

CHAPTER I.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

1.1 Background of the study.

Pearl.S.Buck was born Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker on June 26 ,1892 in the family home at Hillsboro, West Virginia. Her parents who were missionaries in China, had taken her to China in her early years. Since she grew up in China, naturally her works have been influenced by her background; which later becomes her style that differs her from the Western authors. Her special characteristics, directs her as a popular writer. As Magill said in the Critical Survey of Long Fiction (1983):

Buck has been enormously successful with popular audiences, more so than with the literary. She is the most widely translated author in all of American literary history. In Denmark, for example her popularity exceeded that of Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck in the 1930's, and in Sweden, ten of her works was translated between 1932 and 1940, more than those of any other American author.

Through her works, Buck has introduced the Oriental heritage to her audiences, especially the western audiences. And by doing this, she purposes that the East is understandable to the West. On the other hand, as



written by Virgillia Peterson in New York Times (1957) that throughout her writing life, Pearl.S.Buck has been building bridges of understanding between an old and new civilization, between one generation and another, between differing attitudes toward God and nationality and parenthood and love, (Curley,Kramer and Krane,1983 :158).

The prominent characteristic of Buck's works lie on the choosing of words. She has never used the flowery words, only the simple words but have a deep understanding about humanity and life. Her great strength lies on the description of the characters, the life, and the Chinese cultural values which are the main project in her works. Her description about cultural values of Chinese shows as if she is a real Chinese. As Phyllis Bentley said :

There is a firm unity in her works which makes it component parts not easily distinguishable,...an identification with one's characters so complete and so well sustained is rare in fiction...The language in which Mrs Buck presents this material...is English very plain, clear English, yet it gives the impression that one is reading the language native to the characters...Mrs Buck never, I think, uses a word for which a literal translation into Chinese could not be found...Whether any novelist can be in the very flights who depicts a civilization other than his civilization...(Curley,Kramer,Krane 1983:159-160).

The characteristics of Chinese background produces many

novels such as: Sons, The Mother, Pavillion of Women, The Good Earth, The Bondmaid, etc. She also writes about China in the intellectual conflict with the West, such as; East Wind, West Wind, The First Wife, The Young Revolutionist, A House Divided, The Exile, The Fighting Angel, Kinfolk etc. She also writes novels with the China's background at war with Japan, such as The Patriot, The Dragon Seed, The Promise, China Flight, etc.

The Good Earth (1932) is one of her works which has won The Pulitzer Price, as well as her most famous work. It is a novel of the soil on the one hand and a novel concerning Oriental life on the other. A story of Wang Lung, a poor farmer who becomes a wealthy landlord, a man who struggle for life, success and happiness. In The Good Earth Buck exposes many elements of life and expresses a fascinating Chinese culture in detail. As is said by Magill in Critical Survey of Long Fiction (1983):

The appeal of The Good Earth is undeniable and easy to explain: its universal themes are cloacked in the garments of an unfamiliar and fascinating Chinese culture. Echoing many elements of life, the books speak of animosity between town and country, love of land, decadent of rich and honest poor, marital conflict, interfering relatives, misunderstanding between generations, the joys of births and sorrows of old age and death, and the

strong bond of friendship.

The strength description of the Chinese culture in The Good Earth opens the eyes of the world about China and its culture, especially the Western readers. From this novel, they know about the real China, not only from the country that is called China, but the entire thing, especially about its culture.

In The Good Earth millions of Westerners first met the Chinese people as they really feel and think and behave.... Before 1930 many American pictured the Chinese as queer laundrymen, or clever merchants like Fu Manchu, or heathens sitting in outer darkness; few believed they could greatly influence our own fate. Since the historical events have thought us otherwise-- and among those "events" Pearl Buck's book might well be included (Curley, Kramer, Krane, 1983:163).

Leo Gurko also remarks; The Good Earth is almost the first book to unlock for the West the interior of China (Herzberg, 1966:120).

Through The Good Earth, many people know well how each nation has its own characteristics and culture. Through the literary works the reader can know about the culture of a certain nation. Since literary work is the "window" of the world, thus, literary works always describes the culture that is clarified by the character's manners, thoughts, speech and the description of the characters social background. On the

other hand, literary works are considered by its readers as the fiction work. Fiction works constitute a work wherein the imagination of the author takes a big role. The Good Earth is one of the literary work which arouses the puzzles and in doubts among its readers. The doubt is centered upon the Chinese cultural life which exists in it, whether Buck's description on the Chinese cultural life is real or merely her imagination, since Buck is a westerner who has stayed a long time in China. This is the first reason of the writer of this thesis to elevate this subject matter into her thesis.

The second reason is in her literature class, the students are always faced toward Western background. They analyze novels, poetry, drama which are written by English or American author. Therefore, they know well about the Westerner's customs, beliefs, manners, thoughts, etc. Whereas, there are many literary works which have different social background, in this case the Eastern background. The Good Earth is one of a novel which has an Oriental background. The reflection of Chinese cultural aspects in The Good Earth is presented attractively by Buck, and it really interests the writer.

Based on the above background, the problem

discussed in this thesis is formulated in the following statements:

1. Are these cultural aspects described in The Good Earth similar to the real Chinese life?
2. Are not these aspects merely colored by the imagination of the author?

The answer to the above questions are extensively described in Chapter 4 as the main part of this thesis.

1.2 Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is first, to find out the cultural aspects of the Chinese society which is reflected by the characters' manner, through the literary observation. Second, to prove that the cultural life of the Chinese in The Good Earth has the similarity with the real life of the Chinese. This efforts does not mean to forget or underestimate the others cultural values. But conversely, by knowing others, we try to understand who they really are.

1.3 Significance of the study

Every society has its own cultural values which are different from that of others. The cultural differences constitute interesting cases to be learned. By learning it, one's mind and understanding about a certain nation will be broadened. And it is expected, too that this thesis will help those who want to know more about Chinese culture through the literary works. On the other hand, by writing about The Good Earth the writer is able to get more knowledge of different kinds of society. She also hopes, this observation may inspire others to do a further literary observation and even more research on Pearl S. Buck's works.

1.4 Focus of the study

This thesis will discuss the elements of Chinese culture which can be found in The Good Earth. The cultural aspects that will be elevated are those concerned with:

1. The Wang's family system.
2. The marriage and women's life.
3. The Wang's beliefs.

1.5 Methodology of writing

In analysing this subject matter, the writer collects the data from books, encyclopedias, or some printed materials dealing with Pearl.S.Buck's works, especially The Good Earth and the Chinese civilization. Besides that, she also collects some critics of Buck's work and her view. Moreover, the writer finds some information from another books dealing with her approach. This research is purely library research.

After collecting the data from valid resources, the writer also uses descriptive analysis to analyze this subject matter. The description will lie on the characters' manner or pattern of behaviour, what they do, think, feel, and react. Sometimes, she also quotes the datas to support her analyses.

