

PEARL S. BUCK'S LITERARY ENVIRONMENT AND IDEAS

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Abstract. Pearl S. Buck was a major literary figure of the 20th century, and her works gave us a glimpse into the cultural and social realities of China. What's interesting is that she was a cross-cultural writer, and through her fiction, we can see the roles of women in traditional Chinese society. This study looks at the literary environment that shaped Pearl Buck's writing and the main ideas in her works. Growing up in China as the daughter of American missionaries had a big impact on her worldview and creativity. Her novels explored themes like family values, women's roles, poverty, social inequality, and understanding between different cultures. One of her most famous novels, *The Good Earth*, tells the story of Chinese peasants and their deep connection to the land. This novel was a huge bestseller in the US and appealed to readers worldwide who wanted to learn more about China. The Japanese, in particular, were fascinated by stories about Chinese farmers. Even today, stories about Buck's life and works are still featured in the Japanese press - by the end of 2022, Japan's top three newspapers had published 568 articles about her. This study also examines how Buck used literature to build bridges between Eastern and Western cultures. Her realistic writing style, humanistic ideas, and social commentary made her a significant voice in world literature. By exploring her works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social issues that shaped her writing. Buck's writing continues to be relevant today, offering insights into the complexities of human experience and the importance of cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords: Pearl S. Buck, literary environment, humanism, Chinese culture, women's role, intercultural understanding, social inequality, family values, realism, *The Good Earth*.

Introduction. Pearl Buck, who was born in rural West Virginia, was taken to China by her missionary parents just a few months after her birth in 1892. Years before, her parents, Absalom and Carie Sydenstricker, spent some time in Japan. Their ship stopped in Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki on their way from West Virginia to Shanghai, China. Pearl described her parents' views of Japan in Buck (1966, 9–12): For them, Japan was their first sight of the Orient and remained for them somewhat of a dream, a land of disciplined beauty, of cleanliness and order, a land of manageability

and comprehensibility. They escaped to Japan in later years for brief periods when torrid summers and contending warlords made life in China intolerable. Years later, after spending time in Japan, Buck wrote about her own views of Japan:

Japan was like a dream to me when I was a kid. Every time we traveled across the Pacific, I couldn't wait to visit. The country had a storybook feel to it - the beautiful scenery, the unique buildings, and the people who were always so polite and friendly. They would often give me gifts, which made me feel special. I loved stopping in Japan because it was like a safe haven in the middle of a big, stormy ocean. The islands were calm and peaceful, and that's what made them so appealing. As Pearl Buck once said, Japan was a place of serenity, a place where you could escape the chaos of the world.

Pearl S. Buck is a big name in American literature from the 20th century. She's known all over the world for writing about Chinese life and culture in a way that's real and honest. What sets her apart from other Western writers of her time is that she actually lived in China for a big part of her childhood and young adult years. Because her family were missionaries, she got to learn about Chinese customs, language, and daily life from a really young age. This mix of Eastern and Western cultures had a huge impact on her writing and the ideas she came up with. As a result, her stories are not just entertaining, but also give readers a glimpse into a different way of life. By sharing her experiences and observations, Pearl S. Buck helped bridge the gap between two very different cultures, making her a truly important figure in literature. Her unique perspective and writing style continue to inspire readers and writers to this day, and her work remains a significant part of American literary history.

The world Pearl Buck grew up in as a writer was a mix of Eastern and Western cultures. At the start of the 20th century, China was going through a lot of changes - people were poor, there were wars, revolutions, and some people had more than others. Buck saw firsthand how hard life was for peasants in China and how the old ways were changing. These experiences later became the basis for many of her books and stories. Her writing shows not just the struggles of everyday people, but also the values, traditions, and feelings that connect us all, no matter where we're from or what our culture is. She wrote about things that matter to everyone, like how people live, what they believe in, and how they feel. By doing so, she was able to share the stories of Chinese people with the world, and show that even though we may be different, we're all connected in many ways.

Buck's unique perspective, shaped by her experiences in China and her Western upbringing, allowed her to create stories that were both authentic and relatable to people from different backgrounds. Her writing continues to be an important part of literary history, offering a glimpse into the lives of people in a changing China, and the

universal human experiences that we all share. Pearl Buck was a writer who helped people in the West understand Chinese culture in a real and caring way. Back then, many Americans didn't know much about China and often thought of it in a stereotypical way. Buck's novels tried to bring people from different cultures closer together. She showed that Chinese people are just like everyone else, with the same hopes and fears, and things that make them happy or sad. By doing this, her writing became a way to connect different worlds and encourage people to respect and appreciate each other's differences. Buck's work was important because it helped break down barriers between cultures and promoted understanding and kindness. Her stories made people see that, even though we may be from different parts of the world, we are all similar in many ways. This helped to build a bridge between the East and the West, and her literature is still valued today for its ability to bring people together.

Her most famous novel, *The Good Earth*, published in 1931, played a major role in establishing her literary reputation. The novel portrays the life of Wang Lung, a poor Chinese farmer, and his family as they struggle with poverty, famine, wealth, and social change. Through this work, Buck emphasized the importance of land, family unity, hard work, and moral responsibility. The novel became highly successful, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932, and later contributed to Buck receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938.


Pearl Buck's writing also focused on the lives of women and how they were treated unfairly in society. Her female characters were often shown as strong, hardworking, and patient, even when faced with difficult situations. Buck believed that women should be treated equally and with respect, and she wrote about the struggles they faced in their daily lives. She wanted people to understand and care about the problems women encountered, and to recognize the importance of treating everyone with kindness and dignity, no matter their background or culture. By sharing her thoughts and ideas through her stories, Buck encouraged readers to think about the importance of equality and compassion for all people. Her writing continues to inspire people to work towards creating a more just and fair society, where everyone is valued and respected.

Therefore, the study of Pearl Buck's literary environment and ideas is important for understanding how personal experiences, cultural background, and historical events influence literary creativity. Her works remain valuable not only because of their artistic quality but also because of their message of humanity, cultural understanding, and social justice. Pearl Buck's contribution to literature continues to inspire readers and researchers around the world today.

Conclusion. Pearl Buck's literary environment played a major role in shaping her worldview and artistic creativity. Her experiences in China enabled her to describe Chinese culture and society realistically and sympathetically. Through her novels, she highlighted important themes such as human dignity, family values, women's rights, poverty, and intercultural understanding.

Pearl Buck's writing still matters today because it teaches us to be kind, care about others, and think about social issues. One of her most famous books, *The Good Earth*, shows how much she believes in the power of regular people and the need to stay true to our moral and cultural values. By writing about different cultures, Pearl Buck helped people in the East and West understand each other better, and she became one of the most important writers of the 20th century. Her stories continue to inspire us to be more compassionate and aware of the world around us.

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