1969

The Changing Nature of Family Values in Pearl Buck's House of Earth

Sue Min Huang

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THE CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY VALUES
IN PEARL BUCK'S HOUSE OF EARTH

BY
SUE MIN HUANG

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Arts, Major in
English, South Dakota
State University

1969
THE CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY VALUES

IN PEARL BUCK'S HOUSE OF EARTH

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser
Date

Head, English Department
Date
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INTRODUCTION

A human being often faces certain problems which he feels he must solve to his satisfaction during his life time. Among them the most common and difficult one for a thinker or writer is to find his own identity, or in other words, to know himself. A whole library of literature has dealt with it. According to the Chinese belief, "to know thyself" is the greatest wisdom required of a scholar.

This writer has been confronted by such a problem and now wishes to grapple with it. Her problem is that she wants to discover her own being, especially her identity of a Chinese farmer's daughter, living and studying in the United States, regarded as a foreigner on the campus. Since this writer is a Chinese student majoring in American literature, she believes that it is valuable to know the American concept of Chinese family values as described by the American novelist, Pearl S. Buck. It is also important to understand the Chinese people in their own society and environment when sweeping revolutionary changes have been in progress under the impact of westernization and territorial occupation. For this reason, a study of Pearl Buck's work seems especially appropriate to a Chinese student of literature studying in the United States, in increasing her understanding of herself and her culture.

Pearl Buck is well-known as a writer on Asia, especially on China. Half of her more than sixty-five books (written between 1930-1967) have dealt with people in China. Pearl Sydenstricken
Buck has produced some thirty novels, ten juvenile stories, three volumes of short stories, and eight books of non-fiction. ¹ Though some of her novels deal with America, one with India, and one with Korea, her long novels and best known ones are about China and the Chinese.

There is so much of China in her books that students of Asian studies have divided them into three categories:

1. China at home
2. China in the intellectual conflict with the west
3. China at war with Japan

The first, China at home, appears in works such as The Good Earth (1931), Sons (1933), The Mother (1933), and Pavilion of Women (1947). Novels such as East Wind: West Wind (1930), The First Wife (1933), A House Divided (1935), The Revolutionist (1934), and Kinfolk (1949) are examples of the second category. The last, China at war with Japan, appears in works such as The Patriot (1939), Dragon Seed (1941), The Promise (1934), and China Flight (1943).² In these novels the Chinese people are vividly re-created by Mrs. Buck, who herself lived in the two cultural backgrounds, American and Chinese. She spent the first thirty years of her life in China and learned to speak Chinese before she spoke any English.


Pearl Buck stayed in China from 1892 until 1931. During these years she experienced living with all classes of Chinese people, from the very poor peasantry to intellectual college students and learned professors in Nanking. During this time, the Chinese farming folk, which consisted of four-fifths of the total Chinese population, also went through tremendous cultural and generational changes when industrialization and western ideas were gradually introduced to the agricultural kingdom.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and evaluate Pearl Buck's demonstration of changing family values as manifested in Chinese farming folk in the early twentieth century to determine whether it is, as most Chinese critics believe, prejudiced. The thesis is limited to three novels, *The Good Earth*, *Sons*, and *A House Divided* which compose Pearl Buck's trilogy, *House of Earth*. It does not attempt to compare her presentation of Chinese family values in *House of Earth* with that of her other novels on China nor with that of other writers. It attempts only to catch Pearl Buck's picture of the changing nature of family values from the old China to the new China under the impact of generational distance and western cultural influence.

In Chapter I the writer reviews the incidents of Pearl Buck's life and related literature in order to show that Pearl Buck has the solid training and Chinese cultural background to establish a bridge for passing between the East and West. In addition, the criticism of *House of Earth* is surveyed. In Chapter II a study of the plan and
purpose of House of Earth is presented. A short survey of the Middle Kingdom's recent historical background and the life of the Chinese farmers against this background comprises Chapter III. Traditional teaching in China comes at the beginning of Chapter IV in order to interpret the family life in House of Earth. Finally, a chapter examining the generational and cultural distance found in the three novels concludes the thesis.
CHAPTER I

PEARL BUCK'S DUAL HERITAGE; BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Pearl S. Buck became famous in both the Western and Eastern Hemispheres in the 1930's. She received a Pulitzer Prize for *The Good Earth* in 1932, the William Dean Howells Medal for Distinguished Fiction for the years 1930-1935,¹ and in 1938 the Nobel Prize for literature.² She was the first and the only American woman who has achieved this international high honor. *The Good Earth* became one of the best sellers in American fiction and has been translated into more than thirty different languages, not including many pirated editions. There are seven different translations in Chinese.³ At the highest point of her fame in the 1930's, Pearl Buck was hailed as the Tolstoy of America. In popularity with American readers, *The Good Earth* is surpassed only by *Gone with the Wind* and *Anthony Adverse.*⁴

However, Mrs. Buck's popularity has not brought equivalent critical acclaim. As one critic wrote of *The Good Earth* "despite


²"Nobel Prize to Pearl Buck," Library Journal, LXII (Dec. 1, 1938), 928.


its vast popularity, or perhaps because of it, critics and scholars have been slow to grant Pearl Buck's work a place in literary history.¹ Few literary critics and modern commentators have paid attention to her vast body of other works noted earlier in this thesis. Most of these she has written since her first success at the age of forty. Very little criticism of her work appeared in the 1950's. In 1963 a Japanese student made a study of Pearl Buck's concept of oriental woman.² Pearl S. Buck by Paul A. Doyle is the only complete valuable study of Pearl Buck as an American novelist.³ A dissertation, The Image of the Chinese Family in Pearl Buck's Novels by Doan-Cao-ly published in Saigon in 1964, is also available.

In spite of these few efforts, the literary tendency today is to ignore Pearl Buck's works almost completely. Although now in her late seventies Pearl Buck is still very active in her project of "Welcome Home," an organization for helping Amerasian children. Recently she was named as one of the ten greatest American women for 1969. She is now better known as a humanitarian than she is as a novelist despite her Nobel Prize.

The chief sources of Pearl Buck's life in China must be drawn from isolated references in books and in periodicals. They have


³Doyle, Pearl S. Buck.
been used for the purpose of evaluating Pearl Buck as a novelist. *The Exile's Daughter* and *Pearl S. Buck* by Cornelia Spencer and the author's semi-autobiography, *My Several Worlds*, are very helpful for an understanding of Pearl Buck's early life in China.

Though born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, daughter of Absalom and Caroline Sydenstricker on June 26, 1892, Pearl Sydenstricker was brought to China by her Presbyterian missionary parents when she was only five months old.¹ The Sydenstrickers lived in Chinkiang, Kiangsu. Chinkiang is one of the little Yangtse valley towns where the Grand Canal meets the Yangtse River. Chinkiang, although located less than one hundred miles from Nanking, the capital of the Republic of China, was still regarded as "darkness of China" where foreigners were virtually unknown to the native Chinese in 1900.

The father, Andrew Sydenstricker, as a pioneer Presbyterian missionary, always tried to push further and further into inland areas to preach to the Chinese. The family once lived in a mud-walled and mud-floored house like the earthen house of Wang Lung in *The Good Earth* in a completely Chinese society except for her own parents and her older brother, Edward.² Lacking Americans in her environment, she lived in close intimacy with the Chinese people and


spent her formative years in the interior, provincial valley of China. She spoke Chinese before she learned English, played with Chinese children, and visited their homes, for she had no other American playmates. Therefore, Pearl Buck came to know Chinese society and customs from first hand experience.

Even as a little girl, she was interested in listening to her old Chinese nurse and Amah's (means "servant" in Chinese) ancient Chinese tales. She later declared that was the first actual literary education she received.1 She also admitted that she was a "curious child plaguing everyone with questions sometimes too intimate and personal."2 Her mother, Carrie, was her private tutor who taught her and encouraged her to express herself in clear and grammatical English. At night she also had the chance to listen to her father's exciting and hazardous adventures as a missionary in the unknown areas of China.

However, Pearl Buck herself maintains that "it is the Chinese and not American novel which has shaped my own efforts in writing. My earliest knowledge of story, of how to tell and write stories, came to me in China."3 From her childhood she knew what she wanted: to write stories for she liked to listen to them the most. "One

---


2Ibid., p. 62.

longs to make what one loves," she said, "and above all I loved to hear stories about people. I was a nuisance as a child, I fear, always curious to know about people and why they were as I found them."\(^1\)

Her Chinese reading and writing came from her Chinese tutor, Mr. Kung, an accomplished Confucian scholar. Besides the principles of Confucianism, she also learned recent Chinese history, especially the story of the T'aip'ing revolution.\(^2\) In 1909 Mr. Kung died and Pearl Buck stayed home for a period of time without any definite daily lessons to learn. Naturally, the curious girl dived into any book available in her father's limited library. She plunged into a series of novels.\(^3\)

Among the novels she read, Dickens' stories, which were known for their overflow of humanitarianism, interested the young Pearl Sydenstricker most. She began to read *Oliver Twist* at the age of seven. *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* were her favorites which she read straight through with tears in her eyes. Later she read Dickens' complete set of novels again and again for ten years. He was her most favored English novelist before she was twenty. She

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\(^1\)*My Several Worlds*, p. 75.


\(^3\)*Doyle*, p. 76.
wrote a grateful essay in *Saturday Review of Literature* acknowledging her debt to Dickens.\(^1\)

The young and curious girl read other things, widely and extensively. Thoreau, Hemingway, and Dreiser impressed her very much. She once told her friends that the latter was her most admired American author. When she received the telephone call telling her of her being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1938, she exclaimed, "Oh, I wish that it could have been given to Theodore Dreiser instead."\(^2\)

At the age of twelve after the death of her private Chinese teacher, Pearl Buck was sent to a boarding school in Shanghai where she gained experience of being away from home and saw the real society of China. The school mistress, Miss Jewell, had assigned her to visit an institution for slave girls who had fled the cruel treatment of their masters. Thus from this work she came to gain knowledge of the suffering and misery of the common people in China.\(^3\) Unfortunately, Carrie, the mother, found that the social work in the boarding school humiliated her child and immediately took her precious Pearl back home and tried to educate Pearl herself. Yet the social work in the institution and the contrast of poverty

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\(^1\)Pearl Buck, "My Debt to Dickens," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XIII (April 4, 1936), 11.

\(^2\)My Several Worlds, p. 77.

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 64-69.
and riches enlisted the girl's tremendous sympathy for the Chinese people. The sign at the entrance of a park controlled by Englishmen "No Chinese, No Dogs" must have impressed her deeply. These incidents in her life account for her eventual humanitarian activities in helping underdeveloped Asian areas, besides her work as a successful novelist.

Pearl Buck's particular Chinese background and literary training proved very beneficial when she came to the United States at seventeen to enter Randolph-Macon Woman's college. She won two literary prizes in her senior year in college: one for the best short story, the other for the best poem. In 1925 when she was a graduate student in the English Department of Cornell University, her special background again proved valuable. She won two hundred dollars for the best essay discussing international exchange.¹ Here in this prize essay, "China and the West," two worlds, East and West, met significantly for the first time in her life.

The East, especially the peaceful Chinese land was deeply rooted in Pearl Buck's heart. She once asserted: "It would be hard for me to declare which side of the world is most my own....I am loyal to Asia as I am loyal to my own land."² As a result of her particular experience in childhood and adolescence, within her mind

¹Doyle, p. 30.
flowed two streams, American and Chinese. Therefore, she returned to China and the Chinese people after four years of college in 1914.

In 1918 Pearl Sydenstricker married an American agricultural missionary, John Lossing Buck, in spite of her parents' strong objections. The newly married couple moved to the Anhwei province in North China because of her husband's work. There she became intimately acquainted with the ways of the Chinese peasants, their farming methods, and their struggles with drought, flood, and famine. Since her husband, John Lossing Buck, was an expert on farming, she must have received wide first-hand knowledge of the farmers both from her own observation and from her husband's studies. For Pearl Buck, the farming people of Anhwei "were the most real, the closest to the earth, to birth and death, to laughter, and to weeping." She wrote, "to visit the farming families became my own search for reality, and among them I found the human being as he most nearly is." There was a deep love for and understanding of the Chinese peasantry in her best novel, The Good Earth. This novel is only one of her efforts to portray the drama of the Chinese farming life out of her more than thirty years of observation in China.

Wang Lung in The Good Earth is drawn from the illiterate farmers in Anhwei where the Bucks stayed and where her husband tried

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1My Several Worlds, pp. 263-265, 291.

2Ibid., p. 146.

to improve the poor farming conditions for five years. The Yellow River, which caused floods very often, was called "the Sorrow of China," and runs through the province of Anhwei. And the floods in this province were the most serious in 1920's. Many farmers there had to move to Honan, Hupeh, or Chiangsu to escape floods and famine (see Appendix I). Therefore, Pearl Buck presented the suffering and hungry peasantry in *The Good Earth* from her own five-year experience of living with the Anhwei farmers and sharing their sorrows and difficulties.

In 1921 the Bucks moved from the northern province, Anhwei, to Nanking, the capital of China. Pearl Buck then taught English literature at the University of Nanking 1921-1931, at Southeastern University 1925-1927, and at Chung Yang University 1928-1930.¹ There she had a chance to know another segment of Chinese society, the intellectual Chinese professors and the young college students in the capital city. In 1920's sweeping changes were taking place in all large cities in China. Modern ideas from the West had already begun to take over the old and traditional ones. A new democratic government had been recently established in Nanking. But dissatisfaction and distress were still strong among the people. There were ambitious Japan and Russia to take all possible advantage of the feeble and ineffective democratic government, and there was World

War I. Demonstration against the political unsteadiness and against Chinese traditional teaching and bondage was very common. Most of the college students at that period were rebellious and bewildered by the new changes and new ideas. This drama of change in China's bigger cities was to appear in Pearl Buck's novel, *A House Divided*. The political situation of the warlordism and instability was to be in *Sons*. Wang Yuan, Sheng, Ai-lan, Mei-ling, and Meng are all drawn from the students in Pearl Buck's literature classes.

Although novels of her experience in China began to appear in the 1930's, her articles on her impressions of the changing China appeared much earlier. Her first essay, "In China, Too," is about some of the new practices in China: the popularity of cigarettes, the different organizations of sexes, American dancing in China, and the rebellion against parental authority.\(^1\) She kept writing articles about China and sent them back to America for publication. Most of her essays and short stories written in this period were exclusively about China and mostly published in *Forum* and *Nation*.\(^2\)

In 1931 Pearl Buck left China for good, but her knowledge of China and her love of the land and culture had been deeply rooted in her heart. She can speak Chinese as if it were her native tongue.

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\(^1\)Pearl Buck, "In China, Too," *Atlantic Monthly*, CXXXI (Jan., 1923), 68-72.

although she has not mastered the written language as well. But her favorite pastime had been reading ancient Chinese novels.\textsuperscript{1} Chinese literature was distinctly interesting and helpful to her as a novelist.\textsuperscript{2} All Men are Brothers, a two-volume English translation of an ancient Chinese tale, has been one of her greatest achievements. She admitted that the knowledge of the Chinese language and the Chinese people helped her in receiving the Nobel Prize in literature in 1938.\textsuperscript{3} She also pointed out to this writer in her letter of September 24, 1968, that the Chinese novel had had great influence on her novel creations.\textsuperscript{4} Nor can one forget that her Nobel Prize Speech was called "The Early Chinese Novel."\textsuperscript{5}

An interesting episode about the publication of the author's first long piece of fiction East Wind: West Wind (1930) also shows how much influence Chinese literature has on Pearl Buck as an American novelist. In her first draft of this first novel, Pearl Buck deliberately included a great number of cliches and hackneyed phrases from the books she had read in English because in Chinese literature it is

\textsuperscript{1}My Several Worlds, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{2}George A. Cevasco, "Pearl Buck and the Chinese Novel," pp. 450-473.

\textsuperscript{3}Pearl Buck's reply to questionnaire of Irene Rodak whose thesis was on "The Role of Language in the Work of the Living American Nobel Prize Winners," Unpublished Master Thesis (Buffalo, 1957).

\textsuperscript{4}Pearl Buck's reply to this writer's question on September 24, 1968.

considered a mark of fine style to use well-known diction and phraseology found in the works of great writers. But the publisher refused to accept her first novel unless she revised the manuscript and put her ideas and story in her own style.¹

As a result of her great achievement as a novelist and her contribution to both literature and humanitarianism, she has had honorary degrees from Virginia University (1939), Harvard University (1942), St. Lawrence University (1942).² But her greatest and the most admirable achievement is her more than thirty volumes that treat exclusively of China and the Chinese. Of the more than 250 western writers who have written novels using China as their essential background for setting, Pearl Buck is quantitatively and qualitatively the most outstanding.³

As a novelist Pearl Buck's first fiction, *East Wind: West Wind* appeared on April 10, 1930. The theme of this novel is the conflict of the Western and Eastern culture, a vital problem in twentieth century China. The book was so popular that within one year of its publication, it had gone through three editions. The novel was discovered by the reading public rather than by literary critics. Little criticism is available after the original review

¹Doyle, p. 30.


of the first publication. The general opinion about the novel was that Pearl Buck was successful in her description of the aristocratic Chinese families and in discovering the complete differences in customs between China and the West. Yet the setting, the contrived narration, and the sentimentality were regarded as weaknesses in the story.¹

The Good Earth, her second novel, published in 1931 brought her literary fame, wealth, and a publisher-husband, Richard J. Walsh. Pearl Buck's first marriage, unfortunately, turned out to be the failure that her parents predicted. It ended with a divorce from John Lossing Buck in 1934, and she married Mr. Walsh late in the same year. The Good Earth, a novel about the suffering and joy of a Chinese peasant family which Pearl Buck as a child, adolescent, and mature woman had looked upon, not only established the author's world-wide fame but also made her a target for attacks and criticism. Fame made further demands and requirements: The Good Earth placed heavy and steady pressure on Pearl Buck to maintain her literary fame. Sons and A House Divided, part of her trilogy, House of Earth to which The Good Earth also belongs, have been generally severely criticized. Pearl Buck wished she had not written The Good Earth just as Sinclair Lewis once confessed that he frequently wished he had never written Main Street.²

¹Doyle, p. 31.
²My Several Worlds, p. 78.
One of the main criticisms about Pearl Buck's portrayal of Chinese life arose from the Chinese critics and scholars who insisted that the picture of the Chinese farming folk and the agony of the Chinese youth under the impact of western ideas and Chinese traditional teaching she had presented in her novels were untrue, prejudiced as most "old Chinese hands"\(^1\) would be.

One of the earliest indignant discussions of Mrs. Buck's work appeared in *New Republic* in 1931. Mr. Younghill claimed that "China is different" from what Pearl Buck had portrayed in *The Good Earth*. He protested that Pearl Buck put too much emphasis on romantic love which was alien to the Chinese people. Thus Pearl Buck failed in catching the real feeling of her Chinese characters. He further insisted that no Chinese would become sexually involved with his own slave as Wang Lung in *The Good Earth* does. He blamed the novel as working toward the confusion not clarification of Confucianism.\(^2\) Another violent attack on Pearl Buck for giving a false view of Chinese life is found in an article by Professor Kiang published in *New York Times* 1933. Mr. Kiang, professor of Chinese studies at McGill University in Montreal, charged Pearl Buck with exaggerating and distorting certain aspects of Chinese life,

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\(^1\)A term used to refer to the westerners who may be sons or daughters of certain missionaries or business men who spent five or ten years among the limited American society in China. Yet when they go home, they claim to have the authority on all information on China.

\(^2\)Kang Younghill, "China is Different," *New Republic*, LXVII (July 1, 1931), 186.
creating a great many errors of facts.\textsuperscript{1} For instance, Chinese never made tea by sprinkling "tea leaves" on hot water. Nor would Chinese people be so uncivilized and brutal as to kill their own female babies as happened in The Good Earth. He concluded that non-Chinese writers could not write accurately of life in China, and the peasants and the lower class people Pearl Buck wrote about were rare in China. He further led readers to believe that there were no bandits in the new China of today; therefore, he argued that Buck's picture of China in The Good Earth and Sons was completely distorted.\textsuperscript{2}

In the same issue of the paper, \textit{New York Times} allowed Mrs. Buck to publish a rebuttal to Professor Kiang's attack.\textsuperscript{3} Pearl Buck also showed her agony of critical attacks from her Chinese critics in the essay "Advice to Unborn Novelists," published in 1935.\textsuperscript{4} She felt that she was not well-received by the Chinese critics simply because she was born five months earlier in America, not in China. In another essay, "China and the Foreign Chinese," she tried to make a distinction between the real Chinese and foreign Chinese. The foreign Chinese, having stayed away from their own people for quite a period


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 16.


of time, easily forgot the less pleasant aspects of their own country. The foreign and intellectual Chinese consisted of only a small portion of the total Chinese people. Therefore the peasantry should be the true Chinese whom she was trying to portray in her novels.¹

In spite of all her own explanation and clarification, the suspicion that Pearl Buck has been prejudiced against Chinese culture still exists in certain critical quarters. Most of the Chinese intellectuals believe that Mrs. Buck has not portrayed the Chinese peasantry and its suffering of the cultural change in the early twentieth century with accuracy.²

Jean Tony, a Chinese Jesuit, was the first who made a systematic study of Pearl Buck's China. He stood up for Pearl Buck and praised Pearl Buck's realism in her presentation of Chinese people. But he still felt that Pearl Buck was an alien who did not have the required Chinese cultural training to wholly understand the Chinese people's inner traits.³

Because of this critical controversy, as a Chinese student who is interested in Pearl Buck's art of creation, this writer felt that grappling with the Chinese family changes in House of Earth would achieve a better understanding of herself, a foreign student

¹Pearl Buck, "China and the Foreign Chinese," Yale Review, XXI (Spring, 1932), 539-547.

²Doyle, pp. 53-54.

of the twentieth century wavering between the traditional Chinese and western education.

The Good Earth was not well received by American critics either. Among the critical literary circle, Nathaniel Peffer was the representative of all. He said that Pearl Buck did not have "the qualification of the exotic and the unique material in which she works," even though she was entitled to be counted as a first rate novelist.¹ Some, however, felt more favorably toward the novel. Mr. Phelps was the first to call The Good Earth a masterpiece.² The essay, "The Art of Pearl S. Buck," is the first pioneering, perceptive, and appreciative study of Pearl Buck's handling of scene, style, characterization, plot, and theme. Mrs. Bentley found a firm unity in Pearl Buck's materials and a dual character is her style, which was American and Chinese, plain and clear, but impressive.³

Despite the Chinese protest and American criticism, the main factors in the judgment of the committee for giving the Nobel Prize to Pearl Buck in 1938 were the novels on Chinese life and the


biographies of Pearl Buck's parents who were enthusiastic in their
ever exploration of the "darkness of China." Anders Osterling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy and the Chairman of the Nobel Com-mittee on literature wrote:

The decisive factor in the academy's judgment was, above all, the admirable biographies of her parents, the missionary pair in China—two volumes which seemed to deserve classic rank and to possess the required prospects for permanent interest. In addition her novels of Chinese peasant life have properly made a place for themselves by virtue of the authenticity, wealth of detail and rare insight which they describe a region that is little known and rarely accessible to Western readers.¹

There was criticism about giving the Nobel Award to Pearl Buck. Some maintained that the Prize for 1938 was more or less a "political" prize.² Pearl Buck admitted that she suffered very much when many of her fellow American writers attacked her for getting the award. Although she herself was unable to believe it when she got the telephone call from Sweden and exclaimed, "O Pu Sing Sin!" which means "I cannot believe it!" in Chinese, she was very glad that the news was true, but later felt depressed to know that the literary circles were all against her.³ It was claimed that she was too young, that she had written too few important books, that no woman writer deserved

²Doyle, p. 91.
³"O Pu Sing Sin; awarded the annual Nobel Prize in letters," Newsweek, XII (November 21, 1938), 33-34.
the award, and that she was not an American since her subject matter and even her places of residence were completely Chinese.\textsuperscript{1}

Few important favorable comments appeared to support Pearl Buck against the general hostile attitude. Sinclair Lewis complimented Pearl Buck for having "given a new picture of the Orient in terms of human beings."\textsuperscript{2} One of the few critics to come to Pearl Buck's defense was Henry Seidel Canby. Mr. Canby assumed that "they [the Nobel Prize Committee] must be crowning one book, a masterpiece which richly deserves exalted recognition...a unique book, and in all probability belongs among the permanent contributions to the world literature of our times."\textsuperscript{3} The unique book he talked about is The Good Earth which Mr. Canby regarded as a document in human nature.\textsuperscript{4} But he believed that Pearl Buck's technique of expression and her language in other novels were her great and obvious weaknesses.

Mr. Malcolm Cowley also came to defend Pearl Buck against literary circles. Mr. Cowley maintained that the critics were offended because the public had, so to speak, stolen a march on them:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1}Pearl Buck, "Advice to Unborn Novelists," pp. 513-514. And \textit{My Several Worlds}, p. 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{3}Henry Seidel Canby, "The Good Earth; Pearl Buck and the Nobel Prize," \textit{Saturday Review of Literature}, XIX (November 19, 1938), 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., pp. 9-10.
\end{itemize}
(Pearl Buck) was discovered by the public at large while the literary scouts were looking the other way....But the effect in serious circles was merely to clink the case against her.1

He examined the trilogy, House of Earth, and praised the legendary plot and Biblical style in The Good Earth and Sons. However, he also pointed out the essential weakness of style and plot in the third novel of the trilogy, A House Divided. He felt that the trilogy was a failure because Pearl Buck could not construct a novel that dealt with contemporary materials, although she had a "strong sense of fidelity to events that actually happened."2

Discussing Mrs. Buck's Nobel Prize Award, Oscar Cargill felt that the prize was well given for Buck's universality of view and timelessness of her setting and tone. He said that the Prize for 1938 was also a good reminder that pure aestheticism was not everything in literature.3

Having spent her first half of life in Asia, especially in China, Pearl Buck is well-known for building a "bridge for passing" between the East and the West. Regardless of her lack of originality or creativeness, and the literary circles ignoring her huge body of works, she still has a greatness with which no other American can compete. Pearl Buck is not only an interpreter but also "a

1Malcolm Cowley, pp. 24-25.
2Ibid., p. 25.
cultural liaison officer between the Western world to which she belonged and the resurgent Orient where she grew up.\textsuperscript{1} According to W. Tasker Witham, Chinese life was introduced to America by Pearl Buck.\textsuperscript{2} Before 1930 many Americans thought of the Chinese only as laundrymen, clever merchants, or heathens destined to be doomed. The Good Earth reveals the Chinese people as human beings of flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{3}

Pearl Buck's literary creation of more than thirty novels on China serves as a link between "the Yankee and the Chinese...the brotherhood and democracy" just as Hemingway links Spain and America.\textsuperscript{4} As the best interpreter of both Old China and Modern China, she has won a wide audience of world readers through her extensive knowledge of China, her enthusiasm to tell about it, and her sympathetic attitude toward her second country.\textsuperscript{5} Pearl Buck through her contribution in literature has provided a meeting place for the East and West.

\textsuperscript{1}Henry Lee, "Pearl S. Buck—Spiritual Descendant of Tom Paine," Saturday Review of Literature, XXV (December, 1942), 16.


Gray praised her presentation of Chinese life and Eastern life "with real insight into the people and their way of life."\(^1\) In fact, Pearl Buck is an internationalist who has a dual cultural background to provide better bridging over East and West cultural distance.

Pearl Buck communicated "positive feeling and confidence in life." The Good Earth is not merely a book about the Chinese life and Chinese problems, but also a book about universal human problems.\(^2\) Pearl Buck had the magic spell to make her readers "enter into her chosen milieu of war or peace, rich or poor, old or young, the human heart."\(^3\) In an interview by S. J. Woolf, Pearl Buck admitted that it was not the background that interested her so much as it was the characters. And this was the reason why she was such an admirer of Theodore Dreiser. She felt that irrespective of nationality, men and women act much the same under similar circumstances.\(^4\) Therefore Pearl S. Buck, after living in China for more than thirty years, and then spending the rest of her life in America and doing much traveling, had found that East and West meet except for certain superficial differences.

\(^{1}\)James Gray, On the Second Thought (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1946), pp. 28-35.


\(^{3}\)M. M. Bitker, "Windows on Several Worlds," Saturday Review of Literature, XLIII (October 7, 1961), 41.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAN AND PURPOSE OF HOUSE OF EARTH

The Good Earth published in 1931 proclaimed Pearl Buck as a world-renowned artist of the first rank. Yet few people realize that The Good Earth is only the first novel of Mrs. Buck's trilogy about the changing China, which is composed of The Good Earth (1931), Sons (1932), and A House Divided (1935). Pearl Buck's trilogy is better known by the title of the first novel than by either of the succeeding titles, Sons and A House Divided. And for most readers to know Pearl Buck's picture of China, The Good Earth is the novel to read.

However, this novel really presents only a few of the concepts that Mrs. Buck intended to show. The truth is that all three novels of the trilogy together must be read to fully understand the change of family values in China during the past half century. In other words, in order to understand how accurately Pearl Buck has presented China to the western readers, one has to read the three novels in House of Earth in order. This is what Mr. Youngkjiang, Pearl Buck's chief critic, failed to do; therefore, he protests in New Republic that "China is different" and that Pearl Buck is prejudiced against Chinese.¹

In order to evaluate her work fairly, one should understand what she was trying to do. Wang Lung, the main character in The Good

¹Younghill, p. 186.
Earth, represents the lower social strata and illustrates the Chinese peasantry in the process of becoming the Chinese bourgeoisie. His sons move into Chinese aristocracy as provincial war lords and landlords. His grandsons and granddaughters turn out to be the most liberal-minded intellectuals, living in the international city, Shanghai, or receiving western educations abroad. Thus Mrs. Buck has attempted to trace the development of the 20th century Chinese family in the three generations of the Wangs. The author herself tells what she wanted to achieve in *House of Earth*:

When this trilogy began to shape itself, it began, not as a single book, *The Good Earth*, but as the entire span of a Chinese family rising, as nearly all great families do, out of the earth. The story told in the first book was not the story of a farmer, but of a man far more than the average farmer, a man whose home was upon the land and would always be, but who used the land as a foundation upon which to build a family. Nothing in Chinese life, and indeed in human life, is more significant than this rise and fall of families. The founder is often a strong, naive, clever, simple man, whose children swiftly grow beyond this environment and carry his vigor far and wide into other lines. In *Sons* the original vigor of Wang Lung was carried into war and trade and money spending, but already that vigor, first bound in one figure, is dissipated, as time goes on, into many sons and many places. In *A House Divided*, the vigor seems quite scattered. Accustomed riches, remoteness from the land, the complicated forces of modern existence, have tempered and even destroyed the strong ruthless unconscious selfishness of the founder. The family begins to be not only physically but mentally and spiritually scattered.¹

The trilogy, according to many critics, becomes a sort of Chinese Buddenbrooks.¹

Each book deals with the one generation of the Wang Family. The Good Earth shows the rise of Wang Lung from poverty to riches, from an earthen house to a brick house and then to the biggest house in town. Sons describes the way Wang Lung's three sons emerge as aristocrats, the first a landlord, the second a merchant, and the third a military officer. The story, however, centers its narration on the third, Wang the Tiger, who becomes a provincial war lord. The third book, A House Divided, concludes the history of the Wang's family. The grandson of Wang Lung, Wang Yuan, returns to the earthen house where the Wangs were born, died and buried after he has had six years of education in America and taught as a university professor in the Chinese capital, Nanking.

When she was preparing to write the trilogy, Pearl Buck acknowledged that "there was no plot or plan. Only the man and the woman and their children stood before me."² There is no doubt that the man and the woman standing before Pearl Buck were Chinese; therefore, House of Earth is a Chinese story. The local color, the setting, and the peculiarities of the characters clearly tell the readers so. Both The Good Earth and Sons have only Chinese characters. The

setting is in a very traditional and conservative society, a land never touched by western civilization.

The three novels share many things in common. The most distinct one is the language. Many critics, especially Mamoru Shimizu, point out the Biblical style in House of Earth. There are numerous examples of Pearl Buck's using the peculiar expressions which are found in Scriptures. According to Mr. Shimizu, Pearl Buck borrowed a great many images and words from the Bible, sometimes from the Book of Common Prayer, with varying degrees of diversion.\(^1\) Taking three passages from The Good Earth and from Scripture, for instance, one shall find the similarity between them.

"Obey him and bear sons and yet more sons. Bring the first child to me to see." (The Good Earth, p. 221)

...and there was space within the walls for the body of Wang Lung and for each of his sons and wives, and there was space for sons' sons, also. (The Good Earth, p. 280.)

Or if a child had fallen ill or the old man had reached suddenly at the end of his days, Wang Lung might have been caught up in the things... (The Good Earth, p. 183.)

**Exodus 2.22:** And she bore him a son. (Also found in Judges, 8.31)

**Genesis 21.23:** Swear...by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son's son.

**I Kings 17.7:** And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes upon heaven,...\(^2\)


\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 120-121.
In spite of what has been found about her Biblical style, Pearl Buck commented on a certain occasion,

The style is not Biblical, it is Chinese. For of course, when I wrote in China of Chinese things about Chinese, I used the Chinese tongue...When I am writing about Chinese people the story spins in my mind entirely in Chinese idioms, and I literally translate it as I go. I know that so long as I live I shall have difficulty with prepositions because the Chinese language has very few, and the English is simply prickly about them.

The direct English translation from the Chinese language sounds remote and mysterious to most westerners, perhaps, but it carries Chinese color and Chinese culture in such words as "firewagon" for "train," "old head" for "father," "moth-browed bride" for "pretty bride," and "stomachful of characters" for "learned," "noon rice" for "lunch," "running dogs" for "slave," and "tea leaves" for "tea."

These peculiar phrases are used in her trilogy. Chinese images and sentences are also scattered in her narration. Following are the few examples found in House of Earth.

I don't stomach a woman.

It could cut through a bolt of silk and so cold it could divide a cloud in two.

What is your honor name?

She is the only one out of all I feed who knows for what I am!

The three novels are also similar in use of folklore, superstition, and inherited traits among the family members. One can tell that O-lan and the Wife of Wang are typical Chinese women who

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1Pearl Buck, "Advice to Unborn Novelists," pp. 513-514.
"sewed a row of small gold Buddhas upon their Child's cap"¹ as tokens of good fortune. The Wangs are Chinese who always send for a geomancer to decide the date and place of burial, or to decide the specific hour and date of a wedding.² In Sons the reader is surprised to find that Chinese people consider it bad luck to see a nun in the forenoon, and many Chinese spit upon a nun to get rid of the ill omen.³ The New Year folkway is still very common in Taiwan nowadays. On New Year's Eve, the Wangs customarily paste on all their doors and farming implements and utensils squares of red paper on which are gilt-inked letters for happiness and riches to bring the family good luck in the coming year.

Pearl Buck is strangely silent on the religion of the Chinese people. It is true that she often alludes to the shrines where the Wangs went to say their wishes. But we hear little of the Chinese gods and goddesses except in regard to burial rites.⁴ Yuan in A House Divided remained beyond the influence of Christians. From this writer's judgment, Pearl Buck implies that the Christian missionaries were neither necessary nor helpful in "civilizing" the old Chinese

³Ibid., p. 242.
⁴N. Patrick, "China; as viewed through the eyes of Pearl Buck," Scholastic, IIVII (January 18, 1938), 33-34.
society. The same idea is found in her essay, "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" ¹

The reader will better understand Wang Lung's wishes and purposes for going to temples if he has a basic understanding of Chinese religious belief. One of the little shrines to which Wang Lung went to burn incense is Tu Ti Kung. The shrines of this god are found everywhere in China and Taiwan. Tu Ti Kung serves his celestial superiors as the official recorder of the activities of the living. In the country, he is the guardian of the land and god of agriculture; in town, he is a patron of business and a god of wealth. Only through this god can the farmers send their prayers for more rains and good harvests.

Another god most Chinese worship is Shang Ti Kung who is believed to have the power of raising the price of rice and making a barren woman fertile. He is not obliged to provide these services, but if approached with respect and handsomely bribed, he might. On his wedding day, Wang Lung went to a little temple with O-lan to burn incense. Of course, it was to Shang Ti Kung that he and O-lan prayed for sons.² When he returned from the south, Wang Lung went to an incense shop and "bought a paper god of wealth to hang on the wall."³ The gods and goddesses the Chinese believe in are not as

¹Pearl Buck, "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" Harper, CXVI (January 19, 1933), 143-145.

²The Good Earth, pp. 22-23.

³Ibid., p. 137.
sacred and saint-like as the western God. They can be bribed by material goods. When Wang the Eldest's third son was sick at home, Wang went to a temple to promise a robe to the goddess if she would cure his child.¹

The Chinese think of their gods as human, wicked, and as mean as any ordinary human being, just as the ancient Greeks used to do. Whether they are going to have a good harvest or not depends completely on the rainfall from heaven, and the poor farmers can do nothing about it. The farmers usually blame the drought, floods, and the famines on their wicked gods. Wang Lung even went to "the temple of earth, and deliberately he spat upon the face of the small, imperturbable god who sat there with his goddess...and Wang Lung gnashed his teeth at them..."² When the famine was over and Wang Lung came back from the south, he again went to the temple. The god's and goddesses' bodies were now naked and "sticking through the tatters of their paper clothes."³ Wang Lung looking at them "grimly and with content," said aloud, "as one might speak to a punished child, 'Thus it is with gods who do evil to men!'"⁴ Chinese people are not scared nor slow to complain of the injustice of an unknown supreme power ruling over human beings.

¹Sons, p. 68.
²The Good Earth, p. 73.
³Ibid., p. 137.
⁴Ibid., p. 138.
The characters in House of Earth with whom Pearl Buck had to
deal are all members of the Wangs. In a study of Pearl Buck's
effectiveness as a novelist, Phyllis Bentley praises the author's
ability to create and manipulate characters in the Wangs' family
tree. Pearl Buck is, states Phyllis Bentley,

equally successful with characters of every age, sex,
and type, and in the indication of the differences
between various types. The war lord, the merchant,
the decadent poet, the kitchen slave...All these figures
in her pages, and all have life and truth.¹

Pearl Buck portrays Wang Lung's three sons inheriting certain
characteristics of the parents, Wang Lung and O-lan. They all have
reasonable resemblance to their parents. Wang the Eldest is as kind-
hearted and lusty as his father. Wang the Second inherits Wang Lung's
thrift and mania for money. Wang the Third is as quiet as O-lan,
and as just as Wang Lung in dealing with people. Wang Lung's love
of the land is found again in the third generation in Wang Yuan.
For Pearl Buck each child of the Wang family has certain inherited
family traits but still is "an individual character...yet possessing
the flesh of his parents' flesh and blood of their blood."² Many
critics maintain that Pearl Buck is more successful and convincing
in her female characterization. It is true in The Good Earth. O-lan
does not play a very important role in the novel. Neither does she
open her mouth often. Yet she comes more alive and is more

²Ibid., p. 795.
representative of the Chinese than Wang Lung who is the main character in this novel.

The Good Earth is a narrative about an impoverished Chinese farmer, Wang Lung. The reader is led into a remote society and yet he still can share Wang Lung's excitement and shyness on his wedding day, can comprehend the expectation and joy over the birth of his first child, and can feel sorry for the suffering induced by poverty, hunger, drought and famine. The ebb and flow of life, the changes and perpetual movement from summer to winter to spring are all portrayed with authenticity and universality.

The second book, Sons, seems more remote and strange for the western reader to comprehend and appreciate. For it deals with the Chinese war, a political situation which has never existed in western countries. In addition, Pearl Buck modeled Sons on the orthodox Chinese novel. The material is purely Chinese.¹

Wang the Tiger was a war lord who had spent his life and braved all dangers hoping that his only son Wang Yuan might some day become a great figure in the country. Wang the Tiger regarded war as "a good enough business." He hoped that he would sit upon a throne and see his son a prince. But the new times upset all the good old ways. Wang the Tiger died with his dream unfulfilled. He finally turned out to be a complete failure, both in his own career and in bringing up his precious son. The son Wang Yuan rebelled against the tight

¹Pearl Buck, "Advice to Unborn Novelists," p. 513.
control of family ties. He deserted his loving father and ran away from home. And Wang the Tiger's failure was also due to the abolition of the war lords in 1926 when General Chiang Kai-Shek tried to rid the Nationalist government of all who would not support nationalism including the Communist party and the regional war lords in northern China.¹

The history of Wang the Tiger mirrors the transitional period of the change from a monarchy to a democracy. Sons in every respect represents true Chinese society because the bandits and war lords played an important part in Chinese life. Numerous books and essays have studied the war lords in 1916-1927. Shui Hu Chuan, a Chinese novel translated into English by Mrs. Buck, is also about the bandits and robbers in ancient China. Cornelia Spencer reports that Sons was Pearl Buck's own personal favorite of all her books about life in China.² Yet from the writer's point of view, Pearl Buck praised the novel published right after her most successful one, The Good Earth, to attract most of her readers' attention to it and to counter the severe criticisms against Sons. From this writer's judgment, the second novel of her trilogy is much inferior to her first one both in characterization, story-telling, and usage of effective language to carry the Chinese local color.

²The Exile's Daughter, p. 172.
In *A House Divided*, the final volume of the trilogy, the emphasis is placed on Wang Yuan, Wang the Tiger's only son. The setting shifts from a small provincial town to the western-controlled city, Shanghai, and then to America where Wang Yuan stayed for a period of six years to receive his education. But most important of all, he went to America to escape imprisonment, for he had joined the Communist conspiracy in 1926. *A House Divided* is partially a reflection of the changing of the Chinese mainland from an unsuccessful democratic government to Communism. The setting of *A House Divided* is also not so remote nor so typically Chinese as the other two in this trilogy. Most of the Chinese characters in this novel are western-minded such as the Tiger's learned wife, her daughter Ai-lan, her adopted daughter Mei-ling. Sheng the poet not only dances and writes English verse for an American publisher but also acts as a fashionable gentleman about-town.

The contrast between life of the wealthy and life of the poor, a modern problem of twentieth century industrialization, is also explored in this novel. After all, China in *A House Divided* was no longer such an isolated land having no touch with the western world as it was in *The Good Earth* and *Sons*. Meng, the younger brother of Sheng, the poet, became a radical revolutionalist, finally a Communist after he found that the new democratic government was as inefficient and corrupt as the Manchu Empire. Wang Yuan's national consciousness which he felt while in America and the cultural contacts of the younger generation show not only the new China but also the conflict
between the East and the West, and the transition from the old to the new life.

Throughout the three novels, Pearl Buck shows the reader her concept of China, changing from a conservative, agricultural, and superstitious people to a modern and educated society. She describes the process and the agony of how the old customs and family values are broken down and how the new ways replace the traditional ones. Yuan, a typical Chinese and a promising youth, finds himself through his education in Shanghai and six years of education and lonely life in America. He represents and speaks for the enlightened Chinese young generation. Yet he eventually is to find that not everything belonging to the West is good. Still strongly influenced by his Chinese education and patriotism, he returns to China with enthusiasm to help people of his own race. He cannot disregard the fact that China is his past and his own blood although he finds poverty and tradition in Chinese society disgusting and a kind of bondage to him. His mind consists of both Chinese and American ways, liberal in some respect, but conservative in others. Yuan is the regenerated generation which will create a China of tomorrow.

Under the impact of westernization shown in Pearl Buck's last novel, *A House Divided*, the old, traditional, and agricultural family system has gone to pieces. A completely different generation with a new set of moral standards and beliefs is operating the Chinese society and families. Therefore, to get the China viewed through
the eyes of Pearl Buck, one has to read *The Good Earth*, *Sons*, and *A House Divided* in order. All three novels are equally indispensable to the true and accurate understanding of what Pearl Buck felt China was and what China is at the present time.
CHAPTER III

THE MIDDLE KINGDOM AND THE CHINESE FARMERS

In order to understand that Pearl Buck has presented a true picture of changing China, one has to bear in mind that differences of blood do exist within China. On a close examination, the abstract notion of a pure Chinaman disappears and breaks up into a picture of a variety of races, different in their stature, temperament, habit, and mental make-ups. And since The Good Earth, Sons, and A House Divided are also "glimpses of Chinese history and philosophy, and the constant tragic movement of the current history, the continual wars and the revolutions,"¹ an understanding of Chinese political, social background, and changes in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century is also indispensable. China at this time was in a period of turbulence that surrounded the fall of the old China and the establishment of a new society when outside forces were beginning to have an effect with cultural intrusion and territorial occupation. Beside the main political movements, some obvious social evolution also continued to modify contemporary China. And the farmers which constituted four-fifths of the total Chinese population suffered the most from these sweeping changes in the past half century.

The northern Chinese living north of the Yellow River are usually taller and stronger than those from the central and southeastern parts of China. According to Lin Yutang, the northern Chinese are "acclimatized to simple thinking and hard living, tall and stalwart, hale, hearty—onion eating and fun-loving...are in every way more Mongolic and more conservative than the conglomeration of the people near Shanghai."¹ The Wangs are identified with these characteristics. First of all, they were "onion eating," hard working, and strong in physical structure. At least Pearl Buck herself has told the readers that the earth mother, O-lan, in The Good Earth is a strong and hard working woman from a northern province in China, Shuntung. O-lan was not considered as a beauty because she was "neither pretty nor clever, square, rather tall" with a pair of big, unbound feet.²

The southerners, living down the southeast coastal area around Shanghai, and south of the Yangtse River are "easy-tempered, cultural and sophisticated, mentally developed but physically retrograde." They are usually more poetic and comfort-loving. People in these regions, especially from the east central part of China are noted for their delicacy in physical structure, light and milky in complexion. It is customary for the strong northerners to admire the smallness

²The Good Earth, p. 17.
and tenderness of the female beauty of middle China. Pearl Buck has captured the differences between people from the north and middle China and stressed the point of different physical make-ups in *House of Earth*. O-lan, for instance, was known for her height, strength, plainness, and darkness in appearance. Wang Lung's favorite concubines, Lotus and Pear Blossom, and his own pretty daughter were publicly acclaimed charming women. They had the similar outward appearance—small, soft, oval faces, egg-shaped, exceedingly delicate, and little red mouths. Ai-lan's husband in *A House Divided* is a typical representative of these southeasterners, a literary man about-town with no occupation except dancing, party-going, and poetry reading.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, movements of trade with foreign countries and sending scholars to foreign countries for a western education have brought about a new type of Chinese. These events have tended to smother racial and provincial differences. Most of the characters in *Sons* and *A House Divided* such as Yuan, Ai-lan, Mei-ling, Sheng, and Meng are all the third generation growing up under the strong influence of western civilization.

Chinese always call their own country the "middle Kingdom." Regarding themselves as the central, the biggest, and the most civilized country, they refused to deal with non-Chinese on an equal

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1Yutang Lin, p. 18.
2*The Good Earth*, p. 316.
basis. "Closed Door" had been the policy of the Manchu Dynasty for five hundred years. The Manchus had had enough trouble in suppressing the rebellious Han,\(^1\) without accepting the constant demand of powerful western countries such as England, France, and America for economic and political penetration.

As a result, the Opium War broke out in 1832. In ten years, England, the United States, and France had broken down the "Closed Door" completely, and succeeded in trading with the Chinese.\(^2\) Thus the ideological influences and alien political ideas began to affect both the thinking and economies of China. And the opium trade and use began to corrupt officials, wealthy land lords, and land ladies. They ate opium as a fashion, like smoking cigarettes nowadays. The "Ancient Mistress" of the House of Hwang, Wang Lung's uncle and aunt, and the magistrate in Sons were some of the Chinese opium-eaters whose only reward for their expensive hobby was poverty and death.

The T'aip'ing rebellion from 1850 to 1864 was an immediate result of the introduction of western influence plus the wide-spread unrest of the depressed peasantry. "T'aip'ing proposed not only to overthrow the Manchu rule; they intended also to achieve a social revolution... The rebels aimed at improving the status of women,

\(^1\)Han is the main and the most civilized of the five different tribes of which China is composed.

\(^2\)Clubb, p. 12.
opposed the opium traffic, and introduced communal economic organization\textsuperscript{1} to solve the suffering farmers' problems. The revolution, though unsuccessful, proved that the suffering and the mistreated agricultural masses had awakened to their nationalism. By the twentieth century, they had become a meaningful force, as is evident in \textit{A House Divided}.

Besides the Civil War, the debility of the Chinese government also attracted emerging foreign powers, especially the ambitious Japan and Russia. A small country like Japan could go to war with China and succeed in gaining title to Formosa and the Pescadores in 1864; thereafter, other countries, Russia, Germany, Britain, France, and America, also acquired substantially increased political and economic holdings in China. Without actual fighting, there was keen competition between these countries. China by that time was worse off than a colonial power; the Manchu Emperor was a ruler in name, but not in reality.

After being defeated by Japan in 1865, the Peking government began to purchase some guns and naval vessels abroad. The first self-realization and reform was based on the concept that "Chinese knowledge is the theme; western knowledge is for practical use."\textsuperscript{2} The Chinese were still slow and indifferent to progress. If they progressed at all, they moved at a snail's pace. As Pearl Buck

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Clubb, p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 17.
\end{itemize}
describes in Sons, most of Chinese people were still illiterate and had no idea of what was going on in their own country. Wang Lung in The Good Earth was also representative in this respect.

Not until 1900 was the echo of "reform, reform, reform, and reform" heard throughout the whole nation. Both the Manchus and the common people felt the need of westernization. Sponsored by the young Emperor, Kwan-Shi, planned by K'ang Yu-wei, a sweeping reform took place. The Emperor declared that European studies must be included in the curriculum of scholarly and educational subjects. Thousands of students were sent abroad to see the world and to acquire a foreign education. Public school and military academies were set up for the first time in China at Shanghai and Canton.

During the Boxers Rebellion and Big Swords in 1900, eight countries were united to fight against the unreasonableness and ignorance of the Manchus. As a result, the Manchus were miserably defeated. This humiliation awakened new ideas and produced new people. These new ideas and new radical and patriotic young people were to succeed in 1911 in throwing over the corrupted Manchu Empire. They established a new modern country, based on a democratic government.

What hastened the collapse of the Manchu Empire was official corruption and inefficiency, the wretched conditions of the people, internal unrest and foreign pressure. Yet the democratic government that followed the Manchus' overthrow did not fulfill its promise. Under the rule of the Manchu Emperor, there had at least been the
outward appearance of a centralized rule from Peking. Now democracy meant that individual military men clung to their own power and independence, and fought against each other. The feeble symbol of a democratic government was almost non-existent.¹ Bandits and warlords took democracy as the change from central control to unlimited personal freedom, and divided the nation into parts by themselves. This was the Chinese political situation during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century in China. This was also what Pearl Buck tried to present in her second novel, Sons.

Warlordism began with the death of Yuan Shih-K'ai, a Chinese president, in 1916 and lasted until the first military union in 1927.² Wang the Tiger in Sons was one of the provincial warlords who desired to maintain regional autonomy and hoped to profit from such powerful military control.

The foreign pressures which started early in 1840's were by the 1920's even worse. The whole nation, especially the common people, were suffering from heavy taxes both from the central government and regional warlords and were constantly under the threat of being robbed by bandits. The democratic government was beset with petty factionalism. At the same time Communist agents of the Soviet Union were working hard to turn the Chinese anti-foreignism and


²Chung Kai-Shei led his army swept through the country and defeated all warlords occupying north China and the Communist party occupying the western part of China.
national feeling into pro-Communism. Disappointed with the new democratic government, most radical young people, who were somewhat naive at the same time, turned to Communism to find their hopes and dreams for an ideal, prosperous New China. The Communists eventually were to succeed in taking over the Mainland of China in 1949. Meng, the youngest son of Wang the Eldest, was a typical Chinese youth of this period. At first he was an enthusiastic revolutionist working hard for an ideal democratic country. Yet he became a devoted Communist later, running away from his family and friends in dreams of a good government under the control of Communism.

During the century after the western intrusion of machines and culture, the country's idyllic peace and the people's traditional beliefs were disturbed. There were tremendous changes especially in large cities. There was shifting of population from the countryside to the urban centers of new industries. Shanghai became the international city where the well-off families moved to from different provinces. Wang Lung's grandsons and granddaughters were among the grand immigration. Hundreds of young people were sent to Japan, Europe, Russia, and America to acquire new learning. No high office was ever again likely to be given to any but a person with western knowledge as is evident in *A House Divided*. By 1936-1937, in all China, 108 colleges, universities, and technical schools of college
grade were set up. There were also twenty-seven research institutes and graduate schools founded.\(^1\)

Among the gradual social changes in people's practices, customs, and beliefs, the unbinding of the Chinese women's feet was the most important and obvious. It began in the late nineteenth century, but the official issue that forbade foot-binding was in 1912. Pigtailed men were disappearing from the scene of China at the same time, too.

Despite those sweeping changes throughout the country, enlightened provinces were limited to the area above the Yangtse River and those cities connected by railway. An Englishman in 1909 walked across China on foot and found most interior farming people were still untouched by the spirit of Europeanism.\(^2\) Because of their ignorance, illiteracy, and conservativism, the peasants suffered the most from the country's political unrest; they also fought the longest against the movements of westernization.

For over fifty centuries the Chinese have been fundamentally an agricultural people in spite of post World War II industrialization. The farmers are essentially the foundation of the nation. Although China is the third biggest country in land size, most people are crowded into the few coastal and near coastal regions. The


density of population in coastal areas is a serious problem in China. For two-thirds of the big land is barren, mountainous, and too dry to be fit for farming.¹

To get a clear picture of how the farmers get along with little land and tremendous human labor, one can examine the following comparison: "The average Chinese farm household consists of 6.2 people who cultivate 4.2 acres of land; in the United States farm families average 4.2 persons and cultivate 157 acres."²

China is also known as a monsoon country. In the summer the winds blowing from the southeast bring rain to the coastal area on which the farming depends. Being far away from the Pacific Ocean, North China is sure to get a dry winter. But the summer there with abrupt and sudden showers often causes floods. The Yellow River located in the southern part of North China, having drought and floods so often, is called "the Sorrow of China." Therefore the famine and hunger of the farmers in Pearl Buck's trilogy is authentic.

The Chinese farmers have to work with bare hands laboriously and prodigiously. Even today implements are usually simple and farming methods are largely traditional.³ A son learns farming from his father's father. Mr. Winfield, making a study of the Chinese


²George B. Cressey, Asia's Lands and Peoples (New York: Whittlesey House, 1944), p. 84.

³Tawney, p. 107.
farmers in 1945, stated:

The knowledge of the average peasant today is severely limited. Most of them spend their entire lives within walking distance of the house in which they were born. Most of them have never seen a map and cannot conceive of anything alien to their immediate experience.¹

Mr. Winfield also discovered that about forty per cent of the people of the city of Shanghai, the largest and the most modern city, can read and write, and throughout the whole nation 75-80 per cent of the Chinese are illiterate.² Until the 1920's there was no farming journal available for farmers in Taiwan.

Rice in the south and wheat in the north are two principal crops. Wang Lung is a typical illiterate farmer living in the southern part of North China, Anhwei province, at the end of the 19th century. His farm is on the border between the rice and wheat regions. Pearl Buck herself tells the reader clearly where the farmers in The Good Earth live.

The people of whom I wrote did not live in that rich province (Kiangsu). Nanking was the southern city to which they came in famine. Their home was in the northern province of Anhwei, where I once had lived and known them. To that province they returned after the famine was over.³

The agricultural implements were rather simple and primitive in The Good Earth. The hoe, the harrow, the plow, and a cow were the simple pattern for each farmer. The grain was cut with a sickle

¹Winfield, p. 150.
²Ibid., p. 154.
or bill-hook and was commonly threshed on an open threshing-floor of beaten-hard earth.¹ The women shared the work. Because of these disadvantages in farming, standard of living of the people was necessarily low. Pearl Buck is realistic when she describes the work in the fields and the housekeeping of Wang Lung's family. The clothing and the food of the farming people, the thousands of people starving to death, are all dealt with in a realistic way.

The refugees and beggars of Pearl Buck in The Good Earth are real human beings living in China. The scenes she has depicted are to a large extent authentic when one compares the two passages from The Good Earth and from Land and Labour in China.

And as the spring grew into summer, the people who had gone away from the floods came back again, one by one and group by group, spent and weary with the winter and glad to be back, although where their houses had been there was nothing now but the yellow mud of the water-soaked land. But out of this mud, houses could be fashioned again, and mats brought to roof them...²

The migration most characteristic of the last decade has been a flight of refugees whose hearts remained in their home land, rather than an advance of pioneers courting opportunities and dangers of virgin territory where some of them being unable to afford the price of a railway ticket, must tramp some hundreds of miles to their destination.³

Chinese farmers love their land and are deeply attached to it. They manage by all means to keep their land, and strive to add

¹The Good Earth, p. 68.
²Ibid., p. 250.
³Tawney, p. 105.
a tiny bit to it, if possible. To a Chinese peasant, "land is one's flesh and blood." And "it is a good thing to buy land," "it is better certainly than putting money into a mud wall," lest it should be robbed by bandits.¹ They are never willing to sell the "good earth," for it is the only source of their living.

Wang Lung is representative of this view of the land. When asked whether he would sell his land while his whole family were starving to death, Wang Lung insisted, "No--no—we will never sell the land." His wife, O-lan, echoed, "the rakes and the hoe and the plow we will never sell, nor the land."² During the most seriously hungry period with no food or roots of trees to feed his family, Wang Lung stirred up a little of the "good earth" of his own land and gave it to the children.³

Land became a symbol and a sign. "It is the end of a family ...when they begin to sell the land," Wang Lung said brokenly in his death bed; "out of the land we came and into it we must go....And if you will hold our land you can live....No one can rob you of land."⁴ To be himself and to find his meaning in life, a Chinese farmer has to return to his land and his "good earth." Wang Lung could forget his "good healthful earth" when he temporarily found a new world of pleasure in the tea-house and with his charming concubines. Yet he

¹The Good Earth, pp. 51-52.
²Ibid., p. 84.
³Ibid., pp. 80-82.
⁴Ibid., p. 317.
was most himself and happiest when he returned to his earthen house, taking off his shoes to walk on the soul-comforting earth.¹ He died in his own land and went back to the earth just as a typical Chinese farmer wishes.

Wang Lung remained basically unmarked by the interlude in the south where revolutions had been going on. He was troubled later by his sons, especially Wang the Third's new idea about war, and he had to cut off his braid to follow the fashion in the city. But he did not know that both subtly and violently, the old China he had known was being undermined by western ideas and imported machines.

Sons is the picture of the shift from a totally agricultural economy to a partially industrial and commercial one. The sons of Wang Lung were no longer the thrifty and ignorant farmers like their father who belonged only to the land, and whose only pleasure was to possess more and more land. Wang the Eldest sold his father's precious land here and there to buy nice things for himself, to provide his family's living, and to educate his children. The land he inherited from his old father became a burden to him because he did not know how to till it himself. Nor did he have the ability to handle the tenants who plowed his land. He was anxious to get rid of "the good earth." Wang the Second, then, was a merchant, a new product of the recent-established commercial society. He, on the other hand, wanted to exchange the land for money to increase his

¹The Good Earth, p. 203.
enterprise of buying and selling. Money, not land, was the only thing that mattered to him. Wang the Tiger, as a military officer and a war lord later on, did not want his father's land either. He had to sell the land in order to raise an army to establish himself as a powerful war lord, a most popular profession during the early part of the twentieth century when the Manchus were thrown over and there was no emperor on the throne.

Wang Lung had "bought with silver the desire of his heart"; ironically, his sons standing beside his death bed started arranging for the selling of the land. "Out of the earth he ploughed and turned and spent himself upon. He [Wang Lung] took his life from the earth drop by drop by his sweat he wrung from it."¹ To his disappointment all his three "good sons" kept away from the "good earth." The disintegration of the Wangs, therefore, was expected. Wang Lung, in order to keep his land, arranged for Wang the Third to stay at home to plow the land. He did not allow the third son to go to school. He wanted him to remain as an illiterate, ignorant, thrifty, and devoted good farmer as he had been. But none could go against the times and tides, even a willful and strong person like Wang Lung.²

Fortunately, the Wangs found the hope of prosperity in the third generation. Wang Yuan, the only son of Wang the Tiger,

¹Sons, pp. 32-38.
²Ibid., pp. 142-143.
inherited his grandfather Wang Lung's unquestionable love for and devotion to the good earth of China. The family's identity with the earth and agricultural welfare was found again. Agricultural engineering was his interest and his major when he was a student in the United States' college for six years. He then returned to his good land of China, and to his grandfather's little low earthen house.¹ Wang Yuan again, like his grandfather, treasured and worshipped the earth but in a different way. Wang Yuan was a learned farmer with a Ph.D. who knew the newest methods of farming, and who had seen the big world. Prosperity was naturally in view, and famine, floods, and drought were gradually disappearing from the farming society when more and more learned, scholarly farmers had come back from abroad to serve their own people. Farmers were no longer illiterate, and agricultural science was introduced to the land-loving Chinese peasantry. The promising youth would still inherit their ancestors' trait of keeping and loving their "good earth," but famine would no longer be able to threaten the peasantry and drive them out of their "House of Earth."

CHAPTER IV

TRADITIONAL TEACHING IN CHINA: FAMILY

LIFE IN HOUSE OF EARTH

As noted in the previous chapter, China is still in the process of changing, and there is difference in progress toward westernization throughout the nation. It is not surprising to find writers who write differently in their presentations of China. Yet the Chinese people have had the longest continuous history of customs and ideas of any people. Although there is no single formula for social behavior of any human being, there is a certain uniformity in China, where the great melting pot has been in existence for more than five thousand years.

This in consequence raises the question of where a writer can find this uniformity to represent the true Chinese to the world. In dealing with a country, the common man cannot be ignored. Ancient Greece was not entirely peopled by men like Sophocles. Nor is China totally populated with Confucian scholars. To talk of Greece and think only of Sophocles and Pericles is to get a wrong picture of the Athenians. To talk of China, one has to know the four-fifths of the farming folk of the total Chinese population. The farmers, so full of courage and patience, so overwhelmed with suffering and simple happiness, and so untouched by modern western influence for many centuries are the real carriers of Chinese culture. The only
way to understand the typical and traditional China is to look at the common people, not to search for the exotic or unusual.

A true picture of the changing family values will be revealed by penetrating beneath the superficial quaintness of mannerism and Confucianism. One also has to see beneath the strange Chinese customs and superstitions and look for real manhood, fatherhood, womanhood, and motherhood. Therefore, a survey of the traditional teaching in China is helpful to the understanding of Wang Lung's family life.

Five hundred years before Christ, Confucius taught the Chinese the supreme value of the individual and the family. According to Confucianism, before a person worries about his duty to the state and to the world, he should establish himself, both morally and intellectually, as a perfect gentleman. After being qualified as a gentleman, he is able to establish himself as a dignified household head. Therefore, the essence of the Chinese mind takes its root in individualism and family welfare.

Chinese people have been traditionally family-minded rather than social-minded. And China is a nation of individualists. According to Lin Yutang, the word "society" does not exist as an idea in Chinese thought.¹ In the Confucian social and political philosophy we see the direct transition from the family, "chia," to the state, "kuo," as successive stages of human organization. "The nearest equivalent to the notion of society is a compound of two words,

¹Yutang Lin, p. 172.
"Kuochia" or "state-family."¹ "Public spirit" is a new term, as is "civic consciousness" and "social service." Thus the family mind is only a form of magnified selfishness and individualism. This belief of individualism also results in a lack of interest in politics. Even today, in any provincial town of Taiwan, a traveller can find the Chinese in his long gown, as placid, as contented, as happy-go-lucky, as if nothing could shake him out of his dream.

The Chinese always say of themselves that their nation resembles "a tray of sand," each grain being a family. The common people are as ignorant as they are careless about politics of their own nation. Neither do they customarily pay any attention to social welfare. But within the family, there is a strong sense of ties and obligation. According to an old Chinese proverb, "a Chinese shovels only the snow falling in front of his own house."

As a moralist, Confucius also provided the five human relationships in society, namely, father-son, king-subjects, husband-wife, brother-brother, and friend-friend. The moral ethics of Confucianism binds the subject in unconditional obedience to the ruler. It also defines other social ties, such as complete subjection of a son to his father, a wife to her husband. Filial piety is regarded the first of all virtues. The principal idea is the status which puts every man and woman in a definite place in society.

¹Yutang Lin, p. 172.
In the twentieth century the common belief is that men are created equal; yet the inequality of women in China can easily be seen from the Confucian teaching: "Only the hypocrites and women are the two kinds of people who are hard to deal with." The position in which a Chinese woman is placed in society is clear. The seclusion of women had been for centuries severe. They had no social activity. Most of them were uneducated. Illiteracy was very common among women and farmers. Home economics was taught by mothers. Foot-binding was not a symbol of suppression, but a sign of a woman's delicacy; yet it restricted their freedom. Having to live in the homes of their parents-in-law, they were practically their servants with no freedom nor privacy. Most peculiar of all, a Chinese boy is told that he cannot grow up if he passes under a woman's pants on the washing line.

As a political philosopher, Confucius held firmly to the belief that the past contained the model on which the present and all future society should be patterned. He sought the reformation of the world by looking up to the virtue of a Golden age of Yao and Shun whose existence is still controversial in the Chinese history. Therefore, the Chinese have been traditionally conservative in politics, looking backward rather than forward.

Since Confucian literature has been the basic of education and public instruction, it is not surprising to find that the Chinese are individualistic, conservative, obedient to parents and established
rules, and contemptuous of females. All these result in stagnation in the progress of the whole nation associated with modern industrial society.

In addition, Lao-tse, a contemporary of Confucius, preached Taoism. Confucianism has too much realism and too little room for fancy and imagination; Taoism is a mystical, romantic idealism. In other words, Taoism stands for the world of wonder and mystery for which Confucianism fails to provide. Lao-tse, like Emerson, taught the people to find themselves by returning to nature and worshipping primitive simplicity. According to Taoism, there are many roads leading to the Great Right, Tao. A man must not go against any of them. He must listen to the variety of opinions and be amused. Taoism objects to the artificiality and responsibilities placed upon the individuals by society. Therefore, Taoism, the romantic side of the Chinese character, shows itself in individuality and patient endurance, an outstanding quality of the Chinese people. This mystical creed also appeals to the Chinese who dislike regulation and exactness. The Chinese attitude of detachment with which they regard affairs not immediately concerning them also results from Taoism. In *The Good Earth* O-lan is the representative of all these characteristics.

Pearl Buck's trilogy is almost a history of a typical Chinese family, its falling, rising, and the complicated relationship among

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1Yutang Lin, p. 115.
the various relatives; therefore, a more detailed discussion of Chinese families is desirable for understanding her work.

The family system is the root of Chinese society, from which all Chinese social characteristics derive. From a big family the individual learns the first lesson in social obligation between man and man, the necessity of mutual adjustment, self-control, and a sense of duty and obligation toward the parents and family elders. Wang Lung's respect for and obligation to his father and his relationship with his uncle's family is a good example. Besides being a dutiful son to "old head," Wang Lung also had to put up with and feed his uncle's family, a group of "jovial, sly, and hungry, lazy" men and women. Despite all the dissatisfaction he had at heart, Wang Lung did not dare to complain or criticize his uncle. Later, as a rich landlord, Wang Lung had to assume the responsibility of feeding another family, his uncle's. For according to the Sacred Edicts,¹ it is commanded that a man is never to correct his elder. Neither should he let any relative starve if he himself has enough to eat.

Among the family society, each member is supposed to keep its face and to give its members favor and privileges. Therefore, if a man is more capable than others in the family and holds a high governmental position, he is supposed to give the best chance and

¹Sacred Edicts is a book containing imperial orders of Chinese emperors.
position to his relatives. Also, a wealthy man is not supposed to let any member of his family lineage beg for a living or be in any worse situation. If he does so, he loses not only his own face but also the whole family's face, which none of the Chinese can afford to lose. This Chinese characteristic explains why Wang the Eldest and Wang the Second gave financial support to Wang the Third when he was still a low military officer trying to raise an army like most other war lords. In return, both of the elder brothers hoped that some day Wang the Third might become an important military leader who would protect the whole House of Wang. They hoped their sons might grow great through an uncle's high position. The same thing happened to Wang Yuan when he was a professor teaching in Nanking. He was constantly urged to find positions for his cousins who were not well-educated. Chinese people sincerely believe that "charity begins at home."

All these Chinese teachings and beliefs mentioned in the first part of this chapter shaped the life of the Wang's in the House of Earth. Wang Lung lived with his "old head" in an earthen house roofed with wheat straw from their own field. As this writer can testify similar farm houses built of mud and roofed with rice thatch are still very common on Taiwan farms. A family which is able to tear down one of the mud walls and replace it with strong red bricks shows signs of prosperity. Not only were housing conditions bad for Wang Lung but also the farmer's material goods for daily meals were scarce. Water was precious because of the continuous glittering
sunshine in North China where Wang Lung's family lived. Tea and rice were kept for special occasions, for both were considered as luxuries in life. The earth could not bear enough fruit for a family of two, Wang Lung and his aged father.

As a dutiful and pious son, Wang Lung took up the responsibilities of housekeeping and serving his old father; yet he worked in the fields at the same time. He was the man in the family. His father was too old to contribute anything to the family. Yet even in a family of two, the Chinese family tradition still influenced the conduct and conversation of father and son. The nagging father never forgot his responsibility to preach. Even on Wang Lung's wedding day his father found fault with his wastefulness although it was Wang Lung who earned a living for the family. The father never let Wang Lung forget that to him was due the son's full time dedication:

I have ploughed land, says he to his son, and I have sown seed and I have reaped harvest and thus have I filled my rice bowl. And I have beyond this begotten a son and son's son.

Wang Lung's efforts to please his father are apparent during his behavior at the barber's. The father always had the authority to make decisions for Wang Lung. When asked by a barber whether to cut off his braid because it was no longer in fashion for town people to grow braids, Wang Lung answered unhesitatingly:

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1The Good Earth, pp. 1-20.
2Ibid., p. 82.
'I cannot cut it off without asking my father!' and the barber laughed and skirted the round spot of hair.¹

Although Wang Lung was the man in the house, when it came to the question of marriage, it was the father who decided and who arranged for Wang Lung. Like most Chinese, the Wangs believed that marriage was a family affair. The desires of the parents and the needs of the family took precedence over Wang Lung's personal interests. At heart Wang Lung dreaded having an ugly servant for a wife or a pretty one who had been ruined by the rich lords and their sons. Yet he had no power to state his feelings or worries. The old father felt,

with the weddings costing as they do in these evil days and every woman wanting gold rings and silk clothes...there remain only slaves to be had for the poor.²

Therefore, the "old head" went to the House of Hwang to ask for a wife for his son, Wang Lung. The only thing Wang Lung knew about his wife-to-be was that she had been a slave who had neither pock-marks nor a split lip.³ O-lan thus appeared as a stranger to her father-in-law and to her husband, Wang Lung. The plain-looking and large-footed, inarticulate O-lan turned out to be as good a servant as the family had expected.

²Ibid., p. 10.
³Ibid., p. 11.
From the first day that the bride arrived at the Wangs, she had the duties of, and little more status than, a servant. She was expected to release Wang Lung from the drudgery of cleaning and cooking, bringing the father-in-law morning tea or hot water, and seeing to his comfort in every way. She was also expected to serve him meals whenever he wished them, with her eyes lowered and her mouth shut. To her husband, Wang Lung, whom she had not met until the day of her marriage, she was also subservient. She must accept him, even his bad temper, without complaint. Besides providing his meals and keeping his clothes in order, she also had to make his and the rest of the family's clothes and cloth shoes (traditional Chinese comfortable shoes made of heavy cloth).

Above all she was expected to provide the family with a son—the means of continuing their line of descent. The birth of a son ends the anxiety in her husband's family and gives her at last an undeniable status in the family. It is legal for the husband to marry a second wife, and the first wife is supposed to encourage him to do so, if she fails in her duty of bearing a son for the family.

All these duties required of a daughter-in-law, the "brown, common-faced" O-lan performed very well. And Wang Lung owed her unquestioning devotion. The mud house was transformed, the sparse meals gained new flavor, the cotton quilt became soft. Wang Lung sometimes could not help feeling proud of having such a wife.¹ She

¹The Good Earth, pp. 26-31.
kept working on one after another "until the three rooms seemed clean and prosperous."¹

Furthermore, O-lan took her place beside her husband and worked in the fields with Wang Lung shoulder to shoulder. Besides tending animals and fowl, O-lan helped Wang Lung to survive through the famine by begging and to return to their home from the South where the family went as refugees. Everything was the result of her extreme practicality and wisdom and hard work.

To crown all, she bore a son in time who would carry on the Wangs' family line. O-lan did bear son after son just as the "Ancient Mistress" had wished her when she left her miserable life as a servant in the kitchen of the Great House.² In China, the wealth of every family was counted by how many sons a family had. Nobody asked how much money but how many sons and grandsons one had.

In China of old times, a wife was regarded as part of a man's property; therefore, when Wang Lung got prosperous and became a landlord, he wanted to have all his belongings to match his fame, including his wife. And after all, O-lan was merely a "faithful, speechless serving-maid, who is only a serving maid, nothing more."³ Wang Lung eventually got tired of O-lan's plain looks and reproached her:

¹The Good Earth, p. 29.
²Ibid., p. 20.
³Ibid., p. 30.
I mean, cannot you buy a little oil for your hair as other women do and make yourself a new coat of black cloth? And those shoes you wear are not fit for a land proprietor's wife, such as you are.¹

Then "he was ashamed that he reproached this creature who through all these years had followed him faithfully as a dog..."²

Wang Lung was a willful person. He found that "before the law he had no complaints against his wife, for she had borne him three good sons, and there was no excuse for him except his desire."³ Yet as the Chinese common proverb goes, "Even a shrewd man of great ability cannot get past a pretty girl guarding a gate." Wang Lung first took concubines, a typical prostitute, Lotus, from a tea-house, then Pear Blossom, a bondmaid whom he had bought for Lotus. The pretext for this decision was that taking concubines was a customary practice of wealthy men. A few concubines in the house are a luxury and decoration that a gentleman of leisure and money should enjoy.

As a wife of such a wealthy man, O-lan could only shed tears for her fate and misery. She had no right to oppose her husband's willfulness and unreasonableness. "Nor did she have a mother's house to go back to anywhere."⁴ Poor O-lan had been sold to slavery

¹The Good Earth, p. 150.
²Ibid.
³Ibid., p. 174.
⁴Ibid., p. 181.
and had lost all connection with her parents. The only solution was her resignation to events and her typical Chinese quality—patient endurance.

Now a house with more than one woman will never get peace.¹ And it was very true in Wang's family. Even the moral ethics of Confucian teaching cannot keep every member of the family in his definite place all the time. There was ceaseless friction between the women of Wang Lung. For the most part their conflict was wordless, expressed only by emotional distance between them but on occasion the tempers flared. O-lan did not yield to her husband's concubine, Lotus. She sustained herself with stubborn and unexpected resistance. For instance, she continued to be a servant to the whole family but refused to serve or cook for Lotus. Neither did she want to see Lotus. In order not to face the fact that Lotus now took over her position as Wang Lung's favorite, she avoided the places where Lotus might appear. She also never talked to Cuckoo who had been O-lan's fellow servant in the House of Hwang and then became Lotus's personal servant. Actually O-lan tried in every way to give Cuckoo a hard time whenever Cuckoo came to the kitchen to prepare food for her mistress. No open quarrel ever resulted, but Wang Lung had to build another kitchen to solve the problem between his women in the house. In China, two kitchens in one big house is a sign of family division and decline.

¹The Good Earth, p. 191.
The conflict in the next generation was even more severe between Wang Lung's daughters-in-law. Both of his daughters-in-law were betrothed by their parents, a traditional Chinese marriage. And they both fulfilled their duty of managing the household and bearing sons. But the Wife of Wang the Eldest and the Wife of Wang the Second differed in their family background and attitudes toward life. The Wife of Wang the Second was a country woman and the other was from the city. The one from the country did not care for the outward appearance of her hair and clothing and could eat any coarse food. She had neither lady-like gracefulness nor the proper education required of a woman of her own day. On the other hand, the Wife of Wang the Eldest had a sound education. She made a clear distinction between what was proper and what was out of propriety. Living in the same house and sharing the same family name, she always considered herself as the first lady in the house of Wang, especially after the death of O-lan. She also regarded herself as superior and despised her younger sister-in-law. She constantly complained to her husband that she was mad with

all she [her sister-in-law] does and is. When I come into a room where she is she pretends to be at some task from which she cannot rise and give me place, and she is so red and loud I cannot bear her if she speaks at all, no, not even if I see her pass.¹

Naturally these two women had had endless wordless friction. Eventually both of them learned to hate each other with great hatred.

¹Sons, p. 40.
"It was born in a hundred small quarrels of women whose children must live and play together and fight each other like cats and dogs."¹ Their anger burst out when the Wife of Wang the Eldest closed the door on the other while she was nursing her baby in public on the street. The husbands had to agree to separate the big house of Wang into two and use two different gates.² Thus the Wangs divided first emotionally, then physically, despite the traditional belief that an ideal family consists of generations of fathers and sons living together.

In an ideal Chinese family, all members of the big family live under the same roof, sharing their labor and their wealth. In this traditional communal family life, trouble and friction happen not only among women but also among men and brothers. In this type of big family system each man and woman, especially the child, is safely sheltered and protected. Children are usually spoiled, especially the eldest son who is not only the first son of his parents but also the most important inheritor of grandparents who expect the little boy to carry on the family name. Wang the Eldest was a typical product of this family system. He was used to getting what he wanted and did not learn any trade, but he knew how to spend money. Wang the Second did not have such an important role as his elder brother

¹The Good Earth, p. 320.
did. In addition, he was a miser, a "yellow" and "small" merchant who was in the business of buying and selling.

Conflict arose from their different points of view toward money. Even on Wang the Second's wedding day the two of them quarreled over how much money they should spend. It was Wang the Second's wedding day, yet he insisted on simplifying the wedding ceremony:

It is an odd thing for the wedding to cost ten times as much as the bride. Here is our inheritance that should be divided between...being spent now for nothing but the pride of my elder brother.¹

But to Wang the Eldest, a wedding without the required formalities was losing the rich Wang family's face. Wang the Eldest did not believe the family was humble or "from the land and rooted in the land." Besides, "men in the town were beginning to call the Wangs 'the Great Family Wang.' It is fitting that we live somewhat suitably to that name, and if my brother cannot see beyond the meaning of silver for its own sake," said Wang the Eldest to his aged father, Wang Lung, "I and my wife, we will uphold the honor of the name."²

Although the two brothers did not and dared not quarrel under the authority of their father, each had quite a hard time trying to be tolerant of the other in such communal living.

Throughout the trilogy, sons of Wang Lung and their wives did not have any specific names. Their names, such as Wang the Eldest,

¹The Good Earth, p. 297.
²Ibid., p. 298.
Wife of Wang the Second and Wang the Third or Wife of Wang the Eldest, indicate their family position, or status. Later when there were two wives for Wang the Third, it was hard to make a distinction. However, they were called the Learned wife of Wang the Third and the Country wife of Wang the Third. Each member of the family through his own given name learned his position and duty and behaved himself according to his status in order to suit the whole family. Although Wang the Second had the ability and the ambition to manage the affairs of the House of Wang after the death of Wang Lung, and Wang the Eldest did not have the brains and training for this complicated task, Wang the Second had no family status to support him. He was still the second, therefore inferior. He was not supposed to go beyond his definite position to insult his elder brother. He must "bury it all in his heart and answer with smiles and welcome"\(^1\) to his elder brother's decision and order. His agony was "a thing to be borne."\(^2\) He was, therefore, eager to be independent of this complicated family life to reduce his dissatisfaction of being the second in the family, seeing the big family falling apart.

Chinese society demands of a young man that he care for his aged parents. If he does not, he is an outcast in his home district and under suspicion everywhere else. It is unthinkable for a son to let his parents live alone in one house and his family in another.

\(^1\)The Good Earth, p. 181.

\(^2\)Ibid.
The old Chinese saying interprets best the Chinese notion of a son's duty to his parents: "Save enough grains for famine period; bear enough sons to protect against one's old age." The number of sons one has is the greatest guarantee of one's happy old age.

On the other hand, raising a girl in the house is a luxury. Not only does the family have to provide a girl's handsome dowry, but as soon as a daughter is old enough to be useful in the house or in the fields, she is also old enough to marry and leave the family to give her labour and sons to another family. It was really tragic for O-lan to kill her baby-girl with her own hands after giving birth to a second girl. She felt that during the famine period the family "could not afford to feed another slave." ¹ The family attitude toward females is shown in this practical, though inhuman, action. How insignificant and inferior a daughter was in a Chinese family is also well-illustrated.

Another Chinese family characteristic is the belief that one has only one father, but one can have as many children as he wishes. Wang Lung, for instance, brought along his aged father to the South as a refugee. He did not complain of the burden of an old man who was too old to walk. And Wang Lung had to carry him on his back despite the fact that he had little sons and O-lan, having just given birth, who needed care more than the "old head." Old people of a Chinese family are well-respected and provided for.

¹The Good Earth, p. 78.
Old grandparents usually share their beds with their grandchildren, enjoying the warmth of their young bodies and the satisfaction that they have by their own efforts produced at least two generations for the family. When O-lan had a second son it was Wang Lung's, and any Chinese pious son's duty to offer his aged father the young grandson to sleep with him. And Wang Lung proudly did so.¹ No such practice in Sons and A House Divided was found because times had changed between the three generations.

Above all a pious son should give a big funeral and a fine coffin to insure his parents' comfort and happiness after death. A fine coffin made of the best quality of wood should be bought for the aged parents before their death for their consolation. Wang Lung did that for his "old head" and his three sons did the same thing for him.² The biggest funerals were both given to the "old head" and Wang Lung because, after all, the Wangs were then a family of prosperity and decency. They had to do what was proper for the sake of face and the piety required of a Chinese son. Genuine love for the deceased Wang Lung was undermined.³

In her evaluation of the Chinese family Pearl Buck is very accurate in the idea that love and thrift are the two things which make a family prosperous. Without them, the family will be scattered

¹The Good Earth, p. 55.
²Ibid., p. 257, and Sons, p. 4.
³Sons, pp. 9-22.
and divided emotionally and physically. The Wangs were not an exception. Every reader can observe how much love, warmth, devotion, and comfort O-lan brought into the poor three-room earthen house of Wang, how hard both Wang Lung and O-lan worked together, just like two buffalos, from sunrise till sunset. These were the two qualities, love and thrift, that brought the Wangs happiness and wealth. But peace, love, and prosperity were immediately threatened the day when Wang Lung entitled himself to occasional visits at tea-houses, flower-girls, and finally concubines one after another. Love in the family began to vanish. Misery and sorrow fell upon O-lan and ended in early death. Hatred began to take possession of Lotus and O-lan. And the three sons and two daughters were confused by the complicated family relationship.

Many women later appeared in the House of Wang. First were Wang Lung's two concubines, Lotus and Pear Blossom, then his daughters-in-law, and a great many slaves and granddaughters. But there never was the kind of love and thrift O-lan had once brought to the family. Nor was the type of thrift, quiet, patient endurance, and practicality O-lan had demonstrated found in the coming generations. Whenever there was more than one woman in a house \[ \text{a big family} \], there was jealousy and selfishness operating in the hearts of the whole family members. And genuine love became impossible. And since there was no love and thrift, the Wangs' family was not going to stay united and prosperous. Although the traditional Chinese belief is that an
ideal family should have as many generations and as many sons and daughters-in-law as possible living under the same roof, many defects of this communal life divided the Wangs emotionally and physically. In order to reduce the hatred and conflict and in order to keep up with the social changes in New China, the Wangs, in reality and in emotional family feelings, were scattered in the last of the trilogy, A House Divided.
CHAPTER V

GENERATIONAL AND CULTURAL DISTANCE

In the third novel of her trilogy, *A House Divided*, Pearl Buck leaves her peasants, brutal war lords, and cruel bandits, for the third generation. Although the farmers and war lords were China's chief social problems, they were by no means the only one nor the most interesting. The impact of Western civilization upon the Confucian social order had created a violent conflict between the young and the old, parents and children. There, forever, was an unbridgeable gap existing between the young and the old, between two different generations, and between the East and the West. The gap is also found in the first two novels, *The Good Earth* and *Sons*, although it is much more obvious in the third novel, *A House Divided*. However, the unpassable gap dividing the young and the old in the first two novels is generational distance. In *A House Divided*, however, the chasm dividing the nearness of individuals such as parents-sons, mother-in-law-daughters-in-law, and friend-friend is not so much by generation as by different cultural backgrounds.

Wang Lung, in the first generation of the trilogy, was a dutiful and pious son. He fulfilled all the obligations required of a good son. His "old head" found no complaint against him. The old man ended his life, satisfied and peaceful, with a big moving
Wang Lung, on the contrary, found no peace with his sons and daughters-in-law so that he had to retreat to the earthen house which had been deserted for years. When he died, a big funeral procession with many hired mourners and paper furniture burning for the deceased Wang Lung was only the rich House of Wang's formality which required no sincerity nor zeal for filial piety of his sons and grandsons. Wang Lung was certainly a more grateful son than his sons in the next generation.

The process of modern times and a new educational system has also molded new conditions of social life. The young man no longer welcomed the old man's experience and knowledge of tradition. In a society striving to get rid of the past and eager for the new, the old man no longer represents wisdom nor authority. Tradition becomes bondage. The youth cries violently for new spirit, independence, and freedom. In the earthen House of Wang, the eldest son first set the example that would later cause endless trouble for his father. "If I am to be a scholar," said Wang the Eldest as a tiny lad, "I would like to go to the south to the city and enter a great school where I can learn what is to be learned." But Wang Lung as an illiterate farmer could not see the need of more learning for his eldest son who knew how to tell "a letter that has the wood

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1 The Good Earth, p. 275.
2 Ibid., p. 326.
3 Ibid., p. 225.
radical when it should have the water radical."¹ Wang Lung regarded his son's demand as nonsensical. Yet the young man was not going to give up. He stared at his father with hatred and went on: "Well, and I will, then, for go south I will, and I will not stay in this stupid house and be watched like a child, and in this little town which is no better than a village! I will go out and learn something and see other parts."² And south Wang the Eldest went in spite of the father's objection and confusion.

Wang the Third carried this rebellion even further. He ran away from home to rid himself of parental despotic treatment. At the age of eighteen the lad had already decided to "be a soldier and go forth to wars." Wang Lung, the aged father on hearing this cried out angrily, "Now what madness is this, and am I never to have peace with my sons?" The old man tried all means to dissuade his son from this decision by coaxing, "My son, it is said from ancient times that men do not take good iron to make a nail nor a good man to make a soldier," and "it is a disgrace to a man like me, a man of silver and of land, to have a son who is a soldier."³ What Wang Lung said was all in vain. Wang Lung was too "old-minded," too ignorant to comprehend the meaning of war, freedom, and revolution which now possessed his son's heart. There was no bridge for Wang Lung to

¹The Good Earth, p. 206.
²Ibid., p. 226.
³Ibid., pp. 323-326.
pass into an understanding of the passion and conviction of his sons. Wang Lung's youngest son ran away from home eventually and where he went no one knew.

The possibility that the youth might run away from home strengthened the position of the youth who stayed at home, and gave him the courage to defend his right against his parents' abuses. The son of Wang the Eldest, for instance, had made good use of the method to get what he wanted. As a young man and the eldest son in the family, he had gone to a new sort of school in town. There he had learned many things including that "all young men ought to choose their own maid to wife." When his parents urged him to marry the girl they had picked out for him, he threatened to "leave home and never see his parents any more, and hang himself on a beam." The only solution Wang the Eldest found for his son's new ideas and his threats was "-let be-you shall do as you please,”. Although Wang the Eldest was horrified that his son had "the silly thought of choosing a wife for himself" and did not need a "go-between" for his marriage, he had to give in.

The age difference between Wang the Third and his two elder brothers also made Wang the Third, the youngest son of Wang Lung, almost belong to another generation. To Wang the Third, his elder brothers were "like men who were blind and deaf and dumb because they

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1Sons, pp. 397-399.
2Ibid., p. 212.
did not see what they were or what they had made their sons."\footnote{1}{Sons, p. 34.}
But on the other hand, Wang the Eldest and Wang the Second regarded their youngest brother as a stranger who did not even understand or care to stay for three years of mourning at home for their father's death as any pious son should do for decency and face's sake.\footnote{2}{Ibid., p. 369.}

A comparison between the first and the last wedding taking place in House of Earth also shows the generational distance between the first and the third generations. On his wedding day, Wang Lung went to the House of Hwang on foot to get his bride whom he had never met. On his way he bought two pounds of pork, six ounces of beef, and a little fish, and fresh squares of beancurd with his scanty silver which he held as preciously as his own blood. O-lan, the bride, had to prepare a wedding feast for the seven guests they invited.\footnote{3}{The Good Earth, pp. 4-15.} Ai-lan, one of Wang Lung's granddaughters got married in very modern fashion. The feeling and desire of Wang Lung was neglected, but romantic love and courtship had already taken possession of his granddaughter. She went so far in free flirting with men that an unexpected child was conceived before the wedding. The marriage, though a disgrace to the family, was still according to a new fashion, "very different from the simple way in which her grandfather Wang Lung had taken his wives, and very different too from the old formal
wedding of his sons in set and appointed fashion by the forefathers.\textsuperscript{1} There was music from foreign instruments, flowers set everywhere which alone cost many hundreds of "silver pieces." Guests were numerous and vehicles were uncountable. In a grand hotel the couple got married and then after the wedding, the newlyweds went on their honeymoon for a month.

Generational distance shows not only in the dramatic incidents mentioned above but also in Pearl Buck's skillful story-telling throughout the trilogy. The distance between three generations is apparent in the material comfort the Wangs had suffered and enjoyed. Wang Lung, the first generation in House of Earth, lived in an earthen house. The reader can almost hear the squeaking door and see the tumbling little hut. Dressed in the wadding of a torn filthy winter garment, he had only blue cotton cloth as his wedding suit. Water was precious and tea was like silver.\textsuperscript{2} The Wangs lived their lives as a day to day battle for survival. They even had to go begging in the south when famine came.

Wang Lung's three sons, on the contrary, could go to the south for more learning. As sons of a rich landlord, they lived in the biggest house in town and depended for their livelihood on the land inherited from Wang Lung. Dressed in satin or silken robes, they dined on "winter bamboo, shrimp's roe, southern fish and shellfish

\textsuperscript{1}A House Divided, pp. 239-240.

\textsuperscript{2}The Good Earth, pp. 3-7.
from the southern seas and pigeons' eggs" plus wine and fresh green tea.¹ His grandsons could toy with music and go abroad for a foreign education as Yuan and Sheng did. The following scene of Wang Lung's eldest grandson as a young lord in a rich man's house shows how much different he was from his grandfather, Wang Lung.

Wang the Eldest saw his son lying in the silken quilts of his bed, and the young man wore silk to his very skin, and his skin was like a beauty's skin, oiled and perfumed and his hair was perfumed and smoothed with foreign oil.²

None could see, none would have dreamed that his grandfather was one Wang Lung, a farmer and a man of earth. The grandson was badly spoiled and grew "old here in idle slothful pleasure."³ With his fur coat on his back, he went out daily and kept himself busy gambling, dancing, and flirting with girls.⁴

The change of times and the influence of Western civilization brought the Chinese youth all kinds of material goods, individual freedom, and independence from traditional teaching and parental control. Most of the young people conformed to whatever was newest and most western. The old people on the other hand blamed everything on the "foreign devils" who had come to plunder and rob the land where they had no business at all.

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¹The Good Earth, p. 287.
²Ibid., p. 280.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 211.
Besides the rebellious sons and grandsons, young women also talked ruthlessly of how in the new days men and women were freed from their parents' rule, and how man and woman were created equal. This emancipation of women and daughters-in-law is also found in *House of Earth*. In the previous chapter the writer talked about the slave-like and slave-position of all women in China. The modern tendency is to break the big communal family life into small ones. The generational differences can be seen again by a comparison between the four daughters-in-law in the Wang's family. O-lan, Wife of Wang Lung of the first generation, being an old-fashioned and obedient wife, had no control over her husband. Neither did she dare to fight or argue with Wang Lung when he took concubines. She blamed herself for not being pretty enough, and therefore, deserted by her husband. In order to avoid her daughter's having a miserable married life like hers, she bound the little girl's feet tighter and tighter every day.¹ To O-lan, Wang Lung was almost her Heaven and her God whom she had no right to go against.

The Wife of Wang the Eldest in the next generation, on the other hand, always told her husband how everything should be done "and Wang the Eldest listened and then went out from her and gave commands as his own."² She was the real director of the House of

¹ *The Good Earth*, pp. 238-239.
² *Sons*, pp. 22-23.
Wang behind the scene. Wang the Eldest and his concubine were constantly at the mercy of her temper and orders.

The Learned Wife of Wang the Third was married in traditional manner and had only one daughter, Ai-lan. As a learned woman, she was not as superstitious as her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. She had not sewed "a row of small gold Buddhas" upon her child's cap as tokens of good fortune as her mother-in-law had done before her.¹ Nor did she, like her elder sister-in-law, let her child wear "a gold ring in one ear to deceive the gods" in order to make the gods think the child was as worthless as a beggar.² When she was discussing with her husband about the girl's future, she said: "I shall not bind her feet and let us send her to a school and she can wed whom she likes."³ And this learned woman did follow her own new idea and moved to Shanghai in order to educate her only daughter.

Wang Lung's granddaughter-in-law was another new type of woman. She would not live as a servant in her mother-in-law's house. At night she complained to her husband, "What-am I to be a servant to that old proud woman? Does she not know we young women are free now-a-days and we do not serve our mother-in-law any more? We women today do not bow down before anyone."⁴ She was anxious to get away

¹The Good Earth, p. 47.
²Sons, p. 215.
³Ibid., p. 372.
⁴Ibid., p. 492.
from her mother-in-law to the big city Shanghai to see the world. Yet even that did not solve her problem either. Later she still complained, "with this house full of servants she will call me to pour her bowl of tea,...And she blames me if a measure more of rice is used this month than last! I swear I cannot bear it. Not many women nowadays will live in the house with their husband's parents, and no more will I."¹

This spirit of revolt against the past sometimes went too far for the old and unprepared parents to understand and bear. It was very pathetic for Wang Yuan's mother, a lonely and isolated woman to express her worry about her daughter-in-law: "I hope she is a decent maid and one who can cut a coat and turn a fish as it should be turned. And I hope I may see her sometimes, though I know very well these new times anyhow, and the young do what they will..."²

The poor ignorant woman did not have the least idea about her only precious son Wang Yuan's marriage. The woman who was obliged to marry an unpassionate war lord without any choice was now overshadowed by her son Wang Yuan who belonged to a completely different generation and had received a western education. Wang Yuan stated confidently and boldly about his parents' arranged marriage for him,

¹A House Divided, p. 48.
²Ibid., pp. 223-224.
"It is true I do not belong to my father's time; it is true he has not this right nowadays over me. It is true...It is true...

Wang Yuan represented the fight of the youth against the domination of the elders, especially his provincial war lord father. Wang the Tiger also fought against Wang Lung, but that was merely generational distance. Wang Yuan educated in Canton and Shanghai was saturated with western ideas. This educational system represented the youth of both sexes striving for the marriage of personal choice and self-realization. Actually, the third novel of the trilogy, *A House Divided*, is a study contrasting the folkways and beliefs between the East and the West. The novel ends with Wang Yuan standing outside the earthen house where his grandfather had been born and feeling that he must always waver between the old and the new, between the East and the West. Emory S. Bogardus believes that the main theme of cultural distance runs from the first page to the closing paragraphs of the book.²

Wang Yuan being the only precious son of Wang the Tiger had no individual freedom to talk about because his war lord father wanted to shape him for a Lord of War. In a family with a strong-willed and hot-tempered father, Yuan hated the smothering life and the closed society of the village. Eventually he was able to get away to a

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¹*A House Divided*, p.

²Emory S. Bogardus, "Cultural Distance in *A House Divided*," *Sociology and Social Research*, XX (May, 1936), 373-377.
military school in the south although at heart he disliked blood and killing.¹ A few years later, when he returned to his warlord father in the uniform of a revolutionist, Wang the Tiger drew his sword and was about to kill his own son. For his only son became an enemy to all war lords in the north. But a sense of parental nearness stayed his hands. No actual killing took place, but the bridge for mutual understanding and compromise had been forever broken.

Although filial piety is the first of all virtues and Chinese children are expected to make great sacrifices for their parents, yet the sense of patriotism and self-realization are often stronger; filial piety is often undermined when it is in conflict with a young man's heart. When Yuan returned to his father after their first open quarrel, Yuan felt his father had "grown like a little child again." He felt he should be a dutiful son and decided to treat Wang the Tiger "with tenderness and no anger."² The resolution was short-lived however; in a few minutes the father looked obscure, unpleasant because of his not being washed or shaven, his robe dribbling with food and wine. "There was not anything about his father that he loved." He announced to his old father, "I will not have my body used like this to tie life to yours...I have always hated you..."³

¹A House Divided, pp. 10-17.
²Ibid., p. 28.
³Ibid., pp. 28-33.
Yuan stormed out of his father's house, went to Shanghai first, then farther away from his father to America.

Parental love alone bridges the gap once in a while between cultural differences. When Yuan and his cousin were in danger of being executed for joining a certain political conspiracy, Wang the Tiger and Wang the Eldest led in supplying the money to bribe the high officials for sparing their sons' lives. True fatherhood was shown in spite of the lack of communication and understanding between father and son.

Filial piety drew father and son nearer although this traditional practice has been a disappearing shadow in the Chinese society. When Yuan saw the familiar square trembling letters of his father's handwriting, he was always touched with an old tenderness. He decided to pay a visit to his old father and his uncle's family in the earthen house after his return from the United States. Tragically, he found himself disgusted and disappointed and "a stranger with these folk who were his own blood," for "he had a life to live they could not conceive, and their life was as small as death to him." Even though he had been away from home for only six years, Yuan found nothing to say to his father, nor the old man to him. Such is the true, although sad, cultural and educational distance that may exist between parents and their own children, between the youth of the same age but of different cultural backgrounds.

\(^\text{1A House Divided, p. 257.}\)
The climax of cultural distance is found when Yuan of the new generation who had been educated in America for six years and came home with the highest academic honor, a Ph. D., faced his own mother. Yuan "looked down upon the woman in her old-fashioned coat and skirt of black cotton stuff and asked himself, 'Was I indeed shaped in this old woman's body? I feel no kinship in my own flesh.'"¹ He could not look upon his mother without suffering to think she was his mother. As he looked down upon her who then "sat and stared at nothing...and forgot him, and slept gently..." he perceived that "they were not of the same world, these two, and that he was her son was meaningless to him."²

Only when death approached the Tiger did Yuan, the son, bridge the chasm temporarily, being overcome with sympathy and filial piety. He concluded that "his father was his father still. He could not so lay aside his duty to that old man which was his own past, too, and still somehow part of him."³ For this reason he came back to his own country, to his own race from America. And for the same reason he went patiently from the south where he had already settled back to the north where the earthen house was located. Father and son met each other again. For the first time they both realized how much they had loved and needed each other. Unfortunately, the barrier of

¹A House Divided, pp. 272-273.
²Ibid., p. 274.
³Ibid., pp. 337-350.
generation and culture shadowed the parental love and filial piety most of the time.

Cultural distance coupled with racial difference is also shown during Yuan's six years of stay in America. When Yuan and Sheng first set foot on America, they both sensed that "there must be something wrong here in this city, that so many people go at such speed somewhere."¹ Wherever they went, they felt "a strange alien odor, a little like a certain curd of milk they love to eat."² He became aware that he himself then was a "foreign devil" instead. As a foreign student in America he had to rent a room. But the first house he went to he felt that he could not get along with a landlady "whose girth and bosom were enormous, with short hair of a hue bright reddish yellow color dulled with kitchen grease and smoke."³ Yet at another door, he was refused simply because that they "don't take any colored people here."⁴ He was shocked at the thought that his pale yellowish skin and his black eyes and hair which had been considered the fairest was then foreign and "colored." In the United States day by day, he went his solitary way and held himself aloof and turned proud within himself at the "coarseness" and "savage" spirits of the young race, Americans.⁵

¹A House Divided, p. 137.
²Ibid., p. 141.
³Ibid., pp. 145-146.
⁴Ibid., p. 146.
⁵Ibid., pp. 146-159.
The period of being a foreign student in America had been six years of great solitude. And the cultural distance between the two races was the main cause. It took time for Wang Yuan and his American classmates and friends to reveal their true human hearts and tear down the outward barriers of language, religious beliefs, superficial mannerism, and different customs and practices. Yuan eventually fell in love with an intellectual type of American girl, Mary. In his solitude, he once said to Mary gratefully: "You have made me forget we are not one race. Somehow, for the first time since I entered your country I have felt a mind speaking to my mind without a barrier."¹ Yet in a few days later he felt deeply, "it is not wise nor well for two of different flesh to wed each other. There is the utter difficulty for the two races, neither of which likes such union,"² and "there is inner struggle against each other goes as deep as blood does..."³

The utter difficulty the American Mary and the Chinese Yuan encountered was obviously the different cultural backgrounds they were from plus "the distance of one flesh for flesh that was not its own kind."⁴ The sad ending of Yuan and Mary's romantic love illustrated the way that unlike cultures and races led to distance despite

¹_A House Divided_, p. 189.
²_Ibid._, p. 193.
³_Ibid._, p. 139.
⁴_Ibid._, p. 209.
the similarity of youth to youth in any age in any country. Similar cultures lay the first and basic foundations for nearness of human mutual understanding and passionate feeling. Culture exercises a determining role either to separate or to unite two persons, two generations and two races. The reduction of cultural distance will not guarantee the full communication between people and smooth the generational and racial prejudice; yet without the cultural similarity, love and understanding is constantly threatened from within and without.

Through the generational and cultural distance Pearl Buck shows another aspect of the communal family life and the changing nature of family values in House of Earth. Due to the pressure of western civilization from without and the generational gap from within, the values of the big communal family system are impossible to maintain in China. However the spirit of rebellion, the sorrow of the men and the weeping of women in House of Earth are both Chinese and universal in their significance.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

This study has evaluated the changing nature of family values in House of Earth by Pearl Buck, a well-known American novelist and a Nobel Prize winner, whose background is concerned mostly with China and Chinese people. The thesis begins with a short introduction which explains the significance of this study and gives the statement of purpose.

Chapter I gives a brief biographical sketch of Pearl Buck's life in China in order to show her dual heritage, Chinese and American, which enabled her to build a bridge for passing between the East and the West. Some of the early criticism of the trilogy is also included in this chapter.

Chapter II discusses the purpose and plan of House of Earth. A synopsis of each novel and an analysis of Pearl Buck's characterization, her use of direct translation of Chinese, and the smooth story-telling, a technique inherited from Chinese ancient tales, compose the second part of this chapter.

Chapter III gives a short survey of the recent Chinese historical background. Following this is an examination of the hard lives of Chinese peasant families in House of Earth. Pearl Buck weaves the thread of fact carefully in her narration. The details of Chinese folklore, religious beliefs, and customs are all dealt with in realistic ways.
Chapter IV introduces the traditional teachings and beliefs in a Chinese family. This brief introduction is preparation for an evaluation of the shifting of family values in House of Earth.

Chapter V examines the generational and cultural distance existing in the three generations of the Wangs' family. The unavoidable gap caused by different times and tides makes apparent that it is impossible to maintain a big communal family life under the same roof because of the changes of generation and culture.
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Southern Part of North China
THE WANG FAMILY TREE

Key to symbols:  △ male  ○ concubine
□ female  ○ slave
= marriage