

# CROSS-CULTURALISM IN PEARL S. BUCK'S FICTION\*

by

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When by the development of technical inventions the peoples of the earth are drawn closer to each other, the surface of the earth shrinks, so that East and West are no longer separated by almost insurmountable voids of distance, and when on the other hand, partly as a natural effect of this phenomenon, the differences of national character and ambitions clash to form dangerous discontinuities, it is of the greatest importance that the peoples of the earth learn to understand each other as individuals across distances and frontiers. When works of literature succeed in this respect they are certainly in a very direct way idealistic in the sense in which this word was meant by Alfred Nobel.

—*Bertil Lindblad*<sup>1</sup>

By cross-culturalism I mean not only the theme of cross-cultural relationships but also the doctrine advocating the importance of cultivating cross-cultural sensibility and improving cross-cultural understanding. Since Pearl

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<sup>1</sup> Bertil Lindblad, Director of the Stockholm Observatory at Saltsjöbaden, made these remarks prior to Pearl Buck's acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature on December 12, 1938. Quoted in *Nobel Lectures: Literature 1901-1967*, ed. Horst Frenz (New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1969), p. 360.

S. Buck has dealt with cross-cultural subject matters in many of her works, it may be safe to say that a clear understanding of her faith in cross-culturalism is indispensable to a fair evaluation of her achievement as a writer, and that the most appropriate approach to her work is therefore cross-culturally oriented. The main purpose of this paper is, then, to give a concise account of her cross-cultural philosophy by way of discussing her literary treatment of the cross-cultural theme, a theme which has persistently recurred in her work ever since her first novel bearing a properly symbolic title—*East Wind: West Wind*. In the meantime, it is also hoped that this paper may serve as an illustration of the usefulness of the so-called cross-cultural approach to literature.

I mean several things by this approach. To make this point clear, I would like to quote verbatim a lengthy passage from a paper which I presented during an American Studies seminar held in the Philippines in October, 1976:

On the simplest level, this approach means a way of investigating how and what aspects of a culture are depicted in works by an author of a different ethnic or cultural background. It aims at the study of the writer's image of an alien culture or society. Following this approach, we can find out how Pearl S. Buck has viewed Chinese people and their culture. On another level, this approach seeks to analyze an author's treatment of actual cross-cultural encounters. Many writers, such as E. M. Forster, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James, are interested in describing such encounters in their works. They usually present the cross-cultural theme by putting characters of different racial and cultural backgrounds into dramatic situations in which they interact with one another. By dramatizing such encounters, the writer often sheds light on certain similarities and differences in the characters' respective cultures. In what manner or under what circumstances do such encounters take place? How do the involved characters act and react? What is the consequence of the contact? Does it, in the words of Bronislaw Malinowski, lead to conflict, cooperation, or com-

promise? What insights, if any? Does the author incidentally or deliberately transpose his or her native point of view onto alien characters or vice versa? These are some sample questions we may raise when we undertake this sort of literary study. The same approach may also mean the method by which certain comparable aspects of different cultures as dealt with by an author or several authors are compared or contrasted systematically. Emma Enfeng Tenn has illustrated this method in part by comparing the different attitudes toward the family on the part of Pearl S. Buck's Chinese and American characters. Basically, Harold R. Isaacs also employed this method in his interesting book, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*. To cite one more example, Francis L. K. Hsu, in *Americans and Chinese*, also used literature, among other means, to determine certain comparable qualities of the two cultures.<sup>2</sup>

It is exactly the approach as defined in the above passage that I have adopted in the study of Pearl Buck's fiction. Only by using this approach, I believe, can I expect to make a balanced analysis of the issue under question.

Pearl Buck may be taken as an "internationalist" in the sense that she was always concerned with situations or issues of an international nature. She became an internationalist by chance rather than by choice. Had she been brought up in her own country, instead of her adopted one—China, she would probably have acquired an entirely different outlook on the world. It is clear that her cross-cultural perceptivity resulted from her abundant experiences of having lived in "several worlds." Her life, her thought, and her work have all been colored or conditioned, in one way or another, by the "cross-culturalism" thus acquired. The most important reason why she appealed to the Nobel prize jury in 1938,

<sup>2</sup> Yü Yuh-chao, "A Cross-cultural Approach to Literature," in *Literature and Society: Cross-cultural Perspectives*, ed. Roger J. Bresnahan (Los Baños, Philippines: United States Information Service, 1976), pp. 260-76.

according to James Gray, was that she was "by way of being an internationalist."<sup>3</sup> This observation certainly stands to reason.

Owing to the element of cross-culturalism prevailing in the bulk of her works, Pearl Buck occupied a special place among her contemporaries. As a matter of fact, she cannot be counted either as a purely American, or as a purely Asian, writer. She stood somewhere in between, but she might be content to be called an internationalist. In this connection an unnamed critic is right in saying:

One cannot conveniently place her in one school or another of our short story writers and novelists. Though an honored member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she is not of the mainstream of her colleagues of the twenties, thirties and forties who brought the modern American short story to fruition. Acclaimed and beloved by peoples of the world, indeed the most translated American author next to Mark Twain, she belongs rather to the mainstream of world literature.<sup>4</sup>

If there is a school of internationalist writers, then it must be where Pearl Buck wanted to belong. In fact, she was quite aware that she did not belong to the mainstream of American literature. Once she remarked that American critics did not fully understand her. She said, "American critics, accustomed to dealing with American writers, ought to face the fact that I am not a 100 percent American writer." She certainly had good reason to say so. Incidentally, the unfavorable criticism concerning her winning of the Nobel literary prize was a heavy blow from which she never recovered completely.

<sup>3</sup> James Gray, *On Second Thought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1946), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, "Introduction" to *Hearts Come Home and Other Stories*, by Pearl S. Buck (New York: Pocket Books, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Albin Krebs, "Pearl Buck Surveys Literary Scene," *New York Times*, 28 July, 1969.

She confessed in her autobiography that she had been "too diffident, ever since, to mingle with American writers...."<sup>6</sup> She was not a typical American author essentially because she was a product of Eastern and Western cultures and also because she was particularly interested in writing about the complicated encounters of those cultures. It is true that some of her works deal exclusively with Americans and their society, but it must be recognized that her world-wide reputation is primarily based on those works reflecting her cross-cultural perceptions.

Of the several countries dealt with in her fiction, China is most impressively handled. Consequently, she is most often associated with her interpretations of China and the Chinese, especially in *The Good Earth*, *East Wind: West Wind*, *The Mother*, *Pavilion of Women*, and *Dragon Seed*. She turned out to be the first major non-Chinese writer who could make the Chinese and their culture come alive for Westerners. The tremendous influence she has exerted on the attitudes of Westerners toward the Orient in general and China in particular becomes an important factor contributing to her reputation. In praise of her influence on the West, James Gray writes, "A full share of the credit for that change of mood on the part of the western world must go to Pearl Buck. Her series of books helped to change our minds, moving them in the direction of sanity, compassion, and understanding."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, she helped a great deal to clear away the highly romantic or distorted perspectives through which Westerners used to see the Orient.

The extraordinary popularity Pearl Buck achieved through introducing the Orient to the Occident can be easily seen from a comparison between her and other

<sup>6</sup> Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds* (New York: John Day, 1954), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> James Gray, p. 34.

western writers who have made similar efforts. Here is an observation made by G. A. Cevalasco in 1967:

Of the more than 250 Western novelists who have used China as backdrop, she is quantitatively and qualitatively the most outstanding. Although Maugham's *On a Chinese Screen*, Hobart's *Oil for the Lamps of China*, Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, and Cronin's *The Keys of the Kingdom* are all significant literary achievements, even taken collectively these leading British and American novelists of China and her people do not surpass the works of Pearl Buck. Most Western writers, moreover, seem to exhaust their knowledge and interest in the Orient with a single book, but not Pearl Buck. She has written almost fifty volumes that treat exclusively of China and the Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

This passage gives a succinct and appropriate appraisal of Pearl Buck's success in her fictional treatment of the Chinese and their culture.

Pearl Buck's broad knowledge of the Chinese people is well manifested in the remarkable diversity of Chinese characters in her work. They cover a rather wide range of professions and age groups. Several types of Chinese characters prove to be particularly distinguished, including the industrious, frugal, and illiterate peasants, the selfish, pleasure-loving, and snobbish landlords, the confused, discontented, and critical young intellectuals trained at home or abroad, the provincial, cruel, and power-craving warlords, the restless, iconoclastic, and anti-imperialist revolutionists, as well as the submissive, dutiful, and ignorant housewives who have great difficulty in coping with their modern educated husbands. Pearl Buck describes both positive and negative traits of the Chinese, but her general image of the Chinese is quite favorable. She gives a comprehensive description of such an image in the following passage:

When I think of the Chinese, I think of a kind of person I like. He is not poetic, but extremely realistic, practical rather

<sup>8</sup> G. A. Cevalasco, "Pearl Buck and the Chinese Novel," *Asian Studies*, 5 (December, 1967), 444.

than artistic. The Chinese artist is never an artist for art's sake. Art is always a means or a philosophy with the Chinese .... The Chinese is a loyal father and friend. But this has its limits. He is not fantastically loyal. This loyalty will come to an end if occasion demands it. He is common-sensible about everything.... The Chinese can be terribly cruel. He never loves an animal. He will never die of love. He is not egocentric. He is remote from the maudlin in everything. He is a man of principle, but not to the point of folly, for his goal is larger than any one principle or any one situation. I see these as features of the basic character of the Chinese, the basis of all the characters I have created, the variety occurring as I discover deviations and combinations of so many different kinds. There is some mixture of some or all of these qualities in every Chinese I have ever known.<sup>9</sup>

Through such a penetrating analysis of the Chinese character in both her fictional and non-fictional writings, Pearl Buck displays amazing perceptivity about the Chinese people. What further distinguishes her as an internationalist writer lies in the fact that she was also fascinated by the peoples and cultures of other Asian countries, including Japan, Korea, and India. Although she is less famous for her writings about these peoples, her presentation of them in *The Living Reed*, *The Patriot*, *The Hidden Flower*, *Come, My Beloved*, and *Mandala* is rather expressive of her familiarity with their cultures.

Three major types of Japanese people caught Pearl Buck's special interest, namely, militarists, traditionalists and modernized Japanese. The militarists in her fiction are extremely ambitious, disciplined, cruel, haughty, and unreasonable. They are detestable primarily because they destroy peace. The atrocities they have done to other peoples, especially the Chinese and the Koreans, are effectively depicted. Unlike the militarists, other types of Japanese characters receive rather sympathetic

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Mind: American Images of China and India* (New York: John Day, 1958), p. 158.

treatment. Their refined artistic taste as reflected in their gardens and flower arrangement, their love of order and cleanliness, their instinctive spirit of solidarity, their high literacy, their sophisticated etiquette, and their readiness to accept influences from other countries—all these features which combine to shape the national character of Japan have been firmly grasped by Pearl Buck.

She was also interested in portraying Korean and Indian characters, especially those of aristocratic origin. As represented by the patriotic revolutionists in *The Living Reed*, Koreans are a very proud, brave, dynamic, and strong-willed people. They display these qualities largely through their desperate struggle against Japanese rule. As for Indian people, two types of them are contrasted impressively, that is, the wealthy and well-educated elite vs. the fatalistic and poverty-stricken masses. On the whole Pearl Buck's image of the Indian people is also favorable since she called special attention to their great wisdom as manifested in their religions and philosophy.

Comparatively, Westerners are not so successfully portrayed as Orientals in Pearl Buck's works. The British characters, as seen in *The Promise* and *Imperial Woman*, are described in a rather skimpy manner. This is perhaps because the author wanted to direct attention only to their imperialist mentality. As for American characters, various types of them are depicted, including businessmen, physicians, scientists, artists, middle-class housewives, diplomats, and missionaries. Generally speaking, these Americans share such qualities as naturalness, plainness, forthrightness, and friendliness, the qualities which Pearl Buck liked best as she pointed out in a speech entitled "What America Means to Me."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Pearl S. Buck, "What America Means to Me," in her *What America Means to Me* (New York: John Day, 1943), pp. 196-212.



However, some characters display such undesirable qualities as being indifferent to or contemptuous of other peoples. The quality which has received most severe criticism from Pearl Buck is what she called the sense of "white supremacy." As a result, her image of an arrogant white man with a strong feeling of superiority leaves a deep impression on the reader.

It is an unusual accomplishment for Pearl Buck to present so many different images of various peoples in her works. What is equally significant is that she frequently presents them by way of making cross-cultural comparisons. Sometimes she compares two or three Asian peoples, as she does in *The Patriot* with the Chinese and the Japanese. But more often than not she compares Westerners with Easterners. The major differences between them as treated in her works lie in their attitudes toward nature, science, religion, and family. Most of her Eastern characters have an intimate feeling toward nature and therefore regard themselves as a part of it. This feeling is clearly reflected in the tenacious love of land on the part of Wang Lung and Ling Tan and other Chinese peasants, in the great pleasure which such Japanese characters as Mr. Muraki and Dr. Sotan Sakai derive from their immaculate gardens, as well as in Indian people's mystical respect for "sacred cows" and other natural objects. By contrast, no such harmony between man and nature is sought by Pearl Buck's American characters. They tend to think of nature essentially in physical or material terms. They wish to tame or dominate it for practical purposes. For example, Bert Osgood in *Mandala* wants to have all the crocodiles in a lake killed for the sake of tourism, and Mr. MacArd in *Come, My Beloved* cannot appreciate his Indian guide's respect for animals. This attitude toward nature has much to do with their emphasis on science. They are far more

scientifically minded than Orientals. In fact, many of Pearl Buck's American characters are scientists, such as Mrs. Winters in *The New Year* and the physicists in *Command the Morning*. American progress in science and technology is clearly juxtaposed against Asian backwardness in the same fields.

A striking comparison between Oriental polytheism and Western monotheism is also made in many of Pearl Buck's works, especially those dealing with missionaries. Buddhism and Hinduism are often presented from a Westerner's point of view while Christianity is often viewed through an Easterner's eyes. The different concepts of religion between the East and the West become a main source of cross-cultural conflict. Pearl Buck presented this sort of conflict in order to illustrate the importance of religious tolerance. For the same purpose, she liked to call attention to Chinese acceptance of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. This tolerant attitude toward religions is, as demonstrated in Pearl Buck's works, in sharp contrast to the Christian concept that there is only one true God.

According to Pearl Buck, Orientals and Westerners also differ considerably in their attitudes toward the family. Orientals attach much greater importance to family life than Westerners. The family is the center of Oriental life. It exerts great influence on individuals. Most of Pearl Buck's Asian characters are very closely tied to their families. They regard it as an important duty to serve as links between their ancestors and offspring. Such a close tie between individuals and their families is scarcely found in her American novels. However, the traditional authority of the family is challenged by many young people in Asia who have been influenced by the West. They begin to assert their individuality and independence by freeing themselves from the control of the family.

The fact that Pearl Buck was able to depict various peoples and their cultures is a plain indication of her cross-cultural sensitivity. Concerning the presentation of her cross-cultural observations, several things can be singled out here. First, she was perceptive enough to have located a large number of causes which brought about cross-cultural contact. These causes include academic pursuit (as seen in the case of Wang Yuan in *A House Divided*), immigration (as seen in the Jewish families in *Peony*), tourism (as seen in *Mandala*), inter-racial love (as seen in Fengmo and Mary in *Pavilion of Women*), intermarriage (as seen in Tom and Bettina in *The Angry Wife*), the missionary movement (as seen in *The Young Revolutionist*), colonialism (as seen in the British rule of India and Burma in *Come, My Beloved* and *The Promise* respectively), imperialism (as seen in the Japanese invasion of China and Korea in *Dragon Seed* and *The Living Reed* respectively), and military confrontations (as seen in *Command the Morning*). The numerous causes of cross-cultural contacts as illustrated in Pearl Buck's works may also serve as a clear proof of her strong internationalist inclination, which led her to explore many kinds of cross-cultural situations.

After the cross-cultural contact is established, the author's next step is to delineate how the individuals concerned react to the contact. It is usually by way of depicting the interactions between those who have come into such contact that she revealed her points of view on the cultures concerned. Normally, their interactions would develop into some sort of conflict, and she then compared or contrasted the cultures concerned by way of explicating such conflicts. This technique of handling cross-cultural contacts is skilfully employed in her first novel in which a number of conflicting norms or values as embodied by two groups of characters representing "east wind" (China) and "west wind" (America) are

over and over again brought into sharp juxtapositions or comparisons. In many of her subsequent works, notably *Peony*, *The Hidden Flower*, *Kinfolk*, *Imperial Woman*, *Letter from Peking*, and *The Living Reed*, she repeatedly utilized this same technique to unfold cross-cultural themes.

Another important point regarding her treatment of cross-cultural contacts is that she paid special attention to the impact of such contacts on her characters. Generally, her characters have demonstrated three different ways of reacting to such contacts, the reactions being hostile, friendly, or compromising. Some people choose to reject the norms or values of the culture with which they come into contact and continue to assert the norms or values of their own culture. This hostile reaction to the contact is illustrated by Mr. and Mrs. K'ung in *East Wind: West Wind*, Dr. Liang Wen Hua and his elder son in *Kinfolk*, the revolutionists in "Father Andrea," Mathilde in "Repatriated," and Dr. Sotan Sakai in *The Hidden Flower*. Some other people react in the opposite way. They are receptive to the contact and therefore willing to absorb the introduced norms or values and forsake those they originally held. This kind of reaction makes possible the process of the so-called westernization or modernization commonly seen in developing countries. It is demonstrated by such characters as Ai-lan in *A House Divided*, young Mr. K'ung in *East Wind: West Wind*, Ko-sen in *The Young Revolutionist*, and David in *Peony*. A third reaction seeks a compromise between the introduced values and the corresponding ones of one's own culture. This conditional adoption of introduced values is exemplified by Kwei-lan in *East Wind: West Wind*, Wang Yuan in *A House Divided*, Madame Wu in *Pavilion of Women*, Tzu Hsi in *Imperial Woman*, and Jehar in *Come, My Beloved*. This critical or selective attitude toward cross-cultural contacts is

more healthy than the others because it is usually conducive to the development of cultural pluralism.

The various patterns of reaction to cross-cultural encounters may serve as an additional expression of Pearl Buck's insight into cross-culturalism. However, most of her western characters, especially missionaries, are more often than not described as unresponsive to the Eastern cultures to which they are exposed. This may be because, when they come into contact with other peoples, they are usually preoccupied with their purpose of giving or teaching something to those peoples instead of receiving or learning something from them. Or it may be simply due to their sense of superiority. But, if they had been more varied in their reactions to Eastern cultures, the total picture of their cross-cultural experiences as drawn in Pearl Buck's works would have appeared more truthful and lively.

It is evident that Pearl Buck took such pains to explore cross-cultural encounters because she wanted to improve cross-cultural understanding among peoples. As a matter of fact, this purpose was prompted by her ideal of creating "one world" out of her "several worlds." By this ideal she did not mean that all cultures should be merged into one or that all peoples should become alike. Instead, she meant that all peoples should try to understand and appreciate each other's culture so that they can expect to live together peacefully and harmoniously on equal grounds. When she denounced isolationism, she expounded this position by saying:

I am not arguing for the amalgamation or the synthesis of civilization. The melting-pot idea is futile in India or the United States. The brew in a melting pot is always boiling over. It will not do for peace or for cooperation. Our own country, the United States, suffices for illustration. We have achieved a union at least within ourselves. Each state, each

party, each group, takes pride in its own being, in its difference, as well as in its union with the whole.<sup>11</sup>

As shown in this passage, the "one world" in Pearl Buck's mind is an ideal state in which all peoples share the same aspiration for harmonious co-existence while taking pride in their respective cultures. She not only acknowledged the differences existing among peoples but also stressed that the differences are indispensable to the enrichment of human civilization as a whole. What she really desired was that all peoples can become tolerant and appreciative of each other's distinct features. Such mutual tolerance and appreciation is the foundation upon which the "one world" can be built.

Incidentally, in recent years there has been much discussion in U.S. academic circles about the whole concept of the "melting pot," and there has been a growing tendency to say that the "melting pot" never really worked in America. Instead it is now fashionable to talk about "cultural pluralism," or a "cultural mosaic," as various immigrant groups assert their own "ethnic" identities, so that there are "Afro-Americans," "Italian-Americans," "Polish-Americans," "Chinese-Americans," etc. It is obvious, therefore, that Pearl Buck, in stressing the importance of improving cross-cultural communication for the sake of cultural pluralism, was several decades ahead of her time.

The aspiration that one will try to become a member of the "one world" by understanding and accepting the "several worlds" to which one is exposed is a thread by which most of Pearl Buck's works can be strung together. For carrying out this aspiration the most logical method to use is to give peoples of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds the opportunity to mingle with one another, to adjust to one another, and to learn from one another.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

This is exactly the method employed by Pearl Buck. By using this method she was able to expose some specific obstacles in the way of a harmonious and understanding relationship among peoples. As has been shown in her works, the greatest obstacle which prevents peoples from establishing such relationships is rooted in racial inequality or racial prejudice. She attacked racial inequality vehemently because in her opinion it can bring about such misfortunes as failure of interracial love and marriage (as seen in the case of *The Hidden Flower*), the predicament of displaced children (as seen in *The New Year*), religious intolerance (as seen in *Peony*), and even war (as seen in *The Promise*). It is made very clear that a tolerant and peaceful relationship among peoples is impossible unless all races can stand on equal grounds. Since she attached so much importance to the building of such an ideal cross-cultural relationship, tolerance, equality, and peace turn out to be the major themes in her works dealing with cross-cultural encounters.

Pearl Buck's efforts to present these significant themes were essentially prompted by her faith in human nature. This faith is manifested in, among other things, her constant references to the Chinese saying: "All men are brothers," or "All under heaven are one." To her the noblest human feeling is called "universal brotherhood," which underlies her unfailing concern with both peace in the world and the future of human civilization. In consequence she is generally recognized as a humanitarian writer. However, she resented being so called. In an interview in 1969, she argued:

I am not a humanitarian. It's just that a writer must be involved in the mainstream of life in order to write, and I cannot endure disorder in any form. When I become involved and find a situation that is not right, then I must try to do something to change it. But it is the artist's sense of order

that leads me to undertake such a cause as displaced children, not any humanitarian feelings. I am a writer, and my work is to write books.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, she is a humanitarian in the true sense of the word. If she was motivated to undertake her chosen causes by an artist's sense of order, instead of humanitarian feelings, then her sense of order must be inseparable from her eagerness to defend humanity. She was not a writer in an ivory tower; she was very actively involved in human affairs. Accordingly, any conflict or hostility existing among peoples, any deprivation of freedom and equality, any threat of poverty and disease, or any form of cross-cultural misunderstanding became a form of disorder which she could not stand. It is only natural then that she advocated racial equality and world peace in many of her works. Her unwavering aspiration for a unified and peaceful world is definitely an expression of the highest form of humanitarianism.

Pearl Buck's humanitarian cross-culturalism may be attributed to her missionary heritage. Although she resigned from the missionary service in the mid-stream of her life, she never really ceased to be inspired by the kind of missionary spirit as embodied by her prominent parents. She was strongly opposed to many practices carried on by what she called mediocre missionaries. She did not even approve of the fundamental missionary concept of preaching Christianity to "heathen" peoples in an attempt to convert them into Christians. Nonetheless, she never doubted the value of the Christian idea to save the world with the kind of love embodied by Jesus Christ. Behind her creation of the character of Ted MacArd in *Come, My Beloved* was definitely this faith in Christian love. Behind her condemnation of the use of the atomic bomb in *Command the Morning* and *All Under Heaven* was also the same faith. Her

<sup>12</sup> Albin Krebs, *op. cit.*



espousal of this faith in the power of love to save the world may explain everything she wrote, did, or said. As she expressed in a poem entitled "Essence,"<sup>13</sup> this love is indeed the essence of her works as a whole. This is also why she was, in her own words, "always in love with great ends."<sup>14</sup>

If her inherited missionary spirit led her to favor such themes as racial equality, religious tolerance, and world peace, it may also have led her to present them in the ways she did. Consciously or unconsciously, she seemed at times to be somewhat preoccupied with her chosen "great ends". She was very much conscious, however, of the distinction between a moralizer and an artist, and she professed to be an artist. She defined the "true artist" as one who will never choose a story, or twist life, to illustrate his moral theory, as a preacher might do. She maintained that a good novel can teach something without moralizing so long as it is true to life, and so she defended "artistic didacticism." Still she had some difficulty in freeing herself completely from the moralizing tendency of a missionary. As shown in such works as *The Young Revolutionist* and *All Under Heaven*, she occasionally yielded to the temptation to moralize at the cost of art. Whenever this happened, her treatment of cross-cultural relationships became strained and contrived.

Strangely, this limitation in her artistry became increasing apparent after she left China to settle permanently in America. In the earlier part of her career, she was able to achieve a high level of artistic refinement, as observed by Phyllis Bentley in an article entitled

<sup>13</sup> The last sentence of this poem reads: "On this earth, though far or near,/Without love there's only fear." The poem is collected in *Words of Love*, by Pearl S. Buck (New York: John Day, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Pearl Buck and Eslanda Goode Robeson, *American Argument* (New York: John Day, 1949), p. 203.

"The Art of Pearl S. Buck."<sup>15</sup> But in some of her post-Nobel works she was obviously inclined to concern herself with moralizing to the neglect of art. This is why a critic, Dody Weston Thompson, considers her not as an artist but a teller of "morality tales."<sup>16</sup> Thompson criticizes her later works by saying that they "display at one time or another, and sometimes all at once, careless lack of control of point of view, cliché characters, a sentimental Pollyannaism, a scarcely veiled didacticism, and a lack of depth despite a breadth of theme."<sup>17</sup> The deterioration in Pearl Buck's artistic performance may be attributed primarily to her obsession with humanitarianism.

This is perhaps the most obvious reason why Pearl Buck has received comparatively little attention from critics. She chose not to keep abreast of modern literary trends which were initiated by such avant-garde figures as James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. She preferred to uphold the traditional aesthetics of the novel while considering modern methods of novel writing as not necessarily "an advance over the old."<sup>18</sup> As a result she did not actually care to meet the demands on which modern critics generally insist, such as subtlety of expression, sophistication of thought, psychological probing, and complexity of language. A tension has thus arisen between her and the critics.

However, G. A. Cevalasco raises a question as to whether or not it is fair to criticize Pearl Buck's work by literary standards disagreeable to her. He holds that

<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Bentley, "The Art of Pearl S. Buck," *The English Journal*, 24 (December, 1935), 791-800.

<sup>16</sup> Dody Weston Thompson, "Pearl S. Buck," in *American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize*, ed. Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Pearl S. Buck, "On the Writing of Novels," *Randolph-Macon Woman's College Alumnae Bulletin*, 26 (June, 1933), 7.

"it may be somewhat uncritical of them [American critics] to judge her fictional efforts according to artistic dogma and aesthetic criteria she herself does not accept or attempt to emulate."<sup>19</sup> He regrets that they have been overly concerned with "such avant-garde considerations as archetypes, symbolism, the subconscious, the unconscious, interior monologues, and stream-of-consciousness techniques to be interested in the quintessential element of the novel—its narrative quality."<sup>20</sup> Another critic, Elizabeth Janeway, also praises the distinguished narrative quality of Pearl Buck's work by saying, "She has something to say and she says it with lucid ease. If she lacks the warmth of humor she makes up for it by the warmth of sympathy. If she has a mission she can also tell a story."<sup>21</sup> This criticism gives a convincing explanation of Pearl Buck's wide readership throughout the world despite the fact that most critics have ignored her. For the general reading public, she made up for some technical deficiencies by telling interesting and meaningful stories in plain and warm language.

That a Nobel literary prize winner should have received so little critical attention and at the same time have enjoyed so great a readership is itself an unusual phenomenon. Writing after Pearl Buck's death, Thomas Lask described this phenomenon tersely, "She had no standing among literary critics.... What the critics disdain, her multitude of readers embrace. It's an arrangement she would have approved of."<sup>22</sup> Although Lask did not elaborate on this statement, it may be

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<sup>19</sup> Cevalco, p. 449.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Janeway, "The Optimistic World of Miss Buck," *New York Times Book Review*, 25 May, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Lask, "Writer Cited as Defender of Humanity," *New York Times*, 7 March, 1973, p. 40C.

logical to assume that what Pearl Buck's readers like most about her work is her straightforward and often entertaining plots objectively presented in a relatively simple and direct style. Jason Lindsey is one of those who are attracted to the simplicity of her language. He defends it as a virtue instead of a flaw by saying:

Her efforts in behalf of communication have caused certain undiscerning critics to describe her as a simple writer. Nothing could be wider of the mark. Distinguished, non-patronizing simplicity of style is very hard to come by. Pearl Buck's several styles are all so deceptively simple that they constitute a snare by which more than one imitator has been caught.<sup>23</sup>

Simplicity for the sake of communication—these words could be read as an important insight into the secret of Pearl Buck's world-wide popularity. Indeed, communication is the right key word to use for accounting for her contribution to the world. By means of her widely circulated works, especially those dealing with cross-cultural subject matter, she has paved a broad way leading to a better cross-cultural communication.

In Pearl Buck's opinion, a fine critic is one who "would have judged the writer on how well he had accomplished the goal he had set for himself, and not have befuddled the reader by irrelevant remarks of his own."<sup>24</sup> As this paper has demonstrated, her ultimate goal is to reach across the boundaries of races and cultures. So far as this goal is concerned, she has moderately succeeded, and, for this reason, she will always be remembered as a hard-working pioneer in the field of cross-cultural exploration.

<sup>23</sup> Jason Lindsey made these remarks in 1966 in a course on the American winners of the Nobel Literary Prize at the Kursverksamheten of Stockholm University. Quoted in *For Spacious Skies: Journey in Dialogue*, by Pearl Buck and Theodore F. Harris (New York: John Day, 1966), p. 138.

<sup>24</sup> Pearl Buck, *A Bridge for Passing* (New York: John Day, 1961), p. 153.

In short, a reading of Pearl Buck's works centering on such exploration will inevitably result in the broadening of one's vision of the world and the sharpening of one's cross-cultural sympathy and perceptivity. To read such works embodying her internationally-oriented and humanitarian-based idealism is to get to know a respectable writer who is constantly seeking to transcend cross-cultural boundaries. Her "several worlds" are the inexhaustible sources of material for her writings, but all her literary efforts have undoubtedly grown out of her aspiration for "one world." This "one world" idealism turns out to be the most commendable legacy she has handed down to her audience in both the East and the West.

## 賽珍珠小說中的文化交錯思想

(摘要)

余 玉 照

賽珍珠的小說多半處理文化交錯的題材，所以，如欲正確評判她的作品特色，必須先瞭解她表現在作品中的文化交錯思想。本文主旨即在於闡釋她這種思想的內涵及其表現的種種方式與技巧，同時兼論她如何受到這種思想的影響，而建立她在文壇上的特殊地位。

賽珍珠曾經生活在「幾個世界」裏，這種經歷終於孕育了她的既深且固的文化交錯思想，也使她成爲一個國際性作家。她之榮獲一九三八年諾貝爾文學獎，主因之一便是她的作品富於國際色彩。

在她筆下的幾個國家中，中國是她最拿手的好題材。大地三部曲、東風：西風、龍種、深閨怨以及慈禧太后等作品，使西方人不再以往昔那種浪漫不切實際的眼光看中國。另外，她在長青竹中寫韓國，在愛國者與隱藏的花朵寫日本，在來吧，吾愛與曼達拉中寫印度，無不流露出她對整個東方的興趣。她喜歡藉着描繪不同人民之間的接觸情形來表達她對不同文化之認識。例如東西方對自然、宗教與家庭的相異態度，她在作品中便作了有趣的比較或對照。她能夠同時處理幾個不同民族及其文化固屬難得，但同樣可貴的是她能夠深入觀察許多文化交錯的導因以及不同人民或文化面臨種種文化交錯情境時的種種不同的反應。這些導因與反應，在她筆下，便常常有效地推動了她作品中的故事情節，刻劃了不同文化背景的人物，終而呈現了她所偏愛的文化交錯主題。