

# Representation of Cultural Conflict in Fictionalizing Pre-Revolutionary Era in China: An Analytical Study of the Novel the Good Earth of Pearl S Buck

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**Abstract –** *The Good Earth, a novel by Pearl S. Buck, portrays the true picture of China during the rule of the last royal family. The novelist is the daughter of missionaries staying in China who are well acquainted with Chinese life in the village. The novel was published at the beginning of the 20th century, a period of turmoil in Chinese history. During the phase covered by the book, China experienced major political shifts. The global and social upheavals of the 20th century is nothing but a remote echo of average people's lives. This novel gives readers a near glimpse into China's inner existence and its inhabitants. The book that talks about the family, beliefs, strategy and custom of the Chinese people helped to keep China friendly after the First World War. This paper tries to examine the seriousness of the adjustments that occurred in China throughout the pre-Revolutionary period.*

**Keywords:** pre-revolutionary, china, The good earth, Pearl S Buck;

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## INTRODUCTION

As her second book, *The Good Earth*, was written in 1931, the world-renowned Pearl S. Buck (1892-1993) for her touching history of the joys and sad incidents of the Chinese farmers Wang Lung and his kin. The book was a best-selling book in the USA and soon it was translated into more than 30 international languages; it appeared alone in at least seven separate translations into Chinese. *The Good Earth* has been turned into a Broadway play and a film. Pearl Buck was given the Pulitzer Prize for this novel in 1932 and the William Dean Howells Medal for Distinguished Writing in 1935. The Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938 brought her international renown, largely in appreciation of her masterpiece book, *The Good World*, with two biographies of her ancestors, *The Exile* and *the Warrior Angel*, written in 1936.

Although using a book written by an American may seem troublesome, rather than a genuine Chinese literature, to bring Chinese traditions to American students, there are many explanations for utilizing *The Good Earth*. First, it is popular, and many students still read it, so it is important to have a crucial debate. Second, in the 20th century, Chinese authors mostly tackled China's political destiny, and their writing is mostly more didactic than concrete.

Pearl Buck, on the other side, primarily participated in explaining the Chinese people she met and explaining the specifics of Chinese culture, traditions and attitudes to her American audience. Pearl Buck finally takes the perspective of an outsider who is especially susceptible to the various facets of Chinese life than Westerners. Therefore, she strives to document several information which may be taken for granted by a Chinese researcher. *The Good Land* provides a precise and knowledgeable portrayal of conventional Chinese culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

## ABOUT PEARL S. BUCK

Absalom's and Caroline Sydenstricker's daughter, Pearl Buck, was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, on 26 June 1892 when her parents were on leave in China. But when she was just a couple of months old, her parents came back with Buck to China and she stayed in China for 17 years. Buck thought she contributed to both American and Chinese communities. She still preferred Chinese cuisine, and Chinese was her first language. The first language she learnt to compose was English, though, and her mother tutored her in American subjects in the morning, when her dad was reading

the Bible on the night and on the Sundays. However, at night Buck had a conventional Chinese teacher who instructed her to learn, compose and follow Confucian values in Chinese. Her Chinese nurse even taught her to say her Buddhist and Daoist tales and brought Buck to the nearby temple. Buck interacted with and visited their homes with Chinese girls.

At 17, Pearl Buck returned to the USA for Randolph-Macon Women's College (1910-1914). Shortly after her return to China she married John Lossing Buck, an American agriculture expert who was assigned to teach the Chinese American farming methods by the Presbyterian Mission Board. When residing for many years with her husband in northern China, Pearl encountered the farm families there and closely studied their lives. She remained in Nanjing for the next ten years (1921-1931), a stay that only disrupted for one year of research for the M.A. Graduated in Cornell in English, though her daughter was treated to American medical care and suffering from learning disability owing to hereditary condition. Western ideologies affected the Chinese in Nanjing even more than the northern farmers and Pearl Buck started writing both essays and fictions regarding the conflicts between traditional and modern forms among the young people. Her first novel, *East Wind: West Wind* (1930), details two marriages: a traditional girl called Kwei-lan is unsatisfied with the arranged marriage she has with a man who believes in Western modern practice; and, despite his parents' protests, Kwei-lan's brother is reluctant to marry an American girl. *The Good Earth*, with its sequels *Sons* (1933) and *A House Divided* (1935), was released in 1931 and republished in 1935 as a one-volume trilogy entitled "House of Earth".

## A SUMMARY OF THE GOOD EARTH

The plot continues on the wedding day of Wang Lung. Wang Lung is a poor young farmer who has agreed for him to marry a slave girl called O-lan from the great family of Hwang's home, living in a tattered brick house with his father. After Wang Lung has brought home his young, silent bride, she works with him on the fields before her first child is born. They love their son and O-lan dressed him up at the New Year and happily brought him to the House of Hwang to introduce him. She learns that the Hwang household has squandered its wealth and is now poor enough to be able to sell its property due to ostentatious waste and decadence. Since Wang Lung has had a reasonably successful year with the aid of O-lan who continues to be in the region, he determines to expand his wealth and place further by the purchasing of some land from the House of Hwang. While Wang Lung and O-lan still have to work harder with more ground, they still produce good harvests; they also produce their second son and their second daughter.

But soon Wang Lung is failing. His unprincipled and selfish uncle is jealous, needing part of Wang Lung's new wealth; while Wang Lung, consumed with his need to gain more property, spends all family savings; drought triggers bad harvest and the family suffers from a shortage of food and the starvation of the little dried booties and maize they leave, a starved, filthy neighbor. O-lan must strangle her fourth child as soon as she is conceived, or she will die of hunger. Wang Lung, badly poor and starving, sells his furniture for a little silver to send his family to the south, but he refuses to sell his land. They drive a firewagon to a southern city and remain on the street in a castle. They reside with O-lan, the grandfather, and the children who beg for bread, and Wang Lung pulls the jinrikisha (or rickshaw) to the rich or shooting freight at night.

In the southern town, Wang Lung sees the exceptional prosperity of Western, Chinese and imperialist aristocrats and is involved in the revolutionaries demonstrating against the injustice of the oppressed. He is witnessing troops confiscate innocent citizens and compel them to bear army supplies. However, the overarching priority of Wang Lung is to return to his beloved country. Wang Lung and O-lan entered the crowd of the poor people, who plundered the neighboring rich man's house and had gold and joys enough to allow them to return to the north. They are restoring their homes and plucking their crops, buying plants, oxen, new furniture and farm equipment, and finally more land at Hwang's bankrupt estate.

There follow 7 years of prosperity in which children develop and begin school; a third son with a twin sister is born, and the harvest is so abundant that Wang Lung employs staff and his faithful neighbor, Ching, as a steward. Wang Lung is wealthy enough to not think about life, as a flood triggers general hunger in the 7th year, when his land is under the surface, he grows impatient in his idleness. Bored with his plain, coarse girl, he went to a tea shop in the city run by a southerner where the rich and idle gave their time to drink, to play games and to meet prostitutes. There he starts an affair with Lotus, a delicately lovely yet dishonest courtesan, whom he obsessively loves. Wang Lung is abusive to his wife and children and wastes his fortune on Lotus, eventually spending all of his wealth to buy her and create a courtyard next to her to reside in as his second wife. Here Lotus lies in silks, enjoying costly delicacies and chattering with the misleading and opportunistic wife of the uncle Wang Lung.

Yet there is immediate dispute. O-lan is profoundly hurt and furious, which defensively makes Wang Lung guilty and cold towards her. There is a misunderstanding between O-lan and Lotus's maid Cuckoo who misrepresented O-lan, when she was an old master's concubine in the

Hwang Building. Ancient father of Wang Lung complains against a "harlot" catering decadence in the kitchen. Finally, Lotus is intolerant of the children of Wang Lung, in particular of his beloved daughter who became mentally impaired during famine because of malnutrition. As a consequence, Wang Lung cools Lotus' enthusiasm and when the flood goes back to planting, he isn't consumed with lust.

Wang Lung encounters a series of joy and sorrow in his family ties and in his farming in the last third of the novel. The strong crop seasons are characterized by poor years from time to time, leading to a heavy storm, extreme winter freezing and the crackling of locusts. But Wang Lung tends to flourish in. Yet his prosperity still carries with it a lot of dissatisfaction. His first son is lazy and just involved in sex. Wang Lung is upset when he learns out the son visited his local prostitute and his own Lotus first and arranges his marriage. In addition, his uncle Wang Lung 's good-for-nothing, his wife and his mother, impose their challenging money and spiritual influences on the family; Wang Lung has to be kind to them, as the uncle is a leader of a robber gang, which defends the wealthy household Wang Lung from for as long as it provides for the uncle. He would ultimately hurt the uncle and his wife by getting them addicted to opium.

Family relationships are still upping and downs. O-lan 's cancer eventually overcame her, and Wang Lung 's gentle treatment for her on her deathbed did not reimburse her for the insults she got as Lotus returned home. She is glad to die just after the marriage of her first son is complete, so she can anticipate a grandson. Father Wang Lung dies soon after O-lan, and the trustworthy steward Ching is buried next. Although these sacrifices are followed by new joys: the first son creates grandchildren and grandchildren and the second son, a prosperous grain dealer, and the second daughter marries and has children as well.

He leases out his farmland to tenants as Wang Lung ages. His eldest son persuades him to purchase Hwang 's old estate in town both as a way to get from the position of his disgraceful uncle and wife and as a sign of Wang Lung's high social status. Wang Lung is glad that he can now succeed Hwang's old master, who once threatened him. However, while Wang Lung is the head of an extended family of three who live in comfort with several servants, he cannot find harmony. The two elderly brothers and their wives fight; the youngest son declines to become a farmer as Wang Lung wished and enters the army instead. The evil son of the uncle is more disturbed if he camps for six weeks in his military regiment in the elegant house of Wang Lung. And Wang Lung, long fatigued by old Lotus, has some consolation in taking Pear Blossom, his young slave, as his concubine.

Finally, Wang Lung returns to his land's earthen house to perish. Material wealth has given him shallow social happiness, yet peace and protection can only be taken from his homeland. Even in his last days, he is upset when his two older children decide to sell the property when he dies.

## **THE GOOD EARTH: FICTIONALIZING PREREVOLUTIONARY CHINA**

A brief review of China in the pre-revolutionary era will allow one to better appreciate the Good Earth. The novel depicts China's life in the early 20th century, a rather turbulent time in China's and its people' culture. By the mid-19th century, China and its citizens found it very difficult to avoid the West while they were historically close to Westerners and their theories. Following the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), there were a number of treaties. These treaties (such as the Unfair Treaty) granted the Chinese rivers the Westerners access privilege. The foreigners residing in China were also removed from Chinese regulations. Missionaries began pouring into China in an attempt to convert the Chinese faith to Christianity. Misstrust of the western intruders was increasing in the course of time. The Boxers Rebellion (1898-1900) that contributed to the killing of many Westerners gave birth to a new Treaty that entitled them to station their powers indefinitely in China. The Qing Dynasty rulers since the 17th century was overthrown in 1911, after a major rebellion in China. Various political parties ran for dominance before Mao Zedong announced the People's Republic of China's organization. During this time, the death rate was very high. In order to strengthen their influence and extortion leverage from municipal leaders, the nationalist group forged coalitions with the tiny Communist Party and the patronage of the Soviet Union. In 1926 and 1927, the Revolutionary Group started its Northern Expedition to capture the locals.

The novel shines light on the life of a Chinese boy who lives on the cusp of the war in a rural village. The novel depicts the shifts in the lives of the protagonist Wang Lung, and his rise and fall after his wedding with O-lan, a slave in Hwang 's home. Via his diligent work and the expertise of his wife, Wang Lung uses the status of his family and succeeds in buying the property from the Hwang family. This paper attempts to examine the seriousness of the reforms that occurred in China during the pre-revolutionary period. Wang Lung displays no care regarding the war rumours before he directly hits his life. He is disturbed by the horror that soldiers who walk in the streets of the Great City are attracted into the army. With the arrival of the war he gains financially from the mass exodus of the affluent.



Placed in Hillsboro, West Virginia, on June 26, 1892, as the fourth of the seven children of her parent, Pearl Sydenstricker Buck Chinese was named after Sui Zhenzhu. Her parents were earlier in China. They returned to China, after the birth of Buck, as part of their missionary service. As a girl she came to China and lived with her parents for the next quarter of her life. Her father, Absalom Sydenstricker, was an ascetic missionary and had to stay away from home much of the time. Her mum, Caroline Stulting, was a very lively lady. Yet she also renounced her religion when her patriarchal husband had utterly ignored her. When four of her seven children died, her health grew worse. Her family had to migrate to Chinkiang (a tiny harbour in Kiangsu province), in 1896 when she spent her childhood days hiking in the city's streets and grew up to play with the Chinese children who took her closer to Chinese life. Buck has treated both Chinese and English since her infancy. Her aunt, who introduced her to English Literature, and later a teacher, Mr. Kung, who taught her Chinese (Buck, p. IX), taught her mainly.

The Boxing Revolt took Absalom 's family back to America in 1900 in view of the civil instability in China, anticipating the effects of the tumult. The Chinese nationalists switched to the West. Prior to the resolution of political turmoil, Buck returned to China from Shanghai's Miss Jewell 's College. One of the events which shaped her future life as a writer was voluntary work at the Golden Door (golden door), a shelter for China's prostitutes and slave girls. They began their journey in Anhwei to Nansuchou. She was quite sad and repelled in her life. She was eventually touched by the problems confronting poor Chinese farmers .

The Good Earth, one of America's best-selling books, describes family life in China only before the Second World War. The Good Earth was selected by Life Magazine as one of the 100 greatest works written in the period 1922 to 1944. The main merit of the novel – Oscar Cargill claims that it bears the conviction of reality of all the vicissitudes of Chinese life – is that what improves or moves are not expected of alter (Cargill, p. 149). In 1938, she won the Nobel Prize in Literature — not only for the Healthy Earth, but for her biographical masterpieces about her fathers and the work body of her fellow countryman in China (Rasheeda, p.41). E M Foster remarked that the novel's final measure would be our love. Her works is noted for its plain composition, reverence for common ideals, concise storylines, universal concepts, vital portrayal of the truth itself (Doyle, p.38). Though East Wind and West Wind were her first novel, it was The Good Earth published in 1931, that generated an immediate phenomenon by staying the bestselling book of 1931 and 1932, and also by winning the Pulitzer Prize and The Dean Howells Medal in 1935. In the past, Chinese women and young people were infamous for their suffering. Such well-known works by Buck include The Sons (1933) and The House Split (1935), which form a trio with The Good Earth. Buck, which was a serious

humanist. Her writing has really well opened Americans' mindsets regarding cultural, social and gender inequality. The book offered a new viewpoint on the Chinese people's lives. The intellectual views of the 1930's were strongly enlightened by Bucks' thoughts about race; human rights, and gender. While there was little critique of the book, readers in the West and around the world viewed the book as predominantly accurate depictions of Chinese society. Pearl S Buck was quite disheartened and repelled by the life she had. She was touched steadily by the problems faced by poor Chinese farmers. She believed that in China the average citizens were always abused and exploited. She believed firmly in the traditional expression, "all under the sky are one thing". In her book she included all her emotions. The Good Earth is basically a novel about the crisis that describes a farmer struggling from the trail of economic and natural disasters. The Chinese farmers are the most abused, and suffered community in China, despite being a farmland of peasants comprising four fifths of the total population. The Good Earth portrays the emotional condition of around 70% of the Chinese population and was reprinted 10 times in the year following its publication (Rasheeda, p.41-42).

The Good Earth portrays the life of Wang Lung, a regular farmer in Anhwei village. The novel begins on the wedding day of Wang Lung. For the first time ever since the New Year, Wang Lung bathes in his best clothes and purchases unique food from the market to mark the happy time of his life. The family of rich tenants, House of Hwang, resides in the neighbouring city where the future wife of Wang Lung, O-Lan, resides as a slave. Wang Lung lives a happy life with his partner, O-lan. She loves, works hard and sacrifices herself. Wang Lunggets was pleased that she was pregnant with her first child. O-lan 's wedding with Wang Lung brings good fortune to the family. Like Theodore. F.Harris:

The Healthy World is an outstanding definition of insight. It's a novel that's unique. China is the Healthy Earth. The characters in this pretty exciting tale are not: they are either "queer" or "exotic." They are so profoundly real that we are more involved in their humanity and habit after the first pages. Anyone who suppose that a Chinese countryman 's tale is monotonous will have a surprise reading this novel. Buck has the talent of storytellers. She appears like a reel that unrolls scene by scene, each with a character.

O-lan and Wang lung also have kids. They began to conserve silver on their wall in an earthen jar. The House of Hwang often deteriorates opium. Via their diligent work Wang Lung and his wife O-lan raise money for the purchasing of the Hwang family.(Buck, P.54)They speak about the riches of their property in the village of Anhwei, and the uncle of Wang Lung is coming to him to ask for

money for their daughter's marriage. Wang Lung is compelled financially to support his uncle after he began to talk ill about him. However, at the onset of a serious draught their luck improves. The crop is minimal and starvation is prosperous. O-lan and Wang Lung are injured with three sons and three daughters. Because of the disaster and subsequent drought, their first daughter is physically disabled because of lack of nourishment. Wang Lung's address is named "Poor Fool fowl, all of his life."

One of O-lan's son takes home a stolen pork meat a day and Wang Lung gets angry and says: "We're beggars but we're not robbers. (Buck, p.119) The conflict will soon escalate. The rich and affluent are fleeing the region, after all, to avoid the conflict. By stealing the rich, Wang and his family are able to return to their land and restore their estate. In the meanwhile, a twin son and a daughter, their youngest children were born. He finally has the opportunity to send his first two sons into training, and keeps the third one on the ground with money and jewellery plundered by O-lan from an abandoned building. Wang's only diamond, which O-lan had for herself to create an earring for his concubine Lotus, is O-lan's absolute deception of her husband and O-lan dies during her first marrying son's wedding. During her death Wang Lung remembers her position and mourns for her. Buck is not directly dismissive of the position of conventional Chinese women, though he is a feminist. Yet she is sufficiently real in depicting their challenges and difficulties. This is seen quite plainly by O-lan's character, who was not even able to pick his own husband, leaving behind the reality that she does not see who she marries prior to the marriage. The interplay between O-lan and Wang Lung tells us that certain Chinese women were frequently afraid of their husbands.

Pearl S Buck forms the characters of her women in the Chinese patriarchal culture that value more men than women. The folk history of ACHN tells us: "When babies were born, they placed them on the bed and gave them jades to play with, and when a baby girl came into existence, they laid them on the sheet, and they gave them a tile to play with". In chapter 7, *The Good Earth*, while O-Lan is in her bed of motherhood and asks O-lan: "What's your time now? His wife's voice responded more feebly from his bed than ever when he heard him speak: it's over again — he's just a slave this time — this isn't worth mentioning. It's only slave this time — no notice worth mentioning. He reached him with a sense of evil — a kid! A girl in his uncle's house triggered all this trouble. Now a child has already been born in her household. " The daughter is still treated as a liability to her community:

The woman herself knows that the universe as a whole is masculine. All that formed it, controlled it and now control it are the man today. She, though, should not feel guilty for it. She acknowledges that

she is weak and dependent; her lessons in aggression have not been mastered.

He wants peace and prosperity but there are always challenges and quarrels in his household particularly between his first and second sons' women. What riches and riches encourages Wang Lung to dive deep into the pleasures of existence, physical as well as material, and carry home the next concubine. Critical theory is a school of philosophy, which aims to criticize community and civilization, by drawing together awareness of social sciences and humanities. In Max Horkheimer's book, he writes: "The aim is to release people from the conditions that enslave them". The book, *The Good World*, Wang Lung and the children of O-lan are brought up without knowing the importance of income. They were people who wished to live in the city while poor; still intending to sell their things without their father's knowledge. Wang Lung is never dissatisfied as an average peasant, but he takes an interest in certain words in life such as fine clothes and concubines. A critical theory, "tried to revitalize progressive social critique, societal skepticism, and debated authoritarianism, militarism, economic disturbances, environmental catastrophe and popular society insecurity" (Shaw, pp.160-181). Pearl S Buck attempted in her novel *The Good Earth* to reveal the new American issue. In 1924 Pearl S. Buck wrote: Bolshevism? No, I don't think so. The Chinese young man has a little rant and is a brilliant philosophies, yet he has an inner basis that is an unemotional, tough sense, a realistic blessing from his ancestors that will allow him pause and see what the Bolshevism has achieved and find it fruitless and will hang on to a healthier, slower order of change. As an unbiased, unselfish peasant, Wang Lung once encountered a politician who passed political pamphlets in town. What Wang does about the leaflet is really humorous — he puts the leaflet into his shoe to cover a void. He never accuses his landlord for his problems but blame the weather for all his problems. His difficulties are private, not social; only foreigners are ignorant in the novel. He does not suffer from hardship. When an evangelist reveals the image of a character on Wang Lung's cross, he wonders what this guy has to have done to warrant this penalty, also implying how naïve he is, taking the Pamphlet of the evangelist and handing it to his mom, O-lan, to make shoes out of it.

The novel *The Good Earth* gives us an insight into the lives of Chinese farmers and the social changes which affect their practices and lives. The novel blends custom, past, social environment, community and politics, making the entire work a dynamic yet obvious simplicity framework. It is a fantastic fictionalization of pre-revolutionary China's culture and community. The novel predicts the big reforms that were about to take effect in China. Its historical significance rests in the reality that the depression and chaos leading to revolution were

fictionally recorded. The circumstance of women represents community and culture rooted in a conventional life pattern.

## CONCLUSION

A text of human existence explaining a whole way of existence is the Nice World. "It was formed from the mind of Pearl Buck" who had existed and felt without sacrificing the detachment in her western viewpoint throughout the Chinese pattern. "The people portrayed by Buck in The Good Earth are universal symbols. Over the centuries, these men and women have struggled to make a livelihood out of the soil. It is the tale of honest hard-working people who realize the importance of land and through.

We should not ignore The Healthy Earth on trivial snobbish grounds, nor should we embrace it (or everything else) uncritically as portraying "the" image of China. This is all good and good. But in realistic, yes-or-no words, are we expected to allocate that? In a college-level history of China, most licensed Chinese scholars will not use The Good Earth as the human-interest portion (I prefer Daughter of Han and Chinese fiction). But I encourage friends to re-read the novel by Buck and the book by Peter Conn, and to suggest utilizing The Good Earth in U.S.-China relationship courses that discuss the problems of historical cultural comprehension and representation, where it serves as a primary text, not a Chinese sociological resource.

On the other side, especially at the secondary level, the book is still commonly read, and I will not deter teachers who find the book a pleasant read. As long as students are reminded that not all Chinese are agricultural, that the Chinese family structure is not bad merely because it varies from our current American model, and that China has improved drastically since the 1930s, reading The Good Earth transmits much better than harm.

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