on Ariaiah believes that she is cursed by the fate and she is doomed to adversity in her life.

After that event Dirk visits his mother, Claudine in Shalott one day and informs her that he will marry. Then Dirk traces Ariaiah to Troy, her hometown. There he proposes to her and she consents. They are married within a month after the proposal. Before long she notices that is pregnant and Ariaiah is anxious about who the father of the first-born, Chandler, is. In succession grand parents come to see their grandchild. After seven years, their second child is born. The boy named Royall resembles his father, Dirk Burnaby very much. The Burnaby couple longs for a daughter since the first two children are boys, and they have their wish fulfilled. The third baby named Juliet is a girl. The little family seems complete and happy.

But a latent crisis is approaching Dirk Burnaby quietly. Not long after Juliet's birth, he can not help taking on a "doomed" lawsuit, referred to as the "Love Canal" case. Nina Olshaker, the initiator of this lawsuit, is a desperate woman who is known as the "Woman in Black," and she is considered by Dirk's friends as "known Communist" and "professional agitator." Nina Olshaker is a young mother who lives in Colvin Heights and her daughter has died of leukemia. She also finds some other strange phenomena

about people's health in her community and the nearby school. She suspects that the pollution in the Love Canal area is the real cause of these problems, so she starts the lawsuit against the City of Niagara Falls, namely Love Canal case. After Dirk Burnaby inspects the pollution and health problems in Colvin Heights, Dirk agrees to take on the lawsuit for social justice. He betrays his class and alienates himself from his family and friends. But he loses the case and is arrested for courtroom assault and his career is finished. About two weeks later, his car plunges into the Niagara River because of two vehicles' two-way squeeze from the front and the rear when he goes back home. His corpse is never found.

Ariah's prediction seems to come true. Her second husband also leaves her. She moves to a new rowhouse where her neighbors do not know her and where she lives in seclusion. Ariah never speaks of Dirk Burnaby and never allows her children to ask about him. As Royall and Chandler grow up they all try to make a thorough investigation of the mystery of their father. Finally, through Juliet's boyfriend Jr. Bud Stonecrop, they get to know the facts about their father. A memorial ceremony for Dirk Burnaby is held when the Love Canal lawsuit is reinstated by a coalition including five lawyers who also get support from the local Democratic Party, and they win. Dirk is honored as a heroic crusader and a pioneer by people.

As a successful fiction, *The Falls* attracts much critical attention. At present, the comments on this novel in Western countries are all articles instead of academic books. As the novel is based on the real environmental justice event, some critics interpret *The Falls* from the viewpoint of ecological criticism. Ellen Emry Heltzel claims that "[i]t's impossible to call *The Falls* Oates's fictional masterpiece; yet, in depicting a paradigm shift that permanently altered this country's political and environmental awareness, *The Falls* ranks as one of her best" (Heltzel). Gilligan Flynn points out that the novel begins with the romance of a hero and a heroine, but it mainly reveals the environmental destruction of the Niagara Falls area (Flynn 2004, 83). Sharon L. Dean thinks that *The Falls* is a social novel and people can feel the sublime, solemn, and mysterious power of *The Falls* and the environmental pollution of American industry" (Dean 2006, 527-

529).

As an important work of Oates, *The Falls* also attracts much attention of Chinese scholars. Here I only focus on their ecocritical interpretations of the novel. Xu Jian presents that “*The Falls* places the very urgent environmental crisis before the world, which makes people reexamine the ecological conception and the consciousness of environmental protection carefully” (Xu 2006, 92). Zhang Shengmao thinks that Oates is not an ecologist, but she is deeply anxious about the deteriorating ecological crisis; she is concerned for the disaster brought about by human beings’ exploitation of nature, and the later rehabilitation of the hero manifests Oates’s optimistic attitude to ecological problems (Zhang 2008, 112). Chen Lijuan wrote a thesis about *The Falls* from the perspective of ecological feminism. She analyzes the oppressed status of nature and the subordinate status of women presented in *The Falls* and point out Oates’s intention to establish harmonious man-nature and man-woman relationship. Liu Li studies *The Falls* from the perspective of Ecocriticism in her MA thesis. She mainly studies the novel from man-and-nature relationship, man-and-man relationship, and man-and-self relationship, which are the necessary elements to establish ecological harmony in the world.

From the review above, it can be seen that as an ecofiction, the appeal for ecological harmony is an important motif of *The Falls*, and some critics have approached this point. But there is not much elaboration on her critique of the development, its cultural premises, and its supporting policy and institution (developmentalism) which brings about much ecological and social problems and damages the ecological sustainability, social wellbeing, and individual happiness. In a growth society like that of the United States, the dominant economic ideology is that economic development is the core task of the society and development is the requirement of social progress. The economic policy is just based on this belief. As I have argued, the development hegemony is to give the common people an illusion that they can only improve their life and well-being through achieving economic growth; the development is interpreted as a process of reproduction of capitalist relations of

production that is full of social inequalities. In the following, I will explore the critical discourses on development embodied in *The Falls* from the viewpoint of cultural premise, the ecological harm and the social problems caused by development, as well as the detrimental effects on individual psychology and happiness.

Patrick D. Murphy claims that: “for contemporary ecofiction to successfully shape eco-friendly worldviews, writers dramatise character’s relationship with nature” (Murphy 2000, 1). In this novel, Oates weaves her critiques of human anthropocentric hubris, development cult, and its social consequences into the textual narrative. As “shaping eco-friendly worldviews is one of the aims that some contemporary authors of ecofiction have set themselves” (Keller 2018, 3), this ecocritical study will promote the understanding of the idea of degrowth in this novel, and promote the shaping of eco-friendly worldviews in the public. This is of great importance in constructing a more eco-healthy world in view of worldwide ecological deterioration.

4.2 Disclosure of the Physical Harm caused by Development in *The Falls*

The Falls is narrated from a third person perspective; the omniscient extradiegetic narrator knows everything about the story and the narrator serves as the focalizer most of the time in the novel. In this novel, Oates presents a typical picture of booming capitalist industry and economic prosperity. This is considered as progress in the novel. The kind of active pursuit of economic development is usually called developmentalism. As I have defined, developmentalism generally refers to an activist state engaged in selective industrial policy (Khan 2011, 4). In *The Falls*, Oates actually expresses her negation of this kind of economic expansion through the narrative discourse. For example, she describes the economic boom as “Inland from the Niagara River and the fantastical mist-shrouded Gorge the city of Niagara Falls and its outlying suburbs was aggressively developed” (Oates 2004, 166). Of course, aggressive development is inevitably dangerous for ecology and local people. In the following, I will examine the

critical discourse in this novel.

4.2.1 The Destructive Effects on the Ecology of Economic Development

As mentioned above, the core of western culture is anthropocentrism. Nature is usually considered as the property of human kind from ancient time. Descartes ever said that: “[h]uman kind is superior to animals and plants” and “human kind is the master and ruler of nature” (Lewis 1992, 69). This kind of anthropocentric ideology roots deeply in the whole society. When advanced societies carried on the industrial revolution and entered the capitalist age, science and technology became the powerful tool to exploit nature. As the tool for this kind of exploitation, science and technology are deeply valued and actively developed. In contemporary America, they become a tool to conquer and rule nature and realize the accumulation of social wealth. In Rachel Carson’s view, “the postwar culture of science that arrogantly claimed dominion over nature was the philosophical root of the problem” (Carson 2002, xvi). Further development of science and technology brought about industrialization and industrial culture with the foundation of unlimited economic growth (D’Alisa, Demaria, Kallis 2015, 33) to human society. Not only does this trigger serious ecological crisis, but it also leads to a serious social crisis and social crisis. What happened in *The Falls* is a typical case of this kind of ecological crisis.

The story of *The Falls* mainly happened in areas of Niagara Falls from the 1950s to 1978. In this period American industry was booming and the economy was prosperous. As the result of development of science and technology American people become more capable of in controlling and exploiting nature. To make profit and promote economic growth, they exploit or even extort all kinds of natural resources without considering the biophysical capacity of nature. They also establish many kinds of plants to produce numerous kinds of products useful for people to make profits by exploiting natural resources. The mainstream culture in American society considers human’s “looting” of nature as a kind of power, and the reformed nature as a kind of progress.

In *The Falls* Oates describes the area of Niagara Falls in the 1950s with its thriving

industry as “Boom times” (Oates 2004, 166). She comments that the 1950’s will be an industrial age in the Niagara Falls area, which will substitute for the tourist age of the 1850s. The booming of industry absorbs more and more population to Niagara Falls, and it will reach more than 100,000 in recent years; chemical enterprises will also concentrate in this area with the highest degree in America by 1970 (2004, 166). The city of Niagara Falls, and its outskirts are stretching out aggressively in this period. Rapid development of factories and population explosion are symbols of industrial civilization. This kind of civilization changes nature greatly: the wilderness, the forest land, and the field surrounding the city are dug and leveled, and they are changed into industrial zones of thousands of acres. As a result, these violent changes people become confused: the familiar suburban area is becoming strange; it is distorted and disordered as if it has just survived an earthquake. But all these are considered as “progress” (2004, 167) by Dirk Burnaby who is a typical intellectual of that time. This kind of developmentalist view is widely shared by most people. The “great construction” is carried out like a raging fire. The field is being covered with cement. The woods are leveled; the trees are cut into pieces and transported away. Building machines hurry in working on many sites. The road is widened from two lanes to three lanes, and highway sprawls through fields within a short time. New bridges are also built with astonishing speed.

Due to the scientific ideology in the society, science and technology develop rapidly in this period and the industrial productivity is improved greatly. People begin to establish many kinds of factories to satisfy new demands.

A no-man’s-land, claimed for factories, warehouses, employee parking lots. Auto parts manufacturers, refrigerating unit manufacturers, chemical factories, fertilizer factories. There were gypsum plants. Tanneries and leather goods factories, Detergent, bleach, disinfectant and industrial cleanser factories. Asphalt, asbestos. Pesticides, herbicides. Nabisco, Swann Chemical, Dow Chemical, United Carbourundum, NiagChem, Occidental Chemical (“OxyChem”). Giant power stations were being erected south along the river with the much-publicized intention of “harnessing” as much as one third of the water power of The Falls.

(2004, 167)

The products of these factories will be used and then entered into the land, river, and the bodies of plants and animals; the hydraulic power station will also have a negative effects on the ecosystem. All these will change the natural ecology and break the ecological balance. Nature has to pay for human beings' material desires. Dirk Burnaby feels indignant about the evils done by irresponsible people when he finds that the east area of Niagara Falls where Nina's family live is contaminated into an underworld. It has been changed into an artificial ugliness for the evil-doings of a small part of chemical elites.

Out of anthropocentric ignorance and the development addiction, the local government and the investors of the Niagara area do not realize the interdependent relationship between nature and them. Even the common people need economic growth because their employment depends on these industries. For example, Nina Olshaker's husband "worked the night shift at Parish Plastics, one of the largest factories in the county" (2004, 199). They never consider ecological and environmental issues. In their thoughts the Falls are inexhaustible resources for the operation of the industries of the city regardless of what human beings do to the natural world. This leads to reckless extortion of natural resources without thinking about its consequences.

In an anthropocentric and money-oriented society, the local people only regard nature as a profit-making tool and the resource for economic growth. The only use of nature is to be used in people's money-making activities. They never think about what will happen to nature when they use the natural resources. In industrial society people try to use all available resources to make profits and meet their material desires. The process of commodification further aggravates this situation. People become more money-oriented and material interests become the most important concern. The first standard to judge a thing is whether it can win money or not. Clyde Colborne, the manager of the hotel Rainbow Grand, does not believe in the mysterious power of Niagara Falls, but he is deeply satisfied that "The Falls was good for one thing: money" (2004, 57). He only knows he can make profits from the beauty of Niagara Falls. This

is a most pragmatic view on nature, but it reflects the real thoughts of the local people: nature just exists for satisfying human beings' material needs and nature is an inexhaustible resource for human beings' welfare.

In the industrialized society to achieve economic success becomes the thing of primary importance. People will do anything for money even if it is harmful to nature or other people. Clyde Colborne said to Chandler about the chemical factories: "They'd still be manufacturing the sticky-stuff, napalm, if anybody'd pay them to, and the 'research scientists' are right now working on biological warfare weapons within a few miles of this office" (2004, 385). For economic reasons, people do not hesitate to contaminate the land, air, etc. The most obvious example in the text is the Love Canal case. This case originates from a seven-mile canal locally known as Love Canal which is used as a waste dump by Swann Chemicals. The mysterious canal had never existed as a waterway. Its construction started from 1892 by a local developer named William T. Love; his ambitious plan was to connect the upper and lower Niagara River and bypass the Gorge. But Love had gone bankrupt before it was finished; the canal was left only partly dug. Swann Chemicals acquired the uncompleted canal at auction. From 1936 to 1952 the Love Canal was used as a municipal and chemical waste disposal site. Swann Chemicals dumped large amounts of waste there and also sold privileges of dumping garbage to the city of Niagara Falls. In the 1940's, it was sold to the U. S. Army for dumping radioactive chemical warfare wastes produced in the Manhattan project. After that Swann stopped dumping and covered the hazardous waste with dirt; then it sold the polluted property to the Niagara Falls Board of Education at a negligible price. In the contractual stipulation Swann Chemicals was exempted forever from any physical damages suffered as a consequence of the hazardous waste. Thus, Swann Chemicals did not pay anything to treat the chemical waste, and through cunning plot it succeeded in escaping its responsibility. After that the board resold much of the land to a local developer named Colvin, and built an elementary school which was opened in the fall of 1955, and much of Colvin Heights had been built and many houses were sold to the residents. Then the hazardous waste was released; the environmental

problems appeared and people and pets were hurt by the hazardous waste. But medical investigators declared that there was no hazard to health in Colvin Heights or had been taken care of. The only consequence of this evil-doing is that the land and environment were contaminated and the innocent were victimized. The tragedy of Nina Olshaker's family is a case in point. This is the very case that shows the disasters brought about by industrialization and economic development, and this tragic event evidently results from the desperate pursuit of economic growth regardless of the consequences.

Besides foolish pursuit of economic development and material wealth people in the text are also short-sighted. They misunderstand many things. They think the chemical industry is an effective way to improve human life. "Better Living Through Chemistry" (2004, 385) becomes a slogan of modern life. People also regard their development of insecticides and herbicides as one of their successes. While they are gratified at their achievements, they do not realize that the so-called progress and property is foreshadowing a great ecological crisis which will threaten nature and human kind. Oates depicts the change of Niagara Falls during Chandler's lifetime: "Niagara Falls had become a sprawling, burgeoning, 'prosperous' industrial city. It was boasted that the city's population had doubled since the 1940's" (2004, 344). Thousands of industrial jobs are created, which is reiterated as a special merit of economic development. The chemical enterprises are distributed most densely in the United States. It is a publicly known fact that Niagara Falls has been almost thoroughly defaced. Even the only remained "historic" residential area of Lunar Park has begun to worsen. As Ulrich Beck points out, "[r]isks of modernization sooner or later also strike those who produce or profit from them. They contain a boomerang effect, which breaks up the pattern of class and national society" (Beck 1992, 23).

As local people of the Niagara region are obsessed with economic development, the local environment and ecology begin to degenerate. American eco-ethic scholar Cynthia Hamilton considers that industrial development has close relation with environmental deterioration; economic growth causes the destruction of the municipal environment. In the United States economic development brought about serious

environmental destruction, such as environmental deterioration, health problems, decline of living quality, and increase of living expenditure (Hamilton 1993, 67-68). *The Falls* presents the disastrous result of environmental destruction. The most direct consequence for human beings' looting nature is that human beings lose their home for living. Due to industrialism and development policy in advanced societies, the natural environment continuously deteriorates. Dirk, as Niagara local, witnesses the environmental changes:

[...] the Niagara River was dangerously polluted from Buffalo industry, but less polluted in the Chippawa Channel which was on the western side of l'Isle Grand, than on the eastern, the Tonawanda Channel, bordering the industrial suburb of North Tonawanda. Of pollution, you don't want to think. If you can't actually smell it, taste it, see it. (Oates 2004, 94)

Environmental contamination like an intangible monster exists at every corner of the Niagara area. People can feel it all the time. At the beginning of story the gatekeeper feels that "his lungs hurt, not only the stinging spray of the river but the strange metallic taste of the air of the industrial city sprawling east and north of The Falls, in which the gatekeeper had lived all his life" (2004, 6). There are many textual presentations of this kind of industrial pollution, especially chemical air pollution, in the novel. After a quarrel with Ariaah, Dirk drives in the vicinity of Love Canal at night. In this area

The lewdly winking teasing lights of Dow Chemical, Carborundum, OxyChem, Swann Chemicals; Alliance Oil Refinery, Allied Steel; pale smoke like drifting bandages; and fog; and mist, obscuring the moonlit sky; East Niagara Falls was a region of perpetual drizzle; smells that had become visible; rotted eggs, sour and sweet and yet astringent like disinfectant; a taste of ether. (2004, 247)

As it can be seen, we know that the contamination is rather serious in the whole area of The Falls. In the Love Canal area the situation is the most serious. Due to chemical waste dumped by Swann Chemicals and radioactive chemical warfare wastes by the U. S. Army, the contamination of this area is deadly. The land becomes infertile; when the residents plant vegetables in the garden, the seeds do not sprout. In Colvin

Heights there are only a few abnormal-looking trees with morbid leaves. The water is polluted. At the Ninety-ninth Street school, “the kids can taste the drinking water isn’t right” (2004, 200). “In the back yard, in lots of back yards here, there is this strange disgusting black sludge that oozes up, like oil, but thicker than oil” (2004, 200). Dirk went to Colvin Heights and he calls Colvin Heights the underworld. He said that: “Into the underworld then I descended; where you can’t see, can’t breathe; suffocating in black muck. In shame” (2005, 218). From these we can see that the whole area, especially the Love Canal area becomes unfit or even dangerous to live in.

4.2.2 Nature’s Punishment of Human Beings

In a growth-oriented society people just regard nature as a source of profit. They just want to make money by nature when they contact nature. Unfortunately human beings’ ruthless looting of nature is to drain the pond to get all the fish. In the long run, human beings will never be able to earn money one day in near future. Niagara Falls is regarded as a paradise of tourists. People from all worlds come here to feel its magnificence and mysterious power. Therefore, the Niagara Gorge and land along the river next to The Falls are exclusively developed as a tourist area so that it can make millions of dollars per year. However, this area can not avoid industrial pollution in the process of economic development. Clyde Colborne expresses his view towards the influence of pollution on his business:

Sure I hate what the city was turning to, air smelling like a cesspool on certain days, and honeymoon couples from all over checking in my hotel and expecting, I don’t know, some kind of paradise, plus tourists from Germany, Japan, coming to see The Falls and not knowing what the city is. Sure we had complaints; through the 1970’s it’s been getting worse; people like me, my family, we’d been in the ‘luxury hotel trade’ as it used to be called, for a long time; now the business is mostly ‘tourist trade.’ (2004, 383)

Since the influence of pollution, Colborne cannot enjoy the bestowal of nature, he had to get out from under the Rainbow Grand hotel because “like the Titanic it would’ve

been, mid-1960's when all of the country was going to hell" (2004, 383). He diversifies it into motels, pizzerias, bowling alleys, discos, and cafés. As people unscrupulously over-exploit nature they destroy it and "lose the possibility of making money in the long run" (Liu 2009, 21). Oates warns us with Chandler's remark about The Falls and erosion: Niagara Falls City may very likely fall into ruins, hide in underbrush and inhabitants disappear because "things wear out, civilization wear down, species vanish" (Oates 2004, 405). And Niagara Falls may also disappear because of erosion. Chandler, in the novel, is a reliable character because he meets the norms of the implied author, the second self of Oates. His words may be considered as the author, Oates's condemnation to the exploitative economic activities in the Niagara area. Through the character, Chandler, Oates realizes her authorial presence. Chandler's warning can be universalized: if people do not take precautions against the over-exploitation of nature, tragedy like this will very likely happen.

Besides the loss of profit-making potentiality, local people also suffer the loss of their homeland. The land and the water are contaminated with chemical and radioactive wastes, so the plants cannot grow in the fields. The air is also polluted by these wastes. Not only people cannot plant crops to supply food to them, but also they cannot even live in the polluted area. The residents of Colvin Heights are facing this kind of situation. It is located on the Love Canal area which is dangerously polluted. This area has become hazardous to live in. The seeds they planted cannot come out because of the hazardous wastes buried under the ground. It is clear that the land here has become infertile. In their backyards strange disgusting black sludge oozes up. The basements of their houses smell of backed-up drain and are leaky because of the corrosive effects of the wastes. In their yards surfacing barrels that contain a virulent kind of tar are formed. The water becomes undrinkable. There is some kind of phosphorous rock in the school of this area that burns the eyes and skin of children. In the area of the Falls the air is full of sulfurous smell or metallic chemical odor. It is obvious that this area is no longer suited, even dangerous to live in. As the cost of economic development, the local people have to lose their homes.

The most terrifying consequence contamination brings about is the harm to human health, even deprivation of human lives. I have mentioned above that the gatekeeper of Niagara Falls suffers from the hurt of the strange metallic taste of the air from the northern and eastern industrial city. Common people must face this problem, too. In the heavily-polluted area, the area of the Love Canal the situation is extremely bad. Dirk does not live in Colvin Heights, but “as more frequently, since Love Canal, and the hours Dirk Burnaby spent in Colvin Heights, his eyes were likely to water, and sting; and a headache behind the eyes, not a rapid drumbeat headache but an andante beat, a drummer with a large muffled instrument” (2004, 252). Nina’s son, Billy “gets headaches over at the school, his eyes are sore and he’s coughing a lot” (2004, 200). Her youngest daughter Sophia dies of leukemia at the age of three, and another daughter, Alice does not gain weight, does not have much appetite because she has “fluctuating low-white cell counts” (2004, 200). Some people in the Love Canal cough and their eyes are red and swollen; a person less than fifty shakes all over as if poisoned by toxic gas; some people are on wheelchairs! “One guy works at Dow, he’s using an oxygen mask. Emphysema” (2004, 231-232). At the Ninety-ninth Street School in the area of Love Canal the kids play in the open area and on the playground and their eyes are burnt, and their skin also. Oates lists series of strange illnesses existing in the area of Love Canal: for baby, birth malformation, still births; for adults and children, liver, gallbladder, kidney diseases, Cardiac trouble, respiratory trouble; infections of eye, ear, and throat; all kinds of cancers; blood pressure problems. Many kinds of strange diseases. Not only are the illnesses are strange, but also the frequency of occurrence of these diseases is abnormally high compared with other cities in America. Through this shocking data we know that the revenge of polluted nature suffered by human beings is extremely harsh, and they are losing their health, even their lives!

From above analyses it can be seen that Oates in *The Falls* presents the environmental crisis and the physical harm to the local people of the Niagara area caused by the negative consequences of economic development. The local government and investors only pursue economic development, regardless of the ecological cost and

the wellbeing of the common people. Since the social elite group including the investors and government officials, the growth machine of growth society, do not show any respect to nature and wantonly loot natural resources, the local environment inevitably deteriorates. As a result, nature begins to punish the short-sighted local people. At first, it is the lower class, the vulnerable people that suffer the punishment, but in the long run the elite group will also suffer losses including physical harm and economic interest. To sum up, it is the capitalist development ideology that leads to a malignant human-nature relationship and ecological tragedy. Through this presentation Oates wants to show us economic growth not necessarily brings about social wellbeing promised by the growth logic and capitalist cultural premises, on the contrary, it may exhaust the ecological sustainability and cause ecological crisis. As a result, the local people may lose happiness or even their lives. “There is a growing literature indicating that environmental degradation upsets well-being. Various studies indicate that poor air quality, for example, is associated with lower scores on happiness” (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 186). Even worse, if people suffer from an illness or die because of environmental pollution, they will never be happy. In *The Falls*, this is exactly what happens to the residents in Colvin Heights. Besides disclosing the physical harm caused by the economic development, Oates also focuses on the social problems produced by economic growth.

4.3 Social and Political Problems Caused by Development

Economic development, in a capitalist society like the United States, is a progress of accumulating surplus value and reproducing the relations of production. In this process, the real beneficiaries are the growth promoters — the business owners, investors, and the economic and political coalition around them, and the grassroots are usually the exploitees. So the development in capitalist society is not only a process of polluting the environment, but also a process of producing social and political inequalities. H. L. T. Quan notes that “it is surely not a mystery that a program of development that rests fundamentally on expansionism, state-defined order and antidemocracy would entail

cruelty, violence, and repression” (Quan 2012, 8). Oates in the novel depicts various social and political problems produced in economic development, and decolonizes the imaginary of development by the just ending of the novel and punitive nemesis of the perpetrators.

Oates once admitted that in the creation of *The Falls* she is preoccupied with social ethical consideration. In fact, *The Falls* illustrates vividly Oates’ condemnation of the social and political evils accompanying the economic growth. Behind the sprawling development of hazardous chemical industry and unscrupulous dumping of nuclear waste, there must be perpetrators and sufferers. At the same time, the beneficiaries of the economic development will subjugate the employees by the political power in their hands so as to maintain their profits. No doubt, it is a process full of injustices and even iniquities. In the following, this sub-chapter will examine the socio-political problems presented in the novel, namely the gap between the rich and the poor, the judicial corruption, and the ecological injustice. First I will examine the gap between the rich and the poor existing in the novel.

4.3.1 The Gap between the Rich and the Poor

Economic development is a process of ecological destruction, accumulation of private capital, and at the same time the widening of poor-rich disparities. The most obvious example is the contrast between Nina’s family and Dirk Burnaby. Nina married Sam Olshaker, a worker of a plastic factory. She lives in a bungalow in Colvin Height, a polluted area. The air there smells “swampy, sweetly sulfurous” (Oates 2004, 198), and “the basement was an ugly cave smelling of backed-up drain and something tarry nauseating” (2004, 206). In such a place her son is unhealthy because of the pollution, and her daughter dies of leukemia. In contrast, Dirk and his family lives in Luna Park, an elegant villa with carefully-trimmed lawns and an exquisite fence. Nina’s family does not have a car, even a cheap one, and she takes the city bus in stormy weather, while Dirk has a luxury car. The life of their parents is totally different. Nina’s father, a steel worker, works in a harmful workshop and suffers lung disease caused by steel dust. Dirk’s mother, Claudine Burnaby, lives in a twenty-three-room manor house and leads

a comfortable life, and never needs to work. The Burnaby family own shares in big firms and get dividends from them; they do not need to do any work and can receive great fortunes. The poor-rich disparities can be shown in many aspects, including the cemetery. Oates describes carefully the distinction between the graves of the rich men and the poor through Royall's eyes: the injustice of the common life is also embodied in the world of dead men; most tomb markers are common stone, but others are luxury granite or marble with elegant engraved facades (2004, 283-284).

The striking gap between the rich and the poor reflects the inequality in the distribution of the social wealth produced by the economic development. This kind of gap between the rich and the poor also indicates their different status in the power and political system of US society. Through this power and political system, the elite group including business owners and their political and economic coalition not only possess more social wealth brought about by economic development, but also maintain this kind of inequality by power operations. In the novel, Oates presents the political and judicial corruption in the Love Canal case which leads to the failure of the Colvin Heights homeowners' lawsuit and the murder of Dirk.

4.3.2 The Political and Judicial Corruption

Politics is based on economics; power operational systems, such as governmental and judicial systems, usually serve the privileged elite group's economic interest in capitalist societies. This function of the power operational system is embodied in at least two aspects. First, just through the power operational system the social elite group promotes economic growth in which they realize their capital accumulation. Second, the power operational system is used unjustly to maintain the inequalities in distributing social and environmental goods and detriments. *The Falls* focuses on the social evil triggered by the ecological crisis caused by chemical and radioactive pollution. In the novel, the motor of economic growth of the Niagara Falls area is the owners and investors of those chemical, plastic factories, and power plants, the governmental sectors, and other main beneficiaries of economic development. Driven by profits they spare no efforts to develop science and industrial technology without any

consideration of their negative, even harmful effects on the environment. When they are demanded to take responsibility for their evil doings they use the political power in their hands to persecute the people calling for justice and even commit political murder. Thus, economic development in the Niagara Falls area not only leads to environmental deterioration, but also political and judicial corruption and evil. In the novel, Oates daringly exposes political corruption and democratic hypocrisy which worsens environmental deterioration. At the same time, environmental deterioration catalyzes political and judicial corruption. Thus, in the novel environmental pollution is interwoven with political corruption, which creates a vicious circle.

In this novel, the event of “Love Canal” is a typical case of political corruption and moral depravity. The so-called Love Canal was used as a municipal and chemical disposal site from 1936 to 1952. Swann Chemicals dumps tons of waste there and sells dumping privileges of garbage to the City of Niagara Falls, and to the U. S. Army for the dumping of radioactive chemical warfare wastes produced by the Manhattan Project. In 1953, Swann Chemicals abruptly stopped dumping and covered the dangerous waste with dirt, and sold the contaminated property to the Niagara Falls Board of Education for only one dollar, and Swann was exempted forever from any damages, namely physical harm or death suffered as a consequence of the dangerous waste. How did this happen? How was this allowed to happen? This happened in 1953, eight years after the atomic bombs exploded in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The consequences of radioactive poisoning are certainly known, and it is the responsibility of the local government to ensure that the citizens are not harmed and murdered by chemical and radioactive poisons. The only reason that the local government does not prevent this from happening is that they share common interests with the perpetrators of this evil, and thus they help and protect each other. They pursue their own interests without consideration for common people of lower classes. This is an obvious exchange of interest between the upper classes. This is a typical political corruption, and also a kind of moral depravity. The reason why the Niagara Falls Board of Education buys the contaminated property regardless of the consequence is that the chairman at the time of

this sale is Ely who is a business associate of Hiram Swann's. This bargain is friends aiding friends, but as the Niagara Falls Board of Education is a public organization which belongs to the government, it is certainly a kind of political corruption. Then the Niagara Falls Board of Education builds an elementary school and sells most part of the land to Colvin, a local developer who builds Colvin Heights in this area.

The conscienceless political corruption continues in the investigation of the hazardous effects of the Love Canal on the residents of Colvin Heights which is located on the Love Canal. As introduced above, the chemical and radioactive wastes are hazardously harmful, and the residents also find nauseating odors, black sludge, children and pets with burn injuries, and a virulent kind of tar in their community; but the medical investigators for the country health board "examine" the site of the Ninety-ninth Street School on the Love Canal and declare the area is not hazardous to health, and they examine the residents of the subdivision with medical complaints and declare there is no grounds for alarm. Their conclusion is unanimous: there is no problem in the area of the Love Canal, and if there is, the problem has been taken care of. This is a kind of serious neglect of their duty as civil servants. The Mayor and the Board of Health even tell a lie that the residents' strange illness is due to their heavy smoking and drinking. In order to evade responsibility they choose to ignore the lives of common people. These are extremely appalling evil and demonic political corruption.

The "Love Canal Case" is an obvious example of judicial corruption and political corruption. The court is a part of the administrative system which aims to protect the interest of the upper class. It surely perverts the law for the interest of its own class rather than to assert justice for the poor people. Before nearly one thousand pages of plaintiffs's and expert witnesses' depositions, scientific and medical data, photographs, and documents Burnaby Dirk and Nina Olshaker had collected for ten months, Judge Stroughton Howell dismissed the lawsuit. The judge clearly prejudices in favor of the powerful defendants. The main reason for Dirk's failure in this lawsuit is the bribery that happens in the process of lawsuit. Swann bribes Dirk's key witnesses to make part of them withdraw and part of them "spoke tentatively, unwilling to fully commit to the

standard of ‘absolute and incontrovertible evidence’” (2004, 264). Swann also buys off more than thirty expert witnesses to defend for it in the lawsuit, and Judge Stroughton Howell most probably accepts a bribe because “it is a fact of public life: judges, politicians, police were in the positions to accept bribes, and some of them went so far as to solicit bribes” (2004, 265). All these point to the very corruption of in the judicature. Oates uses direct authorial commentary to express her indignation at and condemnation of the evil bribery of Swann: “In the hire of Swann. Swann’s money. Bribes. Bastards” (2004, 264)! At the same time, these words can also be considered as Dirk’s “indirect interior monologue,” a kind of free indirect discourse; by using this rhetorical device, the implied author can be perceived, namely the second self of Joyce Carol Oates and her attitude towards the character of Dirk: support and sympathy. In either case, this short paragraph expresses Oates’ condemnation of political and judicial corruption and support for Dirk, the representative of justice.

The murder of Dirk by Swann Chemicals and the police after his failure in the lawsuit is another evidence to show how political corruption works. The indirect interior monologue of Dirk and the pre-verbal perception before his murder intensifies the evilness of the profit-seekers’ attempt to eliminate the potential challenger to their economic interests:

They want to kill me. They don’t know me! The thought came swift and almost calm and though it was a thought as logical as the geometry theorems Dirk had memorized in high school, and had taken solace in, somehow he didn’t believe it, his lips drew back from his gritted teeth in a smile of derision. It couldn’t be! It could not be. Not like this, with such rude abruptness. *Not now. Not when I have so much more work to do. I’m still young. I love my wife. I love my family. If you knew me!* (2004, 270)

Common people’s lives seem very trivial before the business owners and politicians’ interests. Though later Clyde Colborne and other four lawyers initiate the Love Canal Homeowners Association lawsuit which demands to reinstate the Colvin Heights Homeowners Association lawsuit and they finally succeeds; however, it does not mean that the social justice overcomes corruption. To a great extent, it is a political victory of

the coalition of the local Democratic party rather than a pure success of the lawsuit for ecological justice. This event is involved in the political struggle and the memorial for Dirk Burnaby even becomes “a political rally” (2004, 473). Nonetheless, Oates does convey her condemnation of the evilness of the political and judicial corruptions entangled with the economic interests of the so-called social elite coalition through her design of the miserable and wretched end of the murderer, Sergeant Stonecrops and the Chief Justice, Stroughton Howell: one suffers syphilis and dementia and lives a life worse than the dead; another vanishes “in thin air” (2004, 471).

In summary, Oates exposes the political corruption existing in the process of economic development which causes environmental contamination and ecological deterioration. In fact, political corruption and environmental contamination are interwoven. They are all common phenomena of growth society. Another common social inequality connected with growth society and environmental contamination is ecological injustice.

4.3.2.1 The Ecological Injustice

One of the objectives of the degrowth ideal is to eliminate ecological injustice and realize ecological equality. Ecological injustice originates from the institutional inequality in growth society and its development logic. American critic of environmental literature, Richard Hofrichter, proposed that ecological problem is connected with other forms of social injustice such as poverty, racism, sexism, and unemployment; it partly lies in the ecological injustice caused by the lack of political power of disadvantaged social groups and unfair distribution of resources; this influences the mechanism of the whole social life (Hofrichter 1993, 4). American scholar Joni Adamson and the others also note that the unequal distribution of wealth and power often leads to relevant drastic social change and unequal distribution of harmful substances (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 5). These scholars all emphasize the close relationship between ecological problems and class standing, and their viewpoints are fully confirmed by the plot of *The Falls*. The novel shows ecological

injustice closely related with social class and exposes the havoc wreaked by ecological injustice; it is an embodiment of Oates's critical attitude towards ecological injustice. American theorist of ecological justice Liu Feng considers that the residential area of low-income social groups is often the dumping site of toxic wastes, and this leads to their heavier environmental burden than the rich (Liu 2001, 2). This is ecological injustice. In the novel, Chemical factories produce most of the pollutants, and the owners of these factories make substantial profits from them; but they live in the safest residential area. For example, Dirk Burnaby, as an heir of Virgil still receives dividends from MacKenna Laboratories, but he lives in the Lunar Park where "the air is nearly always fresh" (Oates 2005, 239). At the same time, low-income people like Nina Olshaker live in a dangerously polluted area where their health is seriously harmed.

The lawsuit of Love Canal originates from ecological injustice. Swann Chemicals and the U. S. Army dump chemical waste and classified (radioactive) chemical warfare wastes into the Love Canal. Then, Colvin Heights is built after it is covered with dirt. Nina and her family moved to this community six years later. After this, her daughter, Sophia died of leukemia, and her two children, her husband also suffer from several kinds of illnesses, whereas she suffers from migraine headaches, chronic coughs and infections. At the same time, "there are strange clusterings of maladies on streets that bisected the (hidden, buried) Love Canal, and the frequency of occurrence of these maladies was strikingly disproportionate to the frequency of occurrence elsewhere in the city, and in the general population of the United States" (2004, 232). Of course, the residents can also find the hazardous wastes which come up from beneath. In their residential area the water and the land are totally polluted by the deadly wastes. In fact, except for the Love Canal case there are also other personal-injury suits initiated by workers in recent years against certain of the chemical factories, including Dow, Swann. Hooker, and OxyChem. The workers of these chemical factories are usually poisoned by the chemical substances of these companies; but these lawsuits are virtually "always rejected by district judges or settled out of court for undisclosed sums, none of them very high." "[...] someone in Al Mayweather's family, or in the family of a Mayweather

in Chandler's class, who was one of a number of OxyChemical workers who'd gone on disability young, in their thirties and forties; there was a class action suit against the company in the mid-1970's, much local controversy and anger [...] such words as 'betrayed'—'lied to'—'workers' rights'—'work-related illness'—in headlines" (2004, 357). The multi-million-dollar lawsuit does not end favorably for the workers, too. Sizable monetary rewards to dying victims or to their families granted by the jury are frequently overturned in appeals court.

From these examples, it can be seen that the working classes become the very victims of industrial pollution rather than benefiting from economic development, while the upper classes who make substantial profits from economic development do not suffer from environmental pollution. This is a typical ecological injustice. Through the exposure of this alarming ecological injustice Oates expresses her concern for the health of lower classes endangered by the worsening ecological crisis, and also shows her criticism of the powerful social group who bring about the ecological injustice.

To sum up, in this novel Oates presents us the various social and ecological inequalities caused by economic development such as the striking gap between the rich and the poor, wicked political and judicial corruption, and alarming ecological injustice. To build a degrowth society with high social wellbeing and individual autonomy it not only needs to eliminate development values, but also needs to solve this kind of social problems such as the distributive inequality, political inequality, and ecological injustice. A degrowth society will be a democratic society which eliminates productivist obsession and establishes convivial social metabolic systems, so it is also a society which will eliminate ecological pollution and achieve social and ecological equality.

Besides the concerns of social inequality and ecological injustice, Oates also presents the adverse effects of the growth society on individual psychology and happiness which may be linked to the social inequality and ecological degradation.

4.4 The Negative effects of Economic Development on Individuals in *The Falls*

As I have mentioned in the introduction part of this chapter, cultural ecologist, Hubert Zapf, considers that human culture is interdependent with and transfused by ecological processes and natural energy cycles. Arne Naess holds that human beings develops their “self-consciousness” from instinctive ego to social self, then to ecological self. Such an ecological self is a real self of human beings, and it is fulfilled in the mutual influence between the individual and ecological environment.

In the process of economic development and industrial expansion more and more ecological problems appear, these ecological crises foreshadow that the ecological imbalance and environmental contamination in the world are influencing our social culture and spreading into the spiritual world of social individuals. Psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980) agrees to Karl Marx’s theory of alienation:

“The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing; this product is an objectification of labor.” Labor is alienated because the work has ceased to be a part of the worker’s nature and consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. (Fromm 2004, 39)

Fromm also considers that “the production of excessive useful things will produce excessive useless population” (1986, 73). The industrial production brings about spiritual harm to human beings as it produces many materials.

It is a Belgian ecologist and a professor of ecology, Paul Duvigneaud that put forward the concept of “spiritual contamination.” In his work *A General Introduction to Ecology* he advances that there is a kind of spiritual contamination and he expounds that:

In modern society, spiritual contamination becomes a more and more serious problem [...] People live a more and more active life, and vehicles run faster and faster, and traffic becomes more and more frequent; people live in an environment which makes them easier and easier to be furious and where the pollution is more and more serious. These situations make people change into wild beasts being hunted, and people become victims of the diseases of civilization, then hypertensives appear. Nervous social psychology causes people to dissatisfy, and leads to robbery, suicide, and drug abuse. (Duvigneaud 1987, 333)

The spiritual contamination Duvigneaud mentions here refers to the infestation of modern civilization to people's psychological health, congestion of culture of material desires to the soul of human beings, the erosion of commodity economy to the kind feelings of human beings. As a member of industrialized society, the individual psychology and happiness conditions will inevitably be affected by this social and ecological condition surrounding him. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue that "many factors relevant to Layard's dimensions of happiness (and many others important for the health of society as a whole, such as crime) depend on equality rather than GDP per head" (Blewitt and Cunningham 2014, 26). This shows that to a great extent, there is no substantial link between individual happiness and economic development. Meanwhile, numerous individual cases of unhappiness and afflictions may be brought about by the social inequality and injustice.

Oates does perceive this social reality pervading in American society. In *The Falls* she presents vividly the depression and spiritual sufferings of the individuals in the growth society. In this way she tries to convey her concern for individual psychological health and individual happiness rather than merely disclosing the ecological and social problems of the growth society caused by economic development. The psychological problems presented in the novel may include individual alienation, spiritual vacuum, and non-conviviality. Due to these psychological problems, it cannot be claimed that the individuals in disadvantaged social status achieve happiness in a growth society.

4.4.1 Individual alienation

One of the psychological problems embodied in *The Falls* is individual alienation. The

alienation of individuals is manifested as human being's alienation from nature, alienation from other people, and alienation from their inner world. In *The Falls* alienation from one's inner world is especially obvious. This alienation is manifested as loss of faith, ideal, and the ability of self-reflection. Gilbert Erskine exactly illustrates this point. Gilbert, the first husband of Aariah, is 27 years old. He is the son of Reverend Erskine, an excellent graduate from seminary and a recently-named minister, the belief in God has rooted in his soul. But the development of rational science represented by the theory of evolution shakes his belief in God to its foundations. He is enchanted by the beauty and complexity of nature, and he is fascinated with fossils when he is a little boy. He spends a lot of time and energy on seeking out fossils, the evidence of evolutionism.

This gives rise to his suspicion of the biblical account of the Earth's creation. The extinction of many species, flora and fauna, further increases his suspicion to the existence of God; Oates uses free indirect discourse, as an indication of omniscience of the extradiegetic narrator, to show Gilbert's perplexity towards the traditional belief:

And yet: could it be true that ninety-nine percent of all species, flora and fauna, that have ever lived have become extinct, and that species are passing into extinction continuously? Daily? Why did God create so many creatures, only to let them fight frantically with one another for existence, and then to pass into oblivion? Would mankind disappear too, one day? *Was this God's plan?* For surely there was a plan. Christianity must try to comprehend, and to explain.

Under the influence of modern science, technology, and social development, Gilbert's traditional religious belief is going through a great crisis. Thus he suffers great mental distress, and he cannot help doubting the correctness of his faith: "Faith, faith! G. complained to D., 'What good is faith if it's based upon ignorant? I want to *know*.'" (Oates 2004, 30). Owing to his doubt on his faith of Christianity he is doomed to split personality. In addition, Gilbert suffers emotional torture and marriage desperation. All of these factors result in his suicide. Gilbert's tragedy can be considered as a Gothic metaphor of the spiritual evolution from the stage of religious belief to the stage of loss

of faith. Traditional priests usually were pious believers of God and Christianity and lived peacefully due to this belief. But losing his belief in God and being afflicted by the unwilling loss of faith caused by modern science, Gilbert, the priest, eventually choose to end his life. His death, to some extent, can be considered as a trope of the death of religious belief in the modern society. Therefore, there is no happiness in Erskine's life.

Ariah, the heroine in the story, is also an example of individual alienation in growth society. She usually feels alienated from other people. Ariah is characterized as a headstrong, eccentric and volatile woman. She married Gilbert under the arrangement of their parents. After Gilbert commits suicide by jumping into The Falls, she believes that she is damned. This experience leaves a shadow on her mind in her whole life. After she marries Dirk Burnaby she cannot get along well with Dirk's friends, and feels alienated from them. When she is forced to join Dirk and his friends "Ariah was self-conscious among Dirk Burnaby's friends (he had so many, she hardly troubled to remember their names, she was acquiring a reputation for being aloof)" (2004, 130), and she just "required a drink, or two drinks, to feel minimally comfortable with these loud-talking loud-laughing men" (2004, 131). In fact, "Ariah understood that, because she was Dirk's wife, they would respect her and be kind to her; one or two even flirted with her. But she knew that they would never accept her as worthy of Dirk Burnaby" (2004, 131). She never has harmonious relationships with them and only feels alienated from them. In her life she "seemed to have few friends and no intimate friend" (2004, 226). Ariah is also alienated from her neighbors in Luna Park. She "wasn't so friendly with her Luna Park neighbors that one of them might drop by unexpected and uninvited. (She had a reputation, she supposed, for being unfriendly, aloof. And maybe that wasn't misleading.)" (2004, 152). After Dirk's death, the sense of helplessness and loneliness occupies her life. She wants to forget the past and moves to a crumbling brick-and-stucco rowhouse at Baltic. There she becomes more unsociable and eccentric; she nearly cuts off all contacts with the outside world

Ariah shut the door upon *them*. Locked all the windows and pulled

down the blinds. Only her piano students were welcome into the house at 1703 Baltic, ushered into the parlor which was the music room for years, until a porch at the rear of the house was remodeled and winterized and became the “new” music room. (2005, 276)

She nearly lives in seclusion; all her neighbors feel her unfriendliness and aloofness which is actually an expression of fear of intimacy — fear of emotional involvement with another person.

On Baltic Street, among working-class and “welfare-class” neighbors, some of them living in badly decayed rowhouses spilling over with children, the graying red-haired woman who lived at 1703 was known to be a widow, bringing up three fatherless children by herself, dignified, polite, somewhat disdainful and aloof with her neighbors, very reclusive, “eccentric.” It was acknowledged that Ariaiah Burnaby was someone special, an “educated”—“talented”—woman; it was understood that she feared intruders, even a friendly knock at the door could upset her. (2005, 314)

Ariaiah’s unsociability and eccentricity is a kind of psychological issue caused by the social evil in the growth society. Generally speaking, this psychological issue is a comprehensive consequence produced by the social and ecological realities of the capitalist society which pursues unregulated limitless economic development.

Virgil Burnaby exemplifies self-alienation of modern society, too. Although regarded as a successful entrepreneur, Virgil Burnaby leads a lonely life in the last years of his life. During this period, he has not got any interest in his work and public life. He kills his days by indulging in outdoor entertainment and alcohol. In this kind of life Dirk can feel the deep melancholy of his father behind his pleasant mask. Virgil Burnaby is stubbornly unsociable and eccentric, while his wife, Claudine, is assertively gregarious. They began to live separately in their middle-aged years. His only comfort and relief is in entertainments. Dick remembers most clearly his sailing trips with his father; they were communicating only in a silent way with the ripples passing beside them. In the pleasant silence, his father sometimes was smiling in a distant way. Virgil Burnaby is a business partner of MacKenna-Swann Chemicals, so he is a member of the elite group of growth society, and he lives a life of relative material abundance; but

he lives without real happiness in his life. In the capitalist growth society, even the rich people suffer alienation. In fact, Virgil Burnaby is an example of the individuals who suffer non-conviviality in the growth society. In a economic growth society, even the social elite cannot get the pleasure of conviviality, a real enjoyment of degrowth society and “an alternative to the enjoyment sought in consumerism or the subjugation and exploitation of other people” (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 107).

To sum up, in *The Falls* modern people suffer three kinds of alienations. In these kinds of mental states, it is difficult to say that individuals can enjoy happiness. On the contrary, the only thing left to them is weakness, loneliness, emptiness, and even desperation. So melancholy and depression are common phenomena in the growth society presented in the novel.

4.4.2 Spiritual Vacuum

Parallel with the alienated existence of human beings there is another kind of psychological problem — spiritual vacuum. Facing the ecological crisis and the cultural wasteland of capitalist society, individuals tend to lose traditional values and beliefs. Sister Hermann Marie, the nun in *White Noise*, notes that modern people of industrialized society have lost their traditional beliefs, even nuns (DeLillo 1986, 319). Under these circumstances, for most individuals life becomes meaningless, and thus they universally feel bored and desperate. G. R. Hocke calls this symptom spiritual vacuum. Normally there are two ways to fill this spiritual vacuum. One is to commit suicide, including slow suicide — drug abuse; another is to harm others, namely violent crime, even kill people without any reason.

Spiritual vacuum is manifested obviously in *The Falls*. Suicide, drug abuse, and violent crimes happen frequently in the story:

[...] ‘crises’ had become commonplace, like crime. Rarely did these crises involve individuals who’d made pilgrimages to The Falls to commit a spectacular act of suicide; these were natives of the city, nearly always men. They acted upon impulse in sudden rage, despair, madness fueled by alcohol and drugs committing acts of unpremeditated violence, much of it domestic. Their weapons

were guns, knives, hammers, fist. Often they committed suicide after their rage played out, or tried to. (2004, 345)

People have to believe in something, including proper religious belief; it is the spiritual support of human beings. If a spiritual vacuum appears, evil things might creep in the mind. Chandler, the volunteer of the Crisis Center bears witness in the numerous crises caused by spiritual vacuum:

Twice in the past three years, Chandler had been present when men killed themselves. One had used a revolver, in a stand-off with police in a tenement building downtown, on New Year's Day, and the other had died in a plunge into the roiling American Falls from the tip of Goat Island, before a gathering of stunned onlookers. (This suicide, an eighteen-year-old Niagara University math major with no "known history" of the emotional problems, had hung tone-faced over the railing for nearly an hour before letting go. Chandler had been designated to try to reason with him, get him to talk and reconsider, but Chandler had failed, and crept away in defeat. Death in The Falls. Of all deaths it seemed the most vengeful.) (2004, 355)

From the above textual pieces of evidence it can be seen that spiritual vacuum is a common spiritual problem in the capitalist growth society happening along with the environmental destruction and the loss of social ideals, as the result of economic development and prevailing industrialism.

In sum, social individuals are usually influenced by the ecological and social conditions under which they live. In the growth society, with the economic development, consequential socioecological degeneration and crisis, and various kinds of social injustice, the individuals also become psychologically ill. Spiritual alienation and spiritual vacuum are common phenomena in capitalist societies. On the basis of the above textual examinations, it can be concluded that in such a growth society, most individuals including the richest elite group actually live without happiness. The problem lies in that the individuals cannot deprive conviviality in the development culture and economic practice which only values productivity and profitability. The possible way to eliminate the psychological problems of the individuals is to "decenter growth from the definition of both economy and social life" (D'Alisa, Demaria, Kallis

2015, 73) and promote a transformation from the growth culture to a degrowthist culture, and from the growth society to a degrowth society. Only by this can individuals acquire conviviality, autonomy, and real happiness, and thus recover their spiritual integrity and psychological health.

4.5 Conclusion

The Falls witnesses the ecological deterioration and crisis in America in the second half of the twentieth century. As an eco-allegorical fiction, *The Falls* shows Oates's critique of the economic development prevailing in US society. As an insightful writer, she realizes that the environmental problems are closely related to social culture, ideology, and other power operational systems. In the novel, by multiple devices, such as plot design, free indirect discourses, Oates expresses her critiques and even condemnation of the environmental deterioration and ecological crisis event, the Love Canal lawsuit, and the social problems of the Niagara Falls area caused by the economic development including military industrial development. Besides these, she also focuses on the negative effects of the capitalist economic development on individual subjectivity and wellbeing. These representations in *The Falls* prove John Ruskin's conclusion that "industrial societies in fact produce more 'illth' than 'wealth'" (Blewitt and Cunningham 2014, 4).

In *The Falls* Oates exposes the biophysical hazardous effect of economic development — environmental contamination between the 1950s to the 1980s. Along with the economic development, more and more open land, forests, and farmland are commodified and various factories and warehouses are established. Booming industrial production depletes natural resources and produces toxic chemical products and waste which causes serious environmental degradation. In the military industry nuclear weapon production brought about radioactive waste. These hazardous industrial disposals were dumped without treatment, and many kinds of chemical substances pollute the air and water. The Niagara Falls area faced an ecological catastrophe. Oates interweaves the notorious environmental case of Love Canal and the life of the

Burnabys to endow the novel with many dramatic conflicts. In the novel, urged by the development values and utilitarian ecological view, the local government and investors only care about economic growth and profitability while overlooking the socio-ecological effects of the industrial production. While the local people enjoy the social and economic progress, nature's punishment comes unexpectedly. The Colvin Heights residents, the victims of economic boom and environmental pollution, suffer from a series of strange illnesses for unknown reasons, and then they lose clean water and safe home place. Oates in this novel vividly depicts the ecological disaster brought about by the economic development, which totally undermines the conventional imaginary of development and economic growth. The economic development in the Niagara Falls area brings about suffering to most local people, if not all of them, rather than happiness. Moreover, in the long run, the minority of the elite group who benefit from the economic growth will also pay for this kind of economic development. Ulrich Beck has noted the environmental risks for all the social individuals, regardless of their social status. So it can be concluded that development will not bring about happiness at least from an ecological point of view.

In the novel, Oates not only exposes the environmental degeneration caused by the economic development, but also exposes its social harm. Economic growth is a process to produce inequality insofar as the elite group benefits from social production while the lower class suffers from the distributive injustice and environmental consequence. Isabelle Anguelovski points out that "growth is thus part of the process that creates injustices" (Anguelovski 2015, 11). In fact, the inequality will also reduce the happiness of the unprivileged majority when they realize the positional difference. At the same time, the privileged minority also cannot derive the pleasure of conviviality from the subjugation and exploitation of other people; so this kind of enjoyment acquired from this kind of inequality can hardly bring about real happiness. In *The Falls*, economic growth is built on distributive inequality and social injustice. It is not only a process of exploiting nature, but also a kind of exploitation of the lower class in the society. The privileged group gain the benefits at the expense of the sacrifice of the

majority of common people. To maintain their vested economic interests, the local government and investors do not hesitate to pervert the law and murder the lawyer, Dirk. This kind of political and judicial corruption entangled with the socio-ecological problems produced in the process of economic development completely exposes the evil nature of capitalist growth politics, and breaks the conventional imaginary of development.

Another social evil happening in the development of the local economy is ecological injustice embodied in the victimization of the families of Colvin Heights and others in the Love Canal area. This leads to a dramatized environmental justice mobilization in the novel and the later lawsuits. The focus on and the positive dramatization of the environmental justice mobilization in *The Falls* corresponds to the degrowth values and discourse. The final happy ending of the environmental justice mobilization indicates Oates' negation of the development values and politics, though she may not be aware of this point.

Oates also represents the states of individual subjectivity and happiness in the development culture and practice in the novel. In *The Falls* she describes the depression and sufferings of the individuals alienated from nature and society, the spiritual vacuum caused by the loss of traditional values and beliefs. In the circumstances, individual subjectivity becomes abnormal due to the psychological alienation and spiritual vacuum caused by the socio-ecological realities produced by the growth culture and economic operation. Degrowth scholar Filka Sekulova points out that

Disruptions in the non-monetary domains of happiness tend to cause deeper and more permanent ruptures in well-being than losses in the pecuniary ones. These findings are in line with degrowth theory and the idea of reshuffling the importance of economic components of life towards the ones based on human relations, social connectedness and conviviality. (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 184-5)

The psychological problems surely belong to the non-monetary domains of happiness. So these problems will cause deep and permanent loss of individual happiness. Just as Sekulova suggests, the solution to these problems lies in the acceptance of degrowth

values and transformation from a growth society to a degrowth society.

In summary, through the fictionalization of the Love Canal case and the relevant socio-ecological realities in the Niagara Falls area of the United States, Oates decolonizes the conventional imaginary of development in current capitalist and socialist society: economic development is equal to progress. This accords with the degrowth philosophy developing in European countries, Canada, and Latin America countries which searches for other “alterantives in a deeper sense, that is, aiming to break away from the cultural and ideological bases of development, bringing forth other imaginaries, goals, and practices² (alternativas en un sentido más profundo, que buscan romper con bases culturales e ideológicas del desarrollo contemporáneo, y apelar a otras imágenes, metas y prácticas)” (Gudynas and Acosta 2011, 75). Only in such a degrowth society can social individuals can achieve conviviality and happiness, and thereby the society becomes more equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The three ecofictions above are about the growth cult in the United States, and they more or less reflect different economic development stages and are basically arranged according to the degree of the ecological crisis involved. Another commonality they share is that they are all about capitalist socio-economic ideology. The next ecofiction I will analyse, *Wolf Totem*, is about the socio-economic life in the socialist country of China.

² This paragraph is translated by Arturo Escobar. (Escobar, Arturo. 2015. “Critiques of Development” in *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era*. edited by D’Alisa, Giacomo, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis. New York: Routledge.)

Chapter 5.

The Degrowth Values Embodied in Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem*: The Expenses of Development on the Inner Mongolian Grassland

In contemporary world all the advanced countries in the world are capitalist countries; at the same time, to a great extent, the international discourse is dominated by these countries. Their economic and political values usually become the universal paradigmatic ideology in the world. Development and growth values, the critical socio-political ideology in the capitalist societies, inevitably become prevalent in most countries. In the worldwide cult of economic development, it is also difficult for a small number of socialist countries to remain unaffected. Just as Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis point out,

This development consensus, which spans across the left and right political spectrum, and even across the Iron Curtain, evacuated the political before neo-liberalism: socialist economies ended up resembling state capitalism, because they remained trapped in the pursuit of growth and development. (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 47)

In this sense, the development obsession and growth addiction transgresses national boundaries, regardless of the country being capitalist or socialist. Joel Jay Kassiola also contends that

Borrowing the term from John Kenneth Galbraith, we may call this claim the “industrial convergence thesis,” to convey the idea that despite ideological and institutional differences, the industrialized capitalist and socialist societies have much more in common on a deep normative level than their political institutional differences would imply. From this view, whether one's economy is capitalist market-oriented or socialist state-commanded is less important than both systems' seeking unlimited material abundance and consumption. (Kassiola 1990, 43)

So in the contemporary world, the common pursuit of capitalist and socialist countries is economic development and material affluence, and “both capitalist and socialist political systems reflect the identical, fundamental, and industrial social values essential to their legitimacy: unlimited economic growth and the Great Promise of Unlimited Progress” (1990, 44)!

China, as the largest socialist country, also values economic development. In this situation, the productivist economic values and techno-progressivist way of production may also cause some ecological and social problems, even if the nature and extent of the problems will be different from that of capitalist countries. Thus, I intend to expand the corpus by including a famous Chinese ecofiction, *Wolf Totem* (2004), which is written by Jiang Rong and translated by American scholar, Howard Goldblatt, for an ecocritical analysis. By this, I want to note the transnational dimensions of the problem that my dissertation addresses, rather than to do a comparative analysis of American and Chinese ecofictions. Actually, in the contemporary world, the common indicator of the national progressiveness and comprehensive strength is regarded as GDP, though there are a few other indicators. Annually, GDP ranking statistics for countries worldwide are issued by international organization to indicate the position of all the countries. So economic development and growth are commonly placed in the center in the national life in most of the countries, if not in all of them. This emphasis on economy has brought about worldwide environmental problems. This reality is usually reflected in environmental literature such as ecofiction. Here by this expansion of the literary corpus I want to dramatize this transnational quality of the issue of environment and growth. The English version of the novel, *Wolf Totem*, was published by the Penguin Press in 2008. It is worth mentioning that there are some reductions in the English version which makes it assume more typical characteristics of ecofiction. *Wolf Totem* focuses on the ecological degradation of the Inner Mongolian grassland caused by bureaucratic economic exploration during several decades and the consequent deterioration of the grassland ecology and consequent sandstorm in Beijing, the capital of China.

5.1 Introduction to Jiang Rong and *Wolf Totem*

Jiang Rong (1946—), whose real name is Lü Jiamin is a Chinese writer, and was also a teacher of two Chinese universities. He was born in the north of Jiangsu Province, China. His father, a revolutionary fighter of the New Fourth Army during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, served as the director of Jiangsu Health Department after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Later, Lü Jiamin went to Beijing with his father who went to work in the Health Ministry of China. In 1967, one year before the Movement of Going to the Mountainous Areas and the Countryside, he became the vice director of the Revolutionary Committee of the secondary school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. However, he wanted to suffer and experience hard life and even bleed since his father's generation experienced bullets and blood before they became officials. So, in this year, he voluntarily went to Xilin Gol Grassland, Inner Mongolia at the request of the local government of Mandu Baolig pastureland. The total number of this group of Beijing educated youths who went to Mandu Baolig was more than one hundred and twenty. There, he lived for eleven years and accumulated necessary knowledge and materials for the creation of *Wolf Totem*. In 1978, he returned to Beijing and was enrolled in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as a postgraduate of Political Economics. After graduation, he worked as a teacher in university.

Until now *Wolf Totem* is the only novel depicting the wolves and life of the border region of Xilin Gol grassland of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. It was published in 2004 in China, and the translated version by Howard Goldblatt in 2008 in the United States. Howard Goldblatt, an American sinologist born in 1939, is the foremost English translator of Chinese literary works. He translated many works of famous Chinese writers. His translation of *Wolf Totem* is excellent, although he deleted some parts about the discussion of the national spirit of the Chinese nation in the epilogue of the Chinese version and a few other details. In fact, just because this deletion, the English version becomes more typical of a fictional work and more salient in its characteristic of ecofiction. This makes the English version more interesting and

more attractive, eliminating the didactic element.

Wolf Totem is a semi-autobiographical novel based on Jiang Rong's personal experience in the Inner Mongolia. It is narrated from a third-person perspective, but the narrator is non-omniscient. The story takes place in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China at the end of the 1960s. On the grassland near the borderline which is pure, pristine and untouched by industrial culture, Mongolian herdsmen still live a traditional nomadic life. They graze cattle and sheep and move freely from one meadow to another so as to avoid overgrazing. Wolf is a common animal on the Inner Mongolian grassland and forms an important part of the ecological chain. Sometimes the wolves attack the cattle of the herdsmen, but most of the time they prey on the herbivores on the grassland such as gazelles, rabbits, and mice. Thus, they are helpful in maintaining the ecological balance of the grassland. As a wise, fierce animal, wolf is endowed by Jiang Rong with a status of Totem of the Mongolians (someone does not agree with this point, but this point is unimportant since it is not the focus of ecocriticism and degrowthism). Its strategic wisdom, cooperative spirit, and military intelligence enlightened the Mongolian army for a long time in the ancient times so that they were able to conquer the Eurasian continent in the Yuan Dynasty.

Chen Zhen, an educated youth from Beijing, together with other educated youths goes to the border-region to work in the Inner Mongolian production team. The grassland life seems exciting at first, but he soon finds the dangerous side of this life. The wolves sometimes attack the sheep flock and the herdsmen must fight with them. He himself meets with the wolf pack sometimes and escapes luckily. The outsider laborers steal all the frozen gazelles, the food of wolves in winter, and they also steal the wolf cubs for pelts. Just as Bilgee, the tutor of Chen Zhen, who teaches Chen Zhen much knowledge about the grassland wolves and the grassland ecology forecasts, the wolf pack will soon attack the warhorse herd in a blizzard. The military representative, Bao Shungui, a Mongol from a farming region of Inner Mongolia, is angry about the wolves' attack and hunts the wolves massively by vehicles and guns. To get more knowledge about wolves, Chen Zhen steals a litter of wolf cubs and raises one. Yang

Ke, another educated youth, goes with Bao Shungui to visit the new pasture. Bao's eating the swan meat and digging wild peonies makes him disgusted. Raising the wolf cub, Chen Zhen finds that it is wise enough to dig a hole to avoid summer heat and escape possible attack.

Bao Shungui wants to develop agriculture, and then a lot of (Mongol) laborers from the farming area of Inner Mongolia move to the pasture. The outsiders kill swans, wild geese, and pheasants for food and dig wild peonies for sale as herb medicine. In summer, a wolf pack attacks the warhorse again with the help of a mosquito disaster, which leads another massive hunting of wolves launched by Bao Shungui. The methods include poison, bombs, and guns, without considering the ecological consequences. At the same time, the laborers hunt all the marmots in a vicious way whether it is big or small. With the sharp decrease of wolf population, the quantity of mice greatly increases, and the Mujuzi River area originally abounds with grass and water turns into a desert in 1975 due to intensive farming. Several years later Chen Zhen and Yang Ke go back to Beijing and begin their new life there. When they come back to the grassland thirty years later, the Tengger grassland has turned into a desert where the river dries up and which is infested by mice. In the spring of 2002, Chen Zhen knew from Batu and Gasmai's phone call that most of the Olonbulag pastureland turned into desert, and settlement herding would change into raising cattle. Beijing is sometimes attacked by the sandstorm from Inner Mongolia.

Called a remarkable book without peer in the contemporary age, *Wolf Totem* has received much critical praise even in the western world. As the English version is lacking some passages of discussion about the national spirit which make the concern of national character of the novel outweigh its environmentalist concern, the western critiques usually focus on the environmentalist motifs. Unlike many Chinese critics, western critics rarely examine the topic of Chinese cultural identity and national spirit embodied in this novel. The most typical academic confirmation of this novel comes from Timothy Weston who is deeply moved by the novel and makes a comment that:

No other novel, from any country, has given me so deep an

appreciation for the vitally important and interconnected roles played by all creatures and species within the natural environment, or of the fragile relationship between we human beings and the ecological setting in which we live. At a moment when awareness of our endangerment of the planet is rising to new levels, Jiang Rong has produced a profound lament about what it can mean when human beings and human societies carry on with little-to-no regard for the natural environment. (Western 2018, 146)

At the same time, Weston also notices Jiang Rong's political discourse of "Han Chinese cultural and political imperialism" (2018, 146) entangled with the environmental degeneration.

Similarly, Jerry Varsava develops a critical discourse about two interconnected themes embodied in *Wolf Totem* in his paper "Jiang Rong's 'Wolf Totem': Toward a Narrative Ecology of the Grassland of Contemporary Inner Mongolia"

the collision between traditional minority Inner Mongolian culture and modernizing majority Han Chinese socioeconomic practices, and the consequent ecological degradation of Inner Mongolia that ensues over the last four decades of the twentieth century as indigenous Mongol values are supplanted by those of the immigrant Han Chinese. (Varsava 2011, 283)

Varsava establishes the causal relationship between the conflict between the Han Chinese socioeconomic policy and traditional Inner Mongolian nomadic herding culture and later ecological deterioration of Inner Mongolia. His attribution of the reason for the ecological degradation to the authoritative socioeconomic practices points to my argument of institutional economism in governmental economic policy. In the novel, Jiang Rong notes that Inner Mongols revere and emulate wolves, while the Han Chinese "assume the role of abject 'stupid, fat sheep,' while submissively honoring the imperial Han dragon" (2011, 287). Wolves are crucial in maintaining the "primordial vitality" and ecological balance of the grassland and "the cultural-spiritual equilibrium" (2011, 288) of Inner Mongolians. In such circumstances, the wolf is endowed with much more positive value here than in conventional Chinese culture by Jiang Rong. The ecological wisdom of traditional Inner Mongolian culture is represented by Bilgee and his "grassland logic" (2011, 290). The Han Chinese

development policies, a kind of “technē” (2011, 293), severed from the reality of Inner Mongolia make a mistake of double ignorance: ignorance of “‘critical components, processes, and possibilities in complex systems surrounding us,’ but also of that very ignorance itself” (2011, 293). The Han authority represented by Bao Shungui fails to know the ecological consequences of the agro-industrial policies implemented on the grassland and the ignorance of the policies itself. The socio-cultural ecology is changed with the influx of laborers and corps. As a result of their destruction of the local fauna and damage of the flora, the ecological balance is broken and desertification of the grassland is unavoidable. This also incurs the yellow-dragon sandstorm in spring in Beijing. In his paper, Varsava attributes the reason of ecological degradation of Inner Mongolian grassland to the conflict between the traditional Inner Mongolian culture and the Han agro-industrial culture, emphasizing the inapplicability of the Han Chinese socioeconomic practices to Inner Mongolian pastureland, but the fact is that these Han Chinese socioeconomic practices themselves are problematic even to the other Han provinces of China due to their economism and technoprogressivism.

Karen Thornber focuses on the ecoambiguity in *Wolf Totem* in her paper “Acquiescing to Environmental Degradation: Literary Dynamics of Resignation.” As Thornber defines, ecoambiguity is “the complex, contradictory interactions between people and environments with a significant non-human presence” (Thornber 2011, 211). It may be expressed in various ways such as:

ambivalent attitudes toward nature; confusion about the actual condition of the non-human, often a consequence of ambiguous information; contradictory human behaviors toward ecosystems; and discrepancies among attitudes, conditions, and behaviors that lead to downplaying and acquiescing to ecological degradation, as well as to harming inadvertently environments one is attempting to protect. (2011, 211)

Thornber deals with one of the most alarming ecological ambiguities: human acquiescence to ecological deterioration in several novels in this paper; *Wolf Totem* is one of them. According to Karen Thornber, *Wolf Totem* describes the acquiescence to the damage to ecology which reaches such a “logical extreme” that the damage “not

only is accepted and unchallenged but also accelerated, despite predictable undesirable consequences” in “an especially powerful way” (2011, 217).

Thornber also argues that the ecoambiguities in *Wolf Totem* are presented in various ways. For example, Mongols permit and take part in the destructive reshaping and transformation of the grassland; Han Chinese insist on destroying the ecology of Inner Mongolia in spite of the warnings of the Mongols about the undesired destructive consequences of their activities; and Han Chinese insist on having more population than the grassland can support. In fact, not all the Mongols permit and participate in the economic reshaping and transforming activities and not all the Han Chinese intend to destroy the local ecology. On the contrary, some Mongols and Han Chinese resist those economic practices. For example, Bilgee, Chen Zhen, and Yang Ke put up resistance to the destructive activities of the laborers and Bao Shungui, though their resistances seem futile to prevent ecological degradation. Another important fact is that even Bao Shungui, the primary villain, is also “a Mongol from a farming region” (Jiang 2008, 88) instead of a Han Chinese. These are the points that Thornber overlooks. So, in my opinion, Thornber should attribute the ecologically-destructive development policy to an institutional ideological force which is unrelated to the ethnic issues and prevails in all the regions of China. According to Thornber, these above-mentioned ecoambiguities are out of perceived necessity, need as well as “compulsion to self-aggrandizement” (2011, 218), desire for profit, and willful compulsion. To Thornber, *Wolf Totem* features some contradictions between human activities and ecological conditions which are involved in the ecological degeneration, and “depicts people as readily dismissing information on environmental degradation; it shows them disregarding incontrovertible physical evidence of the ruinous results of harming ecosystems when lured by the promise of increased power and profit, or simply more comfortable lives” (2011, 222). From this conclusion, it can be seen that this paper considers the lure of “increased power and profit” which is the pursuit of development cult though it lacks elaboration on this aspect, let alone further theorization.

About the cultural identity discourse in *Wolf Totem*, Shu Chunyan

comprehensively grasps the cultural information conveyed by Jiang Rong in the novel, and is of the opinion that it is “with the ambition to carry forward Lu Xun’s national character reform project” (Shu 2013, 88). She accepts that this novel deals with the issues like “environmental deterioration and ethnic conflicts” (2013, 94). Nonetheless, “the national character is undoubtedly the central theme, gradually unfolding in the stories of life struggles of the nomadic tribe, wolves, and nature, as witnessed by the protagonist Chen Zhen” (2013, 94). Donna Chavez also claims that: “[p]art period epic, part fable for modern days, *Wolf Totem* is a stinging social commentary on the dangers of China’s overaccelerated economic growth as well as a fascinating immersion into the heart of Chinese culture” (Chavez 2019, 1).

No doubt, the environmentalist woe and critique of the economic policy is one of the main motifs Jiang Rong wants to express in this novel. With regard to this, Ursula K Le Guin argues that: “the book’s clear moral agenda doesn’t fit smoothly with the policies of a ‘corporate Communist’ state that has set economic growth and productivity above all other considerations”(Le Guin 2008, 1). Considering there is no specific in-depth elaboration on the degrowth discourses in *Wolf Totem*, there is also much space for this discussion on a comprehensive level. Here I will do further examination on the environmentalist motif which is mainly centered on the degrowth philosophical discourses in this novel.

5.2 The Economism and Economistic Practices in *Wolf Totem*

As the representatives of negative force, namely the contemporary political institutions and culture in China, which lays waste the Inner Mongolian grassland and deprive it of primordial vitality, Bao Shungui and some other minor characters are the embodiments of the economistic power in *Wolf Totem*. Since the establishment the Republic of China, Marxism has become the guiding ideology of the whole society, and the governing party, the Communist Party of China, is a Marxist political party, almost all the government officials believe in Marxism. At the same time, “Karl Marx is probably the best known and most influential proponent of economic reductionism, and the prevalence of

economism in contemporary thought is undoubtedly due to his influence” (Notturmo 2014, 56). Karl R. Popper also considers “Marx’s historicism as ‘economism’” (2014, 56). Economism is the foremost growth ideology colonizing cultural, political, ecological domains. According to Mark Amadeus Notturmo, economism refers to “a theory, or belief, or attitude that attributes primary and decisive importance to economic factors, concerns, and considerations in making policy decisions” (2014, 56). John B. Cobb Jr.’s definition is more succinct: “economism is the belief that primary devotion should be directed to the expansion of the economy” (Cobb 1999, 28), and “society should be organized for the sake of economic growth” (1999, 5).

As the economic representatives, Bao Shungui and his group share a common characteristic: they hold a homocentric (or anthropocentric) or egocentric viewpoint upon the ecosystem of the Inner Mongolian grassland. “A homocentric (or anthropocentric) ethic is grounded in society. A homocentric ethic underlies the social interest model of politics and the approach of environmental regulatory agencies that protect human health” (Merchant 2005, 72). This ethical position can also be called human speciesism or human chauvinism which privileges human beings over other nonhuman organisms. “An egocentric ethic is grounded in the self. It is based on an individual ought focused on individual good” (2005, 64). “Environmentally, an egocentric ethic permits individuals (or corporations) to extract and use natural resources to enhance their own lives and those of other members of society, limited only by the effects on their neighbors” (2005, 65). The representatives of egocentric ethics in the novel are Old Wang and other outside laborers, who want to fulfil their own material desires without considering the longterm interest of the local Mongol herders. The homocentric ethic and egocentric ethic share a reductionist viewpoint that “an organism is essentially nothing but a collection of atoms and molecules” (Looijen 2000, IX). Bao Shungui and other accomplices, blinded by economic gains and interests, just ignore or even deny the interconnections and interdependence among the creatures and plants of the Inner Mongolian grassland, and exploit the local flora and fauna resources without considering the ecological consequences.

Due to their reductionist economic values, Bao Shungui, the Military Representative and Director, Officer Xu, and Old Wang, etc. are enthusiastic about the activities that harm and deteriorate the ecology of the grassland in order to get self-aggrandizement, political promotion, and individual profit. Bao Shungui is the man in power who can make local economic policy of the Inner Mongolian pastureland, and at the same time, he has a shortcoming shared by most of the officials in bureaucracy: lack of democratic views and consequential radicalism in administration. Lack of democracy is one of the contributive elements to the reductionist economic practice. In Chapter 13, for exterminating the new wolf pack found by Batu and Buhe which actually does not exist so as to show more achievement to the superiors and promote the increase of the quantity of livestock, Bao Shungui insists on burning the reeds in the valley where the wolf pack is hiding. All the hunters object to setting fire in the reedy valley, but he rejects all the objections and threatens the objectors with the administrative punishment of “a criticism session” (Jiang 2008, 206). At last, he succeeds in burning the reeds by force, but he only finds that there is no wolf pack in the reeds and only one old dog and two best stud bulls are burnt to death. His denial of the democratic advice of the Olonbulag herders in the radical pursuit of increasing profit in herding production and self-aggrandizement is a typical characteristic of reductionist economic practice and only brings about the loss of public property rather than the claimed benefit to the social production. Another example of denial of democracy is Bao Shungui’s neglect of Uljii and Bilgee’s opinion about wolf-hunting and agro-industrial practices on the pastureland. This neglect contributes much to formation of the economic and technoprogresivist policy carried out on Inner Mongolian grassland. The agro-industrial practices, over-hunting, and other destructive activities to the ecology of the pastureland are the cases in point. *Wolf Totem*, to some extent, presents such a mode of development practice.

As Bao Shungui lacks an ecological consciousness and long-term consideration, he considers that “radically reshaping the grasslands will allow for the most efficient use of Inner Mongolian territory” (Thornber 2011, 218), and launches the movement of

farming on the pastureland. When this decision is opposed by Uljii, the former director of the pastureland, who thinks that this will lead to over-farming of the pastureland in the long run, he answers the following: “Each generation controls its own affairs, [...] The next generation is not my concern” (Jiang 2008, 257). This is a typical reductionist economic way of thought: only caring about short-term profit and disregarding ecological sustainability. Karen Thornber makes a comment that “*Wolf Totem* depicts Han Chinese as destroying multiple ecosystems in Inner Mongolia despite warnings from the Mongols that so doing is unnecessary and will have enduring negative results. Their environmental ambiguity stems less from (perceived) necessity than from desire for self-aggrandizement and profit” (Thornber 2011, 220). It is a support to and proof of the economic ideology dominant in the contemporary Chinese authority which is also carried out in the Inner Mongolia region and agreed by many Inner Mongols in power.

The Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps’ grand design for the development of Inner Mongolian grassland is to establish settlements to substitute farming for traditional nomadic herding style of production, and for this aim,

The corps would supply money and equipment, along with engineering teams, to build brick houses with tiled roofs and sturdy animal pens made of cement and stone; it would also dig wells, pave highways, and build schools, hospitals, post offices, auditoriums, shops, and movie theaters. The teams would also reclaim the fertile land to plant grass and grain for animal feed, and vegetable crops. They would set up mechanized harvesting and transport teams, and tractor stations. They would eradicate the damage caused by wolves, disease, insects, and rodents. They would strengthen the grassland’s ability to fight commonly occurring natural disasters. (Jiang 2008, 433)

It seems fairly attractive to many people of the pastureland, including the students, young herders, women, and children. They are lured by the bright future of “increased power and profit, or more comfortable lives” (Thornber 2011, 222) promised by this development design, in a degrowthist term, the imaginary of development. But actually the agro-industrial economic practices will only ruin the ecology of the Inner

Mongolian grassland, and the blind farming on the grassland and the resultant explosion of agricultural population will only be a plunder of the ecology of the grassland. The direct consequence for this blind mechanization of farming production on the Inner Mongolia Grassland coincides with what Bilgee states: the grassland is now already heavily burdened by the large number of livestock, more people and lots of machines will directly destroy the self-recovery ability of the ecology of the grassland. This judgement turns out to be true: “In 1975, the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps was formally disbanded, but the Majuzi River area, with its lush grass and abundant water, had already been turned into a desert by farming” (2008, 507). This kind of exploitation of Inner Mongolian grassland which is full of primordial vitality is similar to the destructive economic invasion of the southwest territory of America in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

In fact, Jiang Rong here negates these kinds of economic practices which overlooks their socio-ecological destructive effects. His condemnation of consumption-intensive and technology-intensive comfortable and luxury lifestyles on the Inner Mongolian grassland and valuing traditional nomadic lifestyle without modern industrialization accord with the degrowth advocacy of voluntary simplicity. Degrowthers contend that

[i]n order for an economics and politics of degrowth to emerge, therefore, it would seem that people at the cultural level must be prepared to give up or resist high-consumption ‘affluent’ lifestyles and instead embrace ‘simpler’ lifestyles of reduced or restrained consumption. (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 214)

No doubt, Jiang Rong, for the environmentalist ideal reflected in *Wolf Totem*, is a degrowthist, at least an ally of degrowthers. His value of more ecologically sustainable lifestyle on the Inner Mongolian pastureland is also consistent with the degrowth ideal of eco-village “in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (2015, 252). To be frank, this kind of degrowth ideal is even difficult to realize completely in a socialist society, let alone capitalist

society with private ownership. Maybe it can only be realized in a future communist society. Connected to this value of voluntary simplicity, it can be argued that *Wolf Totem* assumes some degrowth values, though there is some nuanced difference between different writers and different ecofictions. Jiang Rong expresses his pity for the destructive effects of the economic development activities on the Inner Mongolian pastureland.

In fact, this kind of eco-village ideal of degrowth overlaps with pastoral tradition, if it did not derive from it. Greg Garrard, in his *Ecocriticism*, contends that “pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends” (2004, 33). Degrowth, in essence, is a kind of green politics which also integrates or draws upon pastoral trope. Jiang Rong’s valuing primordial nomadic life without modern industrialization can be categorized into the romantic pastoral tradition, if it is referred to Terry Gifford’s assortment of pastorals. Gifford distinguishes three kinds of pastorals

the specifically literary tradition, involving a retreat from the city to the countryside, that originates in ancient Alexandria and becomes a key poetic form in Europe during the Renaissance; more generally, ‘any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban’ (1999: 2); and the pejorative sense in which ‘pastoral’ implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship. (2004, 33)

Garrard calls the three kinds of pastorals classic pastoral, romantic pastoral, and pejorative idealized pastoral. In *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong, in fact, explicitly contrasts the traditional nomadic lifestyle on the pastureland and modernized and urbanized lifestyle. So the lifestyle he valued can be called the romantic pastoral ideal.

Apart from the blind over-farming on the grassland, there is also over-hunting driven by the economic greed for food, leather, etc. Bao Shungui is also the chief criminal of this ecological crime. He orders to hunt all the wolves which are considered to be a danger to the warhorses and livestock and also a resource of meat and leather. In fact, the wolves’ attack on the warhorses and livestock is caused by their lack of food: the migrant laborers have over-collected the frozen gazelles. Bao Shungui, ignorant of the interconnection between the flora and fauna on the grassland, is obsessed with

making profit from wild animals. Under this guideline, he encourages stealing the wolf cubs massively and hunting the grown-up wolves with all methods including poison regardless of the ecological consequence. He issues formal notice to reinstate the once cancelled annual activity of stealing wolf cubs, and “the rewards were to be higher than in previous years” (2008, 65). He invites the marksmen from the corps, Staff Officer Xu, Staff Officer Batel and others to shoot wolves in vehicles. And this evokes other bloody killings of the wolves:

Everyone’s gone mad about killing. The hunters and workers use trucks and cars, given all the gasoline and ammunition they need. Even the doctors have joined in. They inject an odorless and colorless poison into the bone marrow of dead sheep that they then tossed into the wild. I have no idea how many wolves they’ve poisoned. The worst are the corps’ road repair crews. They use any weapon they can find. They even found a way to insert explosives into sheep bones, smear them with sheep fat, and then leave them at places frequented by wolves. The rigged bones blow wolves’ heads off when they bite down. The workers have put the sheep-bone bombs everywhere. They’ve already killed several of the herdsmen’s dogs. The wolves have fallen into the abyss of the people’s battle. Everywhere people are singing, ‘Kill the wolves! Generation after generation, we won’t stop fighting until all the jackals are dead.’ ... (2008, 456)

It sounds so ridiculous that all the people are enthusiastic about eliminating a kind wild animal from the local ecosystem without thinking of the ecological consequences. It can only be explained as a economic enthusiasm, an urge of material interests, and the lack of ecological awareness. Zhang Jiyuan, one of the educated youths and a horse herder, expresses his critique of the grassland economic policy of the local authority which are all composed of officials from farming areas who do not know anything about the herding life on the pastureland: “All they care about is quantity, quantity, quantity. In the end, they’ll lose everything by being single-minded. No more wolves, no more demand for the Mongol horses, nothing but yellow sand rolling over the Inner Mongolian grassland; the cows and sheep will die of starvation, and we’ll all go back to Beijing” (2008, 376). This critique, in fact, just points out the economic preference

in the present social production policy of the grassland and predicts the ecological and economic consequences of such practices.

Besides annihilating wolves, Bao Shungui also supports the hunt of foxes, marmots, etc. With his support, old Wang and other laborers kill all the marmots for the meat, oil, and skin whether they are young or old, which causes the later extinction of marmots in the pastureland area. Bao Shungui also takes the lead in hunting swans for food; facing Yang Ke's query why he does not protect the swans as they are also national treasures like the white herbaceous peonies, he answers that he is a farmer and he is practical in looking at things: "[t]reasures are things people can get their hands on. If you can't, they're not" (2008, 282). These remarks just reveal his anthropocentrism and economic greed and lack of ecological consciousness. He supports old Wang and other laborers to hunt games so as to save cows and sheep. All of them find great pleasure in hunting swan, wild duck, and wild goose which serve as delicious food. These overhunting eventually cause the loss of biodiversity of the grassland and break the ecological balance of the Inner Mongolian grassland. With the sharp reduction of wolves, the quantity of mice increases rapidly so that the mouse dares to bite the horse and people, and the old family of marmots disappear completely. "It had taken only one summer for the people to turn the lovely swan lake area into a graveyard for swans, wild geese, wild ducks, and wolves" (2008, 470).

5.3 Nature's Punishment and the Consequences of the Economic Development

As the consequence of these economic despoiling of nature, people on the grassland have to suffer ecological punishment and bear the consequences of environmental deterioration. Due to the local people's stealing the wolf cubs for food and leather and seizing all the frozen gazelles, their food for winter, wolf packs take revenge on the herd of warhorse and the livestock and cause a great loss of the corps and the herdsmen. The massive killing of wolves brings about a great increase in the quantity of mice and

rabbits that which hinders the livestock husbandry and eventually causes the loss of human property. As the spiritual company, sustenance, and even the spiritual master, the wolves play a crucial role in Inner Mongolians' daily life; the distinction of wolf brings about spiritual decadence and other spiritual morbidity as well:

Once the wolves were exterminated, the bright red sun would no longer light up the grassland, and the stagnant stability would bring dejection, a withering decadence and boredom, and other more terrifying foes of the spirit, obliterating the masculine passion that had characterized them for thousands of years.

After the disappearance of the wolves, the sale of liquor on the Olonbulag nearly doubled. (2008, 494)

The plunder of the ecology of the grassland not only brings about a spiritual wasteland in Inner Mongolian culture among the herders, but also results in physical ecological degradation.

Due to the overhunting of other creatures such as swan, wild geese, and marmots, the primordial vitality no longer exists at the end of the novel. The amazing swan lake full of wild ducks totally disappears, and the wild geese are difficult to form a flock since most of them are killed and eaten. There are no more marmots on the Olonbulag marmot mountain and other hills, and the beautiful herbaceous peonies on the pastureland do not exist any more. The mice are so rampant that they eat much of the good grass originally for the lambs and also dare to bite horses. The most serious result is the desertification of the whole grassland. The former director of the pastureland Uljii once hints that the Mongolian grassland will turn into a desert like Xinjiang Gobi if Bao Shungui introduces farming into the Inner Mongolian pastureland. It turns out to be true: over-farming advocated by Bao Shungui and the blind mechanization on the grassland eventually cause desertification of the pastureland. When Chen Zhen and Yang Ke return to the grassland, they immediately realize the dramatic change of the Inner Mongolian grassland

The sky was dry and cloudless; the Tengger of the grassland was now the Tengger of the desert. Under the dry hot sky, no dense

green grass was visible; large patches of hard sandy soil filled the spaces between sparse, dry yellow grassland, as if giant sheets of sandpaper had been spread out across the ground. (2008, 508)

Also due to the general ecological deterioration of the grassland, the one-thousand-year river “with water that came up to the horses’ knees or even their bellies” (2008, 509) has dried up. They find that “the fast-flowing water of the old days had receded until the rocky riverbed was exposed; nothing but wet sand and a few wormlike streams crisscrossed the dry rocks” (2008, 509). More serious consequence for the developmentalist economic expansion on the grassland is the extinction of the nomadic herding society in Inner Mongolia. Chen Zhen receives the call of Batu and Gasmai and knows that “eighty percent of the Olonbulag pastureland is now desert. In another year the whole area will change from settlement herding to raising cows and sheep, more or less like the animal pens in your farming villages”(2008, 524). He knows that the nomadic herding society has died out, and the grassland culture with wolves has become a cultural memory.

Jiang Rong exposes the destructive effects of over-farming, over-hunting, and misusing and appropriating commons implemented by the political bureaucrats represented by Bao Shungui. As China is a socialist country, most of the natural resources are commons that either belong to the state or the local collectives. In the age of this story, namely in the 1970s, there was little private property. All these commons are governed and managed by the local officials who represent all members of the local community. In *Wolf Totem*, the old and newly found pastureland in Olonbulag are all managed by Bao Shungui and the local team. Due to the bad governance and illegal appropriation, these commons are almost destroyed due to the local ecological degradation. Originally, the commons are an appropriate form of degrowth and also are a necessary requirement of socialist society. But in the novel, it becomes a hotbed of ecological abusive activities. Jiang Rong, while valuing the traditionally simple nomadic life, condemns these greedy and criminal acts of abusing the commons of the Olonbulag region which totally undermine the degrowth efforts and decrease collective wellbeing.

Except for presenting the destructive effects of the economic abusive activities of the Bao Shungui group, *Wolf Totem* also decolonizes the economism in the bureaucratic management system by the discourses of Bilgee, Uljii, and Chen Zhen.

5.4 Decolonization of Economism in *Wolf Totem*: Holistic Discourses Expressed through Bilgee, Uljii, and Chen Zhen

Chen Zhen is the protagonist of this novel, and he learns much knowledge about the grassland ecology and Mongolian cultural spirit from Bilgee and sometimes from Uljii. The three of them are all reliable characters and the primary positive forces who show Jiang Rong's authorial presence, and reflect his environmentalist idea and delivers his discourses of decolonizing the economism in this novel. It is particularly Chen who is the spokesman of his critique of the economic productive practices of Chinese authority. The core spirit of the grassland ecological wisdom of Bilgee and Uljii is the holistic viewpoint on the ecosystem on the Inner Mongolian grassland. In fact, this is a humanist ecocentric viewpoint in which Bilgee and Uljii accept the symbiotic relationship between human beings and other living and inanimate things in the grassland ecosystem and the interconnection among human beings, fauna, and flora. Of course, Chen Zhen also prizes the so-called militaristic spirit valued and attributed to Mongols by Bilgee, but it is, to a great extent, a national stereotype derived from some historical facts such as the Mongols' grand conquest of many parts of Eurasia in the Yuan Dynasty and the Mongolian nomadic life style. After all, in many regions of the Han provinces, local people also need to fight against wolves in that era (in the 1970s), and they may also be affected by this kind of hunting life in terms of national spirit and are actually militaristic. So to some extent, militarism is largely unrelated with nation. It may be true that some Inner Mongols are militaristic, but this is also true for some Han Chinese. Considering the semi-autobiographical nature of this novel, Chen Zhen, as the poetic self of the author, also conveys Jiang Rong's second self, the implied author's main cultural values about the national character and national cultural identity

of Chinese. Since this thesis focuses on the degrowth discourses and environmentalist presentation of *Wolf Totem*, I will not elaborate on this motif of the cultural identity of Chinese.

Bilgee and Uljii's viewpoint on the grassland social metabolism is holistic instead of reductionist. According to holism, the ecosystem is an organic system composed of all ecological components such as human beings, animals, and plants. Holism considers that "[...] 'an organism is essentially nothing but a complex set of atoms and molecules' [...] 'You cannot just simply reduce an organism to a sack of molecules'" (Looijen 2000, 3). There are some basic assumptions in holism:

Everything is connected to everything else. The whole qualifies each part; conversely, a change in one of the parts will change the other parts and the whole. Ecologically, this has been illustrated by the idea that no part of an ecosystem can be removed without altering the dynamics of the cycle. If too many changes occur, an ecosystem collapses. [...]

The unity of humans and nonhuman nature. As opposed to nature/culture dualism, in holism humans and nature are part of the same organic cosmological system. While theoretical ecologists often focus their research on natural areas removed from human impact, human(or political) ecologists study the mutual interactions between society and nonhuman nature. [...] (Merchant 2005, 77-78)

Bilgee, Uljii, and Chen Zhen are the defenders of the ecological balance of the Xilin Gol grassland of which Olonbulag is one part. Bilgee expresses many viewpoints that accord with ecological holism. When Chen Zhen and Bilgee collect the frozen gazelles in Chapter 3, Chen Zhen feel great pity for the surviving pregnant female gazelle in the crusty deep snow, and cannot help blaming wolves as evil creatures which kill other innocent herbivores and are indifferent to life, Bilgee becomes angry immediately, and says: "Does that mean that the grass doesn't constitute a life? That the grassland isn't a life? Out here, the grass and the grassland are the life, the big life. All else is little life that depends on the big life for survival. Even wolves and humans are little life" (Jiang 2008, 45). This shows his sober awareness of the interconnectedness between the

members of the ecosystem and his valuing of the intrinsic value of plants such as grass. He considers the lives on the grassland in terms of their membership of the grassland and in the context of grassland ecology.

At the same time, Bilgee objects to the overhunting of wild animals and overgrazing. When Bao Shungui insists on exterminating wolves so as to protect the livestock herding, he only agrees to hunt the wolves moderately. He organizes an encirclement hunting of the wolf pack after the massacre of the warhorses by the wolf pack, and the brigade herders kill a few tens of wolves. But he tells Bao that “[...] This cannot happen again. If there are any more hunts like this, the wolves will disappear, and the gazelles, the ground squirrels, the rabbits, and the marmots will rise up. That will be the end of the grassland and will infuriate Tengger. We and our livestock will pay dearly” (2008, 199). He knows clearly that though wolves prey on livestock, they also limit the rising of wild herbivores, and thus protect the grass which is the “big life” of the grassland and sustains all the little lives on the grassland. So Bilgee, together with Uljii and other old herders, insists on maintaining the equilibrium of the dynamic process of the circulation of the grassland lives rather than breaking the intermediates of the ecological chain. As the wolf is a key keeper of this equilibrium, he often emphasizes the importance of the wolf. He once explained to Chen Zhen: “Without them (wolves), the mice and rabbits will rule the grassland. Then, when the grassland is gone, they’ll be in trouble too. No one can escape it” (2008, 469).

As “a rare expert on wolves and grassland” (2008, 509), Uljii is even wiser than Bilgee in managing the production on the Inner Mongolian grassland and presents sagacity in arranging the economic activities of the pastureland. His remark on wolves and the ecology of the grassland is more philosophical than Bilgee’s: “The grassland is a complex place, [...] Everything is linked, and the wolves are the major link, tied to all the others. If that link is removed, livestock raising will disappear out here. You can’t count all the benefits the wolves bring, far greater than the damage they cause” (2008, 238). So Uljii thinks that it is crucial to limit wolf-hunting on the pastureland so as to keep the quantity of the wolf pack which will help in preventing the deadly damage to

the grassland caused by other herbivores such as gazelles, mice, and marmots. With the existence of wolves, the herbivores cannot deplete all the grass on the grassland which is the food of livestock, and through their predation of marmots they can also help in reducing the disaster of mosquitoes.

Maybe Uljii is the most far-sighted one who is able to foresee the plague-preventing function of wolf packs based on his knowledge of the circulation of ecology. He explains to Bao Shungui, the successor to his directorship of the pastureland, and stresses the special function of the wolf pack in the circumstances of a natural disaster such as “a hundred-year or two-hundred-year blizzard” (2008, 254); in these circumstances, many of the livestock will be frozen to death. After the melting of the snow, the carcasses of the dead livestock will decompose and stink quickly, which may cause a plague among the people and animals. “But wolves will dispose of the dead animals in no time. Plagues aren’t a problem as long as there are wolves around” (2008, 254). It was the same in the old times when there were wars and heavy casualties. So wolves are the natural quick decomposers of the carcasses of animals and the key maintainers of the healthy circulation of the ecology of the grassland. By these, it can be argued that Uljii is the most sagacious environmentalist and competent leader on the Onlonbulag pastureland.

Chen Zhen is Bilgee’s good student and gradually understands the crucial importance of wolves to the grassland ecology and the grassland production after he arrived in the Inner Mongolian grassland. So he tries his best to persuade the cadres and soldiers of the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps to stop the extermination of wolves by explaining the role that the wolves play in protecting the good pasture for the spring birthing of lambs from the grazing of tens of thousands of gazelles from outer Mongolia. In that circumstance, even rifles cannot drive the gazelles away. “If not for the wolves, there’d have been no grass for the ewes and no milk for the newborn lambs; we’d have lost tens of thousands of lambs” (2008, 441). By this example, he tells the people in authority that wolves are a contributive force to the livestock production on the grassland rather than a destructive one. He also illustrates

that “[w]olves are the main reason the grassland isn’t overburdened” (2008, 442) by the mice which are much more destructive to the capacity of the grassland than domestic animals. Here Chen Zhen sees clearly that though wolves also prey on the sheep it benefits the grassland and herding production more by curbing the harmful factors to the grassland ecology.

Through the instruction of Bilgee and also by the knowledge he received in his education, Chen Zhen realizes the great importance of ecological balance and sustainability of the Inner Mongolian grassland. In Chapter 32, Director Bao Shungui and Staff Officer Xu kill several wolves and are very satisfied about this, but Chen Zhen is very sad about the killed wolves. Xu senses his sorrow and tries to comfort him by telling him that they can use crop dusters to poison the mice which used to be killed by wolves. Chen Zhen immediately realizes that spraying mouse poison is very dangerous to the balance and biodiversity of the ecosystem on the grassland. He at once objects: “No, you can’t do that, [...] If the wolves, foxes, desert foxes, and hawks eat the dead mice, they’ll all die off. [...] Wolves have lots of uses, [...] I’m trying to make you understand that wolves can reduce the number of gazelles, rabbits, and marmots” (2008, 449-450). For Chen Zhen, the foremost thing for the grassland is the integrity and balance of the grassland ecosystem rather than the short-term effect achieved and benefit got from reckless short-sighted measures.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyphonic theory of fiction,

the central tradition of the novel is constituted by texts which are not unitary in their discourse (‘monological’) but multiple, polyphonic (‘dialogic’). This polyphonic quality is achieved both by the juxtaposition of several voices in the text itself and by the text’s integration of previous discourse, be it anterior literary texts or aspects of language and culture at large. (in Rimmon-Kenan 2005, 118)

In *Wolf Totem*, the textual discourses mainly include the Bao Shungui group’s discourse including the institutional growth values and the Bilgee group’s discourse. In these two opposite discourses, the Bao Shungui group’s discourse is unreliable due to their unreliability as characters. The unreliability comes from their limited knowledge and

problematic value-scheme, namely their economism, homocentrism, and egocentrism. In contrast, the discourse of the three main reliable and positive characters, Bilgee, Uljii, and Chen Zhen, in the polyphonic interplay of the various characters' voices in *Wolf Totem* forms a decolonization of the economic policy formulated by the development-addicted authority represented by Bao Shungui, the big villain and the corresponding productive practices. Their opinions are proved to be completely right by the later ecological deterioration of the Olonbulag pastureland caused by the series of destructive policy and production activities. Besides rejecting the colonization of economism, Bilgee and Chen Zhen also take the lead in taking actions to resist the economic development practices and ecological destruction activities.

5.5 Degrowth Actions of Bilgee, Chen Zhen, and Yang Ke

Out of their degrowth economic ideas and their value of simplicity of life, Bilgee, Chen Zhen, and their ally, Yang Ke and others sometimes take measures to prevent the ecological destructive activities of those economicists and greedy men. Bilgee, as the representative of the older herdsmen, knows well the importance of the integrity of the ecology on the grassland, and he tries his best to protect the wolves and marmots so as to maintain the dynamic balance of the grassland ecology. He finds Dorji's tricks for catching wolves with powerful odorless poison and traps, he covers the poison with low-grade poison with odor that wolves can easily smell. So the wolves will never be poisoned. To deal with the traps, he "told Chen to pick up some sheep bones and throw them at the traps to snap them shut" (2008, 469). To protect the grassland wolves, he risks being punished for his "sabotaging the wolf extermination campaign" (2008, 469). Bilgee also prevents old Wang from killing small marmots to avoid its extinction. To some extent, he represents the traditional nomadic herding life style and the ecological wisdom of nomadic culture on the Inner Mongolian grassland. Chen Zhen, as the loyal student of Bilgee, also participates in Bilgee's ecodefense activities. His good friend, Yang Ke, who also has ecological consciousness, voluntarily participates in the defense of ecological integrity and diversity too. He witnesses old Wang hunts swan with a raft,

but he is not able to prevent this. So he exchanges two swan eggs from old Wang with half a vat of sheep oil and puts them back into the nestle of the swan. Apart from the three of them, other educated youths from Beijing, such as Gao Jianzhong and other other herdsmen, are also in favor of ecodefense and resist the economic exploitation of the ecosystem of the Inner Mongolian grassland.

5.6 Conclusion

Jiang Rong, as an intellectual with advanced ecological awareness, is more sensitive to the ecological deterioration brought about by the blind exploitation of the Inner Mongolian grassland than his contemporaries. He is deeply touched by the ecological degradation and consequential extinction of nomadic herding culture of the Inner Mongolian grassland. With a sense of mission, he wrote this remarkable novel with historical significance to convey his deep regret about and indignation at the economic productive practices on the Inner Mongolian grassland and the consequential ecological deterioration of the Inner Mongolia border region. Through the objection and resistance of the coalition formed by Bilgee, Uljii, Chen Zhen, and other Beijing educated youths and local herdsmen to the economic policy, *Wolf Totem* criticizes the economic development practices and decolonizes the economic ideology dominant in the political and economic domains of contemporary China.

In the ecology-oriented and culture-oriented ecofiction, he describes the whole process of the deterioration of the ecology of the grassland and the accompanying disappearance of the traditional nomadic way of production in great details. Though lacking development in characterization, the novel does disclose the bureaucratic economicism in the political and economic life on the Xilin Gol grassland of Inner Mongolia. The authority, out of economic ignorance, shortsightedness, and greed, brazenly exploits the grassland ecosystem to extort material interests in the name of improving people's wellbeing. Bao Shungui, the head of the economic force, ignores the ecological rules and the historical experience of ecological degradation that happened in his hometown, Northeast China, and insists on carrying out farming on the

pastureland. The arrival of the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps increases ecological degeneration. The developmental design is grand, but it overburdens the grassland nature; the large-scale farming, mechanization, and industrialization much exceeds the ecological capacity of the grassland.

More serious is the over-hunting of the grassland wolf, marmot, swan, wild duck, and wild goose that breaks the ecological balance of the grassland and destroys the biodiversity. The sharp reduction of wolves causes the disaster of mice which will lead to the loss of livestock herding, and the abuse of poison in hunting wolves and mice causes the pollution of the ecological chain, and endangers other animals, plants, and eventually human beings. Over-hunting of marmot, swan, wild duck, and wild goose brings about their decrease and final extinction. All these ultimately bring about the collapse of the ecology of the grassland. It is proved by the final desertification of the pastureland, and as an accompanying consequence, the way of production changes and the nomadic herding culture becomes extinct.

Bilgee, Chen Zhen, and Yang Ke are the representatives of righteous force for the defense of the local ecology. They reject and resist institutional economic productive activities. Their discourse and actions illustrate their degrowth endeavour to preserve the local ecology and maintain the ecological integrity, biodiversity and ecological dynamic balance of the Inner Mongolian grassland. Chen Zhen also expresses his advocacy of cultural diversity which accords with J. Baird Callicott's multicultural environmental ethics and is one of the main concerns of degrowth philosophy. Callicott contends that "while we inhabit many cultural worlds—the Confucian world, the Hindu world, the Christian world—we also inhabit one ecologically seamless biosphere, one planet, washed by one ocean, enveloped in one atmosphere. We are many and also one" (Merchant 2005, 82). Though the nomadic culture of Inner Mongolia is not mentioned by Callicott, but no doubt, it is an independent culture, and it has the value of existence. Consistent with Callicott, the degrowthers are not only concerned by the "questions of epistemic decolonization" in development debates, but are also interested in "the defense of cultural difference" (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, 74). So if

one considers that Chen Zhen is the poetic self of the author, then it can be argued that Jiang Rong is not only an environmentalist, but also a degrowth advocate.

In this novel, Jiang Rong also values the simplicity of the traditional Inner Mongolian nomadic life which is advocated by degrowth values. The techno-intensive and consumption-intensive lifestyle designed by the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps is based on mechanization and a much larger population. Not only does it contradict with the simplicity advocacy of degrowth values, but is also beyond the bearing capacity of the grassland. It turns out to be a destruction of the simple life on the pristine Inner Mongolian grassland and the traditional nomadic culture.

These kinds of destructive effects on the ecology of the Inner Mongolian grassland, and traditional simple life and nomadic culture are also connected to the bad governance and failed management of the commons caused by policy failures and illegal appropriation. Jiang Rong also expresses his condemnation of the political and economic incompetence which undermines the degrowth efforts. The critical spirit of Jiang Rong presented in this novel was invaluable in that era, that is why the novel became the bestseller in that age. The environmentalist critique of *Wolf Totem* has greatly promoted the ecological awareness of the public.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

As I have mentioned in the Introduction, there are various kinds of subgenre of ecofiction. In them, realistic ecofiction more directly presents the values and discourses of degrowth. Realistic novels here refers to non-speculative fiction. As I have defined, speculative fictions generally include science fiction, eco-utopia, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels, and green fantasy. Most, if not all, of these kinds of fictions are usually set in imagined socioecological space in the far future or distant past. In contrast, realistic novels are usually set in current socioecological space and are closely connected to contemporary real life. They emphasize verisimilitude and intend to expose and explore the actual ecological problems existing in our current life. According to this rationale, I have chosen and introduced four ecofictions ranging from the 1970s to the 2000s in the previous chapters. Three of them are American novels and one is the translated version of a Chinese novel. It is worth mentioning that the English version of the novel has some changes to the original novel. I have mentioned this point in the previous chapter. Though they all contain degrowth discourses and present the decolonization of the development and growth imaginary and ideology, their focuses, perspectives, and ways vary.

In *The Falls*, Joyce Carol Oates interweaves a family life with a notorious case of environmental pollution, namely the Love Canal case. With vivid realistic narrative, Oates represents the industrial evil of contaminating the air, water, and the soil. The disclosure of the local contamination is appalling, which evokes the readers' reexamination of the present concept as well as the policy of development and economic growth prevailing in the United States. In the novel, Oates exposes the various destructive effects brought about by the economic development in the capitalist society including environmental pollution, social corruption, and individual physical and psychological afflictions. Economic boom brings about much industrial pollution.

The poor air in the Niagara Falls area hurts the local people and tourists, and the deadly chemical and radioactive pollution in the Love Canal area causes local residents to suffer great physical harms. The details about the physical harms enumerated by Oates are powerful denunciations of economic development. The common people are the sufferers of the economic development, and the murder of Dirk shows that the economic growth is usually accompanied by political and judicial corruption. Just as I have analyzed in the preceding chapter, development is a process of producing distributive inequality, but at the same time it also produces political inequality and judicial corruption. Social changes brought about by economic development has impacted the traditional values of individuals. The social inequality, together with environmental deterioration, brings psychological suffering to individuals. The level of individual happiness in the capitalist growth society is low due to the general ecological deterioration, social inequalities, and the non-conviviality caused by the economic institutional forces. In *The Falls*, Oates discloses and denounces the evil caused by the economic development in the Niagara Falls area, and decolonizes the imaginary of development promised by the American authorities and the capitalist institutional ideology.

DeLillo describes the postindustrial chaos, risks and spiritual alienation caused by industrialism, modern runaway science and technology, and consumerism in *White Noise* as well as other masterpieces. In fact, *White Noise* assumes a quality of ecological wasteland which is grotesque and diversified and full of existing and potential environmental risks. The overall tone of DeLillo towards such an ecological wasteland is ironic instead of accusatory. In *White Noise*, DeLillo describes the toxicity of the runaway science and technology as one of the the main factors which lead to the ecological wasteland of contemporary society. This accords with degrowth theory. One of the degrowth discourses is to politicize the debate about modern science and technology in the era of depoliticization. Different from post-normal science in degrowth society, modern technology is usually out of control due to the technocratization and technoprogessivism in current growth societies. DeLillo has

commented on the relationship between modern death and the innovation of science and technology: the development of science and technology will produce new ways of death (and also new types of physical harm). The most obvious example of this relationship is the case of Jack Gladney who is exposed to the spilled chemical byproduct. The death has been planted into his body, but it is not sure when he will die. This exposes the dilemma and absurdity of postindustrial life: technology has created time bombs that cannot be controlled by its inventors. Another irony to the ecological wasteland is the unpredictability and uncontrollability of modern technology which may correspond to Ulrich Beck's elaboration on the "risks of modernization" (Beck 1992, 23). The accidental spill of the deadly chemical waste and the uncertainty of the microorganism solution to airborne toxin are the cases. Different from Oates's definite denunciation of the evil of economic development and modern technology, DeLillo chooses to satirize the potential to cause unpredictable physical harm to people and even the insidious nature of modern science and technology. About the latter insidious nature, the waves and radiation is the illustrative case in point; the insidious hazard of waves and radiation has been elaborated in the preceding chapters. Another case for the insidious harm of modern science and technology is the side effect of the high-tech product Dylar which is perfectly designed. It hurts the neural function of people. The uncontrollability and insidious nature of runaway technology constitute the absurdity of postindustrial life.

Another aspect of the ecological wasteland is the dehumanizing effect of the runaway modern science and technology and the consumerist ideology which aims for economic growth. The mutual influence between techno-economic environment, culture, and individual mentality has been confirmed by Cultural Ecology scholarship. This has also been explained in the preceding chapters. The dehumanizing effects of the science and technology of the postindustrial era embodied in *White Noise* may include heteronomic effects on individuals, fear of death, spiritual vacuum: crisis of belief, and fetishism. As the cornerstone of capitalist ideology, consumerism reduces individual happiness and causes loss of autonomy.

Compared with the two above-mentioned ecofictions, Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is more activist. In my opinion, the ecodefense he advocates is a natural resistance of the American southwest local people to the commodification of the local land. The economic development activities reflected in this novel basically belong to the early stage of commodification which has physical frontiers. Correspondingly, the ecological degradation caused by the economic development is relatively minor compared with the ecological disasters presented in the other two novels. In this novel, Abbey forcefully criticizes the economic development in the southwestern United States and the developmentalism of American southwestern authorities as well as the greed of the developers of the southwest land in the novel. He calls the developmentalism in the local economic policy "cancer ideology" which exactly shows its danger to the local ecology and society. More than denunciation and irony, Abbey calls on people to carry out ecodefense so as to resist economic development and to degrow. He has clearly proposed this degrowth strategy in his foreword to the textbook of ecodefense, *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. In the novel, Abbey shows his ecocentric idea in his rebuke to anthropocentrism and economism in capitalist ideology, and he advocates people's acting as a plain member of the ecological community instead of a conqueror and dominator of nature. This point is also expressed in the foreword of *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*.

Similar to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* presents the economic development mode on the Inner Mongolian grassland, China. China, as a socialist country, is very different from capitalist countries in the form of ownership and the mode of economic operation. But in an international environment where development is the norm, it is difficult for China to avoid the cult of development and growth. Moreover, the social guiding ideology of China, Marxism itself is a reductionist economic philosophy, and it also values economic development. In this novel, Jiang Rong shows indignation and regret towards the economic invasion of Inner Mongolian ecology and the extinction of the nomadic herding culture. He condemns

the ecological deterioration caused by organized blind farming, over-hunting of wolves and other wildlife carried out by the local and central government represented by Bao Shungui and the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps. As an ecologically-conscious intellectual, he expresses his affirmation of the simple life on the Olonbulag pastureland and values the ecological village life style with ecologically sustainability. But under the political and cultural conditions of institutional economism, it is difficult for a few individuals to resist development policies. Bilgee, Uljii, and Chen Zhen's resistance to the exploitative development, blind settlement, and blind mechanization is futile. Eventually, the Inner Mongolian grassland is turned into a semi-desert and the traditional nomadic herding culture becomes extinct. Jiang Rong praises Uljii's grassland management talent while expressing condemnation of and regret for the local government's mismanagement of the commons of the Inner Mongolia grassland.

Jiang Rong's advocacy of cultural diversity accords with the degrowthers' defense of cultural difference, and embodies J. Baird Callicott's multicultural environmental ethics. The extinction of the Inner Mongolian nomadic culture is related to the ecological destruction of grassland. They are the different aspects of the consequences of the economic development. To these consequences, except condemnation Jiang Rong can only express deep regret at the end of the novel. This ending is a warning to everyone: the economic development can only eventually deplete the ecology and endanger the future of advanced and less advanced societies too. Andrew Dobson once pointed out that "the challenge that faces us is not to try to return to the status quo ante by pursuing policies for growth, which in the long term are doomed to fail and in the short term result in growing levels of inequality and environmental degradation, but to plot a path to benign degrowth" (Bliwett and Cunningham 2014, 155). So degrowth is the only effective way to get rid of ecological deterioration and achieve social equality.

From above discussion, it can be concluded that the four novels express their concerns about contemporary ecological and relevant social issues from different aspects including commodification, the dehumanizing effect of runaway technology,

irresponsible dump of lethal waste, depletion of resources, and blind farming. Though they focus on different aspects, actually three of them express their ecological concerns with similar structure, namely, the opposition between the groups of the reliable characters and the unreliable characters, or between the positive, just forces and negative, evil forces. They are *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, *The Falls*, and *Wolf Totem*. But in *White Noise* there is no an explicit structural opposition. But there is an implicit antagonism between the human beings and the mysterious, insidious, harmful force, namely the white noise, in DeLillo's words.

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the four Gang members and other ecosaboteurs are reliable characters, while Love brothers, their team members, and the local governmental force are the antagonists and the unreliable characters. But the unreliable characters are almost muted because Abbey seldom give them chance to articulate their ideas. Thus Abbey's support and recognition for the monkey wrenching activities are clearly shown. In *The Falls*, Dirk Burnaby and the Colvin Heights homeowners including Nina Olshaker are the positive and just forces, while the owners of chemical companies and local authority including polices and judges are negative and evil forces. The disgusting description of the old retired Sergeant Stonecrop Sr. shows the implied author, Oates's second self's detestation of the evil that the local police and government of the Niagara City committed, and thus expresses Oates's support to the justice forces. By Bud Stonecrop Jr.'s flashback, the truth and details of the murder of Dirk Burnaby are shown to the readers. The final triumph of the Colvin Height homeowners and the commemoration of Dirk Burnaby as an ecological and social activist also indicate the implied author's endorsement of the ecological and social causes of justice in the Niagara area. In *Wolf Totem*, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the two opposite groups are the Bilgee's group of the reliable characters and the Bao Shungui's group of the unreliable characters. Different from the two novels above, there is no a sharp antagonism, fighting or even murder between the members of the two groups. On the contrary, there are many peaceful dialogues and even some joint works between the two groups. This forms a dialogic interplay of the various characters. This is the Bakhtinian

carnivalization mingling the sublime discourses of the reliable characters such as Bilgee and Ulijii with the ridiculous one of the unreliable characters such as Bao Shungui and Old Wang. Of course, the reliable characters represents the presence of the author and express Jiang Rong's degrowth values.

White Noise is a little bit different from the other three novels in terms of the structural opposition. As I have noted in the last paragraph, there are explicit conflicts between two opposite groups in the three novels, though in *Wolf Totem*, the conflict between Bilgee group and Bao ShunGui group is not so fundamental and fierce as the conflicts in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Falls*. The opposition in *White Noise* is an implicit antagonism between the human beings and the insidious harmful, even lethal environmental and cultural toxins in the daily life. This is why DeLillo also named this novel "book of death," I have mentioned this point in the previous chapter. At the same time, as I have noted, there are at least two textual evidences in the novel showing that DeLillo equates the white noise with death. So the implicit antagonism in *White Noise* can also be considered as the opposition between human beings and the white noise pervasive in the life of the USA.

As I have pointed out, degrowth is not only an ecological issue, but also a political, cultural, and economic one. Political ecological research and cultural ecological studies show that degrowth requires the reconstruction of power operational mechanisms and cultural and economic transformation. In fact, it is a social revolution. In the current democratic political environment, degrowth may be achieved through political reformation in capitalist countries, but it is most likely to be achieved through revolution since degrowth is irreconcilable with capitalism. In socialist countries, because of public ownership degrowth may be realized through political and economic reformation and cultural reconstruction according to the design of degrowth. In fact, some degrowth strategies are carried out in most socialist countries such as China and Cuba. In *Wolf Totem*, sharing work, job guarantee, and cooperatives are the basic operations in material production.

Another problem of degrowth is that the transition from growth society to

degrowth society can only be achieved through worldwide concerted action. Degrowth is an anti-industrialist and anti-scientistic enterprise. No doubt, it will increase the ecological security of a nation since it can reduce levels of environmental pollution. But at the same time, it will cause some decrease in industrial production and technological development which will undermines the national defense capacity. In these circumstances, if only one country degrows, then it may be vulnerable to be attacked by other countries. But if all countries degrow, this will not be a problem. So degrowth should be an international common action, and it may involve more international communication and cooperation.

Since degrowth is a political and cultural enterprise, the decolonization of growth imaginary and ideology is a key step in the transition to the degrowth societies. In the cause of ideological and cultural transformation, literature is an indispensable part. Herbert Zapf has indicated the cultural transformation function of literature in his studies of cultural ecology. Of course, the ecological cultural transformation is accomplished by environmental literature. No doubt, in this genre, ecofiction plays a dominant role in politicizing the development debate and decolonizing the imaginary and ideology of economic growth. This is why literary studies on ecofiction are of academic and practical significance.

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