CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Pearl Sydenstricker Buck (birth name: Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker) was born on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, Virginia, U.S.A. Her parents, Absalom and Caroline Sydenstricker, were Southern Presbyterian Missionaries in China. Pearl was the fourth of seven children. She was three years old when she was taken to China, where she spent most of the first forty years of her life. From childhood Pearl Buck spoke both English and Chinese. The family was living in Chinkiang, in Kiangsu province, then a small city lying at the junction of the Yangtze River and the Grand Canal. Pearl Buck’s father spent months away from home and her mother ministered to Chinese women in a small dispensary she had established. In 1900 Caroline and the children moved to Shanghai, where they spent several anxious months waiting for word of Absalom’s fate. Later that year the family returned to the US for another home leave.

In 1910 Pearl Buck enrolled in Randolph-Macon Woman’s College in Lynchburg, Virginia, from which she graduated in 1914. Although she wanted to remain in the US, she returned to China shortly after graduation when she received news that her mother was serious ill. In 1915 she met John Lossing Buck, an agricultural economist. They married in 1917, and immediately moved to Nanhsuchou in rural Anhwei province. In this impoverished community Pearl Buck gathered the material that she would later use in The Good Earth and other stories of China. John Buck was
employed by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Pearl Buck became closely involved in her husband’s work and became familiar with the farmer’s lives and customs. Again she became intimately acquainted with native ways.

In 1921 the Bucks moved to Nanking, where John secured a post at the university. Pearl Buck also taught classes there. The students were inferment because more modern customs and less traditional attitudes were challenging previously accepted standards of behaviour and political thinking. These problems gave Pearl Buck the opportunity to comment in print, and as early as 1923 her articles began to appear in numerous periodicals. It was while living in Nanking that Pearl Buck completed her first novel, *East Wind: West Wind*, which was published in 1930.

Although considered a novel, *East Wind: West Wind* consists of two long short stories. *East Wind: West Wind*, which became immediately popular with the reading public, focuses on a young Chinese married couple who are caught in the conflict between traditional customs and the new, fashionable Western beliefs. The husband, a physician who has spent many years abroad, wants his wife to be on an equal level, but she has been reared and trained in the ancient manner and wishes to be no more than a total slave. She is particularly distressed when her husband insists that she unbind her feet. She has followed one of the oldest and more frequently practised
Chinese customs, designed to develop tiny and pretty feet. Her husband knows that this binding has done considerable physical damage to her feet. Kwei-lan, the wife, is placed in a quandary. To her, bound feet have always been an essential mark of beauty, and she has undergone much pain and inconvenience while growing up, enduring the soaking of her feet in warm water and the tight bandaging. When Kwei-lan tells her mother of the problem, the mother finds her Son-in-law’s attitude difficult to understand. Although she is thoroughly rooted in the old ways and disapproves of change, the mother recommends that Kwei-lan please her husband. The conflict is resolved in this way. Husband and wife become more intimate, and Kwei-lan adopts up-to-the-moment Western ways. The contrast between the old and the new is strikingly delineated.

In the second story Kwei-lan’s brother, studying in the United States, marries an American girl against his family’s wishes, since, according to ancient custom, he has been betrothed by his family to a Chinese girl since childhood. When he brings his wife to China, his parents refuse to acknowledge her status. When, in time, the wife becomes pregnant, the mother-in-law grows even more despondent and dies. Unless one of his parents recognizes the marriage, the son will be unable to obtain his inheritance. When his father insists that the marriage agreement contracted in childhood be observed, Kwei-lan’s brother totally rejects his family and
has his name officially stricken from the ancestral records. The baby that arrives, though, becomes a bond between East and West; and although much tragedy has been involved in the child's conception, the infant will bring about a knowledge and unity of two different worlds, so that, in time, harmony and understanding may develop out of the present antagonism.

With in a year, in 1931, Pearl Buck published her second novel, *The Good Earth*, one of the most successful books in publishing history. The novel demonstrates that its author had gained a thorough knowledge of Chinese peasant life. This authenticity furnished universality to the novel. Set in an impoverished region of Central China, *The Good Earth* tells the story of a poor farmer named Wang Lung, tracing his life from his marriage day to old age. Wang Lung's identity and values have been shaped above all by his relationship to the land, a poor, unyielding soil that this family has worked for generations. When the time comes for him to marry, his father sends him to buy a slave for his wife from the region's wealthiest family. That woman, O-lan, is the novel's most vivid character, a person of strength, integrity, and distinctive good judgements, who provides the book's moral centre. The triumphs and defects that Wang Lung and his family experienced summarize the encounter between traditional China and the revolutionary future. It has been pointed out that the Chinese family analyzed by Pearl Buck seems to be "as familiar as neighbours." The book
incorporates eternal varieties: birth, marriage, children, failures and success, death, and a new generation. The ambivalent tension that a wedding can generate, the occasional bouts with illness that all human beings experience, the difficulties suffered from inconsiderate relatives, and the intense disappointment caused when children, grown to maturity, turn against their parents' values and wishes are just a few of the universal episodes.

After the success of *The Good Earth*, Pearl Buck decided to proceed with a sequel describing the fortunes of Wang Lung's family. In *Sons* (1932) the three sons of Wang Lung are a pleasure-loving, decadent landlord, a shady merchant, and a former military officer turned warlord. The major focus is on the third son, Wang the Tiger. He becomes a powerful brigand and land baron who exerts control over a large section of a province. He expects that his son Yuan will follow in his footsteps and ultimately become an even more powerful leader. But the boy is uninterested in a military life, and his father is disappointed.

*The Mother*, one of Pearl Buck's most memorable novels, appeared in 1934. The protagonist is a young farm wife who, in addition to her household and family chores, works in the fields. After her erratic and indolent husband deserts her, she continues all her previous chores and has to work even harder. One of her children is almost totally blind, and this increases her burdens. This child later dies, and the sorrow of the mother
intensifies. Still later, her favourite son becomes involved in political activities and is executed. The mother's suffering is deeply experienced and the reader's empathy engaged. When her first grandchild arrives, the mother's view of life is resuscitated. A joy of hope and purposefulness assuages all her previous heartbreak.

The saga of Wang Lung’s family was carried forward in *A House Divided* (1935), the last segment of the *House of Earth* Trilogy. In this novel Yuan quarrels with his father and attempts to find direction for his life. For a short time he returns to his grandfather's original farm, but he cannot adjust to that environment. He then goes to live in Shanghai and mingles with the wealthy, fashionable people introduced to him by his elder uncle and other well-to-do relatives. Eventually he travels to America, where he acquires a doctoral degree. But in none of these places is he really at home. He returns to China and encounters new government reforms and revolutionary activities. But he has neither certitude nor real roots. He is too far from his grandfather's farming background to be content on the land, and he is too questioning of modernistic thinking to be at ease in a China that, in the late 1920's, is in turmoil, torn between the old customs and radical, modernistic notions.

*This Proud Heart* (1938) was Pearl Buck's first notable novel using an American setting. The protagonist is Susan Gaylord. Susan is exceedingly
energetic and very intelligent. Although happily married, she is restless and seeks further experiences and fulfilment. She has a special gift for sculpting but refuses to leave her husband and children to pursue the additional study and training needed to perfect her art. Her husband's death gives her opportunity to travel to France for further study. She falls in love with an avant-garde artist and remaries, but in time realizes that his selfishness and jealousy prevent her from achieving artistic fulfilment. She separates from him and determines single-mindedly to develop her talent for sculpting.

The next novel, *The Patriot*, appeared in 1939. In this novel, considered one of her best books, Pearl Buck turned her attention back to the Orient. The novel is a well-conceived portrait of two countries caught at a crucial moment in history. In her next novel, *Other Gods: An American Legend* (1940), Pearl Buck takes up an American topic. The novel's themes are significant. The facts that all heroes have feet of clay and that frequently these defects are deliberately hidden from their adoring public constitute a lesson that needs emphasis in every generation.

Continuing her policy of veering back and forth between Chinese and American topics, Pearl Buck chose as her area of inquiry the Japanese invasion of China and the Chinese resistance against this atrocity in *Dragon Seed*, which was published in 1942. Encouraged by the favourable reception of *Dragon Seed*, Pearl Buck produced a sequel.
The Promise (1943) focuses on Chinese efforts to assist their British allies in Burma. Pearl Buck wrote some novels under the pen name John Sedges: The Townsman (1945), The Angry Wife (1947), The Long Love (1949), Bright Procession (1952), and Voices in the House (1953).

The appearance of Pavilion of Women (1946) once again proved Pearl Buck's popularity. Madame Wu, the leading character, and Brother Andre, the totally unselfish, dedicated scholar, combine to create what is probably Pearl Buck's strongest statement of benevolence and humanitarianism within the pages of a novel. In several respects Madame Wu is a fictional counterpart of her originator. Brilliant, energetic, and a capable manager, she is converted to kindliness, generosity, and a loving awareness through Andre's philosophy and example. The book insists that biblical values (love of neighbour, charity, patience, and beneficence) can solve any problem. It reflects not only Pearl Buck's personal statement but also a basic emphasis on values and a search for stability.

Pearl Buck's ability to focus on interesting subject matter enabled her to follow Pavilion of Women with Kinfolk (1949). This novel furnishes valuable insights into the reasons behind Mao Tse-tung's ascent to power. Although Pearl Buck continued to write almost a novel a year until her death, three of them attract our attention. The living Reed (1963) is a novel about Korea. The Time Is Noon was published in 1967. Joan Richards, the
protagonist of the novel, has many affinities with Pearl Buck. *The Goddess Abides*, published in 1972, is paean to love.

The Bucks were forced to leave China in 1934 due to political tensions. When they returned to the United States, Pearl Buck and John divorced. She then married Richard Walsh in 1935, and with him adopted six other children. Pearl Buck won the Pulitzer Prize in 1935. In 1938, less than a decade after her first book had appeared, she won the Nobel Prize in literature, the first American woman to do so. When she died in 1973, Pearl Buck had published over seventy books: novels, collection of stories, biography and autobiography, poetry, drama, children's literature, and translations.

In her autobiography Pearl Buck records that she was reared in two worlds—the world of her American missionary parents and the world of a vast, a continually fascinating orient and captivating China. She Buck was in a curious position of existing "in one world and not of it, and belonging to another world and yet not of it." Nevertheless, she continually attempted to bridge both worlds; she "belonged as much to the one as to the other." Even when her two worlds came to a more definite division at the time when she chose to settle permanently in the United States, she actually never left her other existence far behind. Her life and her writing blended the East and the West, and she always managed to see both sides of an issue. She was
able to write with complete truth and candour: "The worlds in which I have lived and grown have made me what must be called a controversial figure, as I have been told often enough." So close is she in mind and heart to the Asiatic scene that, after living in the West for twenty-four years, she asserts, "It would be hard for me to declare which side of the world is most of my own . . . I am loyal to Asia as I am loyal to my own land."

The focus of this dissertation is on three novels: *East Wind: West Wind*, *The Good Earth*, and *Pavilion of Women*. I chose these three novels because *East Wind: West Wind* is about the middle class, *The Good Earth* is about poor farmers, and *Pavilion of Women* is about aristocratic life. A study of the paradigms of the Chinese experience in Pearl Buck's novels seems to be a pragmatic critical approach because it helps us explore the themes of her novels. The approach is based on Robert Nisbet's view that "At the center of any given style lies what can only be called a theme, or a cluster of themes. Theme carries with it a more active, passive, and dynamic character than does the word style. Implicit in any theme is at once a question being answered, more or less, and also an ordering of experience and observation in a special focus."
REFERENCES:


