CHAPTER III

THE GOOD EARTH
The publication of *The Good Earth* on March 2, 1931, in Buck’s fortieth year, proved to be a literary phenomenon. This lengthy narrative, covering many years in the history and life of a Chinese peasant family, became one of the most famous best sellers in the history of American fiction and achieved wide popularity abroad. The novel is set in Anhwei province in a rural landscape in China which is identical to that of the town Nanhsuchou, where Pearl Buck and Lossing spent the early years of their marriage.

This novel was translated into more than thirty different languages. At least seven different translations of the novel were made into the Chinese language alone. The main characters in this novel are only one man and one woman and their children. Pearl Buck felt sad that common people of China were so often oppressed and abused. She strongly believed in and emphasized a classical phrase from ancient Chinese literature: “all under heaven are one.” Therefore she incorporated her feelings and universal truth in terms of an agricultural family in her novel *The Good Earth*.

Not only are there these things and situations in the novel as observed by different critics, but most importantly, *The Good Earth* is a characteristic Depression Novel, the story of an ordinary human being suffering the combined trials of natural and economic disaster. This novel also brought several laurels including a sense of appreciation by The Book-
of-the Month Club, an American institution founded in China in 1926 by an enterprising promoter named Harry Scherman to select a book from the hundreds of the new titles published every month. Although *The Good Earth* places much emphasis on the family as a unit, and the analysis of the family fortunes is pivotal and the main characters are studied in detail, slavery is one of the factors for poverty, which is highlighted in the novel.

Oscar Cargill believes that this novel's greatest merit "is the conviction it carries of verisimilitude to all the vicissitudes of Chinese life—nothing changes or passes which does not seem probable."¹ This novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 and Pearl Buck won the Nobel Prize in 1938. She received the Nobel Prize for literature not just for *The Good Earth* but for other portrayals of peasant life in China, for her biographical masterpieces about her parents, and for her body of work. *The Good Earth* was also converted into a Broadway play and into a memorable motion picture with unforgettable performances by the actors Paul Muni and Luise Rainer.

From her life in China Pearl Buck had conceived a warm admiration for the ordinary people of the land. China was an agricultural country, and the farming folk comprised four-fifths of the total population. Despite their overwhelming numbers, these peasants were the most abused group in the country. *The Good Earth* describes the mental state of about seventy percent

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of the Chinese population and was reprinted over ten times within one year of its publication. Theodore F. Harris, focusing the importance of *The Good Earth*, says,

*The Good Earth* is a superb example of intuition. It is a unique book. *The Good Earth* is China. The people in this rather thrilling story are not "queer" or "exotic," they are natural as their soil. They are so intensely human that after the first chapter we are more interested in their humanity than in the novelties of belief and habit. Those who supposed that the story of a Chinese peasant will be monotonous will have a surprise when they read this book. Mrs. Buck has the story teller's gift. She sees life like a reel unrolling scene after scene, each exhibiting character."²

The novel is fortunate enough to have an appreciation from a great writer E.M. Forster, whose logic also equally supports the work of *The Good Earth* with his remark, "The final test of a novel will be our affection for it."³ *The Good Earth* carries us through several generations of the protagonist, Wang Lung, the farmer. The novel opens on day of Wang Lung's marriage. His father is coughing from the other room, and Wang Lung lies on his bed. He goes into the kitchen that is made of straw and
the earth from the fields, and carefully fills the cauldron with water. Water is precious, but after thinking, he suddenly pours all of the water from the jar and decides to wash his whole body because he wishes himself to be clean that day. While making the fire, Wang Lung thinks to himself that this is the last day he will have to light the fire himself. Ever since his mother died six years ago, Wang Lung has had to do it for himself and his father, but after that day, there will be a woman in the house to do it.

On his way, Wang Lung passes the fields and the city wall. He also passes the great House of Hwang, the leading family in the region which keeps the young girls on sale and they are also meant for domestic work. His father insists that there are only slaves left for the poor. Farmers like Wang Lung cannot afford the costly expense of weddings. The woman will keep house, give birth to children, and work in the fields, things a pretty woman will certainly not do for Wang Lung. Wang Lung knows nothing about the woman who is to be his wife except for the fact that she is not pock-marked and that she does not have a split upper lip.

There is a girl called O-lan available, who used to be in the kitchen of that leading family. The Great Lady, in-charge of the great house says about O-lan, "This woman came into our house when she was a child of ten and here she has lived until now, when she is twenty years old. I bought her in a year of famine when her parents came south because they had nothing
to eat” (17). She also tells him that she is a virgin and has been a good
slave. After telling O-lan to bring her the first born child to see, the
Old Mistress dismisses them both. She is very absorbed in her opium
smoking.

Wang Lung looks back to see the woman for the first time and
observes her square face, nose, wide mouth, and small eyes, finding no
beauty in her face. On the way home, Wang Lung buys O-lan peaches,
which she greedily eats. Soon, they reach the temple of the earth, a temple
that Wang Lung’s grandfather made from bricks and tiles. Wang Lung and
O-lan stand before the gods, and it is a moment of marriage for them. O-lan
enters into his life as his wife but the sufferings begin immediately. In terms
of cooking and fuel problems it is observed in the novel as, “The woman,
when he had gone in the morning, took the bamboo rake and a length of
rope and with these she roamed the countryside, reaping here a bit of grass
and there a twig or a handful of leaves, returning at noon with enough to
cook the dinner. It pleased the man that they need buy no more fuel” (25).

One day in early summer, as Wang Lung is working out in the fields,
O-lan comes to work beside him. Wang Lung has no articulate thought of
anything: “there was only this perfect sympathy of movement, of turning
this earth of theirs over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their
home and fed their bodies and made their gods. Sometime, in some age,
bodies of men, and women had been buried there, houses had stood there, had fallen, and gone back into the earth" (27). At the end of the day, O-lan tells plainly and without expression that she is with child. Wang Lung is momentarily speechless, but is pleased. When they arrive home, Wang Lung tells his father the news, and the old man is also happy. Astounded, Wang Lung thinks of himself: “Out of this body of his, out of his own loins, life!” (29).

When the birth of the child approaches, Wang Lung tells O-lan that someone should come to help with the giving of birth. When Wang Lung suggests that someone from the House of Hwang come to help her, O-lan becomes angry because she will not return to the great house without her son in her arms, dressed in good clothes. Because of her pride, O-lan wishes to return to the great house as a respected mother of a male child. Wang Lung is surprised that O-lan speaks so much and that she has thought all these things. Nevertheless, he gives her money to buy the necessary cloths to make coats for herself and the child. Wang Lung thinks of the silver that has come from earth: it will be used to dress his first-born child. O-lan works beside Wang Lung in the field until the very hour of giving birth to a male child. Wang Lung is happy and proud.

On the child’s month birthday, Wang Lung invites people to distribute dyed eggs. After the celebration, the long awaited rains come, and
Wang Lung is relieved. During this time, there is usually visiting among the villagers, but Wang Lung and O-lan do not do much visiting, fearful of those who might be prone to borrow things from them. From his crops, Wang Lung is able to make a lot of money. Afraid to keep it himself, Wang Lung and O-lan dig a hole in their room to store the silver which gives them "a sense of secret richness and reserve" (40).

On the second day of the new year, dressed in their best clothes, Wang Lung and O-lan set out with their new son for the great house. O-lan tells Wang Lung that it was inevitable that the wealth of the great house declined: "'They must be getting poorer for the Old Mistress herself told me they wished to sell land--some of the land to the south of the house, just outside the city wall, where they have always planted rice every year because it is good land and easily flooded from the moat around the wall.' ‘Sell their land!’ repeated Wang Lung, convinced. ‘Then indeed are they growing poor. Land is one’s flesh and blood’" (45). After thinking, Wang Lung cries that he will buy the Hwang land. Although O-lan initially opposes the idea because the land is too far, Wang Lung is adamant, and she is soon convinced. As though she cannot believe it, she says to herself, “Last year this time I was slave in that house” (46).

Wang Lung buys a piece of the Hwang land. When he goes out to inspect it, he realizes that although the land means a great deal to him, the
loss of it does not mean much to the great house. Wang Lung angrily decides that he will fill the wall with silver after silver, and buy more land from the House of Hwang. To Wang Lung, the land becomes “a sign and a symbol” (48). Wang Lung and O-lan work day after day, while the old man watches the child. O-lan is again with child and gives birth to a male child, a second son, and Wang Lung is again very happy. He thinks that O-lan brings him much good fortune. Again, the produce form the year is good, and Wang Lung is able to hide more silver. The land that he bought from the great house is very fruitful, yielding more harvest than his own land. Now everyone in the village knows that Wang Lung is the owner of a piece of the Hwang land. His status rises in the village.

Wang Lung’s uncle is the younger brother of Wang Lung’s father. He is a lazy man whose wife does not work, and whose children, dirty and disgraceful, roam around the village. One day, Wang Lung is ashamed and angry to see his cousin, a daughter of his uncle’s, going around the neighborhood, talking freely with a village man. Wang Lung goes to the uncle’s house and begins to shout at his uncle’s wife. The next day, Wang Lung’s uncle comes to the field where he is working. O-lan is not beside him because of a third birth that is coming. Unable to say anything, Wang Lung listens to his uncle threatening to tell the whole village of his behaviour. Wang Lung has no other choice but to give what the uncle has
come to request, some silver for the dowry of his grown daughter. Wang Lung goes to his house and into his room where he detects a smell of blood. O-lan then tells him that she has given birth to a girl: "It is over once more. It is only a slave this time—not worth mentioning" (56). Wang Lung stands still. A sense of evil strikes him.

Wang Lung is depressed and weary, thinking that daughters are only burdens to families who must rear them for other families. He is sad to think it will be another year before he gets enough silver to buy land. When a flock of crows flies across the sky over his head, Wang Lung thinks that it is an evil omen. It is as though the gods have decided to ignore Wang Lung because it does not rain when it should. The earth dries up, and the plants dry up. O-lan says to him, "If the children drink and the old man have his hot water plants must go dry" (58). Wang Lung answers with anger that breaks into a sob, "Well, and they must all starve if the plants starve" (59). It is true that all their lives depended upon the earth.

The only land that survives is the one by the moat that Wang Lung concentrates his energy into keeping alive. He sells his crops as soon as he is able to harvest them and takes the silver to buy more land from the House of Hwang, which is on the brink of ruin. The Old Mistress continually yearns for expensive opium, and the Old Lord is constantly taking in young concubines. The young lords are careless with money. Thus, when
Wang Lung comes with money to buy land, the agent of the family is more than eager. The newly bought land is twice as big as the first plot that Wang Lung bought from the family.

Autumn comes, and still there is no rain. Wang Lung continues working in his fields, garnering whatever produce he can manage to reap. The two boys also work with their parents. In the house, there is a general fear of starvation, but the girl child is kept full by O-lan’s milk. Soon, however, O-lan is again with child, and there is no milk for the baby girl. Before long, there is no more rice or wheat left, and the old man suggests that Wang Lung’s ox be eaten. Wang Lung initially protests because the ox has been a companion to him since his youth while he worked in the fields. When the children cry for food, however, he finally relents. O-lan cuts the ox’s neck and cooks the flesh for the family to eat.

One day, some angry villagers break into Wang Lung’s house, determined to loot. When they see that he has no more than they do, they are disappointed. When they start seizing Wang Lung’s pieces of furniture, O-lan bravely comes forward to stop them. The men are ashamed and begin to leave; Ching, who is one of these men, leaves quickly in shame because he has grabbed some beans. Wang Lung now has nothing to feed his family, but comforts himself with the thought of his land. He thinks to himself, “They cannot take the land away from me. The labour of my body and
the fruit of the fields I have put into that which cannot be taken away. If I had the silver, they would have taken it. If I had bought with the silver to store it, they would have taken it all. I have the land still, and it is mine" (65).

The next morning, Wang Lung cannot believe that he ever thought of leaving with his helpless children, his old father, and his weak wife. The uncle brings men to help Wang Lung sell his land. Looking at the well-fed and well-dressed men from the town, Wang Lung says decidedly that he will sell his land, but his resolution is soon shaken after seeing how thin his son has become. When he miserably asks one of the men how much he will pay for the land, the man states plainly and without remorse a price that is hardly anything for a piece of land. Wang Lung cannot endure any longer as a surge of anger rises within him. He yells that he will never sell his land: "I shall never sell the land!" he shrieked at them. "Bit by bit I will dig up the fields and feed the earth itself to the children and when they die I will bury them in the land, and I and my wife and my old father, even he, we will die on the land that has given us birth!" (75).

Wang Lung is weeping like a child when O-lan comes to the door to say matter of fact that they will not sell the land. She adds, however, that they will sell their furniture for which the men will give two silver pieces. After they leave, Wang Lung decides to go south while there is money left.
taking a look at his fields, he comforts himself by repeating that at least, he still has his land. Despite the starvation and the pain, Wang Lung tells himself that something should be done; there is a determination to live in Wang Lung. Wang Lung and his family have eaten what they could. Now, none of them gets up in the morning. In the village, there are no animals roaming around anywhere, and the bellies of the children swell out. Wang Lung’s daughter lies quietly wrapped in a quilt, and he feels pity for his daughter who cannot even sit on her own. Wang Lung’s father is better than the rest because he is the first one to be given anything to eat.

At one stage, owing to poverty Wang Lung thinks of putting his girl child into the great house as a slave so that she can get food, drink, and clothes. But through his wife O-lan, he comes to know that there will be a lot of torture. Then, he drops the proposal to put his daughter into the great house. The condition of poverty before they leave for the southern region is very bad. The people of countryside in the northern region are eating what grass they can find upon the wintry hills. There is not an animal anywhere. A man may walk for a handful of days and see not an ox nor an ass nor any kind of beast or fowl.

One day, Ching comes to tell Wang Lung that people are eating dogs and even human flesh. Fearful and panicky, Wang Lung suddenly cries out that they will leave and go south. O-lan tells him to wait until the next day
when she will have given birth to a child. There is no food to eat. Then, he requests his neighbour in the village stating that he needs some food immediately, for which his friend brings in a cotton kerchief a handful of red beans with the soil. He takes the red beans to his wife and she eats a little of it, bean by bean, unwilling except that her hour is upon her and she knows that if she has no food, she will die in the clutches of her pain. Thus, poverty takes a different turn to the pregnant woman.

O-lan gives birth at night and tells him that the child is dead. Looking at the dead body, Wang Lung sees that it had been a girl. Taking the dead child out of the room, he wraps it in bits of broken mat. Examining the body, he sees two bruised spots on its neck. He takes the body as far as he can and puts it against an old grave.

O-lan, the woman Wang Lung buys for his wife, is the novel's most memorable character. She accepts her status and fate without complaints, submerging whatever personal desires she might have in her tasks as wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. At the same time, Mrs. Buck has portrayed her as the story's moral centre, a figure of courage, selflessness, perseverance, and instinctive common sense. And as Adrienne Rich, among others, has pointed out the scenes in which O-lan gives birth to her several children, i.e. three sons and two daughters, are among the such episodes in American fiction. As Peter J. Conn says, "Both in herself and in her
functions, she represents Pearl’s feminist affirmations. There is the sense of poverty at every stage. During their journey towards south, Wang Lung buys, “Four small loaves of bread and a bowl of soft rice for the girl. It was more than they had had to eat at one time for many days, and although they were starved for food, when it was in their mouths desire left them and it was only by coaxing that the boys could be made to swallow. But the old man sucked perseveringly at the bread between his toothless gums” (80).

Thus, they travel a hundred miles in a wagon to reach the city of Kiangsue in the south situated in the southern area. Wang Lung and his family come out of their hut with their bowls and they form a small group in a long procession of people each issuing from his hut shivering in clothes too thin for the river fog, walking curved against the chill to collect a bowl of rice for one penny at the public kitchens, i.e. cauldrons. These cauldrons are for all: “But nothing could stop the mass of hungry men and women and they fought like beasts until all were fed. Wang Lung caught in their midst could do nothing but cling to his father and his two sons and when he was swept to the great cauldron he held out his bowl and when it was filled threw down his pence, all it was all he could do to stand sturdily and not to be swept on before the thing was done” (85).

In southern area nobody is hungry. There is plenty of rice to eat. They become part of an army of displaced refugees who seek shelter in
Nanking, living in makeshift huts under the city's walls. O-lan teaches her children to beg, telling them where to stand and how to cry out to attract pity from the men and women who pass by. Wang Lung finds work pulling a riksha, becoming a human beast of burden and destroying his body for a few pennies a day. Wang Lung feels uneasy to go for begging: "the notion of holding up a bowl and begging of anyone who passed continued to distress him. It was very well for the old man and for the children and even for the woman, but he had his two hands" (82).

In the city of Kiangsue, all beg there openly on the roads except Wang Lung. O-lan begins to call out and to shake her bowl at every passerby. She thrusts the girl child into her naked bosom and the child sleeps and its head bobs this way and that as she moves, running hither and thither with her bowl out-stretched before her. She points to the child as she begs and she cries loudly, "Unless you give, good sir, good lady --This child dies--we starve--We starve --" (87). During begging, the old man receives nothing. His hands are empty. He merely says, "I have ploughed land and I have sown seed and I have reaped harvest and thus I have filled my rice bowl. And I have beyond this begotten a son and son's sons" (90).

Owing to poverty, Wang Lung himself pulls his vehicle--a wooden wagon on its two wheels. He pulls it between its shafts as an ox yoked to earn his living in Kiangsue. Once an American lady travels in his wagon and
gives him two silver pieces, which is double the usual fare. Anyway, here in the city there is food everywhere, whereas in the village there was nothing to eat and the land was dry. Here in the city, owing to poverty in their village, people work all day at the baking of bread and cakes for feasts for the rich and children labour from dawn to midnight.

Men and women labour at the cutting and contriving of heavy furs for the winter and of soft light furs for the spring, and at the thick brocaded silks to cut and shape them into robes. The older men with grey beards pull rikshas, push wheel barrows of coal and wood to bakeries and palaces, strain their backs until the muscles stand forth like ropes as they pull and pull the heavy carts of merchandise over the cobbled roads throughout nights.

Wang Lung gradually gets used to the city and its inhabitants, but he and his family are still like foreigners in a strange place. Kiangsu is very different from Anhwei, Wang Lung’s birthplace. Everything seems hurried; everyone seems impatient. Wang Lung does not work as a ricksha puller any longer, but at night, pulls cargo for the houses of merchandise. During the day, he sleeps inside the hut. When the city is increasingly filled with fear and unrest, Wang Lung cannot bear to stay in the city any longer, continually yearning for the land.

Suddenly, there is a great noise that frightens Wang Lung and the rest of the family. They hear a rising roar filling the streets, and a great door
being opened. A man tells them that the hour has come--the gates of the rich man are open to us. O-lan is soon gone, and Wang Lung also goes out. There is a crowd of commoners, pushing against the gates of the great house to enter. Wang Lung is swept along the crowd into the house and through the many courts. People take different treasures of the rich, snatching and pushing. Wang Lung, the only one in the crowd who does not take anything, is thoroughly bewildered. Dragged along with the crowd, he finds himself in the back of the innermost court of the house. Wang Lung sees a big, middle-aged, well-dressed man who has not yet escaped and he pleads with Wang Lung to spare his life. Wang Lung threateningly demands money from the frightened man who eagerly gives him gold coins. Clutching the gold, Wang Lung returns home, telling himself that “We must get back to the land” (97).

Throughout the city, wealth and abundance prevail, but Wang Lung’s family and many others in the village of huts live in poverty, unable to participate in any of the luxuries of the city, working at the service of the rich. They work all their lives only to be living on the fringes of poverty, barely able to feed themselves. It is late winter and spring approaches. O-lan is again with child and leaves the daughter to the old man’s care while she begs.

One day, as the men are sitting around discussing what they would do if they had any money, Wang Lung says that he would buy land from
which to reap harvests. The men ridicule him and laugh at him, but Wang Lung is steadfast in his resolution. From the men who gather outside the huts to talk, Wang Lung learns that there lives a rich man behind the wall. The people in the huts are resentful of the injustice of never having anything that others have in abundance. However Wang Lung is unaffected by this because he wants only his land. When they return to their village, Wang Lung and his family find their house in tatters and their farming implements and the door missing, but Wang Lung is not bothered. From Ching, Wang Lung learns that a group of robbers lived in his house over the winter. Wang Lung’s uncle was well acquainted with the bandit. The villagers tell him that “Hunger makes thief of any man” (122). Having grown thin and old, Ching has lost his wife and has given his daughter away to a soldier during the famine. Wang Lung is happy that his uncle is no longer living in the village.

One night, Wang Lung discovers a bundle of jewels buried between O-lan’s breasts. “There are such a heap of jewels as one has never dreamed could be together, jewels red as the inner flesh of watermelons, golden as wheat, green as young leaves in spring, clear as water trickling out of the earth” (125). O-lan tells him that she found them in the rich man’s house in the city. She saw a loose brick in the wall and knew that it was a secret hiding place for jewels. Wang Lung is astonished, but decides that it is safer
to convert the jewels into land. O-lan hesitantly asks Wang Lung if she can keep two of the jewels for herself. "Then Wang Lung, without comprehending it, looked for an instant into the heart of this dull, and faithful creature, who has labored all her life at some task at which she won no reward and who in the great house had seen others wearing jewels which she never even felt in her hand once" (127).

Wang Lung then goes to the great house of Hwang with the jewels. The slave tells him that there is no one else in the house except the Old Lord and herself. The Old Mistress died when the thieves came to loot the house, and the servants and the slaves were gone long before that. The slave further tells Wang Lung that this fall of the great house was inevitable because the lords stopped overseeing the land matters. At a teashop, Wang Lung is deep in thought about the fall of the great house. He thinks that it is all because they have left the land. He decides to make his two sons work in the fields so they will not turn out like the young lords of the great house who, separated from the land, did not know its worth and importance.

From the shopkeeper, Wang Lung learns that the clever slave, who is called Cuckoo, is in complete control of the Old Lord. Ching, upon Wang Lung’s suggestion, sells his small piece of land to come and live with him. Soon, it is time for O-lan to give birth again. This time, she gives birth to twins—a daughter and a son. Although he is happy for the birth of the
newborn children, he is sad because of his eldest daughter, who does not do anything befitting a child of her age. She smiles like a baby, but never says a word. Wang Lung calls her his “poor fool.” Wang Lung decides to put the eldest son in school so that he may be a scholar and accompany Wang Lung to grain markets to read and write for him.

During the seventh year, the lands are flooded. Wang Lung is not alarmed, however, because there is enough in the storage for the family to survive and his house is built on a hill. But the lands cannot be worked; Wang Lung is idle and restless, never having anything to do. One day, however, he meets Cuckoo, who has become the keeper of the shop. Nothing happens to prevent Wang Lung from returning to the great tea house. Angry and injured, Wang Lung enters the teashop and mentions the small girl whose picture he is so enchanted with, and Cuckoo silently leads him to the room of the girl who is called Lotus. After his first meeting with Lotus, Wang Lung is sick in love.

Wang Lung’s uncle suddenly returns with his son and his wife. Now a wealthy man, Wang Lung cannot turn his elderly relatives out of the house because he would lose face in the village where he has been gaining respect. Upon arrival, the uncle’s shrewd wife learns that Wang Lung is mad over another woman. Overhearing the uncle’s wife talking to O-lan, Wang Lung suddenly gets the idea that he will buy Lotus to bring her to the house so she
can always be with him. He asks the uncle’s wife to arrange the union of himself and Lotus. On an august day, Lotus comes riding in a sedan chair, followed by Cuckoo, who comes as her serving woman. Wang Lung visits her every night in her quarters, eating and drinking. Soon after the arrival of Lotus and Cuckoo, there is trouble in the house. O-lan and Cuckoo do not get along. They were both slaves in the House of Hwang, but O-lan was a mere kitchen slave, whereas Cuckoo was the lord’s favourite. Cuckoo did not treat O-lan very well at the great house, and O-lan is still bitter about it. To O-lan, living with Cuckoo is a painful insult.

The financial position of Wang Lung goes out of his hands. Of course, Cuckoo is the maid-servant of the family but she spends a lot of money for a variety of things. Unfortunately, Wang Lung’s uncle’s wife also spends a lot of money on food since she is a lover of food. She was the mediator to get Lotus to the house of Wang Lung. It is surprising to note that Wang Lung is helpless. Cuckoo’s behavior with O-lan is very bad. In a pained tone, once, O-lan tells Wang Lung, “I am not slave of slaves in this house at least” (176).

Many men in the village, who admire his ability to keep two women in the house, envy Wang Lung. One is for his pleasure, and the other is the working mother of his children who feeds him. Wang Lung increasingly garners respect and admiration from the men in the village. The rains come,
and there is harvest. In the winter, Wang Lung goes to the grain market to sell his produce, and he has his eldest son to accompany him. He is extremely proud that his son is able to read and write. Walking back home with his son, Wang Lung thinks to himself that he should look for a wife for the grown boy. He discusses the matter with Ching, who, remembering his own daughter, tells Wang Lung that if he had his daughter with him, he would marry her off to Wang Lung’s family for nothing.

Wang Lung’s eldest son’s behaviour also contributes a little for his losing grip on financial matters. He becomes moody. A misunderstanding develops between father and son. His son doesn’t have any work. He develops friendship with Wang Lung’s uncle’s son. They both start visiting the whores. They also become slaves to the habit of drinking. Because of his uncle’s son, his son is spoiled. Once Wang Lung shouts, “Now I have harbored an ungrateful nest of snakes and they have bitten me!” (196).

One day, the eldest son tells Wang Lung that he wishes to go south to attend a greater school. Unwilling to send his son south, Wang Lung forbids him to go, but the son is determined to get away from the watchful eyes of his father. After the eldest son leaves, Wang Lung feels as though peace has finally come. Wang Lung decides to apprentice the second son at a shop before the boy becomes restless and moody like the older son. O-lan lies dying for many months. In the meantime, Wang Lung and the family
realize what a big presence she has been in their lives because no one knows what to do around the house. While O-lan lies dying, Wang Lung does not pay attention to the land, turning all the affairs over to Ching’s care. Winter comes, and during the cold season, Wang Lung sits by O-lan, warming her bed with fire. O-lan protests that it is too expensive, but Wang Lung cries that he will sell all of his land if it will make her better. But O-lan says calmly in return that she must die sometime anyway, but the land is there after her.

O-lan also asks to be allowed to see her eldest son to marry before she dies. She tells him that she wants to die after knowing that Wang Lung will have a grandson. Because Wang Lung wishes to make O-lan happy, he agrees and sends for his son from the city to be married. After O-lan dies, Wang Lung asks his uncle’s wife to prepare the body for burial. One morning, the second daughter goes into the room of Wang Lung’s father to find the old man dead. Wang Lung decides to bury O-lan and his father together on the same day.

Now, Wang Lung realizes that during the days when there was no harvest, his family starved and never had bandits to his house or to his lands. But, now because of the wealth he acquired, the sign of danger has taken place, that too from his uncle and members of his family. The serious cause of poverty is floods. All those pieces of lands along the moat, along the
waterways, which Wang Lung bought from the Old Lord of the House of Hwang are wet and mucky from the full water oozing up from the bottom, so that the good wheat on this land has turned sickly and yellow. The moat itself is like a lake and canals are rivers, swift and curling in small eddies and whirlpools.

The situation is so bad that men and women and children started starving again. The water starts swelling up over his land and over his good crops. The river to the north bursts its dykes. The villages one by one are made into islands and people watch the water rising and it comes to two feet of their doorways. They bind their tables, beds together on the rafts. The water rises into the earthen houses and bursts them apart and they melt down into water. There are no harvests of any kind that year and everywhere people starved.

Some people go to the south and some join robber bands that flourish everywhere in the countryside. Wang Lung realizes that water will not recede in time to plant the wheat for winter and there can be no harvest during next year. Famine is expected upon the land that he has never seen. Now, Wang Lung starts observing saving measures in view of the floods but around him people starve.

Now the water begins to recede. The people who went away from the floods come back again, one by one and group by group. They all come
to borrow money from Wang Lung. Because of poverty some sell land to Wang Lung, and those who cannot sell their land sell their daughters. Later on because of labour problems, he rents out all his land. Now he is not a farmer but a big man. It is said that there is disaster ahead because his sons do not share his commitment to the land.

Wang Lung, buys a slave girl called Pear Blossom for his third son but he and the girl are also not interested in each other. So, he joins the army as a soldier. Pear Blossom remains with Wang Lung as his child concubine. Unfortunately, Wang Lung, tired of O-lan, purchases a young sing-song girl named Lotus. He installs her in a separate apartment in his house. The new arrangement leads to trouble almost immediately. When Wang Lung discovers that his eldest son has visited Lotus secretly, he banishes the young man, as an act that affirms his authority but threatens the stability of his family. As the family become increasingly disoriented O-lan falls sick, weakens and dies. This middle part is necessiated as it is a link between the first part and the final part. The first part deals with the theme of poverty due to famine and the final part will also be dealing with the theme of poverty due to floods.

Wang Lung becomes very old. His two sons are blessed with eleven sons and eight daughters. He leaves his village and sets up his house in town but his love for land remains the same. His roots are in his land. Sometimes,
he takes a servant, and he sleeps again in the old earthen house and in the old bed where he begot children and where O-lan died. He goes to the place where he buried his father and his uncle. His two sons assure him that the land will not be sold and over the old man's head they look at each other and smile.

At an old age, when his two sons talk to each other with an idea to sell away the land, he expresses his attachment and feelings towards the land in these words:

"But the old man heard only these words, "sell the land," and he cried out and he could not keep his voice from breaking and trembling with his anger,

"Now, evil, idle sons -- sell the land?" He choked and would have fallen, and they caught him and held him up, and he began to weep.

Then they soothed him and they said, soothing him,

"No--no--we will never sell the land __"

"It is the end of a family -- when they begin to sell the land," he said brokenly. "Out of the land we came and into it we must go--and if you will you're your land you can live--no one can rob you of land—" And the old man let his scanty tears dry upon his cheeks and
they made salty stains there. And he stooped and took up a handful of the soil and he held it and he muttered,

"If you sell the land, it is the end."

And his two sons held him, one on either side, each holding his arm, and he held tight in his hand the warm loose earth. And they soothed him and they said over and over, the eldest son and the second son,

"Rest assured, our father, rest assured. The land is not to be sold."

But over the old man's head they looked at each other and smiled" (307-308).

By all means, the novel *The Good Earth* has been acclaimed by the people of both the countries, USA and China. Critics like Elizabeth J. Lipscomb, Frances E Webb, and Peter Conn sincerely observed the political situation of China during those days and stated that

*The Good Earth* hit Middle Americans in the Great Depression when they needed both readable diversion and a sense of affinity with those experiencing hardship; its publication also coincided with the beginning of Japan's assault against China. Pearl Buck would be lucky again when the movie version of the
novel, released in 1937, coincided with Japan's all-out effort to conquer China. By then Millions of Americans knew whom the Japanese tanks and planes were slaughtering; it was Wang Lung, O-lan, and all the rest.  

The novel’s simple but eventful plot follows the life of its principal character, the Chinese farmer Wang Lung from his marriage day to his old age. Wang Lung's triumphs and defeats map the encounter between traditional China and the revolutionary future. Wang Lung's identity and motions are shaped above all by his relationship, by his deep attachment to the land. He has really grown up and reared up in an isolated, secluded, detached, and illiterate community where patriarchal piety is the core value. 

Pearl Buck fills *The Good Earth* with the story of the land which depicts the struggles of farmers and the position of their poverty. Throughout the 1930's, millions of farm families were pushed from homesteads, victims of economic collapse and natural disasters of drought and dust bowl. In those sufferings and endurances of farmers would emerge a special subject of fiction, poverty.
REFERENCES:


