

Original Paper

“Truth and Mystery”: Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* and the Research on Overseas Establishment of Chinese Image

Peishen Zhou¹ & Dan Cui^{2*}

¹ Undergraduate student of School of English, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, China

² Post-doc of Literature of School of English, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China; Doc of British and American Literature, School of Foreign Languages of Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, China; Professor, Dean of Institute of International Language and Culture, Leader of Comparative Literature and Cross-culture Discipline, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, China; Doc of Literature, College of Foreign Languages, Yanbian University, Yanji, Jilin, China

* Dan Cui, Corresponding Author, E-mail: summerelephant@126.com

Received: November 9, 2022 Accepted: November 20, 2022 Online Published: November 27, 2022

doi:10.22158/csm.v5n3p59

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/csm.v5n3p59>

Abstract

*This paper aims to analyze the issue if Pearl S. Buck conveys an authentic image of China in *The Good Earth* by composing typical and important aspects ranging from the life of Chinese lower class to the their spiritual status through realistic style. This article reflects its mysterious characteristics by analyzing Buck’s writing of Chinese exoticism and spiritual simplicity and plainness in the novel. Meanwhile, through the exploration of the harsh social conditions, the physical and mental suffering of social oppression, and the tragic fate under the feudal foolishness, Pearl tries to find out the true side of China. In addition, through further study, it is found out that Pearl’s portraying of China is featured with waving position: a sense of fusion of and contradiction between mystery and authenticity, thus presenting a contradictory and compatible image of China.*

Keywords

The Good Earth, Pearl S. Buck, image of China

1. Introduction

Pearl S. Buck, a famous American writer, translator, and activist for human rights and female rights, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1932 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938. She was the first female writer to win a double award. Pearl S. Buck lived in China for a long time, teaching and writing in Anhui, Nanjing, and other places, and was in an in-depth emotional connection with China. Her

writing focuses on the ordinary people under the daily life experience in China, creates a rich range of groups of figures, and strives to build a more real and objective Chinese cultural image of the West. Some of her representative works include *East Wind: West Wind*(1930), *The Good Earth*(1931), *Pavilion of Women* (1946), *The Hidden Flower* (1952), *A Bridge for Passing* (1962)etc.

The Good Earth is the 1st novel of the west to cast their sight onto the positive description of Chinese land and the life of Chinese peasants, which is an “epic description” of the life of Chinese peasants and it was conferred the Nobel Prize in 1938. In this novel, she describes how an ordinary Chinese peasant Wang Lung as a typical case and miniature of a family evolves from decline to prosperity, from prosperity to decline, and then eventually set into prosperity, thus fulfilling the target of forming a typical “real” narrative of Chinese.

Due to its particularity, the academia has come into the large-scale evaluation and researchers have come to the general consensus: the work has changed the stereotypical image of Chinese people and Chinese culture, as well as contributed to changing the impression of China as a “mysterious country” into a real true east country of long history featured with primitive traumatic history and incompetent humble people. But it is such a work that causes scholars and researchers to argue over whether it is a novel of authenticity in reality or just another version of imagination based on the so-called immersed observable perspective and its research is always in debate, highlighting the significance of its research, which need to be deeply discussed and studied further. Therefore, from the perspective of both Chinese and Western cultures, the results are brought about under two completely different evaluation criteria. Therefore, the questions that how the real image of China should be presented and what kind of China is supposed to be shown to the world are the key issues that we try to solve in this study. Under the parallax of eastern and western cultural contexts, we try to explore the real mysterious country from the east through the analysis and research of the pearl’s real image of China. Also, we aim to objectively analyze the value of *The Good Earth* in order to realize the author’s pursuit for correctly transmitting Chinese overseas image and can allow more westerners to gain a glimpse into the real China.

Since the 20th century, the western understanding of China’s image has been probably vague. On the one hand, western researchers have independently constructed the imagined Chinese image from western perspective. With their scientific eagerness to find out about real China and their expertise in academic studies, they have tried to explore real China. However, situated in the westernized context, they have been marked with their native culture in view of their social regime, cultural context, psychological needs, thinking models, value orientation etc. And due to this, their views have been intervened in view of comprehending China. Therefore, what they have seen, heard, read, and written about China reflects their efforts to illustrate China objectively, but inevitably or unconsciously distorts certain facts if not out of intentional efforts. These will also affect their understanding and recognition and even they distort the truth shaped by “Orientalism” (Said, 2007).

For example, Arthur Henderson Smith writes in *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) “the first impression which a stranger receives of the Chinese is that of uniformity. Their physiognomy appears to be all of one type, they all seem to be clad in one perpetual blue, the ‘hinges’ of the national eye do not look as if they were ‘put on straight’, and the resemblance between one Chinese cue and another is the likeness between a pair of peas from the same pod” (Smith, 1894: 48). John Barrow’s description of China in *Travels in China*(1805) presents the general characteristics of this nation are arrogance and selfishness, a firm combination of disguised seriousness and real lightness, and elegant etiquette and vulgar words and deeds (Barrow,1805). Superficially, they are extremely simple and straightforward in their conversation, but they are practicing the art of politics.

As an American native, Buck followed her missionary father to China when she was young, and lived in China for more than 30 years. In view of such experience, her thoughts and values were deeply influenced by the eastern and western cultures simultaneously, and due to some particular reasons, her works are often criticized by people from all walks of life at home and abroad, even receiving negative criticism. So it is necessary to study the real and mysterious exotic image of China established by Buck to seek out an objective and authentic image of China for the public. Starting from *The Good Earth*, we can see how the writing of Pearl S. Buck reflects its authenticity, through dis-mystification, to achieve the correct dissemination of Chinese image overseas. The truth and mystery expressed in the work are somewhat conflicting and integrative. Now, what is presented before us is a contradictory and compatible Chinese image. Therefore, we are not supposed to take an extremely negative attitude and allow westerners to see the essential diligence and simplicity of Chinese peasants, but also recognize the objective value brought by this novel in the dissemination of Chinese culture. Through analyzing and studying the real and mysterious Chinese image constructed by Pearl, we expect more people to re-understand Chinese culture and establish a real Chinese image overseas so that the West can pay more attention to Chinese literature, improve its judgment standards, and make Chinese literature accepted by the world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Domestic Research Status

The study of Buck and her works has begun since the 1940s. From the initial comprehensive denial to the extensive research today, researchers’ comprehension of Pearl has been much clearer and more complete. Due to her own it seems that it is still hard to escape the exotic perspective of her own culture no matter how hard she tries to present a relatively objective China. For this reason, some early Chinese mainstream literary writers have confirmed that while Buck praises the diligence and courage of Chinese peasants, she simultaneously presents primitive habits and corruption of old Chinese society which is portrayed as a regime that seriously oppresses Chinese women with the man occupying the

domineering position. In his reply to Ke Yao, Xun Lu criticized Buck's comprehension and reflection of China as a case superficial level, for he believes that to examine the truth of history, it must be Chinese people that do it themselves (Lu, 2005). Wenjun Li in "The Analyse of American Reactionary Literati Pearl S. Buck" even analyzes her as a rogue person cultivated and immersed in American imperialism who tries to beautify the imperialist aggression and insult over Chinese people (Li, 1960). In more than half a century, even though *The Good Earth* has won many honors, it has rarely appeared positively in the vision of the public.

In the 21st century, domestic research has made richer achievements. Scholars have been conducting diverse perspectives including theoretical approaches including post-colonialism, humanism, and humanitarian spirit, thematic analyses, characterization, narrative perspectives, writing styles, and characteristics. With the related studies developing more maturely, researchers also gradually recognized her contribution to the field of literature and the dissemination of Chinese culture. Ziqing Zhang and Yinglin Shang have discussed the role that Buck plays as a communication bridge between Chinese and Western cultures in "Pearl S. Buck and China—Commemorating the Centenary of Pearl S. Buck" (Zhang, 1992) and "A Human Bridge of Chinese and Western Culture—Commemorating the Centenary of Pearl S. Buck" (Shang, 1992). In "*The Good Earth: The Sublimation of Local Literature*" (Chen, 1995), Chunsheng Chen objectively and rationally situates this work into the context of its time. He affirms the worldwide significance of Pearl's work and claims that it realizes the sublimation of local literature.

From the perspective of the current academic development in China, though the study of Pearl Buck has broken through the perspectives of the times, however, it is still featured with indecisive results and sometimes conflicting mutually, especially in view of the authenticity of Chinese image it has established and portrayed.

2.2 Foreign Research Status

Since Buck won the Nobel Prize, foreign study and evaluation have also illustrated mixed and even contradictory conclusions. Korean-American researcher Younghill Kang in his article "China is Different" (1999) criticizes the distortion that Buck does in this work and points out that in addition to some particular minor details, almost all the important description is not in line with the truth. Also, some western critics put forward doubts over the authenticity of her description of China. For example, when some western critics spoke highly of her, others argued that it only presented a simplified China, but did not deeply analyze its interior details (Hunt, 1977).

In addition, some researchers also hold a positive attitude towards her, believing that her works can make western readers get to know a different China, a kind of alien China from their conventionally recognized country and thus they confirmed the positive role it had played in changing the stereotypically-held impression of the western world on China. American news celebrity Harold Robert

Isaacs (2015) exposed that he had conducted the in-depth exploitative interview of influential figures from multiple fields including those from the American government, news agencies, business fields...etc. during the 1950s, and it eventually demonstrates that all of them had been deeply influenced by Chinese characters portrayed by Pearl S. Buck.

Therefore, we can see that the question that if Buck's *The Good Earth* portrayed an authentic image of China or not has always been the center of academic attention since it is of high importance in view of both the literary value and realistic items ranging from the recognition of China to the relationship between China and other countries as well. So it is of important necessity to explore Buck's writing in detail to clarify certain concerns in view of the authenticity of her illustrating and transmitting Chinese image all over the world.

3. The Writing of "Truth"

3.1 The Writing of Harsh Social Conditions

The Good Earth depicts the life of Chinese rural people in the 1930s. Taking Wang Lung's family as the main line, Buck narrates how his family fought against natural disasters as ordinary peasants, made a fortune in turmoil, and based on the fortune he had acquainted to become a landlord. Under Buck's pen, The Wang lives in an adobe house with broken windows, wear shabby and dirty clothes, and only relies on the land to struggle for surviving. Experiencing continuous droughts, water-loggings, locusts, soldiers, bandits, and other natural and man-made disasters, Wang Lung, as the representative of the all, eats the bark, swallows grassroots, and drinks mud soup. Perhaps if it were not due to the windfall, they would have continued to make a hard-living, since it shows readers the real difficult and even primitive conditions of local villagers who could solely depend on nature-weather. Such a description authentically reflects the real conditions of China's poor and weak people at the social bottom struggling for surviving through suffering the miseries and distresses both from coarse nature and backward social regime.

However, it cannot be denied that Buck's old China is stagnant and backward, and on some levels, she still retains her perspective mingled with a western outlook. While in westerners' minds, people in eastern countries, areas, and regions are so primitive, backward, mysterious, and uncivilized that they need to be salvaged, rescued, and civilized by the west (Said, 1978). Such a preliminary concept is either due to her interior nature-western cultural gene (that is the collective unconsciousness in Jung's words) passed from her ancestors or her nurture based on her life influence from her family and western culture. So it is an inevitable fact that she could not actually understand and rightly interpret the rooted essential reasons affordable for such a harsh circumstance. Actually, no other reason than the collusion and conspiring between domestic imperialism and feudalism at that time can be more reasonable.

In the 1830s, China was forcefully set into a series of serious domestic troubles including foreign invasions, imperialist aggression, and feudal exploitation and oppression, all of which caused the continuous decline and collapse of the countryside in China. Therefore, in some cases, China in Buck's eyes tends to be single, solidified, and superficial. Her solution for this is to blame the villagers for their inability in mind and action to fight against social inequality due to their primitive cognition and even rural people's ignorance and vulgarity in pursuing their own rights, though mostly with her compassion and sympathy. Conclusively, she presents Chinese people suffering suppression as a lack of motivation to gain their rights by fighting but solely trying every means to make out the way to passively surviving without taking actions to change their situations or circumstances. She attributes more to Chinese people's meekness for their poor conditions than analyzes deeply the complicated situation of China at that time. Nevertheless, paradoxically, her depiction illustrates the diligence and plainness of Chinese people on the one hand and makes the western world witness the hard circumstance that Chinese people were confronted with.

3.2 The Physical and Mental Suffering of Social Oppression

Wang Lung is not only the receiver of suppression but also the subject that conducts the oppression. Under the Chinese traditional patriarchal system at that time, the father has always represented the image of an absolute authority as the Other in Jacques Lacan's words. Although Wang Lung's father is old, he is the only person in the family that decides the matter of all domestic affairs. For example, before marriage, Wang Lung cooks food and makes tea for his father daily. Even after his father reprimands him, he only dares to whisper to his heart "that old head thinks of nothing except his eating and his drinking" (Buck, 1973: 5). Because Wang Lung knew that he had to do it, or else it would affect his reputation. So when Wang Lung's uncle asked him to raise his family, he finally chose to make a compromise due to the traditional social system.

Besides, according to the essential code of the Chinese patriarchal system, the social convention is that men handle the social affairs and women take on the household work. In the family, men have the right to exercise decision-making and regulate the behaviors of women. Women bear double physical and mental oppression and even lose their own will, and become attached to men. Taking the relationship of Wang Lung and O-lan as an example, we can see that one carries out the concept of male domination and female submission by observing the moral norms of "three virtues and four virtues". Women were considered as the talking animal that submissively follows the rules and is considered as the tool to reproduce and regenerate the next generation. Wang Lung used a gold-plated silver ring and a pair of silver earrings to buy O-lan as his wife. Under the oppression of the father and the husband, O-lan as the typical woman at that time keeps working and bearing children, but when she gives birth to a 2nd child, which unfortunately coincides with the harvest and Wang Lung blames her, "so you have chosen this time to breed again, have you!" (Buck, 1973: 40). For Wang Lung, he marries his wife only to make

her give birth to children and conduct farming work continuously. When O-lan's third child is a daughter, which is a piece of unfortunate news for them since girls are not considered to belong to their parents, but were born for others, Wang Lung feels so furious, which echoes the fact that the social discrimination and prejudice against women is based on the deep-rooted thoughts of preferring sons over daughters and such suppression makes them unable to escape, and can only bear it silently for they can only rely on their families and men to survive.

3.3 *The Tragic Fate under the Feudal Foolishness*

Buck creates a group of personalized characters in *The Good Earth*, either industrious or simple Wang Lung or thrifty O-lan, has the epitome of men and women in traditional old Chinese society at that time, which also adds a tragic color to their fate. In her writing, old China suffered from natural disasters and man-launched catastrophes. The villagers lost their sanity and rationality due to hunger and become irritable. When they hear that Wang Lung's family is rich in food and his children are still fat, men take up poles and go to Wang Lung's house to search for every corner and scabble every surface to find the food (Buck, 1973: 52). Thus it can be seen that people's thoughts have already become numb under the invisible destruction of society so it is reasonable for Wang Lung to fall into degeneration and degradation.

Although Wang Lung is featured with the diligence and simplicity of ordinary peasants, he also possesses deep-rooted bad habits. The 1st half of his life is full of ups and downs, working hard for a living, and the 2nd half is addicted to lust, but he is bound by society from the very beginning to end, and his self-consciousness is shallow. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believes that the reason for China's backwardness is the darkness of the inner spirit of the Chinese people. China is a land that has not yet been illuminated by the light of human spirit, where the sun of reason and freedom has not yet risen, and man has not yet got rid of the primitive and natural state of ignorance. The Chinese people have no independent personalities and are internally obedient to the clan elders, externally in front of the government (Hegel, 1861). The current social situation at the time is exactly what Westerners had long expected of China.

The most tragic character is O-lan, who was sold to the landlord's family as a slave and then to Wang Lung as his wife. In a society dominated by men who hold a pragmatic spirit of a wife should not be good-looking, but just to give birth and regard women as particular commodities and tools. Women do not have human rights of their own, and they suffer discrimination and belittlement. They are a family shame from the very moment of birth and this shame will accompany them for the rest of their life. O-lan is well aware of this reality of society, family, and male prejudice against women, so when the fourth child was found to be a girl, she chooses to terminate the life of a newly born child.

Pearl S. Buck's description of the real side of China shows the poverty and weakness of the old Chinese society and the feudal ignorance of people's thoughts in the public. At that time, people

experienced the destruction of war and natural disasters, and also experienced the double oppression of imperialism and feudalism, which reflected the process of conflict between traditional feudal culture and modern civilization. Even if Buck's limitations make it impossible for her to realize this, it is undeniable that the social environment she presents is worth exploring the real reasons behind the formation of these harsh conditions.

4. The Writing of "Mystery"

4.1 The Writing of Chinese Exoticism

China as an ancient country is featured with its mysterious culture and customs that always possess hazy and mysterious colors for the West. In that era of underdeveloped information development, Buck shows the exotic sentiment belonging to China before westerners' vision through text writing which conforms with the western's expectation for China, and the such issue has been thoroughly elaborated by Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* (Said, 2012).

First of all, as the original birthplace of silk and tea in the world, both silk culture and tea culture have a history of thousands of years, which contains mysterious and noble humanistic colors and philosophical connotations. In the novel, there are many pieces of description of dressing ranging from the shabby clothes worn by Wang Lung's family in the early poor period to the silk cheongsam after his prosperity. Conclusively, the pursuit of beautiful items in each era never stops. As a matter of fact, silk represents not only a beautiful piece work of art but also a symbol of beauty itself and it has been highly praised and admired as the item of nobility classification from other lower social classes and taste belonging to the class. It even represents the high level of Chinese exotic artistic products.

Although the author's description of tea culture is slightly shallow, close to the daily, the novel began to introduce that every morning Wang Lung boils water for his father, and occasionally in good harvest puts tea in boiling water, when even people at the bottom are also familiar with the etiquettes of serving tea, and tea drinking is particular served for the elders. As a big country of interpersonal relations, China attaches great importance to the relationship between people. Tea is not only a real product for daily life, but also the best harmonious material to communicate between people and deal with complex interpersonal relations. In the novel, the author mentions many scenes where people drink tea. In their daily life, making friends and hospitality, various teahouses are opened on the streets for people to enjoy in their leisure time. All these reflect the profound influence of tea culture on the Chinese people. Developed till now, this popular and elegant culture has carried not only the material civilization, but the spiritual richness.

Secondly, Chinese folk myths and legends are widely spread. Peasants rely on the weather, so to pray for favorable climatic weather and the line of offspring, and the worship of gods are very common. Buck also seeks such a detailed description of exotic sentiment and the unique features of a local

environment always give special characteristics to its gods, and the god in the mind of the peasant is a gnome. People not only conduct the worship ceremony at home but also build the temple in the village—the small temple is built with bricks by Wang Lung. He sincerely believes the gods of their fields can bless ordinary people's life deciding events ranging from marriage, harvest, sons and rain, and they can lay all their hopes for life on various gods. Therefore, no matter how poor their life is, they won't ignore the protection from the god of land. On each Chinese New Year Day, Wang Lung's father will bring some red paper to cut new robes carefully for the solemn figures. There are also gods including "Bodhisattva", "God of Wealth", "Kitchen Lord", "Door God" etc., which illustrates people undoubtedly respect and fear the gods, but this is also precisely in line with the western expectations of the mysterious color of China in view of superstition and strong believe in God of land.

4.2 The Writing of Spiritual Simplicity and Plainness of Chinese

In the novel, the description of the peasants is mostly sympathetic and praiseworthy. Although they also possess certain negative aspects in their personality, however, once they turn to land, they will turn to be industrious, kind, honest and simply rooted in the soil. This is in sharp contrast to the western anticipation and expectation for Chinese as immoral, lazy and ugly. In the novel, Wang Lung and his family are at the bottom, but always retain their dignity. When they flee to the south, someone suggests that he can beg to people for copper money and food because it is the fastest and the simplest way, but Wang Lung always feels he has his hands and wants to gain money through diligent and hard work, which reflects his embodiment of the working people's industrious quality. Due to such spirit deeply-rooted in his bones, he will not adopt such malice to predict the original intention of others' behaviors. When he encounters some poor people, he will buy some food to help the poor, which in other people's eyes is a way for the rich and the gentle to accumulate Yin virtue and earn reputation. However, the inner motivation for Wang Lung is that he firmly believes there are always people out of kindness, out of which, when Wang Lung meets his former neighbor who is emaciated now, he does not forget previous help from his neighbor before, gives him seeds and cultivates him with his cattle. All these reflect Wang Lung's good qualities belonging to Chinese people.

In the westerners' cognition, Chinese people were conventionally called the "Chinaman" living in "Chinatown". They acted as eccentric, ugly, dirty, cunning, numb and cruel, and they labeled the Chinese people as "sick man of East Asia" and described China with misunderstanding and prejudice. However, they ignore those people who can truly reflect the brilliance of human nature, and the land spirit that inherits the Chinese spirit and is deeply rooted in the bones. Pearl's portrayal of the characters also shows her attention to the current situation of the Chinese people and the humanistic values.

4.3 Ardent Love for Land Agriculture

Buck named the novel *The Good Earth* because the land is the clue that goes throughout the novel. The

description of the relationship between man and land, man and nature, nature and land etc., presents us a thorough rural life and vivid characters. As an ancient country with thousands of years of agricultural civilization, land is always held as an almost the most noble and sacred existence in the hearts of all Chinese peasants. They regard land as precious as their own lives. And the richness or barrenness of land determines the prosperity or decline of the family. Land can be considered to be linked to the fate of peasants, and Wang Lung is no exception.

As a typical peasant, Wang Lung works hard on the land and fights against natural and man-made disasters. At the same time, he builds his own house on the land with his own wife and children. He never gives up his land even after hunger and coldness. For Wang Lung, as he set his feet onto the land, his life can be continued. Therefore, no matter how poor he is, he chose to stick to the land. He misses the land when he flees and after settling down in the city, he is still concerned about the land and buys it when he has money. After experiencing giant ups and downs, his love for the land reaches its climax at the last moment of life, “out of the land we came and into it we must go—and if you will hold your land you can live—no one can rob you of land—” (Buck, 1973: 60). Whether by life or death, he rests all of what he has onto the land that gives him eternal peace and foundation.

It can be said that the ups and downs of Wang Lung’s life came from his feelings for the land. From the initial decline, his family becomes rich by buying land, and then, Wang Lung gradually loses himself, which causes his son to sell the land. Even if he finally wakes up, he cannot change the fate of the family decline. Actually for Wang Lung and his family, the land is not only the material conditions of their survival and his spirit, which allows him even to face natural and man-made disasters, but also keep peace of his mind, because he believes he will return to the land, as long as the land still exists, they will always have can habitat, it also causes Wang Lung makes the decision to use money to buy land, to the family prosperous period. On the contrary, when Wang Lung begins to indulge in enjoyment and does not cherish the land, their fate is doomed to tragedy, the decline of the family is taken for granted, what they rely on for survival has disappeared, then everything in the past will return to nothing.

Buck does not write much about the land, but the lines show people’s persistence on and love for land. This carrier of the emotion and spirit of countless peasants, the land, is also presented in front of the public. Before that, westerners’ view of Chinese land was limited to the traditional cultural production on the land. One of the few achievements in agriculture was the systematic use of large manure as fertilizer, and the stagnation of agricultural development.

But what westerners do not know is that it is this land that nourishes the reproduction of the Chinese nation, gives birth to the uninterrupted Chinese civilization, and embodies the painstaking efforts and sweat of countless working people. The appropriate situation of the peasants described in the book, the appropriate life of the fields, and the current discussion of the relationship between husband and wife

really accurately summarize the real essential spirit of the Chinese civilization, which is the endless land spirit.

5. The Antagonistic Writing of “Mystery” and “Truth” in *The Good Earth*

5.1 The Resistance of Land Belief and Western Missionary

As the daughter of a missionary, Pearl is also a former missionary, and she has gone through different stages of understanding of the missionary career. She also gradually realized that the missionary work was not successful in China, because the missionaries paid too much attention to save the souls but ignore the salvation of human's physical body. They deemed that what they brought is the gospel and salvation, but they never really understood the value and rationality of others' culture in essence. The French missionary Évariste Régis Huc summarized the faith of the Chinese people in this way: Chinese people have no faith, so they do not care about the religion. But at the same time, they are superstitious (Huc, 1856). Western missionaries satire the ignorance of Chinese with the prejudice of heretic, and they don't know that the people at that time did not care about any form of faith. Their faith is derived from their love for the land. In the novel, the author also depicts people's most noble belief in land, but holds a deeply hateful attitude towards missionary preaching.

Most Western writers in Pearl S. Buck's era held a position of Western centrism, and from such perspective, the Chinese faith was always placed in a weak and marginal position relative to Christianity. But Buck's *The Good Earth* subverts the western Christian center theory and raises the position of Chinese peasants' belief in the land and the land god to the central position. The land lays the essential position in their life, and it does not need the gift of God. The spiritual pillar of the Chinese people depends on the Chinese people's unshakeable belief in land, rather than rely on missionary. At the same time, it also makes them realize the value of life in the intimate integration with the land, and get eternal happiness and happiness.

5.2 The Collision of Feudal Tradition and Western Women's Independent Consciousness

When reading Buck's *The Good Earth*, we find her description of the characters has always been very special, especially for her portrayal of Chinese women. These women not only have all the kind, honest and industrious human qualities of the people of that era, but also possess the spirit of independence, a typical quality the Western women of that era. In the novel, O-lan as a virtuous wife always assists her husband and takes the family as the center of her attention, which thus represents a typical ancient Chinese woman image.

But simultaneously, Buck portrays her women in western style of the subject status and resistance spirit, so that under her pen, the image of Chinese women were not always obedient to men as conventionally portrayed, but took the initiative to have a say in their own destiny. When people in the village break into their homes to search for food that night, and when the children and the elderly are frightened, and

Wang Lung is at a loss, O-lan stands out and resists against their behaviors with a voice superior to the male voice. In the later stage of the novel, O-lan's self-consciousness and resistance spirit become more and more prominent. She would avoid communicating with her husband's concubine room after Wang Lung taking his concubine, silently washing and cooking, and doing silent resistance. She would also refute when Wang Lung scolds her, "I am not slave of slaves in this house at least"(Buck, 1973, p. 147). At that time, she implemented her meager strength to allow people to see the awakening of Chinese female consciousness.

Another more special typical woman with fused characteristics is Pear Blossom. She was bought by Wang Lung in the famine years, and she also has the honest duty of a traditional woman, wholeheartedly serving her husband. Her loyalty is also reflected most vividly after Wang Lung's death. In the novel, she always remembers Wang Lung's kindness, so after his death, she is willing to stay in their former courtyard and sleep beside his coffin. In the early stage, Pear Blossom is actually very inferiority and cowardly, which is in sharp contrast to the rebellious spirit she bursts out after she became Wang Lung's concubine. Her spirit of resistance is not only against men, but also against class. As Wang Lung's concubine, she always holds the disgusting attitude towards her former hostess Lotus, which even shocks her and frightens her. Therefore, when she sees Lotus touching Wang Long's coffin, she will loudly scold to defend her husband. Not only for Lotus, she is also full of disgust for Wang Lung's first son, Wang Da. This timid woman, for the first time when Wang Da is about to sell the land, she stares and shouts excitedly that she cannot sell the land. It can be said that Pear Blossom's loyalty to her husband and to the land is fused into one. After losing her husband, when she is about to lose the land, she cannot bear and accept such result for she is afraid of becoming a soulless person again. So she finally breaks through the feudal shackles and rejects such decision as if after the spring rain, the seeds of independence and resistance in her hear begins to sprout.

Buck's description of the characters strengthens women's sense of independence and actively intervenes in the western perspective. It reflects the collision between western women's independence consciousness and Chinese traditional feudalism, which gives women the resistance spirit of western style, gradually breaks through the shackles of Chinese feudal traditional thoughts, and makes Chinese women a clearer and more complete cognition of themselves and their values.

6. Conclusion

In summary, it is not difficult to see that the Chinese image of Pearl has both real and mysterious elements, which makes it break through the single image from the one-sided western perspective and deepen the westerners' understanding of China. The "truth" part of the novel shows us the living state and social environment of the old Chinese peasants. While arousing the sympathy of the people, we should also explore the causes and background of these phenomena and provide documents for the

progress of history. At the same time, the mysterious elements contained in the work also let us understand the traditional culture and ideological belief that only belong to the ancient Chinese civilization country, raising the Chinese people's belief in the land to a certain extent. Whether it conveys the mystery or truth, *The Good Earth* portrayed by Pearl exerts a profound impact on changing the image of China in the eyes of Westerners and establishing the correct image of China. The Swedish Academy of Sciences has evaluated her that Buck's novel played a major role in shaping western attitudes toward China, opening a faraway and foreign world to deeper human insight and sympathy within our Western sphere (1938). After experiencing countless sarcasm and misunderstandings, the time has also proved the value and significance of the existence of Pearl and her works.

China is an ancient civilization nation with a history of five thousand years, and at different times it illustrates different cultural backgrounds and characteristics, so we cannot present it all just by a single piece of literature. What we are supposed to do is to objectively and comprehensively analyze each work on the premise of eliminating the limitations of the author's own, and put the work under the background of that era to analyze the image of China in that era. Therefore, China under Buck's pen represents one more facet of China in that particular period. Re-understanding Buck and her works are valuable not only for the East and West (in binary for handy simplicity) but also for our past and future. She opened up a new way for the western world to understand China, viewed the foreign image from a more humanistic perspective, and made a contribution to Chinese culture to the world.

Acknowledgement

At the completion of this paper, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude towards my supervisor Dan Cui, for her choice of this research topic, the design of paper structure and framework, the rigorous academic attitude and strong sense of obligation in telling the true story of China, thus revising and reviewing the paper timely. I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their motivation, patience, love and care during my education and life journey. My final thanks go to all the people who have directly or indirectly supported me in completing my thesis and sincere wishes to you and may everything be pleasant to you.

References

- Barrow, J. (1805). *Travels in China: Containing Descriptions, Observations, and Comparisons, Made and Collected in the Course of a Short Residence at the Imperial Palace of Yuen-min-yuen, and on a Subsequent Journey Through the Country from Peking to Canton...* WF M'Laughlin, no. 28 North second-street.
- Buck, P. S. (1973). *The Good Earth*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Chunsheng, C. (1995). "The Good Earth: The Sublimation of Local Literature". *Foreign Literature*

- Studies*, (2), 66-70.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1861). *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. G. Bell and Sons.
- Hongtu W. (2014). On the Chinese People in the Eyes of the Foreigners in the Late Qing Dynasty. *Chinese Times*, (3).
- Huc, E. R. (1856). *A Journey Through the Chinese Empire* (Vol. 2). Harper & Brothers.
- Hunt, M. H. (1977). *Pearl Buck-Popular Expert on China, 1931-1949*. *Modern China*, 3(1), 33-64.
- Isaacs, H. R. (2015). *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*. Routledge.
- Juan, D. (2012). On China's Image in Pearl Buck's Works. *Overseas English* (6), 176-177.
- Mohammed, D. A. (2014). Oppressing and Discriminating Women as Depicted in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. *Journal of Kirkuk University Humanity Studies*, 9(1).
- Said, E. W. (2012). *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage.
- Said, E. W. (2007). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin Classics.
- Smith, A. H. (1894). *Chinese Characteristics*. Revell.
- von Mossner, A. W. (2021). *Sentimental Cosmopolitanism: The Trans-cultural Feelings of Pearl S. Buck*. In *Cosmopolitan Minds*(58-88). University of Texas Press.
- Wen, J. L. (1960). "The Analyze of American Reactionary Literati Pearl S. Buck". *World Literature* (9), 114-128.
- Xin, T. Z. (2020). *The Study of Chinese Image in the Writings of Pearl S. Buck and Jorge Luis Borges under the Ken of Intercultural Communication—The Cases of The Good Earth and The Garden of Forking Paths*. Huazhong University of Science and Technology.
- Xun, L. (2005). *The Complete Works of Lu Xun*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Ying, J. G. (1999). *Pearl S. Buck: Chinese Criticisms*. Li Jiang Publishing House.
- Ying, L. S. (1992). "A Human Bridge of Chinese and Western Culture—Commemorating the Centenary of Pearl S. Buck". *Journal of Henan Normal University*, (4), 34-37.
- Ying, Z. (2015). The Acceptance and Research of Pearl S. Buck in Western Academic Circles. *Journal of Social Science of Harbin Normal University*, 6(4), 126-129.
- Zhe, S. G. (2021). Chinese Images in the Eyes of Western Writers—The Case of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. *JinGu Creative Literature*(20).
- Zi, Q. Z. (1992). Pearl S. Buck and China—Commemorating the Centenary of Pearl S. Buck. *Foreign Literature Studies* (1), 73-81.

Notes

Note 1. **Epic description**, due to the evaluation of 1938 Nobel Prize "for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces".

Note 2. **Orientalism** as a general term refers to study the history, literature, culture and other

disciplines of eastern countries. Said regards it as a biased way of thinking or cognitive system in which westerners despise eastern culture and arbitrarily.

Note 3. This paper is the periodical research result of Project on “The Anxiety and Transcendence of John Keats’s Individual Identity Construction” sponsored by National Social Science Foundation of China (No: 21FWWB015); of Project on “A Study of the Construction of John Keats’s National Identity” sponsored by the fellowship of China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (No: 2021M700496); of Project on “A Study of John Keats’s National Identity Writing” sponsored by Social Science Foundation of Jilin Province; of Project on “‘Truth and Mystery’: Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* Writing and the Research on Overseas Establishment of Chinese Image” sponsored by Jilin International Studies University; of Project on “A Study of English Major Course System Construction with Value Shaping Based on ‘Global Village’ as the Foreign Language Lab” sponsored by the Academy of Foreign Language Teaching Attached to the Institute of Higher Education of China (No: 21WYJYZD08); of Project on “A Study of Routes Applied to Cultivate the Inter-cultural Competence of English Major Students” (No: GJJX20201130); of Project on “The Establishment and Practice of Vista Mode of Development and Transformation of English-major Teaching Faculty’s Proficiency under New Arts Prospect” sponsored by Chinese Private Higher Education Association (No: CANFZG22417); of Project on “The Construction and Practice of Mode of Development and Transformation of Foreign Language Teaching Faculty’s Proficiency in International Studies of Universities under Multiple-Discipline Background” sponsored by Jilin Higher Education Association (No: JGJX2022D316); of Project on “The Introduction and Translation of Chinese Contemporary Literature and Culture” (No: FYXH2022001).