GENDER, ECONOMIC AGENCY, AND SOCIAL CLASS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PEARL BUCK'S *THE HOUSE OF EARTH* TRILOGY THROUGH THE DRAMATISTIC PENTAD OF KENNETH BURKE

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DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Joseph Chirayil Kurian, thank you for your unconditional love and unwavering faith in my abilities. You are dearly missed!

To my children, Suzanne and Nathan, who inspire and motivate me. All my love!

"By your perseverance you will secure your lives."
Luke 21:19

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ABSTRACT

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GENDER, ECONOMIC AGENCY, AND SOCIAL CLASS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PEARL BUCK'S *THE HOUSE OF EARTH* TRILOGY THROUGH THE DRAMATISTIC PENTAD OF KENNETH BURKE

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For over two hundred years, American impressions of the Chinese crystallized as a result of the accounts provided by travelers, Christian missionaries, and merchants. These accounts propagated misconceptions and stereotypes regarding China and the Chinese. American Nobel-prize winning writer Pearl S. Buck had lived in China for the first thirty-four years of her life, a period which gave her a unique perspective into the lives and practices of the Chinese (Conn, "What the Remarkable Legacy"). This study examines Pearl S. Buck's *The House of Earth* trilogy in which she sought to showcase the real lives of the Chinese and their socio-economic realities. Twentieth-century rhetorician Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory of the dramatistic pentad, along with his theories of identification, mystery, hierarchy, and perfection, are applied to *The Good Earth, Sons,* and *A House Divided* to examine Buck's rhetorical practices.

This study examines the three novels of *The House of Earth* trilogy through the lens of gender, economic agency, and social class. The introductory chapter discusses the inception and evolution of American impressions of the Chinese and Pearl Buck's concerns regarding the prevalent misconceptions in America regarding the Chinese and

their nation. Additionally, the chapter provides an overview of Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism and the five pentadic terms – act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. Using the pentadic ratios in conjunction with Burke's theories of identification, mystery, hierarchy, and perfection, the succeeding chapters reveal how specific female characters gain and lose agency in a patriarchal culture; how men and women establish relationships with each other to build or improve their economic agency; and, the issues of class and social mobility in late imperial and early modern China. The final chapter examines how Pearl Buck established identification with American readers through social issues such as gender, economic agency, and social class in order to bridge the divide between America and China.

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS OF THE CHINESE AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON PEARL S. BUCK AND KENNETH BURKE

In his 1958 research study *Scratches on Our Mind: American Images of China and India*, Harold Isaacs observed, "Like China's great rivers, flooding and receding and shifting their courses to the sea, American images of the Chinese have travelled a long and changing way…" (63). American impressions regarding China developed as the result of domestic and international factors. An early factor was that the "great transcontinental railroads were being built" during the post-Civil War years which called for an extensive labor force (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 31). The need drew Chinese immigrants to America where they were initially accepted; however, as the immigrants attempted to find employment in other sectors, discontent grew across the country. By the late nineteenth century, economic discontent against the Chinese immigrants led to political and cultural actions that marginalized and stereotyped this population. In 1882, political opposition against Chinese immigration led to "The first Chinese exclusion act, which suspended immigration for ten years, was passed…it was extended for another ten years in 1892, through the Geary Act, and for another ten in 1902" (31).

Paralleling the imposition of these laws was the typecasting of Chinese nationals in society:

> Newspaper cartoons, an innovation of the 1890s, quickly began pandering to the national Sinophobia; daily and Sunday strips were filled with the slanted eyes, long queues, and robes of burlesque characters who muttered in pidgin English as they schemed, soliloquized, and eventually came to some bad end or other. (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 31)

The exclusion of the Chinese was not peculiar to American society. As a sixteen-year old, Pearl Buck lived in Shanghai for a year to attend the Jewell School. During her sojourn in the city, she came across "Chinese of mixed blood, miserable blue-eyed citizens who belonged nowhere;" and, at a foreign park in Shanghai, she observed signage that read "NO CHINESE, NO DOGS" (Stirling 22).

In addition, American opinions were also shaped through literature and motion pictures. American poet Bret Harte's famous poem "The Heathen Chinese," published in 1870, was popular; but as Harte himself later admitted, it "may have been the worst poem that anyone ever wrote" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 2). The poem showcased two common Chinese stereotypes, the "sly comic hero" Ah Sin and Confucius who was well known to Americans, but "only as the author of a number of silly aphorisms" (2). Along with literature, by the end of the nineteenth century, American impressions of the Chinese were also groomed through the fast-growing medium of motion pictures that reinforced stereotypical Chinese characters. American films tended to portray the Chinese as

"ludicrous, clownish people, the salacious seducers of white women and heartless murderers of innocent Christians" (Haddad). Even into the 1930s, "films such as *The Yellow Menace, The Red Lantern, The Exploits of Elaine* [among others] were being churned out by the [American] film industry" (Haddad). Along with the domestic economic, political, and social factors, Americans were also influenced by the experiences of Westerners in faraway China.

To late nineteenth-century Americans, China was a "vast, distant and exotic" place known through the "handful of merchants, soldiers and diplomats" who had traveled there (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 2). Other initial impressions of China came from the writings of missionaries, men and women who "were driven by the conviction that they were bringing light to people in darkness" (2-3). The attitudes of the American missionaries paralleled the American diplomatic approach, a combination of benevolence and arrogance, where "Politicians could depend on evangelists to affirm that the United States had a civilizing destiny, a responsibility to bring the world's lesser breeds up to an American standard" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 32). Missionaries approached their analysis of China and its culture with American and Christian values as their frames of reference. Protestant missionaries who translated Western texts into Chinese "advocated that in order to introduce foreign thought to China… the existing and deep-rooted ideological systems ought to be questioned or discarded" (M. Lu). Published in 1894, the missionary publication, *Chinese Characteristics* was written by a Congregational minister Abraham H. Smith who studied Chinese village life extensively for over thirty years. Due to his knowledge of the nation and its culture, he "professed a certain respect for cultural

difference… [and] frequently noted the advantages of Chinese customs and defended China from the charge that it was uncivilized" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 35). However, his study of the Chinese people focuses on what he identifies as negative qualities in the culture:

> The Chinese are indifferent to time, to crowding and noise, to the value of privacy; they know nothing at all of sanitation and they display a stoic disregard for comfort and convenience. They are irrationally sensitive to the loss of face yet at the same time amused by Western notions of guilt. They are notoriously cruel to animals. (35)

When compared against American middle-class values of "punctuality, accuracy, [and] public spirit," the Chinese culture was found to be lacking in civilizing characteristics (35). Owing to the growing numbers of Chinese immigrants, American's foreign interests in China and American travelers to China, there was growing hunger for information about this "new" ancient culture. However, the information that was available to the American audience was "an amalgam of truth, half-truth, and outright fable" (35).

Growing up in China, American writer Pearl S. Buck had a unique perspective of the country, its people, and traditions. The daughter of American Presbyterian missionaries, Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker was born in her mother's home in Hillsboro, West Virginia in 1892. At three months of age, she was taken to China where she lived in two worlds that were mostly mutually exclusive. In *My Several Worlds*, she recalled "I grew up in a double world, the small white clear Presbyterian American world of my

parents and the big loving merry no-too-clean Chinese world, and there was no communication between them" (Buck 11). As a child, Buck learned English from her mother and colloquial Chinese from her governess, Amah Wang. Amah Wang's presence allowed Buck to understand ordinary Chinese life which included wandering the local streets, "overhearing the talk of ordinary people, and watching the barbers, herbal doctors, food vendors, carpenters, and slaves go about their business" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 26). While she experienced local life to a great extent, "She was simultaneously an outsider and an insider in two different societies" (24). Pearl Buck continued to experience displacement and the sense of being a foreigner when she returned to the United States in 1910 to attend the Randolf-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. The college student body predominantly consisted of young, white, female students "whose condescension to her unfashionable clothes and hairstyle" made Buck's initial months lonely and unhappy (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 48). Even more so, she was dismayed that her college mates never asked about China, or "how they lived and whether China was like…[America]" (Buck, *My Several Worlds* 104). However, not all her experiences were negative. She thrived in the feminine intellectual environment and was introduced to men who "believed in the intellectual capacities of women" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 47). While Buck reflected that college was only an "incident" in her life, her biographer Peter Conn argues that, in combination with her upbringing in a patriarchal home and society, it "contributed significantly to Pearl's embryonic feminism" (50- 51).

In addition to her growing concern for women, Pearl Buck's short visits to the United States from China led her to develop a "painful appreciation of the tensions and misunderstandings which subsisted on the jagged cultural edge between China and the West" (Hunt 35). She was concerned about the Western "stereotyped picture of the Chinese as 'the impassive, unemotional, yellow Oriental, with a stealthy step, an impenetrable face, and a swinging queue" (37). In her book *China: Past and Present,* Pearl Buck identified her deep regard for the Chinese as the reason why she wrote about China and Chinese characters. She wrote, 'My beloved people of China…You formed me, fed me, you shaped me as I am forever…To the best of my ability, I have tried to speak for you" (Buck 176-77). The first Nobel-prize winning American woman of letters, Pearl Buck helped shape an American image of China with the publication of her 1931 novel *The Good Earth* (Hunt 33). The first book in her trilogy, *The Good Earth,* "was an important departure in the use of a Chinese theme in American fiction [that]…drew heavily on Chinese materials and contained plausible Chinese characters [rather than] cardboard Chinese characters" (38). Featuring three generations of the Wang family, *The Good Earth* trilogy is Buck's study of China's transitory struggle from its ancient, traditional roots to a modern nation.

Although Buck did not consider herself a "professional interpreter" of China, the novels of *The Good Earth* trilogy closely examine various Chinese social, political, and economic concerns and transitions during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. She considered herself a novelist "interested in the human heart and its behavior" (Buck, *China As I See It* 11). Buck uses China as the lens to examine universal human concerns

and create a resonance with her readers in the West. The immense popularity of her novel, *The Good Earth*, is testament to the success of her rhetorical strategy and reaffirms Kenneth Burke's comment that "effective literature could be nothing else, but rhetoric" (Bizzell and Hersberg 1295).

Twentieth century rhetorician and literary critic, Kenneth Burke focused on literature as art. He approached art as "a means of communication" and that "literature [as] designed to 'do something' for the writer and the reader or hearer (Hochmuth 134). Furthermore, in *Counter-Statement*, his first book on literary criticism, Burke repurposes the Platonic theory of universals as "the universals of the psycho-physical experience [which] are made up of such things as universal situations, recurrent emotions, fundamental attitudes, typical actions, patterns of experience, and 'forms of the mind'" (Reuckert 12). Called the "conditions of appeal," Burke believed that "the artist is, of all the men equipped to confront an issue" using "intuitive or acquired knowledge of the psychological universals" (Rueckert 14). Through this approach, a work of literature becomes a "strategic answer" or "strategy for encompassing a situation" (Hochmuth 134). Pearl Buck is the literary artist who, through *The Good Earth* trilogy, formulates strategic answers to address the widespread misconceptions and ignorance regarding China and the Chinese in American society. Buck's use of strategic language can be understood in terms of Kenneth Burke's system of analysis known as dramatism.

Burke developed a multi-disciplinary approach to rhetorical theory and literary criticism that is grounded in his "interest in the symbol and a corresponding interest in its

use by human agents…" (Herrick 225). By nature, humans are symbol-using beings for whom then language becomes symbolic action. Accordingly, Burke's definition of rhetoric calls for the strategic use of language, that is, "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 41). Thus, it follows that language, for Burke, "is not simply a tool to be used by people, but the basis of …human relations," an approach he termed as dramatism. Through dramatism, Burke explains that language, specifically words create and shape human identities; therefore, in order to understand human actions and motivations, a systematic method of inquiry is necessary. This inquiry involves the analysis of the "internal and external motivators" of characters who "were viewed as agents within scenes, acting in response to particular situations that were, in turn, shaped by the attitude of their language about the situations (Weiser 5).

Burke's system of analysis is called the pentad, which consists of five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (*A Grammar of Motives* xv). The pentadic analysis aims to answer the question Burke poses in the introduction to *A Grammar of Motives*, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (xv). To elaborate, a pentadic analysis asks five questions, "what was done (act), when or where was [it] done (scene), who did it (agent), how did [he do] it (agency), and why (purpose)" in order to examine the human motivations affect human action (xv). These terms are considered the "grammar" or principles that have "interrelationships or tensions" between them and the analysis of these dynamics reveal the motives of the

rhetor with respect to the work (Foss et al. 200). Burke gives these interrelationships a name – ratios which exist among all five elements of the pentad (202).

In keeping with his inter-disciplinary approach to the study of language, Burke understood dramatism as "life, life lived in a world populated by people acting through language to build societies, establish and maintain social relations, adjust to their social situation, and come to terms with their existence in time and space" (Blakesley 5). Applying Burke's dramatistic pentad to *The House of Earth* trilogy reveals Buck's rhetorical strategy to highlight her concerns about the lives of the Chinese people, especially the common people who are caught in the midst of various revolutions within a nation in transition from its traditional folk roots into an emerging, modern China. Furthermore, documenting China's transitional phase through the lives of the Wang family members allows Buck to examine universal social issues such as gender, economic agency, and social class.

The next chapter analyzes specific female characters in *The House of Earth* trilogy using Kenneth Burke's pentad and the concept of mystery to illustrate these women's varying degrees of agency in the Chinese culture. O-Lan, Pear Blossom, and Poor Fool are female characters in *The Good Earth* who are constrained by the traditional patriarchal power structure. These women have limited or no agency throughout their lives. Their lives are controlled by Wang Lung and his sons, and each of them serves a purpose for the male members in the family. In addition to the pentadic analysis, Burke's theory of mystery is used to demonstrate how some women such as Wang Lung's second

wife Lotus have more agency than others. Burke explains that there are three concepts that can create mystery- occupational psychosis, terministic screen, and trained incapacity. He identifies occupational psychosis as a "character of mind relating to one's occupation"; however, occupation is "not limited to a trade or career; he means anything with which individuals are occupied" (Foss et al. 208). O-Lan and Pear Blossom were slaves before they became Wang Lung's companions, and their service background colors their behavior and relationship with Wang Lung. The two women develop specific terministic screens that are dependent on their occupations and which creates limited agency in their lives.

In *Sons*, the wives of Wang Lung's three sons have more agency than their mother-in-law; in particular, Wang the Tiger's first wife is an educated woman. These women are from different backgrounds, that is, they view their lives with unique terministic screens that allow for more agency in their lives. At the same time, "the result of occupational psychosis and its accompanying terministic screen is trained incapacity, the condition in which 'one's very abilities can function as blindness'" (Foss et al. 208). The concept of trained incapacity will be used to analyze the characters of Wang Lung's second wife Lotus and his three daughters-in-laws who have turbulent relationships with their husbands, especially Wang the Tiger's learned wife who leaves him and takes her daughter Ai-lan with her to live separately in a city. Finally, in *A House Divided*, three young Chinese women, namely the pale maid, Ai-lan and Mei-ling, have more agency than women of the previous generations. Through these characters, Buck showcases the changes that she notes in Chinese society as it transitions into a modern nation. Through

use of specific scenes, agents, and acts, Buck offers commentary on the situation of women and gender politics within the traditional Chinese social structure and the ongoing changes at the turn of the twentieth century.

The third chapter analyzes economic agency, or the lack thereof, within the three novels. This analysis focuses on the economic agency of individual characters and includes members of the Wang family. Also, analyses of specific parent-child relationships and husband-wife relationships show how economic agency shapes these relationships. Furthermore, Burke's theory of identification is used to analyze how characters in the three novels develop collective identities that allow for greater economic agency than that available to individuals. At the same time, Pearl Buck's descriptions of the various occupations of the Wang family also serve as strategy to change American perspectives from "'inscrutable Oriental' and 'heathen Chinese' with a hardworking, ordinary farming family" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 129). A pentadic analysis of the economic relationships and choices of the characters in the three novels illuminates China's transition from a predominantly agrarian society to a modern one that did not always value the peasant or the land.

The fourth chapter applies Kenneth Burke's pentad and his theories of identification, hierarchy, and perfection to examine the issue of social class and how it motivates members of the Wang family in the three novels. The actions of the characters in all three novels are influenced by the social and political upheavals in China, events that either help or impede their social movement. This analysis focuses on the hierarchy

of social positions beginning with Wang Lung, a peasant farmer, as he journeys towards perfection. His journey to the top of the social class order is aided in part by the transition sweeping China as the traditional society was swept into a revolution that promised change. By the time of his death, Wang Lung replaces the House of Hwang with his own, the House of Wang.

An analysis of social class illuminates the benefits and concerns of each class of people. It highlights Pearl Buck's firm belief that the peasant was "the backbone of China" who "gave meaning and stability to Chinese life" (Hunt 37). Of all the social classes, "she was charmed by [the peasant's] simplicity, graciousness, and dignity and sympathetic to his sufferings at the hands of nature, warlords, and an indifferent government" (Hunt 36). Analysis of the social classes discussed in the novels reveals Buck's belief that when a person moves too far up the social class ladder and becomes "too wealthy, he loses his moral bearings" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 132). This chapter uses the dramatistic pentad to analyze how different social positions lead to moral decay through an examination of lives of Wang Lung's three sons who are dismissive of their father's ties to the land and, in turn, have no relationship with the land.

In contrast, in *A House Divided*, Wang Lung's grandson, Wang Yuan's rejects "his father's rough and dangerous military vocation for a life of learning and refinement" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178). The novel ends with Wang Yuan standing in his grandfather's earthen home where the journey first began. Pearl Buck uses the scene to demonstrate that Wang Lung's descendants have a chance to regain their moral bearings if they

choose to disregard social position and reconnect with the earth. The character Wang Yuan and his actions represent Buck's "skepticism about China's future. [She was concerned that] [T]he abolition of the ancient monarchy had brought only warfare and disorder" (179). Various scenes in *A House Divided* focus on the plight of the "masses whose misery had not been relieved by twenty years of warfare and political maneuvering" which were part of China's transition into an emerging, modern nation (179).

Pearl Buck's "picture of the Chinese civilization is highly remarkable, then; for she presents…China [as a person inside the country] sees it, but in language (of both lip and mind)" which a Western audience could understand (Bentley 793). She had first-person experiences of the sweeping and tumultuous changes that catapulted China into the modern era. Buck's years in China combined with her knowledge of the language and culture made her an expert authority on China during the early twentieth century.

The second half of her life in the United States proved to her that Americans had much in common with the Chinese:

> The truth is that of all people, Oriental and Occidental, American and Chinese, should best understand each other, because temperamentally we are extraordinarily alike…This is because the people here feel and are the same kind of people that I lived among in China.
>
> [A]s our population is increasing, economic life is necessarily becoming more like that of the Chinese…[W]e are in the transition state between a new and an old

> people…When we have passed into the period in which the Chinese have been for many centuries, I think we shall find our ideas, even, becoming increasingly like there- that is, we shall modify, even as we are now beginning to do, our ideas of abstract right and wrong, to suit what the human heart is able to perform. (Buck *China As I See It* 77-79)

The final chapter summarizes the findings of the dissertation and examines how Buck's work, although set in an alien environment, appealed to American readers by drawing on similarities between the nations. An accomplished artist and interpreter, Buck weaves a detailed and nuanced tale of China that aims to teach and create identification with its Western audience.

CHAPTER II

WOMAN IS NOT THE MOON: THE RHETORIC OF GENDER IN *THE GOOD EARTH*, *SONS,* AND *A HOUSE DIVIDED*

Human beings at birth naturally good;
Natures much the same, habits widely different;
If, foolishly, no teaching, nature deteriorates;
Right way in teaching, attention to thoroughness

(*The Three Character Classic* qtd. in Ayscough 76)

The three novels that form *The House of Earth* trilogy, namely *The Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932), and *A House Divided* (1935) represent Pearl Buck's exploration of the social, political and economic realities of China in the late nineteenth century up to the mid- twentieth century. The first of these novels, *The Good Earth*, was selected by Book-of-the Month Club in America and propelled its author to national recognition (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 122). The novel established Buck as a noteworthy author when it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. The critical response to *The Good Earth* included those that praised the work for "rigorously avoiding stereotypes and rendering Chinese life as recognizably human and ordinary" (126). Pearl Buck's aim in each of these novels was to recreate Chinese reality as authentically as possible. By the time the third novel, *A House Divided*, was published in 1935, the similarities in the American and Chinese experiences, along with the "autobiographical implications" for Buck, made it a work that not just aimed to help readers discover China, but also to rediscover America (180).

For all her newly acquired fame, Pearl Buck "mistrusted her own talent" for she had been conditioned "for four decades" and within "two different" cultures, one American and the other Chinese, of the inferiority of her sex (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 147). Her sense of inferiority began at home with her father, Absalom Sydenstricker, who treated both his wife and daughters as inferior and with contempt. In her semi-autobiographical work *My Several Worlds,* Buck recalled giving a copy of *The Good Earth* to her father who returned it to her "a few days later... saying mildly that he had glanced at it but had not felt equal to reading it" (292). Her husband, Lossing Buck's reaction to her new success as a writer and fame was similar to her father's. Although he "congratulated her on her good fortune," he "made it clear that he regarded his own work as far more significant" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 119). A keen and life-long observer and commentator on gender politics, Buck's novels reveal the complex and stratified nature of Chinese society where women struggled to attain agency for themselves.

Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad is an apt rhetorical tool to analyze the pervasive cultural attitudes that oppressed women and denied them agency and the right to live as individuals. The pentadic analysis of specific female characters in all three novels reveals cultural attitudes and Buck's own experiences in China with her family and in her marriage. Each of the female characters selected for this study has a specific role and its subsequent expectations to fulfill in the hierarchy of Chinese society. The analysis of these characters, from different social strata, reveals Buck's concerns regarding the sweeping cultural and social oppression of Chinese women.

In his analysis of Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism, David Blakesley postulates that, "…a writer's situation is the transformation of personal and public experience into their symbolic equivalents or forms (86). Furthermore,

> Beginning by questioning how texts can be seen as *strategic* and *stylized* answers to situations that inform their production, Burke acknowledges how situations are infinite, but language provides resources for generalization. (Williams 178-79)

Understanding the writer's situation, that is, the combined "personal and public experiences" of the author can aid in understanding the text that, as Burke defines, is a "strategic" and "stylized" answer to particular situation. An examination of Pearl Buck's personal and public experiences and the Chinese perspectives regarding women expose the patriarchal attitudes that Buck and women experienced irrespective of their social background in China. Significant personal and public experiences from Pearl Buck's life illustrate how *The House of Earth* trilogy serves as a strategic and stylized response to the issue of gender inequality. These experiences range from her early childhood to adulthood and then as a married woman in China. Her biographer, Peter Conn notes that, "throughout her childhood, [Buck] lived in two worlds…" – the American world of her parents at home and the Chinese world outside (*Pearl S. Buck* 24). However, what both worlds had in common was the marginalized situation of women, American and Chinese. Buck's first awareness of this marginalization began at home with her mother, Carie and her unequal relationship with her husband Absalom.

Absalom and Carie came from dissimilar family backgrounds that eventually factored into the nature of their relationship. Absalom was the second youngest of nine children and grew up in a home where, "There was always enough food, but rarely any money" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 4). His mother was quiet and detached whereas his father was "fiercely religious," "violent and quarrelsome" whose temperament drove their children off the farm as soon as they were old enough to leave. The Civil War began while Absalom was an adolescent, but he was not old enough to enlist. His inability to participate in the war alongside his father's repressive attitude became reasons that Absalom felt inadequate from early life. Although the members of his family did not get along with each other, religion served as a bond between them (5). Foreign evangelism was particularly appealing to Absalom as it "allowed him the compensation of lifelong combat against an enemy, even more implacable than the Yankees" (5). The Christian rhetoric of "constant strife and bloody battle" against Satan's forces would continually appeal to Absalom as he worked among China's pagan masses. As he had expected, his father opposed his plans; however, his mother agreed to support him if he would marry before leaving for China (6).

Absalom's quest for a woman of strong "religious convictions" led him to Caroline 'Carie' Stulting who came from a prosperous farming family and "grew up secure in her parents' affection and confident in her own talents" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 7). Just like Absalom's family, the Civil War had a deep impact on her and her family with their finances being severely reduced. However, these lowered circumstances did not affect "Carie's sense of well-being"; rather she found that "poverty was teaching her

valuable lessons in self-reliance" (8). Carie and Absalom found common ground in their "shared commitment to a missionary career," but, faced with the harsh realities of missionary life in China, their commitment and marriage eventually eroded away. An incident that occurred during the initial days of their marriage set the tone for the nature of their relationship. Married on July 8, 1880, Carie and Absalom decided to leave for China immediately. They planned to journey by train to California and board the steamer bound for China. The journey to China began with a "moment of confusion" when Absalom forgot to purchase a second train ticket for Carie (9). While the incident seemed comic and trivial at the time, their early years in China had a deep impact on Carie and changed her perspective on her marriage.

The death of multiple children combined with Absalom's distance and focus on his mission work made their marriage an unhappy one for Carie. Pearl Buck was the fifth child born to the Sydenstrickers; and by the time she was born, her parents had already buried three of their older children. Carie was grief-stricken, and the family decided to take a break and return to America. Pearl was conceived on the journey and born in her mother's home on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, West Virginia (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 22). The family returned to China within a few months of Pearl's birth; Carie came to a decision that in spite of her unhappiness, she would honor her wedding vows to Absalom. When asked to reflect upon her mother, Pearl's younger sister Grace Yaukey remembered Carie, "… 'sitting at the piano or the organ, playing and having to give up because she would begin to weep'" (20). Buck was certain that her mother's unhappiness was the direct result of Absalom's "contempt for her as a woman" (20).

Consequently, Pearl Buck's relationship with her father was marked by anger and resentment owing to his limited involvement in their lives and his neglect of Carie. Absalom was away from home for long periods; and while he took these absences as "a signal of his high calling," his wife and children considered it a sign of his neglect. Even when he was home, Absalom remained a stranger, as "He needed time and privacy to work on his sermons and biblical translations" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 19). Pearl and Grace remembered a father who disapproved of holidays and birthdays as it meant spending money on what he considered frivolous items. In later life, after her mother's death, Absalom lived with Pearl and her first husband, Lossing Buck. Pearl Buck took over her mother's responsibilities and helped her father secure the position of Dean of Nanking Theological Seminary's correspondence division after he was forced to retire from active mission work (76). Regardless of his children's efforts on his behalf, when asked to write a short autobiography, Absalom devoted the "sixty-page, handwritten text" called "Our Life and Work in China" to a "recitation of his language study, and itinerations and conversions…his pride was all in the work…Through the whole of this strange document, Absalom's children are barely mentioned, and neither they nor Carie are ever named" (77). His attitude towards women remained severe and contemptuous until his death. Due to this attitude, he did not take Buck's writings or her success after the publication of *The Good Earth* seriously. Conversely, Pearl Buck grew increasingly sensitive to the condition of young girls and women around her.

In conjunction with her personal experiences, Pearl Buck was also influenced by the patriarchal cultural attitudes prevalent in the Chinese culture. These cultural attitudes

evolved over centuries, but Chinese creation mythology shows evidence of a balance between the two genders. In Chinese creation mythology, the heavens and earth were created by Pangu, a male god. On the other hand, human beings were created by a female god, Nuwo, who used clay to make man and woman (Jie xxi). Hence, it would appear that "in [China's] remote past, male and female were rather equal and the female intelligence and resourcefulness were well acknowledged (xxi). Ancient Chinese culture was a matrilineal society; however, this form of society was considered chaotic as "…people coexisted without rulers, and without rules for proper conduct…No differentiation was made between relationships, such as brother/sister, husband/wife, men/women, low class/high class, or young/old" (Lee Yao 13).

While Chinese folklore and historical evidence point to the elevated status of women in antiquity, their position gradually eroded during the centuries following the Shang Dynasty. This shift towards a patriarchal system was centered on the Chinese philosophy of yin-yang that was "Originally conceived as complementary," but gradually became "arranged in a series of hierarchical relationships juxtaposing superiority with secondariness, authority with obeisance and activity with passivity" (Croll 12). In addition to the yin-yang philosophy, both Chinese girlhood and womanhood were ruled by Confucian principles. Ancient Confucian texts detailed "gender-specific norms and expectations" regarding appropriate behavior for daughters, wives, and mothers (13). Female impropriety was not to be tolerated in traditional Chinese society. The primacy of Confucianism within pre-modern China's feudal framework allowed for the development of a "double-standard code of behavior" that limited women's freedom in areas such as

education, marriage, sexuality, and physical mobility (Jie xxii). The actions of male and female characters in *The House of Earth* trilogy are deeply influenced by a combination of yin-yang and Confucian philosophies.

The House of Earth trilogy examines the lives of Wang Lung, his sons and finally his grandson; and in this process, Pearl Buck explores the complexities of Chinese society. The first book in *The House of Earth* trilogy, *The Good Earth*, was published on March 2, 1931. The novel is set in "Anhwei province, in a rural landscape identical to that of Nanhsuchou, where Pearl and Lossing had spent the early years of their marriage" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 124). In the novel, readers are introduced to Wang Lung, an illiterate farmer who, by hard work and perseverance, rises to become a rich landowner. Using the backdrop of agrarian China, Buck highlights gender differences and inequality through major characters such as O-lan, the matriarch of the Wang family, and secondary characters Pear Blossom and Poor Fool. The three women play traditional and marginalized gender roles in the novel. The scene-purpose ratio illustrates O-lan's lack of agency as a young girl within her natal family. O-lan is introduced as a twenty-year old slave in the Hwang household. When Wang Lung arrives to collect her, the old mistress explains O-lan's past to him:

> 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. They were from the

> north in Shantung and there they returned, and I know nothing further of them. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 17)

Chinese studies scholar Elizabeth Croll identifies “The Three Obediences”as governing ideals concerning Chinese women. Explained in depth in the *Nu er Jing* (the Classic for Girls), the phrase refers to the “three authorities of father and elder brothers when young, of husband when married and of sons when widowed” (13). O-lan is considered expendable and a means for her family’s survival during famine years; therefore, she was sold to the wealthy Hwang family as a slave and, more importantly, no family member returned to reclaim her. The old mistress’s explanation serves as a reminder of women’s secondariness and expendability within the family.

Pearl Buck’s *The House of Earth* trilogy tracks the changing situation of women in traditional China and eventually, in the Republic of China. Burke’s theory of dramatism, specifically the pentad with its five investigative terms: scene, act, agent, agency and purpose, is ideal in order to analyze Buck’s trilogy and motives. Pearl Buck uses the rigid and conservative setting of *The Good Earth* in order to establish the long-existing gender tensions created due to the Obediences and virtues within Chinese society. *The Good Earth* introduces Wang Lung, a young farmer, who readies himself to collect his bride from the House of Hwang. His wife-to-be is a house slave in that great home; all the same, he hopes for a pretty wife. His father wisely reminds him of a wife’s role in the family especially in a poor farmer’s household like theirs:

> And what will we do with a pretty woman? We must have a woman who will tend the house and bear children as she works in the fields, and will a pretty woman do these things? She will be forever thinking about clothes to go with her face! No, not a pretty woman in our house. We are farmers. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 8)

The act-purpose ratio reveals the patriarchal expectations regarding the role of women in a household. Wang Lung's father serves as an agent of culture who reminds his son and the novel's readers of the cultural expectations of women in that time period. Upon arriving at the House of Hwang, the Old Mistress also serves as an agent of culture through her comments that align with Wang Lung's father's reminders. She remarks to Wang Lung, "She will work well for you in the field and drawing water and all else that you wish…Neither is she clever. But she does well what she is told to do and she has a good temper" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 18). As any good mistress and in the place of a mother, the Old Mistress reminds wife-to-be, O-lan, of her familial duties, "Obey him and bear him sons and yet more sons" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 18). Her reminder serves to highlight the Chinese scene where "marriage was a pivotal moment in 'becoming a woman' … [since] a girl's happiness, well-being and welfare depended on marriage and a successful marriage at that; this was her future and her only future" (Croll 37). Furthermore, Old Mistress's admonishment reveals the traditional Chinese social preference for sons who are:

> … valuable to the mother because they provide her with "insurance": a share in the family's resources, assurance that she will not be abandoned by her husband,

> and economic support after her husband dies and when she reaches her old age. (Xiong 172)

As the mother of sons, O-lan would help ensure the family's continuity within the "patrilineal social structure" and, in turn, she would earn a cherished position in her family (172).

The Good Earth illustrates a principle which Pearl Buck scholar, Charles Hayford calls "complicated feminism" (Hayford 25). Buck presents O-lan as "a strong, competent woman, essential to the household economy" who works within the "patriarchal, oppressive" Chinese scene that is "stultifying to women" (25). Burke's concepts of mystery and hierarchy serve as useful tools to analyze the shifts in agency that O-lan experiences over the course of her life. In his introduction to *Permanence and Change*, Hugh Dalziel Duncan notes, "For Burke, order in society is not to be studied as some kind of regularity in a process, but as a distribution of authority [where authority] takes roughly a pyramidal or hierarchal form [or, at least, it is like a ladder with "up" and "down"] (xxxii). Mainstream Chinese thought highlighted the "gendered difference …[as] integral to cosmic order with the preservation of harmony dependent on the maintenance of such complementarity and hierarchy" (Croll 13). Men (Heaven) preceded women (Earth) by virtue of the cosmological opposites attached to the genders and, thus there was established a social hierarchy of gender and an expectation of order in society (Croll 12). Pearl Buck understood the superior-inferior nature of society as her Chinese tutor, Mr. Kung, schooled her in this Confucian principle (Stirling 10). Burke argues that

such social hierarchies lead to “estrangement” where “classes of people become ‘mysteries’ to one another” (*Permanence and Change* 276).

The scene-act ratio, when applied to three progressive instances in *The Good* Earth, highlights O-lan’s growing agency within the Wang family. In this sequence of events, the primary agents are O-lan and her husband, Wang Lung. During the early months of their marriage, Wang Lung and O-lan’s relationship follows the established hierarchal pattern. Wang Lung tends to his crops and the field while O-lan attends to household chores and serves her husband and father-in-law. Burke defines act as “names what took place, in thought or deed” (*Grammar of Motives* xv). Wang Lung’s acts are his inner thoughts that Buck reveals are in conflict with established social hierarchy of gender. The morning after his marriage day, Wang Lung wonders if his wife likes him. Until then, “He had questioned only of whether he would like her and whether or not she would be satisfactory in his bed and in his house” (Buck, *The Good Earth* 26). But now, he wants O-lan to like him and yet, he feels ashamed for having the thought. Over the course of several months, Wang Lung observes that “…[O-lan] was like a faithful, speechless serving maid, who is only a serving maid and nothing more…It should be enough that she fulfilled her duty” (29). He desires to learn more about his wife; and yet as a husband, he is not expected to be interested in his wife. His dilemma reveals his feeble attempts to transcend the mystery of gender:

> Sometimes, working over the clods in the fields, he would fall to pondering about her. What had she seen in those hundred courts? What had been her life, that life

> she never shared with him? He could make nothing of it. And then was ashamed of his own curiosity and his interest in her. She was, after all, only a woman. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 29)

His inaction emphasizes O-lan's secondary status within their husband-wife dynamic and reaffirms their assigned positions in the social hierarchy.

Soon after, O-lan begins to gain agency through her hardworking ways that conform to 'The Four Virtues' ascribed to Chinese women (Croll 13). Buck describes O-lan's household duties in *The Good Earth*:

> The earthen floor was swept and the fuel pile replenished. 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.
>
> In the afternoon she took a hoe and a basket and with these upon her shoulder she went to the main road leading into the city where mules and donkeys and horses carried burdens to and fro, and there she picked the droppings from the animals and carried it home and piled the manure in the dooryard for fertilizer for the fields. These things she did without a word and without being commanded to do them. And when the end of the day came she did not rest herself until the ox had been fed in the kitchen and until she had dipped water to hold to its muzzle to let it drink what it would.

> And she took their ragged clothes and with thread she herself spun on a bamboo spindle from a wad of cotton she mended and contrived to cover the rents in their winter clothes. Their beddings she took into the sun on the threshold and ripped the coverings from the quilts and washed them and hung them upon a bamboo to dry, and the cotton in the quilts that had grown hard and grey from years she picked over, killing the vermin that had flourished in the hidden folds, and sunning it all. Day after day she did one thing after another, until the three rooms seemed clean and almost prosperous. The old man's cough grew better and he sat in the sun by the southern wall of the house, always half-asleep and warm and content. (27-28)

As the wife of a peasant, O-lan was expected to assist her husband by caring for their home. Her daily duties involved attending to her father-in-law, preparing meals for the family, and cleaning the home, their bedding, and clothes. In addition to all these duties, to collect manure to use as fertilizer was beneficial as they were a farming family that depended on the land and its output for their livelihood. O-lan's actions in and around her home were self-driven and signify her acceptance of her place as Wang Lung's wife within the household. Furthermore, her actions conform to the traditional Chinese scene that prescribed that the primary duty of a wife was to "care for her parents-in-law and prepare the food" for the family. All of O-lan's actions directly or indirectly affected these two important duties (Lee Yao 32-33). Wang and his father observed her actions and they were pleased in all that she did because her acts expressed conformity to Confucian values and did not dishonor her new family.

O-lan's actions within the household lead to a change in the husband-wife dynamic that improve her agency. Each day, after her household duties were complete, O-lan worked in the field alongside her husband, which leads to a shift in his thinking:

> Moving together in a perfect rhythm, without a word, hour after hour, he fell into a union with her which took the pain from his labor. He had no articulate thought of anything; there was only this perfect sympathy of movement … They worked on, moving together…speechless in their movement together. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 29-30)

The act of "moving together" represents a sense of oneness achieved by the husband-wife. The act of working together in the field allows them to "transcend" the mystery of gender hierarchy. Pearl Buck narrates how the couple "rejoiced in each other's approval when the harvest of their labor brought "a handful of silver dollars over and above what they needed" (44). This unity of action indicates a higher degree of agency for O-lan where her husband, and co-agent, seeks her active role in protecting their money (44). In order to protect their hard-earned money, "they plotted" to identify a space where they could hide the money and then proceeded to hide it together. In the process of sowing and harvesting together, Wang Lung learned to trust his wife. Her actions, thus far, proved to be beneficial to him as they led to initial prosperity and good fortune. Set within the Chinese scene that affirmed men's superiority over women, O-lan and Wang Lung's acts of working and plotting together create opportunities for the couple, not disruptions. Confucian texts such as the *Nu Jie* "exhort[ed] women to be obedient, unassuming,

yielding, timid, respectful, reticent and selfless" (Croll 13). O-lan's character and actions reveal her adherence to the prevalent social attitudes regarding women. Her husband approves of her behavior and actions as they create a favorable, socially-conforming impression about him and his family in the village community.

In *Grammar of Motives*, Burke notes, "It is a principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (3). As Wang Lung and O-lan begin to transcend the mystery of gender, the former learns to read the "small changes at first invisible to him" on his wife's "impassive square countenance" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 50). Another incident that enables a growth in O-lan's agency takes place when Wang Lung learns of the decay and decline in fortunes of the members of the House of Hwang. This incident brings a significant change in agency for O-lan; that is, her words are valued by her husband and bring further prosperity to their family. Uncharacteristically, O-lan speaks at length of her observations that make her suspect the Hwang household's decline: "I believe, if one should ask me, that they are feeling a pinch this year in that house…" (51) O-lan's act of telling Wang Lung about the decline of Hwang and land for sale becomes the means to greater financial agency for her husband. The purchase of good farming land meant the family would be able to increase their produce and earn more money by the sale of it. O-lan was shocked at Wang Lung's proclamation regarding his plan to purchase the land:

> "We will buy the land!"
>
> They stared at each other, he in delight, she in stupefaction.

> "But the land – the land -" she stammered.
>
> … "I will buy it," he repeated peevishly as he might repeat a demand to his mother who crossed him.
>
> "It is a good thing to buy land," she said pacifically. "It is better certainly than putting money into a mud wall. …It was as though she felt his thought for she suddenly ceased her resistance and she said, "Let it be bought. After all, rice land is good, and it is near the moat and we can get water every year. It is sure." (Buck, *The Good Earth* 52-53)

The back and forth conversation between Wang Lung and O-lan is significant because she was not a woman who was free with her words. Her stammering expression of her hesitation and subsequent deliberation of Wang Lung's decision are acts that indicate a greater freedom with her husband and participation in the decision-making process.

O-lan's reactions also call attention to her servant mentality, a factor that Burke calls occupational psychosis. In *Permanence and Change,* Burke explains that the term "corresponds to the Marxian doctrine that a society's environment in the historical sense is synonymous with the society's methods of production" (38). To clarify, a person "to equip themselves for their kinds of work," would develop "emphases, discriminations, attitudes, etc." that would aid them in living life a certain way (40). Raised as a house slave, O-lan is unable to reason as an independent person until her husband periodically voices his ambitious ideas and seeks her counsel on these matters. The example of Wang Lung's determination to pursue the purchase of the land creates a change in O-lan's

personal identification. She dissociates herself from the mentality of a house slave and begins to accept her position as the wife of a landed peasant farmer, albeit one who is submissive and dutiful to her husband as a servant to her master.

A final series of examples that illustrate O-lan's improved agency within the Wang household takes place during a period of famine. The famine lasted several months; and as food became scarce, O-lan helped the family weather it through her acts of resourcefulness, courage, and resilience. During the initial period of the famine, when food was in short supply, Wang Lung carefully shelled their corn, as each grain of it was important. When he gathered the cobs to use as fuel, O-lan redirected him to save them as food. She recalled childhood experiences when her family of origin had weathered similar famine by eating ground cobs (Buck, *The Good Earth* 70). Soon after, when their reserves of rice and wheat were depleted, the family considered eating the ox, but Wang Lung refused. Eventually, the hunger pangs of his family moved him to allow it, but he refused to carry out the killing. To save her starving family, O-lan gathered her courage to perform the task, an act that provided multiple meals for the family such as the blood pudding, cooked meat, and marrows (72). Her ability to make their food reserves stretch for some more days reveals her resourcefulness. Furthermore, she comforted her husband about the ox with simple wisdom, "An ox is but an ox…Eat, for there will be another one day and far better than this one" (72).

During the winter months of the famine, the Wang family survived due to O-lan's courageous actions. That winter, when every family starved, Wang Lung's uncle, as

retaliation for not receiving further help from his nephew, spread gossip that Wang Lung's family still had food to eat (Buck, *The Good Earth* 73-74). In despair, men from the village stormed Wang Lung's home in search of hidden stores of food. When their search yielded only a few morsels of grain, the men showed their frustration by wrecking the household furniture.

At that time, O-lan stepped forward and, with quiet courage, in her "plain, slow voice" addressed the men:

> It is not yet time to take our table and the benches and the bed from our house. You have all our food. But out of your own houses you have not sold yet your table and your benches. Leave us ours. We are even. We have not a bean or a grain of corn more than you – no, you have more than we, now, for you have all of ours. Heaven will strike you if you take more. Now, we will go out together and hunt for grass to eat and bark from the trees, you for your children and we for our three children, and for this fourth who is to be born in such times. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 74)

Her speech to the men is indicative of her high rhetorical agency. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke explains, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (55). Here Burke highlights the different forms of communication and suggests how to they help create commonality and even difference between the speaker and his audience. To build identification, a speaker employs rhetorical strategies that cause the

"audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests (46). The action in this scene is prompted by the gossip spread by Wang Lung's uncle. His gossip serves to create dissociation whereby the villagers began to see Wang Lung's situation as different from theirs. Their resentment leads to the act of storming Wang Lung's home in search of food. O-lan counters the dissociation through her speech in which she calls attention to the commonalities between her household and theirs. She builds identification when she reminds the men that they had "not a bean or grain of corn" more than they did (Buck, *The Good Earth* 74). The evidence was in their hands. Furthermore, she emphasized that, in fact, by taking her family's grain, they had more food than the Wang family. She continued her attempts at building identification by reminding the men that they had no right to destroy her furniture when the men had not sold off any of their own furniture. She then proceeded to identify her family's interests with those of the villagers by calling on them to "go out together and hunt for grass to eat and bark from the trees" (74). The communal actions that she calls for are rhetorical strategies that, eventually, build identification and rapport and result in the villagers leaving in peace.

The famine continued, and so did the struggles of the peasants. Wang Lung decided to move his family to the south temporarily in the hopes of better conditions-work and food. The incidents surrounding their move to the south reveal O-lan's resilience in the face of trials. First, O-lan birthed her fourth child, a baby girl, whom she killed knowing the family had no means to care for the child (Buck, *The Good Earth* 81). Next, when Wang Lung was approached by two men wanting to purchase his land, he wept and raged at his fate. However, O-lan came to support her husband; her voice was

"flat and commonplace" and with "some calmness" she arranged the sale of their household goods so that the family could travel south (87). Upon their arrival in the big city of Kiangsu, O-lan helps the family survive in the city by building a hut from mats and turning her sons, daughter, father-in-law, and herself into street beggars. While Wang Lung was appalled, O-lan reminded him that it was the only practical option for her and the children. Furthermore, when Wang Lung refused to eat stolen meat, she once again guided him with her simple wisdom, "meat is meat" *(*111). When Wang Lung longed to return to his home and land, O-lan stoically offered practical advice- the sale of their girl child to a rich household. Though Wang Lung considered her advice carefully, she asked him to wait as she felt a revolt was brewing in the city. By listening to her advice to wait, Wang Lung did not have to sell his daughter and in passively joining the revolt found riches that helped the family prosper.

In *A Grammar of Motives,* Kenneth Burke elaborates on how a representative anecdote aids in the "construction of meaning and reality" (X. Lu 197). Burke explains that a representative anecdote "must be supple and complex enough to be representative of the subject-matter it is designed to calculate. It must have scope. Yet, it must also possess simplicity…" (60). O-lan's acts during the family's poverty serve as a representative anecdote that Pearl Buck uses to highlight Chinese women's resilience in the face of natural and economic adversity. By juxtaposing O-lan's quiet and calm responses to Wang Lung's emotional, angered and sometimes, violent reactions, Buck turns a positive spotlight on Chinese women. In her characterization of both O-lan and Wang Lung, their acts signify a sense of purpose – to survive and become prosperous –

and a sense of respect for one another. When Wang Lung was unable to respond to a situation, O-lan, as an agent who identified with her husband, stepped in to address the situation. Her growth in agency allows her to take such actions, and her actions comfort and give strength to her husband. From a voiceless kitchen slave who worked in the Hwang household, O-lan as wife of Wang Lung attained her highest level of agency when Wang Lung established her as Mistress of the Wang family in the house of the Hwangs.

Pearl Buck uses Wang Lung's relationship with O-lan and his subsequent relationship with Lotus to examine cultural attitudes towards women and their function within the household. Women's agency was determined based on their value to the male members of their family such as the husband and sons. In *Chinese Women: Past and Present*, Esther S. Lee Yao notes, "The primary mission of all married women, regardless of their social status, was to bear a son" (22). O-lan performed her wifely duty by bearing Wang Lung three healthy sons, and yet he chose to forsake her for another woman. Wang Lung and O-lan's unity in terms of their decisions and actions was the foundation for their prosperity as well as O-lan's greater agency that quickly eroded as a result of Wang Lung's relationship with Lotus. O-lan's anguish over Wang Lung's unfaithfulness brings to light Buck's personal struggles in her marriage to Lossing Buck. The distance between Pearl and Lossing Buck was not just intellectual and emotional, it was also physical. Buck moved into a separate bedroom after she "accused Lossing of behaving suggestively with young Chinese women at the University" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 102). Pearl Buck and her character O-lan faced similar situations with their husbands, but both

women were bound by different constraints imposed upon them by their respective scenes. In Buck's case, she took control of her life and happiness by making the decision to divorce Lossing and then marry her publisher, Richard Walsh. In O-lan's case, she had no recourse but to accept her husband's decisions as concubinage was a legally sanctioned practice.

After Wang Lung meets Lotus, a sing-song girl, his attitude and relationship with O-lan change forever. He begins to sleep separately from O-lan and takes away her prized pearl earrings. These two acts are indicative of Wang Lung's reassertion of patriarchal hierarchy; no longer could Wang Lung identify his interests with O-lan's. The veil of mystery was firmly back in its original place. For her part, when O-lan learns of Wang Lung's interest and visits to Lotus, she was heart-broken. Wang Lung's uncle's wife reminds O-lan that "all men are so" and that O-lan "poor fool, [had] never been fit for a man's fancy and [was] little better than an ox for his labor" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 190). The uncle's wife identifies O-lan with an ox, which was an indirect reference to her slave background. Scene and act intersect at this juncture and reveal a conflict between traditional expectations. O-lan's actions were those of a dutiful wife, and the traditional scene within which they functioned allowed her to expect faithfulness from her husband. Conflict arose when Wang Lung no longer valued O-lan; but he was unable to divorce her since Chinese social codes dictated that "no wife who had mourned three years for her parents-in-law, nor one who had borne poverty in a family which later became rich, could be put away" (Ayscough 57). Thus, although O-lan grieves her husband's

separation from her, she is helpless to stop him from taking Lotus as a concubine, and likewise he could not send O-lan away.

Lotus serves as a counter agent who disrupts the existing order within the Wang family. Lotus was a sing-song girl, a prostitute, at the grand tearoom that had newly opened in Wang Lung's village. Images of Lotus and other sing-song girls were hung on large banners that caught Wang Lung's attention. In Chinese folklore, the lotus is a "symbol of purity" (Leach 646). However, Lotus' profession conflicted with the symbolism of her name. To Wang Lung, however, she represented a fantasy – a pinnacle of Chinese beauty: a woman with a figure "slender as bamboo" with a "small pointed face" and "round eyes, the shape of apricots" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 180). Her small feet amazed him for they were "no longer than a man's middle finger" (179). Buck's description of Lotus parallels what Esther Lee Yao identifies as women as "pieces of art" (105). Wang Lung's own comparisons between O-lan's peasant physique and Lotus' delicate beauty reveal Chinese attitudes concerning beauty where delicate and fair women were valued. Furthermore, by discussing O-lan's unbound feet and Lotus' bound feet, Buck calls attention to the painful and oppressive Chinese practice of footbinding. She highlights not just the Chinese perspective on beauty, but the loss of freedom of movement experienced by women with bound feet, a condition which would have severely limited their agency in life. Women with bound feet were forced to "walk wiggly," and their small feet restricted them "from walking freely outside their rooms" (Lee Yao 106). Thus, to serve men's pleasure, women experienced not just familial

restrictions, but also, physical restrictions that essentially crippled their movements for the rest of their lives.

Lotus gained and built her agency using her beauty and pathos-driven charms. Her actions included sweet-talking, pouting, whining, or sexually gratifying Wang Lung's desires in order to appeal to his emotions to gain what she wanted from him. In his book *Permanence and Change*, Kenneth Burke defines the concept of trained incapacity as the "state of affairs whereby one's very abilities can function as blindness" (7). He suggests that "people to whom it was applied tended to orient themselves in a totally different way from the people to whom it was not applied, the former always trying to escape from life or avoid realities, while the latter faced realities" (8). In Lotus' case, her training and life as a sing-song girl conditioned her to a life where the only means of attaining anything in life was by employing her charms, which was her usual method of persuading Wang Lung to accede to her demands. Furthermore, while she was no longer a prostitute, Lotus did not wish to discontinue the life of leisure and pleasure she had enjoyed at the tearoom from her various clients. She never managed the kitchens or Wang Lung's household as both Cuckoo and O-lan took care of these matters.

Lotus experienced a decrease in her agency as a result of her trained incapacity. O-lan informed Wang Lung that their oldest son was spending time with Lotus, but he did not believe her (Buck, *The Good Earth* 240). However, when Wang Lung witnessed Lotus flirting with his son, he beat both and banished his son from their home. The act of banishing his son was "an act that [affirmed Wang Lung's] authority, but threaten[ed] the

stability of his family" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 126). The scene-act ratio illustrates the moral conflict generated by Lotus and Wang Lung's son's actions. Contrary to the meaning of her name, Lotus' act of flirting with the eldest son constituted an act of infidelity towards her husband. Neo-Confucianist thought that prevailed during the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911) exerted oppressive pressure on women to be faithful and chaste. A woman found unfaithful and disobedient toward her husband could be disowned by him (Lee Yao 75-79). Lotus had no choice but to conform her behavior to her husband's expectations since she and her servant Cuckoo had nowhere else to go and, more importantly, they enjoyed the luxuries of the Wang household.

In her role as Lotus' servant, Cuckoo is another counter agent who created agency for herself by manipulating others. The name Cuckoo has folkloric significance in the Chinese culture. In Chinese folklore, the cuckoo bird is partly associated with conceit and perceived as a "brood parasite" (Lai 530). Every association that Cuckoo formed with other characters she shaped to benefit herself and exerted control on these characters to varying degrees. Wang Lung's first encounter with Cuckoo took place when he went to purchase additional land from the Hwang family. She is described as a "sharp voiced and bitter tongued" slave of the Old Lord (Buck, *The Good Earth* 149). Wang Lung quickly understood her parasitic nature when she eagerly agreed to transact a business deal with him for the Old Lord's lands. In disbelief, Wang Lung refused to proceed with the transaction. Chinese social codes emphasized that women's life revolved around the home and family, so for a woman to discuss and conduct business was hard to accept. That said, Cuckoo has grabbed an exclusive position in the Hwang household due to

moral and social decay among the family members. The Old Lord was old and feeble and completely under Cuckoo's control (155). Ultimately, after making discreet inquiries, Wang Lung returned to purchase the land and agreed to have Cuckoo transact the land deal. He correctly assessed that even though he paid the Old Lord directly, the old man would hand it over to Cuckoo (153).

Wang Lung's second encounter with Cuckoo was at the grand tearoom after he had become a wealthy landlord. Cuckoo worked as a madam and she solicited clients for the sing-song girls who also worked at the tearoom. Cuckoo is depicted as a clever woman who was well-versed with the attitudes of men toward beautiful women. She used this knowledge to her advantage. She manipulated Wang Lung through his desires: …[She] pointed to the painted silken scrolls and said, "There they are, their pictures. Choose which one you wish to see and put the silver in my hand and I will place her before you" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 174). Cuckoo's act of meeting a customer's needs illustrates her role as an effective tearoom madam. Her duties included finding clients for each girl every night and maintaining the well-being of each girl at the establishment. Buck understood the stratified and complex world of prostitution through her experiences in Shanghai in the fall of 1909. Before she was sent to America to further her college education, Buck spent some time at Miss Jewell's School in Shanghai (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 42-44). During her stay, she volunteered at the Door of Hope, a Shanghai-based organization, which aimed to "rescue Chinese women from the degradation and physical abuse that …accompanied their sexual servitude" (42). Buck interacted closely with the women since she could speak Chinese; and in turn, they told her "stories of incalculable

brutality" (43). The stories she heard from these women contrasted harshly with the "emotionally reticent" atmosphere of her family. She returned from Shanghai with a sense of growing feminism that saw both Asian and white men as collaborators "in the use of destruction of Chinese women" (43-44). As a madam, Cuckoo represents a position within the hierarchy of prostitution who gained agency through manipulating clients and prostitutes, also known as sing-song girls.

In Chinese folklore, the cuckoo bird is known to lay its eggs in the nests of other birds, thus a host-parasite relationship ensues between the host birds and the cuckoo fosterlings. This relationship develops "to the extent that cuckoo fosterlings imitate the vocalization of the host, thereby, further encouraging the host parent to nurture the fosterling to maturity" (Lai 537). A cuckoo fosterling's attempts to imitate the vocalization of the host bird are comparable to Cuckoo's attempts to identify with the women around her, namely, the mistresses in the Wang household, O-lan and Lotus. She attempts to identify with them to improve her agency within the household hierarchy.

The relationship between O-lan and Cuckoo was acrimonious from the very beginning. In attempting to identify with O-lan using their mutual background as women in the Hwang household, Cuckoo stirs O-lan's anger. She hailed O-lan in a familiar manner: "Well, and my old friend, here we are in a house together again, and you mistress and first wife—my mother – and how things are changed!" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 202). O-lan refused to identify herself with Cuckoo in this manner, for she remembered Cuckoo's "haughty looks" since she had lived in the Old Lord's chamber

(202). Furthermore, O-lan recalled that Cuckoo had taunted her for being "too ugly and too slow" and a kitchen slave (202). Through such acts, Cuckoo had dissociated herself from O-lan and stressed the disparity between the two of them within the social hierarchy of the servants in the Hwang household. Therefore, the thought of having to share her home with Cuckoo was unbearable to O-lan. It was O-lan and her husband's hard work that had established their fortunes, but now she was asked to share their fortune with Lotus and the opportunistic Cuckoo. As the dutiful and submissive wife, O-lan requested that Wang Lung remove Cuckoo from her kitchen, but he was unwilling to act against Lotus and scolded O-lan. However, O-lan had the advantage in this argument since social codes dictated that "the 'official' wife…legally held the highest status among all women in the same household. Her leading position granted her power in decision making and commanding the respect of the concubines" (Lee Yao 82-83). O-lan wielded this power in her kitchen and prevented Cuckoo from preparing meals for Lotus and herself. Wang Lung was unable to act; in the eyes of society, O-lan was a good wife.

While O-lan and Cuckoo did not establish a positive relationship, a deep and strong bond developed between Lotus and Cuckoo. Cuckoo served Lotus faithfully and proved her usefulness by attending to the concerns of both Wang Lung and Lotus. As the two women grew older, Cuckoo became indispensable to Lotus as a companion, and this status led to greater agency for her. They sat and talked "as friends and no longer as mistress and servant" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 351). The act of sitting and talking together represent the height of Cuckoo's agency which defies the expectations of social hierarchy. However, for all her freedom in the Wang household, Cuckoo understood that

she had to take care of herself. Therefore, after Lotus' death, Cuckoo "collected all she could of" Lotus's belongings and silver and "sent her stores secretly through a hidden back gate" (365). As soon as Lotus' funeral was over, Cuckoo left and "went to someplace of her own she had somewhere, and no more came to the house of Wang" (366). Cuckoo's actions parallel the actions of a cuckoo bird; just as the cuckoo bird manipulates the host bird, Cuckoo's agency was the direct result of her manipulation of people and events to her benefit and for her survival. When the agents upon whom her agency was built were no more, she understood that she had to leave because her position in the household changed.

Unlike Cuckoo, Pear Blossom, Wang Lung's companion in his old age, was a shy and unobtrusive woman. She entered the household as Lotus' slave, but eventually to Lotus' displeasure, became Wang Lung's concubine. A secondary character in the first two novels of the trilogy, Pear Blossom is a pale version of O-lan. Both women shared a common background- they were both sold as young girls by their families- a fact that had a deep impact on both women and their roles within the family. The selling of young girls such as O-lan and Pear Blossom was a common practice among poor families. These acts signified the otherness that young girls experienced within their homes. They were in the family, but did not belong as the other family members. While O-lan was stoic about her family's decision to sell her and even suggested it as an option for poor fool to Wang Lung during the famine, Pear Blossom's reaction to her father's act of selling her was of anger and loathing which she confessed to Wang Lung, "Every man I hate except you – I have hated every man, even my father who sold me. I have heard only evil of them and I

hate them all" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 350). Wang Lung sought to provide for Pear Blossom in the form of marriage to a servant or as a concubine to a younger man who could care for her for a longer period of time. Either of these two options would give Pear Blossom greater freedom and agency. O-lan had gained freedom and agency in life through her marriage to Wang Lung after which she ceased to be a slave. However, Pear Blossom chose against such a freedom that would bind her to another man and instead asked to remain Wang Lung's concubine. Pear Blossom chose to exercise agency that limited her contact with others and allowed her to care for Wang Lung. Her acts reveal her unique terministic screen – of servitude to others. During her lifetime, she served Wang Lung faithfully. She kept watch over him as he was on his death-bed and mourned his passing for the rest of her life. She then took over the responsibility of caring for Poor Fool and Wang the Landlord's hunchback son; all three of them were outcasts, unwanted by their families.

Pearl Buck uses the characters of Lotus, Cuckoo, and Pear Blossom to illustrate the struggles of women who, for whatever reason, were not married. These women faced limited options such as concubinage or prostitution. Both were legal practices in China until the twentieth century; the latter had been practiced since the Chou dynasty (Lee Yao 82). Legal codes concerning concubinage and prostitution meant that poorer Chinese families looked to such practices as socially-approved means of income (83). These three characters and their actions offer snippets of reality pertaining to concubinage and prostitution that Buck gleaned from the stories that she heard during her time at the Door

of Hope. These characters then represent how "women were valued as a commodity instead of as an individual" by the men in their lives (83).

On the one hand, women were treated as commodities, while on the other hand women with disabilities were marginalized and considered invisible by their families and society. A secondary character with no agency of her own in *The Good Earth* and *Sons* is Wang Lung and O-lan's eldest daughter called Poor Fool. This character remains unnamed throughout these two novels and depended entirely on her parents for her survival as her mental faculties were severely retarded. Her parents were clueless as to why she was retarded:

> Whether it was the desperate first year of her life or the starving or what it was, month after month went past and Wang Lung waited for the first words to come from her lips…But no sound came, only the sweet, empty smile, and when he looked at her he groaned forth, "Little fool- my poor little fool-" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 159)

Wang Lung's reaction to the birth of his sons was of joy and pride as male children were highly desired, but at the birth of his daughter, he was filled with a "sense of evil". Even O-lan spoke disparagingly about her girl child, she said, "It is only a slave this time – not worth mentioning" (65). Buck introduces readers to then prevalent Chinese attitudes towards daughters through Wang Lung's thoughts after the birth of his child. He was unhappy that he had a daughter as they did not "belong to their parents" rather they were "born and reared for other families" (66). Unfortunately for the family, the year after the

birth of Poor Fool, the family endured a long famine, which meant there was very little food. O-lan nursed Poor Fool through the early days of the famine, but soon even her milk dried up. Their home was filled with the cries of hungry children. It is during this period that Wang Lung's compassion and love for his daughter developed through the "persistence of [her] small life" (77). The girl child was weak and grew quiet, and she remained that way for the rest of her life. When the family traveled south during the famine, Wang Lung was advised by O-lan and others to sell Poor Fool as a slave to a rich household. He considered the matter, but decided against selling her when O-lan explained that pretty young slaves such as their daughter would be beaten or sexually assaulted by the lords of the household on a regular basis. He was horrified to hear of these conditions and choose to keep his daughter close to him (132-33).

Poor Fool remained with her family throughout her life and she had no autonomy in terms of action. She was completely dependent on others for her every need. She was taken to sit in the sun each morning and led inside every night or when it rained. In one instance, during O-lan's final illness, Poor Fool was left outside all night in the rain and Wang Lung was deeply affected by his family's negligence toward his daughter (Buck, *The Good Earth* 255). In another instance, the fool's delight in seeing Lotus' brightly-colored clothes caused her to laugh out loud, but her strange laugh scared Lotus who screamed until Wang Lung came running. Lotus declared to her husband, "I will not stay in this house if that one comes near me" and she protested, "I was not told that I should have accursed idiots to endure…" (209). Wang Lung was offended by Lotus' words and refused to see her for days. Some years later, Wang Lung's eldest daughter-in-law

displayed a similar aversion to the fool and exclaimed, “Such an one should not be alive at all…” (295). In both instances, Wang Lung reacted strongly against the women; he also realized that after his death, the fate of his daughter was uncertain.

An analysis of the intersecting ratios of scene and purpose reveal Pearl Buck’s motives in developing the character of Poor Fool. A primary motive is to reveal deep-seated social attitudes regarding women and the disabled through the actions of Poor Fool’s family members. O-lan’s passive identification of Poor Fool as a “slave” and the reactions of Lotus and the eldest daughter-in-law are set within the scene of traditional Chinese society. Traditional Chinese society was built on the principles of Confucianism and Taoism that emphasized balance through opposites. In Confucian society the emphasis “is on keeping relationships stable,” a balance which in turn would create “social harmony and order” (Yan et al. 5). Therefore, within such a social scene, a person with disabilities would create disharmony that could lead to chaos in society. Additionally, Chinese superstitions implied that “disability is a form of punishment” that leads to “tragic experience[s]” (5). Poor Fool was never able to overcome limitations of her social scene. Her very existence in the family home created a disruption within the Wang household due to the prevalent attitudes regarding the disabled. While her parents valued her, the rest of the family ignored her existence. Wang Lung entrusted the care of his daughter to his concubine Pear Blossom after his death, an obligation that she faithfully met until Poor Fool’s death many years later. Both Pear Blossom and Poor Fool lived by themselves in Wang Lung’s original earthen home away from the Wang family’s town house.

Pearl Buck had a second motive in developing the character of Poor Fool. That is, the character and her father's concern for her is Buck's stylized expression of her anguish over her own disabled child, Carol. Caroline "Carol" Grace Buck was born in 1920 to parents Lossing and Pearl Buck. By age four, Buck could no longer ignore the fact that Carol was developmentally delayed. Once doctors confirmed her retardation, Buck struggled to accept Carol's condition for the rest of her life. In *The Child Who Never Grew,* Buck describes "not only Carol's difficulties," but also her "role as a mother struggling to accept her child's limitations. Lossing is noticeably absent" from the narrative (Finger and Christ 46). Buck would not learn the cause of Carol's retardation until the 1960s. The condition was called phenylketonuria (PKU), a genetic disorder where the body is unable to "metabolize the amino acid phenylalanine" and leads to intellectual impairment (45). She claimed that her motive behind deciding to become an author was "because her husband [Lossing] thought that sending their retarded daughter to an expensive, private institution was a waste of his hard earned money" and so, "she felt compelled to meet all the expenses herself" (51). Initially, Buck attempted to care for Carol on her own, but she finally had to institutionalize Carol, aged nine, due to the child's "increasingly frequent, behavioral outbursts and need for attention" along with "increasingly militant political disarray spreading through China" (48).

The Good Earth (1932) is one of Pearl Buck's earliest works where she attempts to process her feelings regarding Carol's condition. She hid her daughter's retardation from the public until 1950 when she published *The Child Who Never Grew* and then "continued to reveal some of the suffering that she experienced as the mother of a

retarded child in *My Several Worlds*," a semi-autobiographical work published in 1954 (Finger and Christ 53). Buck's biographer Peter Conn suggests that her "entire career as a writer was anchored in her anxiety for her child" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 102). She was successful in her purpose of providing for her child. Pearl Buck wrote over seventy books in her lifetime and the sales and profits from her books allowed her to establish an endowment at Vineland, the institution where Carol lived for over sixty years before her death in 1992 (Finger and Christ 51-52). By developing literary characters with disabilities such as the Poor Fool in *The Good Earth* and *Sons*, Buck drew the attention of readers around the world to "human tragedies," a fact which in turn helped in "raising money for research and disseminating information" (56).

Following the release of *The Good Earth*, Pearl Buck began working on the next novel in *The House of Earth* trilogy, *Sons*, set during the period of the decline of the Chinese monarchy and the rise of the revolutionary nationalist movement (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 140). The novel focuses on the lives of Wang Lung's three sons, namely, Wang the Landlord, Wang the Merchant, and Wang the Tiger. Towards the end of *The Good Earth* and in *Sons*, all three sons marry and establish their households. The women that they marry develop varying levels of agency owing to the socio-political scene and the personality of their husbands. Chinese society was in the beginning stages of change brought about by the defeat of the Chinese in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. The Chinese believed Japan was able to defeat them due to "its westernization, including its education of women" (Lee Yao 110). But, the concern for women's condition began long before the war with the arrival of western, Christian missionaries whose call for

improvements in the lives of women was later taken up by "western educated scholars and journalists" who campaigned for women's equality, their education, and "freedom in marriage" (111). These efforts were aimed at changing the attitudes of Chinese men "to abandon their feudalistic thinking, to promote the status of their daughters and to support the movement for natural, unbound feet" (111). The female characters in *Sons* experience varying levels of agency within the context of their scene that was both traditional and yet changing, in terms of its treatment of women.

The daughter of a grain merchant, Wang the Landlord's wife came to her husband's home as O-lan lay on her deathbed. She gained approval and in turn, agency within the Wang household due to her traditionally appropriate behavior. When she came to the Wang household, her respectful actions towards Wang Lung and O-lan pleased both of them for her actions confirmed that "she knew her duty" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 259). Her physical mannerisms, which included moving around the house quietly with downcast eyes, were acts that showed her conformity to the traditional expectations of well-bred Chinese women. Furthermore, by tending to her unwell mother-in-law, she identified herself as a dutiful daughter-in-law whose primary duty was to "pay a great deal of respect to her parents-in-law, to obey them as she would her own parents, and to meet their every need" (Lee Yao 22). Through her socially-approved actions that her in-laws found "careful and correct," Wang the Landlord's wife gained her initial agency.

Following the deaths of her in-laws, Wang the Landlord's wife furthered her agency by becoming her husband's advisor and the matriarchal head of his household.

Wang the Landlord is characterized as a pleasure-seeking man of weak character who constantly sought his wife's counsel in all matters. An example of her greater agency can be found in the period after Wang Lung's death. As the three sons sought to distribute their father's wealth, Wang the Landlord's wife through "violent signs" from behind a nearby curtain attempted to persuade her husband regarding the men's decisions. Although her husband tried to ignore her, he was not able to do so because she then proceeded to whisper her opinions loudly so that the brothers and the mediator could hear her comments (Buck, *Sons* 28-29). Her actions are comparable to the tactics used by "empresses, such as Lu and Teng of the Han Dynasty" who assisted "young emperors in managing the government by practicing what was called 'reigning from behind the curtain' since women were not allowed to hold face-to-face conferences with men" (Lee Yao 70). Furthermore, this lady wielded power over her household that included her husband's concubines, unlike her mother-in-law O-lan. Cultural attitudes towards "polygyny enabled an elite wife to monopolize the prestigious role of social motherhood" whereas a "concubine-mother's motherhood was often tainted by her subordinate status in her husband's household" (Du 163). Wang the Landlord's wife, though unhappy about her husband's concubines, understood the socially-ascribed position of superiority that her role as first wife provided, and through this status, she maintained her position and agency within the household.

Wanting to see his sons settled in life before his death, Wang Lung directed his man Ching to find a wife for his second son, Wang the Merchant, as well. Unlike his brother, this second son had specific requirements regarding his future wife:

> I desire a maid from a village, of good landed family and without poor relatives, and one who will bring a good dowry with her, neither plain nor fair to look upon, and a good cook, so that even though there are servants in the kitchen she may watch them. And she must be such a one that if she buys rice it will be enough and not a handful over and if she buys cloth the garment will be well cut so that the scraps of cloth left over should lie in the palm of her hand. Such an one I want. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 291)

His father was astonished by his son's requirements as he could not identify with them, but he recognized the wisdom behind his son's words. Wang the Merchant was a frugal man who was familiar with his older brother and his wife's lavish lifestyle which he attributed to town living. He did not want a wife from town because he feared she would act in ways similar to her older sister-in-law; therefore, he wanted a wife from a village who would know to economize. In short time, a girl who met all his requirements was found; and they were married. When Wang the Tiger visited his second brother's home after their father's death, he was shocked and slightly envious of his brother's family. He noted that the family's cheerful atmosphere "all the noise and good humor swelled and centered about Wang the Second's country wife" (Buck, *Sons* 139). She was a "noisy, boisterous creature" who managed the household and its money carefully and yet could spare a penny for a crying child, if needed (139). Wang the Tiger experienced first-hand the "content between Wang the Second and his wife and he felt the content the children had too" (140). This sense of content within the family was the direct result of the identification in attitudes between the two agents, namely, Wang the Merchant and his

wife. A man of strong economic sense, he had wanted a wife who understood his economic vision. Wang the Merchant's wife understood her husband's frugal ways; and her own actions mirrored his, but on a smaller scale. Her acts allowed her to identify with her husband; these acts, in turn, led to greater agency for her within their household.

Wang Lung's youngest son, Wang the Tiger, was married three times, and the learned wife was his second wife selected for him by his oldest brother, Wang the Landlord. She is not named in the novel and addressed throughout as the "learned wife," for her education was her defining characteristics and her source of agency. The daughter of a scholar and physician who had no sons, the learned wife had been well educated by her father and knew much about medicine. She is representative of the changing attitudes towards education and equality for women. Buck reveals common perceptions about women who were educated through the eyes of Wang the Landlord who suggested such a woman as a prospective bride for his youngest brother:

> She is what they call now-a-days a new woman, such as have learning and not bind their feet…I hear there are many like her in the south, and it is only because this is a small old city, doubtless, that men here do not know what to make of her. She goes on the street even and I have seen her once and she went very decorously and did not stare about her, either. With all her learning she is not so hideous as might be feared… (Buck, *Sons* 303)

The learned wife is characterized as a modern woman who was educated and whose feet were unbound. Despite these differences from a traditional woman, no fault could be

found in her behavior as she behaved in a sedate and mature manner and was pleasing to look upon. Although the learned wife had a good education and was progressive, her marriage to Wang the Tiger was unhappy because of the differences in their attitudes. Wang the Tiger sought a wife in his great desire for a son and was determined to take on as many wives as needed until one of them gave him a son (298). To him, a son meant a future and the continuation of his warlord legacy. Thus, to have a son born quickly, he married two women – the learned wife and the village wife – who were no more than tools to further his ambitions. In his dealings with them, he "never grew familiar with either woman, and he always went in to them haughtily and for a set purpose…", which was to beget a son (315).

Wang the Tiger's interactions with his learned wife and his indifference to her qualities reveal not just traditional attitudes toward women, but signify the personal experiences derived from Buck's own parents. Buck had observed the distant relationship between her parents and watched how the marriage had taken its toll on her mother. Her father was a man who "wished his daughters had been sons; who walked out of church if a woman spoke; who refused to let his wife write a check" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 20). His contempt, for his wife and daughters, was founded on biblical support that the position of women was inferior to men. He found theological support in the writings of St. Paul who "became for Pearl the source and symbol of sexual inequality" (20). Over the years, Buck witnessed the torment that Carie experienced as a result of Absalom's adherence to Pauline doctrine "a theology that belittled [Carie's] humanity" (20). Buck could never reconcile herself with the suffering her mother endured in China and eventually distanced

herself from Christianity due to what she perceived were negative attitudes towards women (20).

In spite of her joyless marriage, Carie sought to do her duty as a missionary wife. Instead of secluding herself within her home, she showed a degree of concern that was lacking from Absalom's unyielding and fundamentalist approach. While Absalom was busy converting pagan souls, Carie focused on more practical matters, that is, she was concerned with the daily lives of Chinese people around her. Carie "spent hours talking with Chinese women about their troubles," an approach that Buck herself emulated as a young girl and later as a married young woman and mother (21). Although Carie's relationship with Absalom was difficult, her role as a missionary wife and devotion to her children served as a life-long example for Pearl Buck. In *A House Divided*, the actions of the learned wife to improve the life of her daughter Ai-lan, adopted daughter Mei-ling, and those of the children at the foundling home are symbolic of the charitable works that Buck's own mother performed as part of her civic and Christian duty. Both the learned wife and Carie were limited in terms of their agency within their family, and yet they found agency – a way to put their abilities to good use - in helping improve the lives of others. Furthermore, both women accepted the limitations of their respective scenes, but actively sought to improve their daughters' agencies – Carie for Pearl and the learned wife for Ai-lan and Mei-ling.

Wang the Tiger fathered two children, a son and daughter, with the village wife and the learned wife, respectively. Of the two children, he focused his attentions on his

son, Wang Yuan, and ignored his daughter, Ai-lan, even though she was an enticing child (Buck, *Sons* 372). Despite her best efforts to engage her husband's interest in their daughter, Wang the Tiger chose to engage minimally with his baby daughter and was astonished when the learned wife spoke of not binding the child's feet and of educating her (372-73). Upon hearing her speak of her progressive plans for her daughter, Wang the Tiger came to understand his wife better, noting that she had a "wise good face and a manner which made her seem composed and able to do what she liked". He also observed that "she did not fear him and she looked back at him without giggling or drawing her mouth down as the other wife might have done." He concluded that the learned wife was cleverer than he had previously thought. Therefore, he was amenable to her plans if they seemed to be wise decisions in the future (373). Wang the Tiger's act of looking at his wife closely for the first time offers her an opportunity to be recognized by her husband. The learned wife's conversation with her husband and its effect on him was beneficial to their daughter as her husband never sent the child away when she visited him in his court along with her brother.

At the same time, Wang the Tiger's general opinion of women remained that they were "ignorant and foolish," an attitude that he tried unsuccessfully to impress upon his son (Buck, *Sons* 381). However, unlike Carie who chose to remain with her husband, the learned wife left her husband to live in a coastal city to educate Ai-lan. As a dutiful wife, she wrote to him yearly to inform him of their life and Ai-lan's progress, and he sent her money for their expenses. In the coastal city, the learned wife established her household where she lived in a dignified manner. Her actions are in keeping with Buck's own

attitudes towards marriage. Buck was determined not to suffer as her mother had; and so, when her marriage to Lossing Buck became unsatisfactory, she made the controversial decision to divorce him. The learned wife who could not understand what events triggered her husband's dislike of women echoes her frustrations. The intersecting ratio of act and agent reveals the conflicting attitudes of Wang the Tiger and the learned wife. Wang the Tiger is an agent who represents the ideology of traditional Chinese society that oppressed women. His ideas conflicted with those of the learned wife, an agent who represented a changing Chinese society that sought to empower women through education and give them equality. By living away from her husband in the city, the learned wife achieved greater agency by putting her abilities to use for the greater social good:

> Her real pleasure was in a certain good work she did for children, those female children, newly born, who are cast away unwanted by the poor. These when she found them she gathered into a home she kept and she hired two women to be mothers to them, and she herself went there daily, too, and taught them and watched to see those who were ill or wasted, and she had nearly twenty of these foundlings. Of this good work she talked to Yuan sometimes and how she planned to teach these girls some good honest livelihood and wed them to such honest men as might be found, farmers or tradesmen or weavers, or whatever man might want good, working maids. (Buck, *A House Divided* 87)

Through the actions of the learned wife, Buck tackles the issues of female infanticide and abandonment that was wide spread in China. By establishing a foundling home for abandoned baby girls, the learned wife offered them a chance at life, an act that also aligned with the growing women's movement that determined that women, just as men, had the right to live (Lee Yao 75). The learned wife used her education to educate and train the foundlings, for she knew that such training would make these girls of questionable social background more valuable to prospective grooms. Her actions also mirror the real-life actions of Pearl Buck who, in 1949, founded Welcome House, an adoption agency that "represented Pearl at her best: she had identified a significant social and moral problem" in the United States related to "disadvantaged children" and found a solution to address the problem (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 313). Buck strongly felt that "a nation defined itself in the way it treated children, especially children who carried the stigma of illegitimacy, or handicap, or minority status" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 313-14). Additionally, the learned wife's reminders to all her children – Ai-lan, Wang Yuan, and Mei-ling- that she would not force them into marriage are indicative of the major social reforms that called for the end of traditionally oppressive marriage practices for both men and women. Through her education, charitable acts, and finding a balance between traditions and modern attitudes, the learned wife acquired far greater agency than her sisters-in-law and the women of the previous generation.

Pearl Buck's final novel of the trilogy, *A House Divided*, delves into the lives of the learned wife's daughter Ai-lan and foster daughter, Mei-ling. While Wang the Tiger's son Wang Yuan serves as the central character, these women are important secondary

characters that Buck uses to extend her "inquiry into China's civil wars and the consequences of national turmoil for individual men and women" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178). The novel is set during the early part of the twentieth century at which time the younger generation was reacting against the Confucian moorings of their culture. Revolutions swept the nations including the Nationalist movement (led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen), the May 4th movement, and later, the Communist movement (led by Mao Zedong). Each of these movements brought changes in the attitudes concerning the position of women in Chinese society. Over the course of the novel, Wang Yuan encounters three Chinese women, among others, who are representative of the very socio-political forces that attempted to dominate the vacuum created by the end of China's imperial rule. Furthermore, the tumultuous socio-political scene of China that, consequently, determines their agency affects the lives of these women. The three women that Wang Yuan encounters while living in the coastal city are the pale maid, a Communist revolutionary, Ai-lan, his half-sister, and Mei-ling, a young woman who was raised by the learned wife.

Wang Yuan's encounter with the "pale maid" took place during his stay in the coastal city. This female character's acts are representative of the change in the agency of Chinese women during this time period. Buck sets the scene for Yuan's encounter with the pale maid in an urban, Westernized coastal city reminiscent of Shanghai. Yuan had enrolled for classes at a school with his cousin Sheng, who informed him that both revolutionaries and young women were to be their classmates (Buck, *A House Divided* 73-74). The pale maid's ability to attend school was the result of two specific movements

in China. The first one was the reform movement led by western missionaries that took place before the Boxer Rebellion and called for equal education. Following the Boxer rebellion, the revolutionary nationalist movement continued the emphasis on women's education. The second influence on women's education was the May 4th Movement, "an intellectual, cultural, social, and political crusade" that took place on May 4, 1919 (Lee Yao 124). On that day, students from National Peking University demonstrated against the unsuccessful republican government and the aggressions of foreign powers, namely, Japan and Great Britain (124). This protest had far-reaching effects on Chinese society, particularly to the women's movement as it "influenced people's attitudes towards other women" and "provided women with an opportunity to work with the opposite sex and demonstrate their equal abilities for the same social cause" (127). Furthermore, women gained greater agency in that women, in 1920, were permitted to attend colleges in Peking and participate in various women's organizations (127). Buck draws attention to this reform-focused Chinese scene that gave young women such as the pale maid the opportunity to go to school and interact with other young men and women.

The pale maid was also identified as a revolutionary, which represented another source of her agency. The end of the Boxer rebellion and the Chi'ang dynasty led to the emergency of "two major parties in China: The Nationalist and the Communist parties" (Lee Yao 130). The participants of the women's movement were divided ideologically in their support of both parties. The pale maid sought to identify herself with the Communists as a way to establish her equality with men and, in turn, improve her agency as an individual. She urged Wang Yuan to join them: "I want to see you in our cause.

Yuan, you are my very brother – I want to call you comrade, too" (Buck, *A House Divided* 95). Yuan was unable to respond to her desire to see him in the Communist party, nor did he reciprocate her love.

As a testament to changing times and women taking charge of their feelings and relationships, the pale maid wrote a letter boldly proclaiming herself to Wang Yuan:

> "I am a revolutionist, a modern woman. I have no need to hide myself as other women have. I love you. Can you then love me? I do not ask or care for marriage. Marriage is an ancient bondage… (Buck, *A House Divided* 100)

Buck's motives here are to highlight the liberation that women experienced as a result of early reform movements. Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintag (KMT) realized the "problem with women's emancipation" and at the Second KMT Congress in 1926, passed several legal measures to ensure women's equality, which included "equal rights for women, the right to inherit and own property, and marriage law based on freedom of marriage and divorce" (Lee Yao 135). The pale maid's letter alludes to the freedoms that women had gained owing to the political and legal measures that had come about in the country.

However, in spite of the greater agency she was afforded due to the changing political and legal scene, conflicts in political attitudes eventually led to the pale maid's untimely death. While at school, the pale maid was arrested and later executed by the nationalist government soldiers. Buck's motive was to showcase the reality of political turmoil between the two major political parties. Between 1925-27, the conflict between the KMT and the Communists led the KMT to launch the Northern Expedition under the

leadership of their new military commander, Chiang Kai-shek. The Northern Expedition was a "military campaign from [KMT] party's base in South China northward to Peking (Sheridan 164). While the first goal of the campaign was to oust powerful warlords, Chiang Kai-shek tackled the threat he saw from the "formidable mobilization of China's urban workers" – both male and female (Gray 222). As a result of this perceived threat, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Shanghai purge of April 1927 where KMT forces attacked the Communists in Shanghai (Lee Yao 131). Buck alludes to the Shanghai purge through the narrative of the pale maid. It raises her concerns regarding both female agency and distrust of the political situation. She insisted to Eleanor Roosevelt that she was "an anti-Communist of the deepest dye," but that "only the Communists had embraced the peasants." At the same time, her horror and revulsion of Chiang Kai-shek's "murderous purges" were well known and documented in the form of various writings (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 272). The actions of pale maid and her eventual death serve as an example of a Chinese citizen, women included, who both gained and lost agency as the result of the changing political climate in 1920s China.

In contrast, Wang the Tiger's daughter Ai-lan is a westernized character who enjoyed great freedom and opportunity. Raised by the learned wife in an urban coastal city, Ai-lan was provided a privileged upbringing and exposed to western ideas. When Wang Yuan met her as a young woman, he heard her "quick footsteps" and thought her step was "like a light running" (Buck, *A House Divided* 40-42). She was quick to inform him that she loved to dance wearing shoes with heels suited for the activity (61). Ai-lan's ability to walk lightly and quickly and to dance suggest that her feet were unbound, as the

learned wife had planned when Ai-lan was a baby. Her unbound feet allowed her freedom of movement. Early twentieth century China saw reform movements such as the natural foot movement (1878-1900) led by reformers such as Liang Ch'i-ch'a (1873-1929) who sought to form organizations to "counteract against this deep rooted social practice" (Lee Yao 115). In November 1929, the KMT's Central Executive Committee decided that "forced or purchased marriages, infanticide, concubinage, prostitution, footbinding, and ear piercing should be gradually abolished" (136).

Ai-lan benefitted from the political and legal changes that allowed her and other young women greater freedom. The learned wife's speech to Wang Yuan alluded to these freedoms when she forcefully told him, "I will never force Ai-lan to any marriage- and I will help you, if need be, against your father in this thing" (Buck, *A House Divided* 45). In fact, Wang Yuan did need her help because his father was pressurizing him to marry a woman that he had selected for Yuan. Despite the learned wife's attempts to improve Ai-lan's agency, the young woman sought only easy and pleasurable ways as improvements to her life. To Wang Yuan, the learned wife shared her cherished hopes for her daughter that someday she might become a "great painter or poet or best of all a doctor" and through these professional achievements, she hoped Ai-lan could become a great "leader in this new day for women" in China (60). However, Ai-lan's mother had come to understand her child's true nature, which would allow for no such greatness, for her gift was "in her laughter and in her mockery and in her pretty face and in her winning ways of gaining hearts" (60).

Buck suggests that a woman such as Ai-lan, while afforded greater agency as a result of reform movements and the westernization of urban Chinese centers, did not inherently have true agency because she chose not to better herself by means of a good education. Furthermore, unlike the learned wife, Ai-lan did not attempt to help others as a means of improving the lives and agency of other individuals. Buck's views are expressed through the learned wife's quiet acknowledgement of Ai-lan's limitations. All that the learned wife wanted for herself and Ai-lan was to be "learned and wise in everything," and for this end result, she attempted to educate her daughter well (60). However, Ai-lan had chosen to throw away her books and had thrown herself into the urban social life. Ai-lan's bold mannerisms, dancing, westernized clothing, and hairstyle are acts that indicate a greater social agency and the rejection of Confucian ideals concerning women's manner of dressing and behavior. However, by choosing not to further her education and instead, choosing to marry a divorced man and becoming pregnant before her marriage, reflect acts that severely limit the choices that the learned wife has nurtured in Ai-lan's life. In choosing a man who valued her physical charms and light-hearted manner, Ai-lan could be compared to the concubines of previous generations who provided companionship and pleasure to the men in their lives.

While Ai-lan chose to ignore the opportunities that her mother provided, her friend Mei-ling, chose to use those opportunities to improve her life. Mei-ling embodies the learned wife's definition of female agency and empowerment. Rescued as a baby and raised in the learned wife's foundling home, the learned wife brought Mei-ling into her home and educated her. She had received preliminary training in medicine from the

learned wife and was in training to become a doctor. Her choice of profession is significant because it highlights Pearl Buck's perspectives on how Chinese women could improve their situation. In 1933, Pearl Buck gave a speech in Washington on the topic of birth control where "She identified herself as a fervent supporter of birth control" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 152). Buck championed birth control and family planning as a result of "her years in China" which had "shown her the terrible cost that overpopulation brings to a nation and to its women (152). In *A House Divided* Buck's heroine, Mei-ling is one is a female character who derives agency from her actions, that is, her choices regarding how she wants to live her life. First, when Wang Yuan proposes marriage to her, Mei-ling is troubled by the idea of not finishing medical school. The learned wife comes to her aid and reminds her that she does not need to marry if she did not wish (Buck, *A House Divided* 280). Mei-ling is relieved, and she reaffirms her goals to both the learned wife and Wang Yuan as "I want to finish school and be a doctor…I do not want only to wed and take care of a house and children" (280). Mei-ling's ability to choose her future was the result of westernization and women's reform movements.

These two forces brought about changes in Chinese attitudes towards women. Reformer Liang Ch'i-ch'ao identified the following reasons to educate women:

> First, education was the prerequisite for women's independence from husband and family…Second, a husband would benefit from having an intelligent wife…Third, the proverb, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,"

> succinctly pointed out the importance of education, for mothers. Better-educated mothers would, theoretically, raise better generations. (Lee Yao 117)

These women-empowering attitudes were linked directly to a rhetoric of nationalism. The woman was the foundation of a strong family and through, countless such families only could a strong China be forged. The learned wife's speech regarding her hopes for Ai-lan reveal not just her attitude concerning the power of Chinese women, the speech articulates Buck's own position on the topic.

Furthermore, Mei-ling's character depicts a mental strength that was similar to O-lan's in *The Good Earth*. Whereas O-lan was portrayed as a figure of "courage, perseverance and instinctive common sense," Mei-ling represents a modern version of O-lan, a confident and mature woman who understood the traditions of the Chinese culture, but looked ahead at modernization. When Wang the Tiger was on his deathbed, the learned wife and Mei-ling came to the earthen home to care for him. The latter's ministrations were gentle and quietly efficient, "from [the house's] poverty, she found somehow the things she needed for her ministration, such things as Yuan would not have dreamed could be so used" (Buck, *A House Divided* 348). Her actions are symbolically connected to those of O-lan who built her agency within the Wang family by attending to prescribed traditional duties. Although Mei-ling was not part of the family, her acts of kindness towards others create an identification with the Wang family matriarch across generations.

After Wang the Tiger's death, when asked if she would remain in the earthen home with Wang Yuan, she responded by articulating a vision that she thought would apply to both of them:

> I can live anywhere, I think, but it is better for such people as we are to live in the new city…I want to work there – perhaps I'll make a hospital there one day – add my life to its new life. We belong there – we new ones -" (Buck, *A House Divided* 351)

Mei-ling's words are indicative of her belief that she could create her own agency by means of a solid education and a good profession. Her choice of profession also alludes to Pearl Buck's continual push for "medicine, education, sanitation" for the Chinese, advances which she firmly believed could be "part of the solution to China's problems" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 141-150). Thus, in Mei-ling, readers are presented with a modern Chinese woman in whom there is hope to solve China's social and political problems. Towards the end of the novel, when Wang Yuan kissed Mei-ling as an act of his love for her, she did not shy away from him. Instead, she "held herself bravely…straightened her shoulders square and sure…lifted up her head and looked back at him steadfastly, smiling…" (Buck, *A House Divided* 352-53). Her response to his act of love represents a woman who was self-possessed and understood the agency that existed within her. It also represents a balance between a modern Chinese man and woman, who had come to terms with their cultural heritage and were learning to navigate the rapidly changing Chinese social and political scene.

Female characters such as O-lan, the learned wife, Ai-lan, Mei-ling and all the others represent the existing and gradually changing attitudes of the ancient Confucian society of China. Each of the characters analyzed in this chapter experienced the ebb and flow of agency, what Burke calls "the means" to accomplish actions that depended on their socio-political scene and its conforming attitudes. Pearl Buck's in-depth examination of the lives of these characters offers readers the real story of the lives of Chinese women. In writing the stories of these women, Buck offers stylized and strategic answers to the political and social changes that were sweeping China in the early twentieth century. In the struggles of these characters, Buck embeds the struggles within her family and marriage. Through her act of writing these stories, Buck builds her own agency. She identified herself as a woman who was "not the moon," that is, she chose not to "depend on the light of another, as does the moon, to make herself shine" (Croll 156). In finding her voice and purpose separate from those of her father and husband, Pearl Buck discovered herself as a writer and commentator of important political and social issues. Buck's novels and their female characters continue to remain relevant in the twenty-first century as gender differences and inequality remain ongoing social issues.

CHAPTER III

THE RHETORIC OF ECONOMIC AGENCY IN *THE HOUSE OF EARTH* TRILOGY

Kenneth Burke defines the "basic function of rhetoric" as the "use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other agents" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 41). His theory of dramatism strives to analyze how "human beings create social realities through strategic choices of symbols in the description of human desires, emotions, situations, and conflicts…" (X. Lu 195). Pearl Buck's three novels that form *The House of Earth* trilogy are the "symbols" that she uses "to move others"; that is, these novels represent her "strategic choice of language" to induce a change in the attitudes of Westerners regarding China and its people (195). The Western association of the term "peasant" with feudalism, servitude, and exploitation generated similar impressions regarding the Chinese peasant (Cohen 155). Historical scholarship focused on whether the Chinese peasant had any opportunities for economic growth, which, in turn, begged the question – was there "growth or stagnation in the pre-Communist Chinese rural economy during the twentieth century and late imperial times?" (161). The pentadic terms act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose and the Burkean theory of identification are tools to examine how *The House of Earth* trilogy presents distinct images of the Chinese economy as opposed to the ones propagated in the West. Pearl Buck's novels reveal an economic infrastructure based on the smallholder economy and concept of *guanxi* that supports and fulfils the economic ambitions of various characters. Additionally, the

analyses of specific parent-child and husband-wife relationships illustrate how the characters gain or are denied economic agency. Lastly, pentadic analyses of common social practices such as female infanticide, selling of young girls and prostitution explain how economic motives became attached to them, a system which allowed these practices to prevail into the twentieth century in China.

Pearl Buck's immediate motive in writing and publishing her novels was financial; her writing would provide the funds to care for Carol, her disabled daughter; however, a second and significant motive was her growing respect and concern for the Chinese people, specifically the Chinese peasant. In *My Several Worlds*, Buck grounds her admiration of the peasant in his value to the nation:

> At this period of my life and of China's history I was keenly aware of the Chinese peasant, his wonderful strength and goodness, his amusing and often alarming shrewdness and wisdom, his cynicism and his simplicity, his direct approach to life which is the habit of a deep and natural sophistication. It seemed to me that the Chinese peasant, who comprised eighty-five percent of China's population, was so superior a human group … (284-85)

As the largest socio-economic group within China, the peasant was integral to the Chinese economy and way of life. Early twentieth century Western scholarship on the state of the Chinese economy portrays the peasant as living in "deteriorating conditions" with no hope of improvement (Gray 150). Burkean scholar David Blakesley notes that, "It is Burke's hope that dramatism can help us find ways of coaxing reidentifications

when it is clear that our previous orientations have driven us into a corner … (23). Through the characters in the trilogy and their actions set within a rapidly changing Chinese scene, Pearl Buck provides opportunities for Western readers to rethink their attitudes regarding the economic conditions of the Chinese peasant in the late imperial and early twentieth century. The narrative in *The Good Earth* suggests that while peasants formed the lowest socio-economic group in China, they were not necessarily cut off from opportunities for economic prosperity.

Over several centuries, the Chinese had gradually converted from a combination of "hunting, herding and farming" to agriculture as the primary mode of life (Hucker 62). By the time of the Shang (1766 – 1115 B.C) and Chou (1100 – 220 B.C.) the Chinese lived in agrarian communities built around a defined seigneurial (*lingzhu*) economy system (Lee Yao 6, Xing and Cole 107). The *lingzhu* gradually disintegrated leading to the rise of freehold farming during the time of the Ch'in dynasty (221 – 202 B.C.) (Lee Yao vii, Hucker 64). Historians suggest two reasons for the prominence of agriculture in China. First, the climate and topography of China along with the rich fertile plains created by the Yangtze and Yellow rivers led to the development of agriculture (Hucker 3). Second, the size of China's population provided a large labor force who turned to agriculture as a source of income.

The Good Earth introduces readers to farmer Wang Lung and his wife O-lan who begin their life together in a small earthen home in the Anhui province of China. Wang Lung and O-lan's actions are representative of the smallholder economy (*xiao nong*

jingji) that existed during the imperial age and in the early twentieth century in China (Xing and Cole 108). Pearl Buck offers multiple descriptions of Wang Lung working his tract of land with his ox to cultivate a variety of crops such as wheat, rice, garlic, and onions (27). Buck describes Wang Lung's anxieties regarding agriculture pertaining to weather conditions:

> … Wang Lung waited anxiously for the rains. And then the rains came suddenly out of a still grey day when the wind fell and the air was quiet and warm, and they all sat in the house filled with well-being, watching the rain fall full and straight and sink into the fields …
>
> … each farmer felt that for once Heaven was doing the work in the fields and their crops were being watered without their backs being broken for it, carrying buckets to and fro, slung upon a pole across their shoulders… (Buck, *The Good Earth* 43)

Pearl Buck's descriptions of Wang Lung's land, his backbreaking labor, and dependence on rain are rhetorical in nature as they illustrate the characteristics of rural smallholder economy in China. Buck's descriptions of Wang Lung's land indicate that he owns land that is his ancestral property passed down from his grandfather to his father and finally to him. This description is consistent with the Chinese economic practice of hereditary land ownership where "ancestral acres" passed through "successive generations of heirs" (LaTourette 487). Wang Lung's home is described as a "small, three-roomed house" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 41). It shows that he is a farmer of modest means. Buck's setting

is indicative of the rural peasant scene in imperial China where "units of cultivation were usually small" (LaTourette 486). The setting and the home are representative of the economic conditions of the rural majority who lived in walled "villages of one-storeyed houses" where the villages "usually lie within sight of each other" (Gray 7). Furthermore, Buck describes Wang Lung's farming practices in great detail; prior to his marriage, Wang Lung labored independently on his land and after his marriage, O-lan worked in the fields with him. The actions of the couple highlight traditional agrarian practices that focused on "intensive application of human labor," the use of "draught animals" such as Wang Lung's ox and rudimentary machinery in the form of farming implements (LaTourette 485).

While the rains water his fields, Wang Lung did not follow the practices of his fellow peasants; instead of wasting time visiting with other peasants, he remains home with his wife and they focus on completing tasks around the home. Buck describes how during the rainy season Wang Lung repairs his farming implements:

> … he took his rakes of split bamboo and examined them, and where the string was broken he wove in a new string made of hemp he grew himself, and where a prong was broken out he drove in cleverly a new bit of bamboo. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 44)

His wife's actions mirror his own where she works industriously to mend and sew shoes and clothing and repairs household implements such as an earthen jar (44).

Furthermore, when O-lan completes her household tasks, she joins her husband in the field, and they work together in order to farm the land.

> The wheat had borne and been cut and the field flooded and the young rice set, and now the rice bore harvest, and the ears were ripe and full after the summer rains and the warm ripening sun of early autumn. Together they cut the sheaves all day, bending and cutting with short-handled scythes. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 35)

An analysis of the intersecting ratios of act and agency reveals a second aspect of the smallholder economy that involves the Chinese peasant's economic attitude of conservation of resources. In *A Grammar of* Motives, Kenneth Burke considers the question of the place of attitude as a term associated with the rest of the pentad. He considers it "a state of mind" that serves symbolically as an act or as the "incipient act" (20). Wang Lung's actions reveal his state of mind; in other words, his actions are symbolic of the Chinese peasant's economizing ways, "… the Chinese farmer [is skilled] in taking advantage of the materials at his hand… In utilizing their environment, they accumulated much experience and displayed no small degree of intelligence. Some of their knowledge arrived empirically" (LaTourette 488-89). In addition to the knowledge that they gained from each other and by observation, the peasants also inherited agricultural practices from their ancestors that aided them in cultivating the land (489). The descriptions of the types of grains that Wang Lung grows indicate his awareness of the common practice of crop rotation within the Chinese peasant community. This

agricultural practice is significant for peasants for two reasons. First, it helps maintain the quality of the soil for future cultivation; second, by cultivating a variety of crops, the peasant had a greater "guarantee of survival" from one crop or another (LaTourette 490-92, Xing and Cole 109). Simultaneously, by working together on their land, Wang Lung's and O-lan's actions represent attitudes of economy in terms of labor power. Agriculture required "day and night" of hard labor and the average peasant could not use hired labor to work such long hours owing to issues of wages and the cost of food. Therefore, by using the "household's total labor power" the Wang family save money and improve the potential for greater profits from harvests (Xing and Cole 112).

The combination of intense labor, established farming practices, and an attitude of conservation of resources allow Wang Lung and O-lan to reap a bountiful harvest such that their "small, three-roomed house was bursting" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 41).

> Much of this would be sold, but Wang Lung was frugal and he did not, like many of the villagers, spend his money freely at gambling or on foods too delicate for them, and so, like them, have to sell the grain at harvest when the price was low. Instead he saved it and sold it when the snow came on the ground or at the New Year when people in the towns will pay well for food at any price. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 41)

Wang Lung's frugality, along with an acute sense of business, justifies Pearl Buck's assessment of the Chinese peasant as shrewd and wise. In *The Good Earth,* Buck highlights the Chinese market town; an integral part of the Chinese economic scene,

peasants such as Wang Lung could sell their harvests and purchase commodities necessary for their home and farming. A farming village typically included a "dozen or more… often related families" whose lands were located around the village. Near a grouping of one or more such villages would be a market town, "with shops and the homes of absentee landlords" (Hucker 12). Historical scholarship traces the growth of small villages, larger market towns, and urban city markets on the "decentralized nature of production" which created the space for Chinese farmers to buy and sell their commodities at the marketplace (Xing and Cole 114). While freehold farming offered a degree of independence to owner-cultivators such as Wang Lung, the average peasant of China's rural scene was not completely "self-sufficient and independent" (Hucker 12). Therefore, the marketplace in town with its potential for buying and selling was the economic avenue for peasants to improve their financial agency. Local minor markets (*defang xiao shichang*) where Wang Lung traded "experienced a great deal of growth and remained the largest sector of China's market trade" during the times of the Ming (1368 – 1644) and Qing (1644 – 1911) dynasties (Xing and Cole 115).

The local minor markets endured a one-way relationship with urban markets (*chengshi shichang*) where "every year large quantities of agricultural by-products flowed from the villages to the cities, without any urban products being exchanged for them at all" (Xing and Cole 114, 117). During their sojourn in Kiangsu, Wang Lung is amazed by the varieties of food available in the urban markets. He has never seen such quantities and varieties of food.

An analysis of the ratios of scene and purpose reveals Buck's motives in offering a rich description of the commodities available in Kiangsu's urban market:

> Here in the city there was food everywhere. The cobbled streets of the fish market were lined with great baskets of big silver fish, caught in the night out of the teeming rivers; with tubs of small shining fish, dipped out of a net cast over a pool; with heaps of yellow crabs, squirming and nipping in peevish astonishment; with writhing eels for gourmands at the feasts. At the grain markets there were such baskets of grain … white rice and brown and dark yellow wheat and pale gold wheat, and yellow soybeans and red beans and green broad beans and canary-colored millet and grey sesame. And at the meat markets whole hogs hung by their neck … and duck shops hung row upon row, over their ceilings and in their doors, the brown baked ducks that had been turned slowly on a spit before coals and the white salted ducks and the strings of duck giblets, and so with the shops that sold geese and pheasant and every kind of fowl.
>
> As for the vegetables, there was everything which the hand of man could coax from the soil; glittering red radishes and white, hollow lotus root and taro, green cabbages and celery, curling bean sprouts and brown chestnuts and garnishes of fragrant cress. … And going hither and thither were the vendors of sweets and fruits and nuts and of hot delicacies of sweet potatoes browned in sweet oils and little delicately spiced balls of pork wrapped in dough and steamed, and sugar cakes made from glutinous rice, … (Buck, *The Good Earth* 109-10)

The scene described above showcases the economic surpluses that flooded a major Chinese city while another province (Anhui) was experiencing drought/famine conditions. The purpose of the scene is to illustrate the differences in the range and workings of the local minor markets and urban markets that relate to the economic disparities that exist between villages and urban cities. The description also shows Western readers how China of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was "greater than all of Europe in size and in the volume of her domestic…" and, quite possibly, in terms of "her foreign commerce" as well (Fairbank and Reischauer 199). It was this overwhelming attitude of self-sufficiency coupled with the "fear of foreign seizure by military power" that restricted trade between Western nations and China (Rankin et al. 22). A second motive of a "sense of universality" can be ascribed to the scenes of drought and later, surplus production of agricultural products. The 1930s was a period of economic turmoil in America where "millions of farm families were pushed off their homesteads, victims of economic collapse and the natural disasters of drought and dust bowl" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 131). Buck's descriptions of the famine and the "endurance of farmers" seek to create identification with American farmers and readers all too familiar with the economic struggles of Americans during the Depression era (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 131).

In the final scene of the novel *The Good* Earth, Wang Lung overhears his two older sons speak of selling some land. He is seized with fear and rebukes them, "'It is the end of a family – when they being to sell the land,' he said brokenly. 'Out of the land we came and into it we must go – and if you will hold your land you can live – no one can

rob you of land-" (Buck 357). Wang Lung's angst regarding the speculations of his sons can be understood by an examination of the laws pertaining to landownership during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The shifting of agricultural practices from the seigneurial economy system to the freehold farming model created the "classic land-tenure problems" which persisted well into the twentieth century in China (Hucker 64). The primary drawback of the freehold system was that it perpetuated economic inequality that is, "The prosperous become landlords, the luckless become tenants"; Wang Lung benefits from the freehold farming system that was in place during the Qing dynasty that allows him to progress from a peasant to a landlord (64). Because he is not a tenant on his land and does not have to pay rent to a landlord, Wang Lung represents an agent "getting rich through diligent farming" (*li nong zhi fu*) (Hucker 64, Xing and Cole 125). His comment "if you will hold your land you can live" identifies land as a form of economic agency for the family. Even if all other enterprises fail, the land could be cultivated to sustain them. The need for grain always existed in Chinese society owing to the explosive rate of population growth; statistics conclusively show how "In the half century or so since 1870 the market surplus of agriculture had increased by about 50 per cent …" (Gray 152). More land allowed for more cultivation of grain which put the peasant or landlord in an economically "advantageous, seller's – market position" (Xing and Cole 126). As a proponent of this economic perspective, Wang Lung urges his sons not to act upon their plans by repeatedly cautioning them, "If you sell the land, it is the end" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 357).

The House of Earth trilogy features Wang Lung's sons who struggle to develop and establish their economic agency during Wang Lung's tenure as patriarch and economic head of the Wang household. In the eyes of the village community, Wang Lung is a prosperous man who "is founding a great house and his sons will be the sons of a rich man and they need not work all their lives long" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 214). While his sons acknowledge his authority at home, the traditional setting of *The Good Earth* builds a restlessness within the sons to escape their father's social and economic authority. Pearl Buck captures their restlessness to be free from their father's patriarchal and economic authority by means of an analogy about the roots of a tree:

> Now as the branches of some great old tree spring out from the stout trunk and strain away from that trunk and from each other, straining and spreading each upon its own way, although their root is the same, so it was with the three sons of Wang Lung, … (*Sons* 53).

In *A Grammar of Motives* Kenneth Burke elaborates on the pentadic term "agent" by providing an example from Ibsen's drama, "… the hero's state of mind after his conflict with the townspeople was objectified in such scenic properties as his torn clothing, and the broken windows and general disorder of the study" (10). The agent becomes "scenic" by reflecting the state of his mind onto his surrounding environment. The three sons of Wang Lung serve as either agents or counter-agents to their father's plans for them; each son's state of mind is reflected as scenic properties in their interactions with their father.

An examination of the ratios of act in conjunction with the conservative scene of rural China reveals how Wang the Eldest becomes a counter agent who experiences a decrease in his economic agency as a result of his rebellion against his father's wishes. Once Wang the Eldest becomes a grown man, Wang Lung takes it upon himself to find his son a bride. In the meantime, he begins to observe a change in his son who becomes "moody and petulant," "would not eat," and "wearied of his books" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 217). When reprimanded by his father, he weeps and flees the room. Unable to reason with the young man, Wang Lung beats him. He cannot figure out the reasons for his son's sudden change in behavior. Ultimately, O-lan identifies her son's malady. She draws comparisons between her son's "melancholy" and the idle "young lords in the courts of the great [Hwang] house" from her youth (219). Unable to communicate the reason for his behavior, Wang the Eldest uses his tantrums to express his melancholic state of mind. Wang Lung is astonished to hear of such a condition and is unable to identify with his son's situation. O-lan reminds Wang Lung that by virtue of his economic need to work the land, Wang Lung could not afford to be idle. His industrious state of mind is reflected in his actions to cultivate the land. On the other hand, Wang Lung's son has no reason to work since he is a rich man's son whose life of luxury has made him a "delicate" (219). In order to overcome his melancholy and unwilling to work the land, Wang the Eldest asks to go to a southern city (236). However, his father rejects his request on the grounds that it would cost too much money. Wang the Eldest is unable to travel independently since he has no money of his own. Here the son's actions signify his anger and resentment against his father and frustration at his own lack of money.

Shortly thereafter, Wang the Eldest is banished by his father and commanded not to return him until the latter sends word. As a result of his impiety towards his father, Wang the Eldest experiences a decline in economic agency in the form of banishment from the family home.

In a similar manner, Wang the Tiger, Wang Lung's youngest son, serves as a counter agent to his father's ambitions for him. When the son asks Wang Lung permission to become a soldier, his father is aghast and bemoans, "am I never to have any peace with my sons!" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 335). His father's initial rejection of his career choice upsets Wang the Tiger but he refuses to listen to his father. When his father asks him why he has chosen the career of a soldier, the son offers an economic reason, "… there is to be a revolution … and our land is to be free!" (336). Wang Lung is puzzled by this explanation, as his son's response does not conform to his own life experiences. He responds with "greatest astonishment" to his son's claims:

> "Our land is already free – all our good land is free. I rent it to whom I will and it brings me silver and good grains and you eat and are clothed and are fed with it, and I do not know what freedom you desire more than you have." (Buck, *The Good Earth* 336)

Wang Lung's response is his attempt to remind his son of their socio-economic scene. As agents within a freehold farming culture, Wang Lung has benefitted from this scene that has allowed him to prosper through hard work from a peasant to landlord. As a landlord, the scene allows him the freedom to make economic decisions that best support his

financial ambitions. These ambitions produce good returns in two ways: their large tracts of land are cultivated to grow grains, which provide good harvests that can be sold for profit, and by renting parts of their land to tenant farmers, Wang Lung earns rent from them, a practice that adds to his agricultural profits. However, the young man's bitter response "you do not understand" reveals his own lack of understanding regarding their economic scene (336). His resentment towards his father leads him to leave home at a young age and set off to become a soldier; and, in this process, he is removed from the wealth and comfort that his father had previously provided for him.

Wang Lung's middle son, Wang the Second is described as "crafty [and] sharp" with a "turn for malice" who enjoys greater economic agency than his brothers. In recognizing Wang the Second's attitudes towards money as aligned with his own aggressive attitude, Wang Lung decides to train Wang the Second to become a merchant. He decides to remove him from school and send him to a grain market for business training (Buck, *The Good Earth* 246). Wang the Second serves a supporting agent whose physical characteristics of being "crafty" and "sharp" create agency for him and enable him to train to become a grain merchant. Additionally, in keeping with the patriarchal social scene, he does not engage in behavior that challenges his father's authority. He agrees with his father's plans for him and willingly goes to train with merchant Liu.

By supporting his father's decisions, Wang the Second gains agency in the form of access to his father's wealth such that, after their father's death, the other two brothers look to him for guidance:

> … it was to the second son that Wang Lung in his lifetime had entrusted the stewardship of the lands, and he alone knew how many tenants there were and how much money could be expected each season from the fields, and such knowledge gave him power over his brothers, … (Buck, *Sons* 23).

Wang Lung's decision to entrust the stewardship of his lands to Wang the Second signifies his approval of his son's actions. Through his father's approval, Wang the Second attains greater agency than either of his brothers, which, after his father's death, transfers to his own brothers who turn to him for advice regarding managing their lands and future financial investments.

The rise of the Chinese merchant was due to the increase in population in China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The need to meet the demands of a growing population resulted in the "growth of the domestic market economy" which in turn ushered China into the modern era of trade and commercialization that "enlarged the role of the merchant" (Fairbank 16). Pearl Buck utilizes the character *Nung Wen* or Wang the Second to illustrate the economic attitudes associated with the merchant class. Wang the Second's ambitions differed from those of his father's, he is more interested in investments, "… he had great grain markets and he had money loaned out and he wanted his inheritance free so that he could enlarge himself in his making of money" (Buck, *Sons* 24). Wang the Second desires to expand his base of wealth, which, for him, depends not on the land, but the grain markets and banking. Historical scholarship reveals that "specialized regional products" energized the trade such that it led to the "organization of

banking and credit" (Fairbank 16). Significant to Wang the Second's industry and motivation is his aggressive attitude toward consolidating wealth. Wang the Second is a frugal and careful man as can be noted from his actions within the home:

> Wang the Merchant still ate the plain spare bit of food he always did and he took no new wife into his house as most men will when they are rich … and he wore the same sort of small patterned silk gown of a dark slate grey that he had always worn. In his house they added no new furniture … (Buck, *Sons* 221).

An analysis of the ratios of act and agent reveals Wang the Second's attitude of economy regarding food, clothing, and the home that contribute to his ambitions of becoming a major grain merchant. His actions within the home are mirrored in the community as well where he is careful with his investments and exact in his dealings with the tenants.

The very attitudes that help Wang the Second achieve economic success also create a sense of mystery between him and others. Kenneth Burke defines mystery as the "obverse expression of the disrelationship among classes" (*Permanence and Change* 278). The disrelationship leads individuals to become strangers to one another. Wang the Second's attitudes regarding money create mystery between him and his sons. His sons resent their father's restrictions upon their own economic agency; however, they are unable to react as the traditional scene demands total filial piety from them. Apprenticed to his several businesses, Wang the Second's acts of denying his sons: the opportunity to pursue other careers, accurate knowledge of his wealth, sufficient funds for pleasure and

beautiful clothes lead them to resent him and create a distance in their personal relationship (Buck, *Sons* 442).

Alongside distancing his sons, Wang the Second's actions affect the lives of the peasants and tenants in his community. He is an extremely shrewd merchant whose "years in the grain market had taught him everything that country people [did] to cheat the merchant and the townsman, for they [were] enemies by nature" (Buck, *Sons* 222). Recognizing his economic prowess, Wang the Second was called Wang the Merchant, but his unsympathetic attitude towards the poor led to a new name "He Who Wins in Every Bargain" (222). In *A Grammar of Motives* Kenneth Burke theorizes, "Both act and agent require scenes that 'contain' them" (15). Wang the Second's actions conform to the social scene of late imperial China where throughout Chinese history peasant revolts had taken place as reaction to the "entropy in China's agricultural system" (Gray 8). Wang the Second's personal attitudes aid in his ambitions; however, these same attributes make him an unsympathetic grain merchant and landlord. Wang the Second is aware of these names and the country people's hatred; however, he cares only to increase his profits. To achieve greater profits, he pressures the tenants regarding their harvests.

His divisive actions and unsympathetic attitude toward the peasants lead Pear Blossom and a village woman to remind him of his peasant roots:

> "How is it that in one generation you forget how your father and your mother toiled on the land even as we do and they starved too, as we must, when you grind our blood and bones as you do now? (Buck, *Sons* 223)

The woman's words are her attempt to establish an identification between herself and Wang the Second's parents. By comparing her toil to that of his parents, she attempts to appeal to his compassion, filial piety, and social orientation at birth. Similarly, Pear Blossom, upon hearing of the general hatred towards him, attempts to caution him by reminding him that he was "my lord's son"; thus, she hopes that by reminding him of his peasant father, the son might change his attitude towards the peasants. Wang the Second turns a deaf ear to their entreaties; his lack of concern is indicative of his economic attitude – the perspective that money is the ultimate power and offers immeasurable agency and security (Buck, *Sons* 223).

In *A Grammar of Motives* Kenneth Burke defines the pentadic term "scene" as "setting, or background" that serves as a "fit 'container'" for an act (3). He elaborates that the acts and agents that result in a "synecdochic relation" between these ratios share the properties of a given scene (7). When applied to the *House of Earth* trilogy, this synecdochic relation between the ratios of scene and act reveals negative economic attitudes towards women, which were an outgrowth of the oppressive Chinese scene. The traditional scene was limiting to women as a result of the dominant Confucian ideology that emphasized the inferiority of women in all respects. Economic limitations on women were a significant aspect of this traditional scene that bound women to their families and greatly reduced their agency within the family and in society. The very existence of daughters within a family was an economic obligation with the traditional Chinese social structure, as daughters had to be married off with a substantial dowry (Lee Yao 48). The

social practices of female infanticide and the selling of young girls into slavery were commonplace in order to avoid the economic burden of raising daughters.

Female infanticide was a common practice during periods of financial difficulty and among poorer families who "foresaw the upcoming shortage of financial resources for their daughter's dowry" and chose instead to "put their baby girls to death" (48). During the long period of drought in *The Good Earth*, a stoic O-lan chooses to kill her newborn daughter knowing that the family did not have the food or money to raise the child (Buck 82). With multiple hungry mouths to feed, her act is indicative of an economic decision that many parents faced regarding the survival of their families during impoverished periods of Chinese history.

Another common practice among poorer families during periods of financial instability was the selling of young girls as slaves to rich households. This practice served two economic purposes; namely, selling the girl child to a rich household would ensure her survival when food was scarce, and the transaction would generate money for the girl's family who could use it for their survival (Ayscough 71). An examination of the scene-act ratio reveals the synecdochic correlation between the oppressive Chinese situation that led to the establishment of economic practices that reinforced women's inferiority and commodified them. *The Good Earth* highlights three instances of this practice over the course of the novel. The first instance is at the beginning of the novel with O-lan who was sold as a young girl to the Hwang household where she worked a kitchen slave until her marriage to Wang Lung, which was the act that freed her from

servitude (Buck 17). A second instance is during the period of drought when Wang Lung considers selling the Poor Fool to save her life. Sadly, he murmurs to the oblivious child, "Little fool, would you like to go to a great house where there is food and drink and where you may have a whole coat to your body?" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 132). O-lan's honest responses to his queries about the life of house slaves lead to a change in Wang Lung's intentions to sell his child.

The Good Earth describes a third instance where Wang Lung who has become a wealthy landlord participates in the economics of slavery. Upon becoming a grandfather, he decides to purchase slaves who would be responsible for caring for his future grandchildren. He purchases five slaves, of whom two are "about twelve years of age with big feet and strong bodies" and another two who are younger to "fetch and carry" for the entire family. The last one's task was to serve Lotus. Shortly after these purchases, a man came to Wang Lung's home wanting to sell a small child of about seven years who grows up to become his concubine Pear Blossom (Buck, *The Good Earth* 283). When in dire straits, families chose to sell their daughters into slavery; in *The Good Earth* families who lived in Wang Lung's area periodically came to sell knowing "he was rich and powerful and a man of good heart" (283). The scene – act ratio reveals economic attitudes that sympathized and encouraged the selling of young girls and slavery with a caveat. Both the Ming and Qing governments emphasized that "a sale for 'survival' was legally justified (Bao Hua 275). In 1789, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty articulated the government's position on the "traffic of women"; "he presented the idea of Confucian 'benevolence,' viewing traffic in humans as a way through which the rich

shared their means with the poor, who could not survive otherwise during difficult times" (275). The Qing government's policy on the trafficking of women along with prevalent Confucian thought regarding the inferiority of women create a socially-accepted business scene where young girls and women could be bought and sold to serve the financial needs of family and relatives. Hence, women such as O-lan and Pear Blossom by virtue of their status as marketable commodities, provide the agency with which others experience economic benefits.

Kenneth Burke elaborates on the pentadic term "act" by listing the various "concepts of action" that include "Profession, vocation, policy, strategy, [and] tactics" (*A Grammar of Motives* 14). The actions of O-lan and Lotus represent their strategies and tactics in order to gain and maintain economic agency within the Wang household. These characters resort to using strategies and tactics owing to the Confucian cardinal virtues that emphasized filial piety over all else. In the husband-wife and father-son relationships, always the husband and father were superior to the wife and son. Furthermore, the traditional scene did not allow Chinese women to "own or control personal property or savings" (Lee Yao 23). Specific female characters and their actions serve to highlight the pervasive economic inequality that existed in nineteenth and early twentieth-century China.

The actions of O-lan, the Wang family matriarch, prove beneficial to her husband as she helps him achieve financial success. After their return from Kiangsu to Anhui, Wang Lung discovers a "cloth-wrapped bundle" that was the "size of a man's closed

hand between [his wife's] breasts" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 144). He is immediately curious of the bundle as it felt hard yet moved at his touch. He asks her, "Now what is this thing you have on your body?" In response to his question:

> [O-lan] drew back violently at first and then when he laid hold of it to pluck it away from her she yielded and said, "Well, look at it then, if you must," and she took the string which held it to her neck and broke it and gave him the thing.
>
> … Then suddenly into his hand fell a mass of jewels … 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. What the names of them were Wang did not know … he knew form the gleaming and the glittering in the half-dark room that he held wealth. (145)

Wang Lung's actions represent domineering male attitudes regarding wealth acquired by women. When Wang Lung demands to know what O-lan concealed on her body, her "violent" withdrawal from his touch is symbolic of her attempt to resist his intrusion of her body as well as the treasure she has acquired. However, in keeping with social dictates, she submits to her husband's demands by handing the bundle over to him for his inspection. Wang Lung is dumbfounded by the riches, and once he is able to think, he realizes that the jewels on their own were dangerous to keep and had to be transformed in some way.

> It [the treasure] must be sold and put into safety – into land, for nothing else is safe. If any knew of this we should be dead by the next day and a robber would

> carry the jewels. They must be put into land this very day … (Buck, *The Good Earth* 145).

Throughout *The Good Earth,* Wang Lung professes his economic philosophy to live and die with the land, which is a consequence of his social position as a peasant farmer. Wang Lung's decision to sell the jewels to purchase land reveals an astute economic decision that benefits the Wang family. With more land to farm, Wang Lung would be able to produce greater harvests that could then be sold for higher profits. In the process of making these plans, Wang Lung completely ignores his wife and proceeds to place the bundle of jewels within his coat. It is then that he catches a look of longing on his wife's face who meekly asks her husband, "I wish I could keep two for myself" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 146). Wang Lung is astounded by O-lan's desire for the two pearls and asks her, "Why should we have jewels like this in an earthen house?" (146). He acquiesces to her request with the realization that her desire is motivated by the economic excesses she had seen, but never experienced, as a kitchen slave in the Hwang household.

Wang Lung approves O-lan's request because her actions had consistently led to economic opportunities and growth for the Wang family. The expensive pearls symbolize O-lan's improved status in the family. Later in the novel, Wang Lung takes away O-lan's pearls and offers them as a gift to Lotus. By "hardening his heart" against O-lan Wang Lung demands the pearls saying, "I have need of them" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 186). He laughs when O-lan places the pearls in his hand while she returns to the task of washing clothes as "tears dropped slowly and heavily from her eyes" but "she did not put up her

hand to wipe them away" (186). The intersecting ratios of scene and act when applied to the two conversations between Wang Lung and O-lan showcase the economic imbalance that existed between men and women. By assuming authority over O-lan's treasure without even asking her, Wang Lung asserts patriarchal oversight that is in keeping with the traditional Chinese scene. As O-lan's husband, Wang Lung claims ownership of any and all of O-lan's possessions. O-lan's reluctance to hand over her treasures and her eventual yielding to her husband's demands are the expected actions of a dutiful Chinese wife.

As an important female character in the *House of Earth* trilogy, O-lan's life experiences reveal a woman whose social agency waxed and waned over the course of her life. At the same time, her individual economic agency experienced no change – she had none. Her existence and livelihood are dependent completely upon her husband. In contrast, Wang Lung's second wife Lotus enjoys limited economic agency as a result of her "profession and tactics" which Kenneth Burke identifies as elements of action. Wang Lung meets Lotus when she works as a sing-song girl at the grand tea room in his village. Pearl Buck uses Lotus as a representative agent to discuss the popular and socially acceptable economic enterprise that was prostitution. The interactions between Wang Lung and Lotus serve to highlight Chinese attitudes towards sex as a "marketable commodity" (Henriot 36). Wang Lung begins to frequent the grand tearoom when he is unable to farm the land during a period of flooding. Pearl Buck offers vivid descriptions of the grand tearoom to help readers understand the extravagant scene thus arranged to cater to men's sexual desires: "This shop was a great hall and the ceiling was set about

with gilt and upon the walls there were scrolls hung made of white silk and painted with the figures of women" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 172). A direct correlation existed between the earnings of a prostitute and the class of the customers of the establishment where she worked. Therefore, prostitutes "from a larger 'institution' had a better chance of reaping more profit" than those that catered to the lower-levels of society (Lee Yao 90). The grand tearoom that Wang Lung frequents catered to a wealthy clientele of "rich men" and "elegant lords" who only wore silk and drank rich wine (Buck, *The Good Earth* 172-73).

Prostitution served as a career choice for many women in patriarchal China. The culprit for career choice was the traditional Chinese scene that limited economic opportunities for women and instead turned them into purchasable commodities. Chinese scholar Christian Henriot notes that, "The general cause was undoubtedly poverty, whether as an enduring condition or the consequence of an accident. The death of parents, especially the father, is a frequently-cited cause" (46). *The House of Earth* trilogy offers no account of Lotus' family; after Wang Lung's death, Lotus depends on Wang Lung's sons to cater to her financial needs. Pearl Buck's descriptions of the manipulative strategies of Lotus and Cuckoo unveil the regressive attitudes towards women and money that prevailed throughout the imperial age and onwards into the twentieth century.

Prostitutes were considered women of ill-repute owing to their choice of profession; at the same time, the assumption regarding the reason why these women were in the profession was that they sought money and wealth (Hershatter 138). The

establishments that housed prostitutes enforced a clear organizational strategy, and a patron was expected to "demonstrate his sophistication" through an understanding of the "social and financial obligations" related to the prostitute and her house (69). Wang Lung is schooled in the social and financial aspects of the grand tearoom by Cuckoo who serves as the madam of the establishment. Upon hearing Wang Lung refer to the women painted on the scrolls as "dream women", Cuckoo reveals, "So they are dream women … but dreams such as a little silver will turn into flesh" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 174). It is then that Wang Lung understands the paintings represent real women and serve as the tea room's marketing strategy to lure potential customers for the prostitutes.

Lotus' arrival in Wang Lung's life represents a period of high sexual expenditure in his otherwise, cautious economic life.

> … he had his clothes made as the men in the town had theirs, light grey silk for a robe, cut neatly to his body and with little to spare, and over this a black satin sleeveless one. And he bought the first shoes he had in his life not made by a woman, and they were black velvet shoes such as the Old Lord had worn …
>
> … And beyond this he bought a silver ring washed with gold for his finger, and as hair grew where it had been shaved above his forehead, he smoothed it with a fragrant foreign oil from a whole bottle for which he had paid a whole piece of silver. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 184).

Wang Lung's actions of grooming himself represent his efforts to refashion himself as a wealthy man and identify himself with the other wealthy men who patronized the

establishment. Over the course of their "career," prostitutes moved through variable phases that included "virgin entertainer," "intimate companion," and "concubine" among others (Hershatter 142).

After Wang Lung expressed his interest in Lotus to Cuckoo, Lotus becomes his intimate companion and is eventually bought by Wang Lung for a steep price:

> The woman who is keeper for the master of the tea house will do it for a hundred pieces of silver on her palm at one time, and the girl will come for jade earrings and a ring of jade and a ring of gold and two suits of satin clothes and two suits of silk clothes and a dozen pairs of shoes and two silken quilts for her bed. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 194-95)

Lotus manipulates Wang Lung's sexual desire for her in order gain his devotion and material gifts for herself. In addition to the gifts that she demands of him during her time as his intimate companion, she insists on a heavy bride price as part of the business transaction that brings her to Wang Lung's home. Pearl Buck's portrayals of Lotus and her madam Cuckoo serve to highlight the economic tendencies of women in the sex trade who "were experts at requesting clothing or jewelry from a close customer" (Hershatter 137). Additionally, the act of paying both Cuckoo and Lotus signifies a common system of business in such situations where both the madam and the girl were offered money. Furthermore, these characters highlight the plight of women who, irrespective of choice, were devalued and treated as sexual commodity or property as a result of their inferior position in Chinese society.

The period between 1894 – 1926 is significant as political and cultural revolutions brought about changes in the role of women in Chinese society. Additionally, the opening of Chinese ports for trade purposes with Western nations brought missionaries who sought to educate both men and women (Lee Yao 105, 116). The early years of the twentieth century saw Chinese interest in women's education grow; one of the reasons for this growth was the thinking that "Without an education [,] women could neither think independently nor survive in the job market" (117). *The House of Earth* trilogy features a panoply of female characters with limited to no economic agency across three generations of women. However, in *A House Divided,* Pearl Buck introduces the character Mei-ling who lives in a coastal city while great social and cultural changes sweep the Chinese scene. Mei-ling is an orphan who is rescued by Wang the Tiger's educated wife and given a good education. The intersecting ratios of scene and act reveal the transformation of Chinese society and the changing attitudes towards women and the economic agency among men and women. The change in the Chinese scene was the direct result of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 that led to intellectual, political, cultural, and economic changes.

Through the Chinese magazine *Hsin Ching Nien*, its publisher Ch'en Tu-hsiu began an intellectual and social campaign that focused on social, gender, and economic inequalities. In the magazine's January 1916 issue, he challenged women not to "consider themselves as men's possessions." He attacked Confucian philosophy for its role in "not giving women equal rights" and advocated for "opportunities for financial independence for women" (Lee Yao 126). In keeping with Kenneth Burke's listed variations of an act,

Me-ling's education and professional career serves as the act that fits the transforming scene of China's early twentieth century. During the early and middle years of the twentieth century, the Nationalist and later the Communist governments enacted policies that allowed women to train for jobs outside the home. By the time of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s "barefoot doctors, veterinarians, and agro-technicians were the most popular occupations among working women" that afforded these women a higher status in society and reduced the discrimination against them (Lee Yao 168). Mei-ling's professional career provides the economic agency for her to improve her life and not be financially dependent on a man, both of which are aided by the changing socio-political and economic scene in twentieth century China.

The House of Earth trilogy demonstrates the rise and fall of the House of Wang; the novels scrutinize Wang Lung's economic success and those of his sons who use the traditional social networks to build relationships that aid in their economic ambitions. Traditional Chinese society was built and depended upon Confucian ideology that defined an individual as "fundamentally a social or relational being" (Tsui and Farh). In such a society, an individual was always perceived in relation to others. The five cardinal virtues of "emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother – younger brother, and friend-friend" that form the underpinnings of Confucian society serve as the primary role relationships (Hsiung 21). The Chinese ideology of the "interdependent self" differs from the Western ideology of the "independent self" where an individual is considered a "self-contained, autonomous entity" (Tsui and Farh).

The primacy of agriculture in the Chinese socio-economic scene created the need for interdependence, a system which produced and stressed interpersonal relationships in the form of "kinship ties and ethnic relations" (Hsiung 21). The concept of *guanxi* is a natural product of this scene where an individual could gain socio-economic and political agency through various interrelationships (Tsui and Farh). The *guanxi* model focuses on values such as "loyalty, reciprocity, dedication, trust" that exist within familial relations and transfer these values onto "non-familial relations" (Hsiung 22). Consequently, *guanxi* becomes "an extension and simulation of familial relations" (22). An integral aspect of rhetoric is the concept of audience awareness. The rhetor's task is to "understand the tendencies of their audience" such that they can "shape their rhetoric in order to move the audience toward a shared purpose" (Borrowman and Kmetz 280). Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory of identification considers the ways in which a rhetor may understand his or her audience. At the same time, the need for identification implies a corresponding division, "the discomfort of being separate from one another" (281). Through identification, individuals "find points of commonality, parallels in ideology, shared beliefs and values, and enemies" that enable them to achieve unity or their self-interests. The *guanxi* model with its emphasis on interrelationships inherently involves identification between the parties involved in the relationship. The *guanxi* model when applied to the interrelationships of Wang Lung and his sons illustrates how it serves as a tool to enhance their economic prosperity.

Within the *guanxi* model, there exist different categories of interrelationships; of these, two categories serve as tools for analysis of the interrelationships developed by

Wang Lung and those of his three sons. The first category of interrelationship involves individuals who are not family; at the same time, they are not strangers to one another. This category is called *shou-jen* which leads to a *guanxi* model that revolves around the principle of "renqing (social obligation or interpersonal favor and generosity)" (Tsui and Farh). The *shou-jen guanxi* model emphasizes "cultivating *renqing*, "favoritism," and "a strong expectation of reciprocity" (Tsui and Farh).

Wang Lung's interactions with his neighbor Ching and the grain merchant Liu represent *guanxi* based on *shou-jen* interrelationships that provide economic benefits to the involved parties. Wang Lung and Ching's relationship is based on the fact that they live in the same village and are neighbors and their shared peasant background. These commonalities create identification between the two men, which, in turn, encourages trade between them. When Wang Lung strategizes about grains and harvests, his plans include buying white turnip seeds from Ching "if they could agree upon a price" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 26). Years later, when Wang Lung has more land than what he could farm on his own, he turns to his *guanxi* partner with a proposition: "Sell me the little parcel of land that you have and leave your lonely house and come into my house and help me with my land" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 157). Ching agrees to Wang Lung's proposition; the men work together to cultivate and harvest the land. However, even their labor is insufficient to harvest and work all of Wang Lung's fields. Eventually, Wang Lung hires six men to labor in his fields and establishes Ching as the steward of his lands (160). A significant marker of the *shou-jen* relationship is the entrusting of "closest

relatives or friends… to key positions" (Tsui and Farh). Ching's stewardship signifies Wang Lung's trust in him that Ching justifies by means of his actions:

> By this time Wang Lung had thoroughly tried Ching, and he found the man honest and faithful… and he paid him well, two silver pieces a month besides his food… [Ching] labored gladly, pottering silently from dawn until dark… hour after hour he lifted his hoe and let it fall, and at dawn and sunset he would carry to the fields the buckets of water or of manure to put upon the vegetable rows.
>
> And it seemed that the handful of peas and of seed which had passed between these two men made them brothers, except that Wang Lung, who was the younger, took the place of the elder, and Ching never wholly forgot that he was hired and lived in a house which belonged to another. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 160)

The dynamic of Wang Lung and Ching's *guanxi* changes due to the former's greater economic means. By virtue of its inception from the five cardinal virtues, *guanxi* is shaped by specific characteristics of these virtues; namely "for each and every relation, there is a senior-junior, leader-follower, and upper status-lower status structure beneath the relationship" where "the one on the lower end is to be deferential and obedient to the one on the higher end" (Hsiung 21). Wang Lung and Ching are keenly aware of the evolution of their *guanxi* due to the changes in their economic means. Ching recognizes that his livelihood is dependent on the success of Wang Lung's agricultural enterprise and this realization establishes identification between both men. Ching benefits

financially from being Wang Lung's steward and has a stable home for himself. Wang Lung benefits from Ching's hard work and his careful oversight of the land and the laborers. Thus, the partnership is a success as it provides economic benefits to both men.

Wang Lung's relationship with the grain merchant Liu also represents a *guanxi* based on a *shou-jen* interrelationship. Their association begins as a result of the betrothal of Wang Lung's eldest son with Liu's daughter. The two men identify with one another through the commonalities of being from the same native place and of similar economic means. Their association provides opportunities for the men to become familiar with one another and in this process, they develop a bond:

> Wang Lung rose and bowed and they both bowed, looking secretly at each other, and they liked each other, each respecting the other for what he was, a man of worth and prosperity. Then they seated themselves and they drank of the hot wine… and they talked slowly of this and that, of crops and prices and what the price would be for rice this year if the harvest were good. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 247).

The acts of bowing to one another, sitting as equals, drinking of wine and casual conversation are expressions of their mutual trust, respect, and admiration for one another. An examination of the ratios of act and agency reveals how through his identification with Liu's interests and their *guanxi*, Wang Lung is able to secure an apprenticeship for Wang the Second in one of Liu's grain markets. Wang Lung desires this apprenticeship as he calculates the benefit of having his son "watch the scales and tip

the weight a little" in his father's favor (Buck, *The Good Earth* 246). *Shou-jen* relationships involve an expectation of reciprocity. Liu is eager to accept Wang Lung's son as an apprentice in his grain market because he has need of a "sharp young man" (247). This transaction is beneficial for both men and Wang the Second. Liu suggests that he would help Wang the Second rise in the grain business after his apprenticeship and, because they were family, he waived a guarantee of apprenticeship for Wang the Second (248). In response to Liu's generous offer, Wang Lung calls him friend and asks to secure their "long-term commitment" to one another in the form of another family alliance where Wang Lung betroths his second daughter to Liu's son (248). Liu benefits from the marriage alliance as Wang Lung's daughter would bring a dowry and "gifts of clothing and jewelry" to his family (249).

The second category of interrelationship focuses on the family; called *chia-jen* (family), this form of interrelationship is "characterized by relatively permanent, stable, expressive relationships in which the welfare of the other is part of one's duty" (Tsui and Farh). These interrelationships form what is called "kinship *guanxi"* where "loyalty (and related favoritism) to family is an obligation without an anticipation of reciprocity" (Tsui and Farh). After Wang Lung's death, his three sons – Wang the Eldest, Wang the Second and Wang the Tiger – form a *guanxi* based on the *chia-jen* interrelationship. As a first step to forming their *guanxi*, the land they inherit from their father is divided equally among the three brothers during *fenjia* (family division). Buck's motive in offering a description of the *fenjia* event is to showcase a traditional event related to a family's finances. Although an elaborate and lengthy affair, *fenjia* shares commonalities with the

reading of a will, an event that would be familiar to American readers. After the *fenjia* "a large family with married brothers, their wives, and their children would form separate and independent family units" (Cohen 162). The Wang brothers live in separate homes with Wang the Tiger living in a different region from that of his brothers.

Historical scholarship shows that property was generally "held by families" rather than a business entity. In this sense, the family became a business enterprise who "adopted strategies of asset diversification and personnel diversification for purposes of sheer survival or, hopefully, to advance their fortunes (162)". Upon their father's death, Wang the Eldest becomes the *jianzhang* (family head); however, he lacks business acumen and recognizes this drawback in himself. The *chia-jen* interrelationships among the three brothers provide opportunities to them to expand their fortunes. As the second step towards achieving their economic goals, Wang the Eldest and Wang the Tiger assign Wang the Second as *dangjia* (family manager) based on his competent handling of their father's land and investments (162). In traditional Chinese economy, the role of the *dangjia* was vital within the family enterprise as it was his job to make the "best use of the available family resources and local economic opportunities" (165). *The House of Earth* trilogy features specific instances that showcase the workings of *guanxi* among the three brothers. The *chia-jen* interrelationship among the brothers allows them to conduct business despite their divisions in terms of personal habits and ideology.

When Wang the Eldest and Wang the Second meet in a tea room to discuss how to respond to their youngest brother's request for money and their sons, an examination

of the ratios of act and agent highlights their division which was the result of their differing attitudes toward economy. Wang the Eldest is a man of excesses whose actions in the tearoom signify his love of food and drink:

> Then he shouted for the serving man of that house and when he came Wang the Eldest ordered this and that food… he ordered on of such things as struck his fancy, for he was a man who loved good food. Wang the Second sat and listened and at the last he fidgeted in his seat and was in an agony for he did not know whether or not he would have to pay his share of all this and at last he called out sharply, … "… I am an abstemious man and my appetite is small…" (Buck, *Sons* 64).

Although Wang the Eldest assures his brother that he will pay for the food, Wang the Second is appalled by his older brother's lack of economy. Buck defines Wang the Second's multiple ways of economizing, which include his personal habits, clothing, and small appetite which are in sharp contrast to his brother's habits. Their personal differences make it increasingly difficult for Wang the Second to identify with his brother; however, the ties of family were inescapable in Confucian China. G*uanxi* formed from kinship ties focused on "role obligations" which asked family members to be loyal to one another and to "do his or her best to attend to the other's needs" (Tsui and Farh).

These *guanxi* obligations manifest themselves in the relationship between the two older brothers and Wang the Tiger. Wang the Tiger writes to them and boldly asks:

> "Send me every ounce of silver you can, for I need all. If you will lend me silver, I will repay it at a high interest… If you have sons over seventeen send them to me also. I will raise them up and raise them higher than you dream, for I need men of my own blood about me that I can trust in my great venture. (Buck, *Sons* 67)

Wang the Tiger's ambition is to become a renowned warlord and he knows that the enterprise of war requires money. His two brothers respond favorably to his plan, and Wang the Second travels to meet his younger brother with his son and nephew (Wang the Eldest's son) (Buck, *Sons* 78-79). Upon meeting with his brother, he is taken aback by his brother's anger and intensity that are foreign to his nature. Furthermore, he is shocked at his brother's demand of "a thousand pieces of silver a month" (85). When Wang the Tiger senses his older brother's hesitation, he offers an incentive to his brother, "Stand by me and you shall have a certain reward. Fail me – and I can forget you are my blood!" (85). Wang the Tiger's dialogue both induces and threatens his brother. His actions aim to remind his brother of their familial bond as well as suggest the economic benefits to both men. After being reminded of his obligation to support his brother, Wang the Second quickly endorses his younger brother's plans saying, "… of course I will do it. I am your brother" (86). *Guanxi* proves beneficial for Wang the Tiger who receives monetary help from both his brothers as they are lured into his enterprise by the notion of becoming "brother to a king" (88). The traditional Chinese scene with its stories and lore of "the deeds of ancient and fabled heroes, who were at first but common men and then by the skill of their arms and by their wit and guile… rose high enough to found

dynasties" induce the men to give credence to their younger brother's words (88). The socio-economic implications of Wang the Tiger's words were too much for his older brothers to ignore. The brothers hasten to assess their lands and sell what they can in order to finance his warlord ambitions, for the success of his ambitions would bring success and economic prosperity to them as well. Their acts of actively selling their lands to sponsor Wang the Tiger's warlord plans establish an identification between them and the younger brother based on the idea of socio-economic success. While the older brother desires social success and dreams of being elevated to the rank of a "nobleman," the second brother hopes for a more general form of "success" (89). By highlighting various *guanxi* interrelationships in the *House of Earth* trilogy, Buck articulates the interconnectedness between Chinese culture and its economy. Buck offers the *guanxi* model as a way for American readers to understand the mechanism by which the Chinese understand one another and those they consider strangers including foreigners.

Kenneth Burke explains the value of the dramatistic pentad in terms of its ability to "systematically dismantle and understand the bases of human conduct and motivation," which would also "generate new insights" (Williams and Kuypers). He explains that rhetoric's concern is "*not terms that avoid ambiguity,* but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise"* (Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* xviii). Pearl Buck is concerned with the ambiguities that persisted in the early twentieth century regarding China. Her motive in writing *The House of Earth* trilogy is to humanize "the Chinese people for the American public" (Hayford 22). She rejects the "old practice of European centrism, which has persistently maintained that modern China

was ‘stagnant’ and ‘backward’” (Jiafan 60). Kenneth Burke’s pentadic terms provide the interpretive lens to investigate the economic ambiguities addressed in *The House of Earth* trilogy. On one hand, the novels address the plight of poor peasants; on the other hand, through the actions of the main characters in the novels of the trilogy, she suggests that “the premodern economy of the later imperial and early Republican China” had “structural stability” through her depictions of the smallholder economy and *guanxi* interrelationships (Feuerwerker 766). Embeded within the larger conversations about land, agriculture and the economy are her commentaries on the social practices of female infanticide, slavery, and prostitution for which she ascribes economic motives. Pearl Buck’s primary purpose in writing the three novels that form *The House of Earth* trilogy was to make China accessible to Western readers through her detailed observations of the nation’s socio-economic and political life.

CHAPTER IV

THE RHETORIC OF SOCIAL CLASS IN *THE HOUSE OF EARTH* TRILOGY

"…high and low do not trespass upon each other; the fool and the wise, each being content with his own lot, keep the scale and stand in perfect balance."

(Han Fei-tzu qtd. in He 4)

American impressions of China and its people were conceived as a result of a "two hundred-year roller coaster" that included both positive and negative associations (Thomson, Jr. 7). Early impressions developed from Marco Polo's accounts of his travels to China presented positive images of an enlightened civilization whose people had attributes that included: "high intelligence, persistent industry, filial piety, peaceableness, stoicism" (Isaacs 63). Characters with the aforementioned qualities can be found throughout Pearl Buck's *The House of Earth* trilogy and her other works. On the other hand, negative images of the Chinese issued when nineteenth century Americans' "alleged benevolent offerings" were rejected by the "heathen Chinee" (Thomson, Jr. 7). Negative characterizations such as "killers of girl infants, the binders of women's feet, the torturers of a thousand cuts, the headsmen..." led Americans to react against Chinese immigrant workers (Isaacs 63). In the early to mid-decades of the twentieth century, American fears of the Yellow Peril soon gave way to the Red Tide when China became a communist nation (Thomson, Jr. 8).

Noted scholar on China, Harold Isaacs, summarized the contending images of China as follows:

> In the long history of our associations with China, these two sets of images rise and fall, move in and out of the center of people's minds over time, never wholly displacing each other, always coexisting, each ready to emerge at the fresh call of circumstance…Thus, advancing or receding but somewhere always in view, our concepts of China have included both a sense of almost timeless stability and almost unlimited chaos. (64)

Pearl Buck's short years in America while studying at Randolph-Macon Woman's College gave her the opportunity to witness first-hand these impressions of China. They gave her the motivation to address and possibly sway both American and Western perspectives regarding China and the Chinese.

The House of Earth trilogy offers a sweeping account of the agonizing changes that China experienced beginning in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Pearl Buck showcased her expertise as a keen observer of China through her nuanced detailing of characters, their social interactions and attitudes and the broader social scene within which the Wang family drama took place. Set in the pre-Revolution era, *The Good Earth* focuses on the family patriarch Wang Lung and traces his journey from a hardworking farmer to a rich landlord. In the next novel, *Sons*, the narrative follows the lives of Wang Lung's three sons – Wang the Eldest, Wang the Second, and Wang the Tiger. Each man seeks a specific social role, namely, landlord, merchant, and

warlord and experiences the benefits and concerns of their class as the Chinese scene shifts from the traditional agrarian community to the modern urban center. In *A House Divided*, the final novel of the trilogy, Wang the Tiger's son Wang Yuan experiences the pull of several social forces that threaten to destabilize the culture after the fall of the imperial order. By following the trajectory of each character and his or her social situation, Pearl Buck offers social commentary on a rapidly changing Chinese society through the circumstances of its citizens from various social classes.

Twentieth-century rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theory of motives articulates a method of explaining the motivations for acts of an individual. More specifically, "if we know *why* people do as they do, we feel that we know *what* to expect of them and of ourselves, and we shape our decisions and judgements and policies to take such experiences into account (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 18). Burke elaborates on the term "motives" calling them "shorthand words for situations" which in turn are understood as patterns of life that may have universal appeal (31). In the process of narrating the Wang family drama, Pearl Buck offers motives or situations that represent "patterns of life" within the Chinese community (32).

In *A Rhetoric of Motives* Kenneth Burke elaborates on the nature of identification where two entities A and B, although not identical, may identify with each other as long as they are persuaded to do so (20). To establish such an identification, "a person *acts* to identify some target(s), i.e., persons, families, groups, collectivities; and to a lesser extent, values, goals, knowledge, activities, objects" (Cheney 145). Burke calls the acts

performed by individuals "substance" and "a way of life is an *acting-together*" that makes individual A "consubstantial" with individual B (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 21). Consubstantial acts depend upon "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes" that give individuals a defined sense of belonging within a particular group such as a social class (21). Burke emphasizes the importance of identification "to confront the implications of division" (22). The hierarchal stratification of traditional Chinese society established defined social communities where individuals developed identification within their social class, but were estranged from social groups either above or below them (22). Furthermore, individuals of a social class could establish consubstantiality through "property," a "scenic word…translated into terms of an agent's attitude, or incipient act" (24). Consequently, an individual's "moral growth is organized through properties, properties in goods, in services, in position or status, in citizenship, in reputation, in acquaintanceship and love" that aimed to solidify his position within a social class. The characters in Pearl Buck's *The House of Earth* trilogy fall into several social classes such as farmer, landlord, merchant, warlord, city dwellers, Communists, students, westernized Chinese, foreign-educated men and women and physicians, to name a few. Her novels explore the vast and complex social scene in China between the late 1800s and the early decades of the 1900s. This parade of characters serves as agents of their particular social class, each infused with attitudes, values and knowledge consistent with their social class; the agencies of these characters wax and wane with the changes wrought by the shifts in the Chinese social scene.

The development of the Chinese civilization began well over two thousand years ago. The earliest Chinese lived on the North China plain and gradually expanded into the south by "military conquest and colonization" of the southern Mongoloid aboriginal people and "peaceable assimilation of originally non-Chinese people into the expanding Chinese nation (Hucker 14). This manner of expansion over centuries meant that "to be Chinese was transformed with each new expansion, as new peoples brought elements of their non-Chinese life-styles into the mainstream of Chinese civilization (14). However, the constant urge to expand signified a continuous struggle for political unity owing to geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. In the traditional Chinese view of history "the dynastic cycle was an important element" where "a strong man" would rise to control the nation "by military means" and later "pass his leadership on to his eldest son" as a means to unify the growing Chinese nation (16-17). Although these dynastic cycles were inexplicably linked to a "progression from strength to weakness, from centralization to decentralization, from order to chaos, from unity to fragmentation, over and over," they eventually led to "stable social and governmental systems" (17). The Chinese ruling class's view of the world was built upon "the classical Confucian teachings and the universal supremacy of the Son of Heaven, who maintained his rule…at the top of a harmonious social order of hierarchy and status (Fairbank 2).

In such a social order, wealth, and not one's pedigree, "became increasingly the major determinant of social status, and people moved – both up and down the social scale very rapidly" (Hucker 334). The establishment of social hierarchy was possible due to the "classical stratification scheme" that evolved during the reigns of several pre-modern

(prior to 1850) Chinese dynasties. As the representative of Heaven, the emperor was at the top of the social stratification scheme; and all other people were hereditarily placed in descending order such as – "ordinary commoners, scholars, physicians, Yang-Yin astrologers, soldiers, military, agricultural workers, artisans, salt producers, miners, and so on" (Hucker 334). The combination of the social hierarchy and the ruling class's feudal oversight of the lower classes in Chinese villages allowed for "peace and order among the village communities" (Fairbank 9). The ruling class established complex bureaucracies that maintained both the status quo and unity within a region and, ultimately, within the nation itself.

It was during the reign of the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1912), the last imperial dynasty of China, that Pearl Buck and her parents lived and worked in China. She absorbed the "values of late imperial China" through her close interactions with "her family's servant [amah Wang], her Chinese playmates, and her Confucian-scholar tutor [Mr. Kung]" (Thomson, Jr. 9). Years later, while travelling through the Chinese countryside collecting agricultural data with her husband Lossing Buck, "Pearl Buck discovered the Chinese peasant. Nothing else in her life, or in the images of the readers, would ever be quite so important as that discovery" (9). In her autobiography *My Several Worlds*, Buck raged against Communist thinker Leon Trotsky's comparison of peasants as "packhorses of a nation" (285). She challenges the status quo by asking "And to what heights may not these "packhorses" rise if they are considered human beings instead of beasts of burden?" (285).

Living in China for close to four decades, Buck was intimately familiar with the day-to-day experiences of both rural and urban life. Following the publication of her first novel, *East Wind: West Wind,* Buck began work on her next novel, *The Good Earth,* a story she envisioned from the events of her life "and its energy was the anger [she] felt for the sake of the peasants and the common folk of China," who were people she had "loved and admired" all her life (280). Her sensitivity toward the plight of common people and admiration of the peasant led her initially to use the protagonist Wang Lung's name as the name of her novel. She reluctantly changed the name of the novel to *The Good Earth* upon a recommendation from her publisher Richard Walsh, who believed the new name would better appeal to American readers. *The Good Earth* examines the attitudes, traditional values, and concerns inherent to the Chinese farmer and to Chinese farming communities.

The Good Earth introduces readers to Wang Lung, a hardworking and ambitious farmer, who works the land and grows crops to support his family. Although it may be possible to label *The Good Earth* as a work about a Chinese "peasant" and his family, historian Charles W. Hayford cautions against doing so. Pearl Buck never used the term "peasant" in her novel, a word that "indeed did not exist in the Chinese language" (21). The Chinese term for peasant/farmer *nongren* developed much later through the influences of European Marxist texts and the Japanese (21). Hayford suggests that the historical connotations of the words "peasant" and "farmer" affect American readers' perception of the social system in China. He elaborates that "The myth of the yeoman farmer civilizing the frontier's 'virgin land' was central to the self-image of American

democracy, …the 'peasant' was the symbol – and perhaps cause – of European despotism and backwardness" (21). American perceptions of the "Chinese 'man with the hoe'" evolved with the fluctuating relationship between China and America. The late nineteenth century language called them farmers; however, by World War I, they were considered peasants (21). This shift in terminology from farmer to peasant indicates a shift in the thinking of Americans. The European associations of the term "peasant" were thus transferred onto the Chinese social scene. Consequently, China became a modern "medieval" nation that "to progressive Americans…came to represent the mirror opposite of their modernity and in a sense a confirmation of it" (21-22). The Chinese peasant became an object of pity and anger – a victim of China's medieval tendencies.

In traditional China, peasants lived in small farming villages; they lived off the land by cultivating it for agriculture. Since antiquity "at least eighty percent of the total population consisted of farming villages" where farmers were "not typically self-sufficient and independent" (Hucker 12-13). Within a village, these farming families were often related to one another and farmed small plots of land that lay around their village.

Life in a village followed a general routine:

> …males of the family tended the crops. Women did some field work but more characteristically spent their time keeping house, tending chickens, …Hardly an inch of land could be wasted, and no product of the land could be left unused.

> Even the dead stalks of harvested grain had to be husbanded for fuel to fire the cookstoves and heat the home in winter. (Hucker 12)

In *The Good Earth*, Wang Lung serves as the representative agent for this social class and through his and O-lan's experiences; readers are offered images of the Chinese that debunk existing stereotypes. Pearl Buck uses Wang Lung's personal reflections as a strategy to highlight a peasant's attitudes regarding his occupation and the land:

> …he thought of his fields and of the grains of the wheat and of what his harvest would be if the rains came and of the white turnip seed he wished to buy from his neighbor Ching if they could agree upon a price. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 26)

Wang Lung's thoughts represent the reality of life that Chinese peasants faced for centuries. Peasants lived at "a bare subsistence level, working hard and imaginatively to sustain that level, exposed to no formal schooling, dependent on the soil and the vagaries of weather" (Hucker 13). Indeed, Wang Lung's actions are extensions of his thoughts and essential to his survival as a farmer. Every day "He put his hoe on his shoulder and he walked to his plots of land and he cultivated the rows of grains, and he yoked the ox to the plow and he ploughed the western field for garlic and onions" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 27).

Once the grain was harvested, there was more work to be done before Wang Lung could sell the grain at the market:

> The harvests were past, and the grain they beat out upon the threshing floor which was also the dooryard to the house. They beat it out with flails, he and the woman

> together. And when the grain was flailed they winnowed it, casting it up from great flat bamboo baskets into the wind and catching the good grain as it fell, and the chaff blew away in a cloud with the wind. Then there were the fields to plant for winter wheat again, and when he had yoked the ox and ploughed the land the woman followed behind with her hoe and broke the clods in the furrow. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 40)

Pearl Buck's descriptions of Wang Lung and O-lan's actions explain how the characters identify with the social class of peasants. Their day-to-day activities signified their consubstantiality with the actions of other peasants in farming communities all across China. Buck highlights the benefits that hardworking and judicious farmers earned when their actions were timely.

In great detail, she explains the Wang family's preparations for the winter months:

> Winter came and they were prepared against it. There had been such harvests as never were before, and the small, three-roomed house was bursting. From the rafters of the thatched roof hung strings and strings of dried onions and garlic, and about the middle room and in the old man's room and in their own room were mats made of reeds and twisted into the shapes of great jars and these were filled full of wheat and rice…there was even a leg of pork which he had bought from his neighbor Ching when he killed his pig…and O-lan had salted it thoroughly and hung it to dry. There were as well two of their own chickens killed and drawn

> and dried with the feathers on and stuffed with salt inside. (*The Good Earth* 41-42)

This passage offers a detailed account of a peasant who enjoys a plentiful harvest and prepares to survive the winter with his family. Buck offers comparisons between this hardworking farmer and a lazy one in the person of Wang's uncle who lives in the same village:

> His uncle was always having to sell his grain before it was even well ripened. Sometimes he even sold it standing in the field to save himself the trouble of harvesting and threshing to get a little ready cash. But then his uncle's wife was a foolish woman, fat and lazy…There was never anything hanging from the rafters in his uncle's crumbling old house. (*The Good Earth* 42)

The intersecting ratios of act and purpose reveal how peasants within a village respond to their social situation. Wang Lung and O-lan represent determined Chinese who work hard to reap the utmost harvests from their lands; and on the other hand, Wang Lung's uncle represents a man who is unconcerned about his living situation and chooses not to improve it. Here, the agent's qualities of hard work and determination create agency for the peasants to build better lives for themselves.

The Good Earth offers lengthy commentary on the life of a Chinese farmer – his joys and sorrows. Buck details the periods of plentiful harvests alongside periods of struggle when entire villages and regions suffered due to the failure of agriculture. The geographic position of China plays an important role in the agricultural efforts of Chinese

farmers. Two great river systems feed China, the Yangtze River to the south and the Yellow River to the north. Both rivers have diametrically opposing effects on the Chinese landscape. The Yangtze River that rises from the Szechwan basin flows into the central Chinese plains and is considered "one of China's great blessings" (Hucker 3). The river's extensive network of tributaries is highly stable which "…offset any irregularities of rainfall, and it seldom erupts in damaging floods" (3). The stabilizing nature of the Yangtze River produced stability in the surrounding areas, especially for the southern farmers. Conversely, the farmers of northern China faced uncertainty owing to the "awesomely malevolent aspect" of the Huang He also known as the Yellow River (3). Flowing from Tibet into North China Plains, the Yellow River carries a larger volume of silt than its southern counterpart ("Huang He"). For centuries, the increased silt volume caused the riverbed to rise rapidly leading to deadly flooding in the neighboring regions. The Chinese have used dykes to minimize the chances of flooding:

> When the river has broken through the dykes, the results have been disastrous. In 1931, …34,000 square miles of land were completely flooded and …8,000 square miles were partially flooded; 1 million people died, and about 80 million lost their homes. ("Huang He")

The Good Earth is set in the Anhwei (Anhui) province of China. The topography of this province is significant to understanding the lifestyle and hardships that Wang Lung and farmers such as himself face on a yearly basis. The southern section of the province lies in the Yangtze River valley; "the northern section is part of the North China Plain" and

consists of “alluvial lowlands” that are the result of two rivers, the Yangtze and Huai He following through the region (“Anhui”). The Yellow River used to flow through the Anhwei province until 1851, but its course was redirected until the 1930s in an effort to curb a Japanese invasion that forced three million people to leave home due to massive flooding (“Huang He”). Pearl Buck understood the harshness of rural life during her experiences as the daughter of missionary parents who travelled between villages for mission work; later, as a married woman, she and Lossing Buck lived in the “town of Nanhsuchou (Nanxuzhou) in rural Anhwei province” where the couple worked closely with the local peasants (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* xiv).

In the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals developed a growing awareness and interest in the Chinese peasant whose “importance to the rebuilding of the Chinese-nation” led to “tremendous outpouring of writing about them” (Han 19). Through literary and academic writings, the images that emerged of peasants described them as “ignorant, unruly, indifferent, and superstitious” (21). Pearl Buck was aware of such descriptions of the Chinese peasant. In *The Good Earth* Wang Lung’s interactions with individuals from other social classes, as well as his adherence to the traditional folk practices, are actions that establish his identification with the class of peasants. There are specific instances in the novel where Wang Lung’s lowly status, illiteracy, and perceived ignorance are highlighted by the other characters.

First, on his wedding day when he goes to collect his bride from the lordly Hwangs, he is commanded to present himself to the lady of the house. Prior to his

audience with her, the gatekeeper reminds him, "You cannot appear before a great lady with a basket on your arm- a basket of pork and beancurd! How will you bow?" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 15). Awestruck by the grandeur of the house, Wang follows the gatekeeper into the lady's presence where he immediately "fell to his knees and knocked his head on the tiled floor" (15). When asked by the lady why he does not speak, the gatekeeper calls him "a fool" to which Wang Lung responds "I am only a course person…I do not know what words to use in such a presence" (16). The intersecting rations of act and purpose reveal traditional social attitudes towards peasants. As a member of the lower class, Wang Lung's subservience was expected by people of higher social classes who, in this instance, were the Hwang family. The gatekeeper's actions tell of an individual who has gained a level of agency as a result of his proximity to the Hwang family. In working as a servant to the family, the gatekeeper is viewed as a person who understands their lordly ways and, hence, was perceived as better than a common peasant. By addressing himself as a "coarse person," Wang Lung acknowledges his lowly status within the traditional scene and reaffirms the image of the peasant as ignorant.

The Chinese peasants of the nineteenth century could be considered "cultured individuals in the sense that they were well-schooled in the bonds of kinship, the duties of status, and the forms of politeness and social deportment"; however, they were "generally illiterate or only semi-literate" (Fairbank 10). Wang Lung's actions provide an accurate portrayal of a Chinese peasant who understands the shortcomings of being illiterate. When he deals with grain merchants in the market town, Wang Lung is always forced to ask them to read out loud the contracts, "Sir, and will you read it for me, for I am too

stupid" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 161). His shame is furthered every time that he needs to sign the contract. Unable to write his name, he would acquiesce to the clerk's estimation of the characters that formed his name saying, "Let it be what you will, for I am too ignorant to know my name" (161). In these two instances, an analysis of the ratios of act and agency reveals the limitations imposed as a result of Wang Lung's peasant background. In "The Rhetorical Situation" Burke explains how "Just as we put things together and take things apart, so there are words that put things together and words that take things apart" (265). By addressing the grain merchants as "sir," the word sets him apart from them, and identifies Wang Lung as inferior to them on account of their education. Furthermore, in identifying himself as "too stupid" and "too ignorant" he acknowledges the hierarchal separation in status among himself, the clerk, and the grain merchants. His actions are socially appropriate since "deference to superiors" was expected to the "peasant commoner" when dealing with "his betters in the upper class" (Fairbank 11). Such incidents also help Wang Lung recognize the value of education and how it affords greater agency to individuals in society and business and leads him to educate his sons.

Another significant aspect of Chinese peasant culture was their religious belief system. By virtue of their class occupation, peasants "lived close to nature" and "Consequently their lives were less devoted to Confucian rationalism than to the lore, superstitions, and Taoist-Buddhist religious observances of the folk culture (Fairbank 10). In *Permanence and Change,* Kenneth Burke explores the idea of piety. He postulates that "Piety is a schema of orientation, since it involves the putting together of experiences

(76). *The Good Earth* illustrates the pieties of patriarchal traditional religion among the Chinese whose basic belief revolved around "respecting the Heaven and following the ancestors" (He 829). Wang Lung functions as an agent of his social class, a peasant with strong traditional religion beliefs whose worship practices signify his identification with the larger community, even nation's, belief system. The patriarchal traditional religion involved "worshipping a heavenly god and the ancestors" where the latter were believed to be "absolute, ultimate, supreme beings" along with "worship of nature and gods of grain" (He 829-31). Two instances in *The Good Earth* highlight the pieties of religious observances that guide Wang Lung's actions. The first scene of piety takes place during Wang Lung's journey to bring his wife home.

> …they reached the western field where stood the temple to the earth. This temple was a small structure, not higher in all than a man's shoulder and made of grey bricks and roofed with tile.
>
> Within the temple snugly under the roof sat two small, solemn figures, earthen, for they were formed from the earth of the fields about the temple. These were the god himself and his lady. They were robes of red and gilt paper, and the god had a scant, drooping moustache of real hair.
>
> Together this man and this woman stood before the gods of their fields...it was a moment of marriage. (20-21)

An examination of this scene and Wang Lung's actions reveal his identification with the religious practices of his father and grandfather and with the "whole neighborhood" who

commonly worshipped the two gods. His purpose in the scene is to seek blessings for the new phase of his life – his marriage- and the desire that it will prove lucky for him.

A second instance of pious activity takes place during the New Year celebrations in the village. Wang Lung and the village prepare to celebrate the new year:

> The New Year approached and in every house in the village there were preparations. Wan Lung went into the town to the candlemaker's shop and he bought squares of red paper on which were brushed in gilt ink the letter for happiness and some of the letter for riches, and these squares he pasted upon his farm utensils to bring him luck in the New Year…And then upon the doors of his house he pasted long strips of red paper brushed with mottoes of good luck, … And he bought red paper to make new dresses for the gods… and Wang Lung took them and put them upon the two gods in the temple to the earth and he burned a little incense before them for the sake of the New Year. (Buck, *The Good Earth* 46)

Wang Lung's acts represent religious motives consistent with the rural village scene where, as Burke notes, the religious rituals emphasize "propitiation" (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 61). Wang Lung's actions represent "the propitiatory pattern by which people were *induced* to serve of their free will," a god or gods "who could be pleased or displeased" (61). The propitiating acts towards the gods of their field involve an underlying motive, that is, a desire for ongoing happiness, luck, and riches for the upcoming year. As an adherent of this belief system, Wang Lung's actions make him

consubstantial not just with other peasants, but also with other social classes that include "the state [and] the clan" (He 830). In this manner, the patriarchal traditional religion, which developed as the "product of the traditional social structure of China," helps sustain the "authority of community ethics" within the different social classes (829).

Wang Lung's period of prosperity and luck change after some years of marriage. *The Good Earth* describes scenes of a gradual climate change during which Wang Lung makes desperate, yet futile, attempts to save his crops. Despite his best efforts, "there came a day when there was no rice left and no wheat left and there were only a few beans and a meager store of corn" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 71-72). At the same time, he is not the only peasant to suffer this food shortage. The food shortage scene at his home was identical to the one in the village where "one could see men standing about, idle and anxious, their faces upturned to the sky, judging closely of this cloud and that, discussing together as to where any held rain in it" (70). The scene-purpose ratio reveals the commonalities in suffering of the people which Kenneth Burke, in "The Rhetorical Situation" considers a form of identification, "identification by sympathy" (268). Every house in the village experiences hunger and despair due to the lack of food and the inability to farm the land. Their experiences create identification in that the villagers were sympathetic to each other's suffering. No one family's situation was better than the other's. Climatic changes, such as droughts, famines, and floods often led to social upheavals in traditional China.

Quantitative research on the impact of drought/famine in the North China Plain (NCP) between 1644-1911 shows a direct relationship between peasant revolts and droughts:

> … the Tian-Li Religion uprising (1813) and Qiu-Shen congregation uprising (1860–1863) both broke out in the last year of droughts, and the Yihetuan Movement (1899–1900) climaxed in the second year of drought. (Xiao et al., "Revolts Frequency during" 221)

For peasants who were limited in their agency as a result of their lower social status, despair and hunger forced them to take action in the form of mass uprisings where entire villages or communities would take up arms in order to give voice to their suffering.

An unavoidable component of the Chinese peasant's scene was the incidences of natural disasters such as droughts/famines and floods. Both events caused hardships and suffering in the form of death, displacement, disease, and hunger for the affected communities. *The Good Earth* features a lengthy drought/famine scene that serves two purposes: first, it offers a realistic account of the struggles faced by men, women and children during the famine; second, the scene and the actions of the characters become Pearl Buck's stylized response to prevailing Western perspectives regarding Chinese famine relief. For all his observance of rituals and piety, Wang Lung endures the hardships that were common to the people whose lives were dependent on the land. Over the course of his life, Wang Lung faces both an extensive season of drought that led to widespread famine in the Anhwei province and flooding that makes the land unfarmable for months. Each scenario reveals peasant struggles and the limits to their agency.

Using what Burke calls "identification by antithesis," Wang Lung's uncle spread rumors that suggested a difference in the circumstances between the Wang family and the rest of the village ("The Rhetorical Situation" 268). His uncle suggests to the villagers that the Wang family still has food and their children were "fat" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 74). Out of desperation, the villagers gather together and attack Wang Lung's home hoping to seize his food reserves. But their efforts are a failure and they leave in shame. Pearl Buck's motive in depicting this act of banditry against the Wang family is to call attention to the actions of the rural people during times of drought/famine. Revolts during such periods were divided into three categories – "mass demonstration, banditry incident, and armed uprising" (Xiao et al., "Revolts Frequency during" 220). The traditional Chinese scene of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw several drought/famines and subsequent revolts in the "1810s, 1830s, 1850s-1860s, 1890s-1900s" (223).

Western impressions of the Chinese government's response to widespread natural calamities were based on newspaper reports from China. *The North China Herald,* a Shanghai-based British newspaper was the leading source of news during the late nineteenth century. In one instance, during the North China Famine of 1876-79, the newspaper "printed frequent front-page editorials concerning the disaster, and British and North American Christian missionaries who distributed relief in famine areas regularly sent their reports to the newspaper for publication" (Edgerton-Tarpley, "Tough Choices" 139-40). The *Herald*'s perspective and thus its readers as well ascribed to a wholly Western approach to poverty and relief work. The *Herald* supported the British opinion

that “science and technology,” “not government action” were “the key to ending the famine and preventing future famines” (141). Through its publications, the newspaper criticized the “Qing government’s distribution of gratuitous relief” claiming that doing so would “pauperize” the people and allow “unworthy recipients” to benefit (140).

The Qing government’s institution of famine-relief was the result of the blending of two significant aspects of the Chinese socio-political scene. The first aspect was the Confucian foundation of Chinese society, which decreed, “a righteous ruler is responsible for feeding the people” (Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron* 91). Chinese philosopher Mencius “popularized the idea that a ruler’s Mandate of Heaven, or Heaven-granted right to rule, was not immutable and could be revoked if the ruler strayed from the path of virtue and failed to act with the good of the people at heart” (91). Therefore, in order to maintain the Heaven-granted right to rule, the Qing government needed to act to ease the suffering of the population. A second aspect of the Qing government was that they were a conquest-dynasty of Manchu rulers who used “civilian granaries and popular welfare” as acts that promoted their commitment to the Chinese people (91).

In Kiangsu, the Wang family witness and benefit from the Qing government’s “nourish the people” policy for famine relief. Wang Lung, his father and two sons join several other migrant refugees “carrying bowls and buckets and vessels of tin…and going to the kitchens of the poor…” (Buck, *The Good Earth* 98). The scene is one of chaos where refugees “fought like beasts” to fill their bowls with rice even though they were assured that all would be fed (98). Wang Lung and his family eat from the city kitchens

along with countless other refugees; not having to worry about food allows the family to focus on finding a livelihood and survive in Kiangsu. In this manner, the city kitchens function as a strategy of social welfare. In a Confucian society that believed in the importance of harmony and balance, social disorder and chaos were unacceptable. Concurrently, the city kitchens also function as a strategy of the Qing government to avoid social disorder as a result of domestic uprisings in the face of widespread suffering (Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron* 94-95).

The *Herald*'s criticism against the Qing government also addressed the social instability that resulted from the migration of displaced people, many of them poor peasants, into larger cities. Documents from the Qing administration, such as *The veritable records of the Qing dynasty*, identify hundreds of incidents of public disorder that included "security accidents (crowds assembled for brawls and group gambling), strikes or petitions, criminal cases (theft, robbery, and murder), and rebellion, many of which are inextricably linked to immigrant refugees" (Xiao et al., "Famine relief, public order"). Pearl Buck recreates this scene of social instability in *The Good Earth* as Wang Lung is swept along with the "howling multitude of men and women who had been starved and imprisoned and now were for the moment free to do as they would" (134). The intersecting ratios of act and agency reveal how the masses who had been deprived of agency due to poverty and displacement are afforded some agency in the form of the mass uprising. Their acts of looting as a large crowd in the homes of rich men for treasures provide a sense of temporary agency. Wang Lung is also swept along, both physically and psychologically, with the mob of people. A man of honor otherwise,

Wang Lung assumes the mob mentality and seizes the opportunity to rob a rich man when he realizes that the money offered by the rich man would allow him to return home to his land. Seizing the chance to improve his agency, Wang Lung promises not to harm the rich man in return for gold coins (Buck, *The Good Earth* 136-37).

According to Kenneth Burke, hierarchy is the result of the "division of labor" that in society exists as categories of social class (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 139). Individuals within the hierarchal order experience "hierarchal psychosis" where they "…rightly or wrongly, become endowed with the attributes of their *office"* (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 279). Burke calls these attributes "a certain cluster of expectancies, rights, material rewards, honors" that are unique to the person. Furthermore, he argued that "Man is goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order) and rotten with perfection" (Burke, *Language As Symbolic* 16). Using Aristotle's "concept of entelechy" Burke to "show how human motivations compel people to complete their tasks" regardless of the outcome; thus, human goals serve as the impetus for their search for perfection (Hill). As a common peasant in the highly stratified Chinese social scene, Wang Lung toils on his farmland to improve his social and economic situation. As a farmer, Wang Lung's goal is land, to have as much of it as he could possibly afford which would provide greater harvests and more money. His multiple acts of purchasing land from the Hwang family represent his growing desire and motivation to establish himself as a landed farmer in his village. A combination of careful decisions and money and resource-saving tendencies aid him in securing the money that he needed to purchase the Hwang lands. Once he acquired the lands, Wang Lung realized that he needed help in

the form of labor; and both of these factors established his identity as a great man of the village (Buck, *Sons* 14).

A popular Chinese saying "Heaven is high and the emperor is far away" sums up the Qing dynasty's social situation (Hucker 341). The bureaucracy of the Qing government had become so complex and elevated that to hope for a high official post or status was unrealistic. The average Chinese would not expect himself or his son to attain bureaucratic status; however:

> …he had every reason to expect one of his sons, with hard work and luck, could improve the family fortunes and status substantially…so that the family could escape from the drudgery of hard manual labor at least for a generation or two. For the average man, that was undoubtedly hope enough. (Hucker 341)

Wang Lung and O-lan's wise decisions and hard work pave the way for their children's better future, which would afford them greater agency than their parents. In addition to his landed wealth, by pulling his sons out of the fields and providing them with an education, Wang Lung secured the path for their upward social mobility.

Wang Lung's three sons choose three different social paths in life. Much to Wang Lung's regret, none of his sons develop attachments to the land. Their attitudes regarding land ownership and enterprise differ greatly from their father's. Wang Lung's attitudes are representative of a peasant's deep relationship with land (Buck, *The Good Earth* 121). He considers selling one's land a great evil; and when he hears of his two older sons make plans to sell their land, he cautions them against it. The scene-purpose ratio reveals

the conflicting attitudes of people of two generations. As an agent of an older generation, Wang Lung's words call attention to the peasant's ties not to just his land, but also his ancestors who farmed the land before him. Thus, in working the land, the peasant achieved consubstantiation with his ancestors and the rest of the community. As agents of the new generation, Wang the Eldest and Wang the Second consider themselves part of the "new elite" who preferred "commercial pursuits" which were considered "more esteemed and profitable" (Hucker 338). To appease their father the sons assure him the land would not be sold; however, "over the old man's head they looked at each other and smiled" (Buck, *The Good Earth* 357). Their act of looking at one another and smiling suggests mutual understanding between the brothers whereby they would proceed with their original plans to dispose of the land.

As the eldest son of Wang Lung, *Nung En* also called Wang the Eldest is educated. His education along with his father's wealth establishes him as a stately landlord. Pearl Buck's descriptions of his person, lifestyle, and social attitudes highlight the life of the gentry and their interests as the Qing imperial age declined. By the time his father dies, Wang the Eldest is forty-five years old and has become a man of excesses:

> … this man grew fatter every month, and it was plain that in another ten years or so he would be a marvel in the town and countryside … [since] he was so round and full about this middle and his cheeks hanging and thick as haunches. (Buck, *Sons* 90)

Wang the Eldest's physical description creates a hierarchal distance between himself and the peasants who are his tenants. His soft and fat body serves as a symbol of the lavishness and idleness of the landed gentry that contrasted with the strong bodies and callused hands of peasants.

In *Sons*, Pearl Buck uses Wang the Eldest's family as an example of the elaborate lifestyle of the land-owning gentry. Wang the Eldest has two formal wives and establishes a singing girl as a "transient wife" at another location (Buck, *Sons* 218). In addition to these women, "this great fat weak man still could not keep himself free"; he falls victim to his desires when he socializes in public and would periodically "pay [for] a new little singing girl" (Buck, *Sons* 218). His multiple wives and concubines are indicative of his higher socio-economic position as only a man of means could afford the maintenance of such a large family unit. Unlike his father, Wang the Eldest does not enjoy being a landlord for he has no ties to the land and feels disconnected from it. In his position as landlord, Wang the Eldest's thoughts and actions are contrary to that of a good landlord such as his father.

Where his father took pleasure in the activities of peasant life, Wang the Eldest is burdened by them:

> Chiefest of all his vague miseries was one not vague, and it was the land he had from him father. It was a curse to him for it was his only livelihood and he must give it some oversight or he would have nothing to eat, he and his children and his wives and servants, and it seemed to him as though there were some vile magic in

> that land, and it was always seed time and he must go out to it or time to fertilize and he must see to it or it was harvest and he must stand in the hot sun and measure out grain or it was time to collect his rents; and there was all the hateful round of the land, forcing him to labor when he was by nature a man of leisure and a lord. (Buck, *Sons* 213-14)

Although Wang the Eldest recognizes that his status, wealth and therefore, agency exist because of the land, his resentment reveals his hierarchal expectation that creates a certain expectation of leisure and ease of life as opposed to the life of a peasant. Another sign of his hierarchal expectation is his opinion of his tenants as "robbers" who he believes prevent him from enjoying life (Buck, *Sons* 214). In viewing the peasants, his tenants, as robbers, Buck illustrates how Wang the Eldest has forgotten his father and grandfather's humble origins and the significance of their occupation to his current position in society. Wang the Eldest's lifestyle and attitudes are firmly entrenched within the gentry class whose excesses were supported by the lower class of peasants.

Despite his leisure-loving ways, Wang the Eldest has moments of clarity where he is able to reason carefully as to why he cannot not identify with the land. In that instance, he blames his father for removing him from the land and freely giving him and his brothers the money they asked without having to labor for it (Buck, *Sons* 214). He tries to correct the situation with his sons when he realizes that they are pleasure-seeking just like him:

> … he saw his son for what he was, a young man dainty and fastidious and idle, without any single ambition for anything except his pleasure, and his only fear that he was not better dressed and less in fashion than other young men whom he knew. … he was frightened for his son and he cried out in a high voice different from his usual rolling tones, "I am afraid for you, my son! I am afraid you will come to no good end!" (Buck, *Sons* 210-11)

Recognizing his personal failings as a man of leisure and the constant worries it brings him, Wang the Eldest makes a brief attempt to change his son's future by ordering him to find a career (211). His son refuses to follow his father's directive and continues with his lordly pleasures and Wang the Eldest loses his moment of clarity as well.

Wang the Eldest is unable to identify himself with his father who was a peasant and man of the earth. Instead, he identifies himself as a "city man, a man of leisure" (Buck, *Sons* 219). Pearl Buck offers commentary on the shifting Chinese social scene of the late imperial age where a new class of educated Chinese arose called the "new elite" who "dominated government service," "managed society," and did not "engage in manual labor" (Hucker 338). These individuals were products of large landowning families whose investments were diversified and not specialized to just the land. Their lifestyles were "increasingly urban, intellectual, and cultured" (339). Wang the Eldest's shift in social status, although indicative of an improved and modern lifestyle suggests a loss of agency. No longer directly connected to the land, Wang the Eldest and his family are restricted in their lifestyle choices and future social mobility since they are on a fixed

income of rents from the land. A strategy that Pearl Buck uses to enhance the widely divergent social attitudes is by providing contrasting descriptions of Wang Lung's and Wang the Eldest's city homes:

> It was a different house indeed from the great house Wang Lung had bought and left his sons in that old northern country That house was aged and great, and the rooms were vast and deep and dark … room upon room sprawled out, and space was plenty and the roofs were high and beamed and old, and the windows latticed with a sort of shell sent from the south.
>
> But this new house in this new foreign city stood in a street with others like it which pressed hard against it. They were foreign homes, tall, high, narrow, without a single court or garden and the rooms were close together, small, and very bright with many glass windows without lattices. (Buck, *A House Divided* 49-50)

These scenic descriptions suggest the changing attitudes regarding social mobility and hierarchal goals. Wang Lung's goal in his quest for higher social status is a sprawling home with vast land holdings. Kenneth Burke defines the relationship between image and idea using the example of a "'poetic' image of a house [which] is also an 'idea' of a house" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 84). He argues that "the *poetic* house is built of identification" (84-85). Wang Lung and Wang the Eldest's houses function as "poetic" images with their contrasting dimensions, which serve to highlight the changes in the social class attitudes from rural landownership to city-dwelling elites. Wang Lung's

home with its vast and spacious interiors and countless rooms builds identification with the source of his wealth – the land. On the other hand, Wang the Eldest's newer, congested foreign home is representative of the newer generation's emphasis on "the general bourgeois comforts and attractions of the town" (Hucker 339).

Considered "one of the features of the Chinese civilization," the Chinese merchant traditionally ranked low on the social scale owing to the nation's emphasis on agriculture (LaTourette 503). Regardless of their social status, merchants were in demand in China's agricultural economy; the market towns and cities that traded in agricultural commodities testified to their dominant presence in the traditional Chinese economic infrastructure (503). Wang Lung chooses the grain business as a possible career for his second son, Wang the Merchant. He apprentices his son to a grain merchant so that the boy can learn the business aspects of the grain trade and, someday, assist his father. Wang the Second successfully completes his apprenticeship and rises steadily to become a well-known grain merchant of his region. While his father is alive, Wang the Second is unable to sell any land. However, as soon as his father passes away, the brothers are eager to sell their lands to finance their personal ambitions. Wang the Second "longed to turn certain of the fields into money because he had a plan to enlarge his grain business and buy over some of the markets of Liu the merchant…" (Buck, *Sons* 37). The traditional socio-economic scene in China promoted feudal attitudes of "landed power" where ownership of land allowed for "personal servitude and control"; thus, an individual who owned land was infused with "landed power [that] exemplified the power of the feudal hierarchy" (Xing and Cole 129). Wang the Second's plan to sell some of his land

and convert it into capital for business ventures indicates a shift in the economic attitude from "landed power" to "moneyed power" where money "an impersonal economic force" allowed merchants greater agency in business (129).

The traditional economic scene of agrarian Qing China led to the development of a "'trinity' consortium" which consisted of the landlord, merchant and usurer (Xing and Cole 132). The social classes that were part of this "trinity" used it to increase their wealth. Wang the Eldest chooses to live an urban lifestyle and therefore, becomes an absentee landlord who collects rent from the tenants that farm his lands. His brother Wang the Merchant is also a landlord with tenants. In his role as a merchant, Wang the Second "had great stores of grain" which he sells to whoever can afford it at high prices (Buck, *Sons* 441). Additionally, he has a usury that allows him to loan money to others at high interest (Buck, *A House Divided* 16-17).

Wang the Second justifies his actions by grounding it in common economic sense and identifies his practices with those of other merchants:

> But Wang the Merchant was righteous enough in his own eyes, for he told himself and all who came to borrow of him that men must not expect to borrow money or buy grain in times of scarcity at the prices not higher than usual, else what profit can there be to a man who is a merchant? He did no more, therefore, than what was just in his own eyes. (Buck, *Sons* 442)

Wang the Second's actions are representative of the exploitative practices of merchants during the Qing era where landlords and merchants constantly colluded "in hoarding to

corner the market" (Xing and Cole 129). In addition to this regressive economic practice, the "trinity" of landlord, merchant, and usurer "intensified the exploitation of workers and increased the income of the feudal class" (132). When Wang Yuan visits his grandfather's earthen home to hide from the Nationalist army, he encounters the peasants who work on his family's land. His presence fills them with fear and confusion; the peasants' overwhelming sense of exploitation and desperation is evident in their plea to Wang Yuan, "Help us poor folk, who are at the mercy of the gods and of the lords of war and of the rich men and governors and all such mighty evil ones" (Buck, *A House Divided* 18). In this manner, *The House of Earth* trilogy invites readers to observe and understand the social self-interests of the upper classes whose wealth and status were the result of the exploitation of the lower classes.

As China's economic growth expanded, the political scene experienced great upheaval beginning with the end of the Qing dynasty. In February of 1912, the last Manchu ruler of the Qing dynasty, Emperor Pu Yi, abdicated, an act that created a power vacuum where "quasi-independent states" struggled to assert their power (Gray 144, 167). The 1911 revolution that resulted in the Emperor's abdication also led to a militarization of the provinces. These provinces were run by "… 'war-lords', in the sense of military governors (*dujuns*) … with *de facto* control of whole provinces" (167). In *The House of Earth* trilogy, Wang Lung's youngest son chooses a soldier's life and dreams of becoming a great lord of war. Pearl Buck charts the rise and fall of Wang the Tiger in the trilogy; he serves as an apt agent to analyze China's warlord era. Following the death of his father, Wang the Tiger desires to sell his inheritance for silver as he has no use for

farming land. Additionally, he wants his brother Wang the Second to finance his cause to establish a military banner of his own and lead men into war. As a young man, Wang the Tiger did not share in his father's love for the land. Instead, he "longed to adventure" and "to be a hero under some banner of war" and thus, to achieve his goals he runs away from home (Buck, *Sons* 54). Using key instances from *The House of Earth* trilogy, Pearl Buck highlights the ambitions and lifestyle of warlords along with the change in perspective amongst the rural people regarding warlords.

Wang the Third is an ambition young man with a "restless spirit" similar to that of his father; but where his father was motivated by land to improve his social standing, the son was motivated by war and heroism (Buck, *Sons* 55). Wang the Tiger runs away from home after he is unable to convince his father that he desires to become a soldier. Wang the Tiger joins a southern militia army where his fearless spirit and steadfastness endear him to the general of the army. His actions within the militia support the general's ambitions and as thanks for his loyalty, the general promotes Wang the Tiger quickly through the ranks to captain (Buck, *Sons* 55). An analysis of the ratios of scene and act reveals not just Wang the Tiger's hierarchal goals, but also situates his ambitions within the unstable political scene that emerged as a result of the decline of dynastic rule.

The two great militaries of the Qin dynasty, the Banner Army and the Green Standard forces, had gradually declined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When the nation faced internal threats such as the Taiping Rebellion and external threats of Western imperials, the Manchu rules were forced to "experiment with new and more

effective types of military organization" (Mccord 22). The imperial court approved the idea of militia units who seemed to have success against threats such as the Taipings. They sent "high civil officials back to their home provinces as 'militia commissioners' to supervise, and ensure loyalty of, … these new forces, the *yongying* (literally, 'brave battalions')" (22). The ideology that knit *yongying* units centered on "a chain of consciously promoted personal loyalties and local ties" (23). However, Wang the Tiger soon grows tired of the general's idle and disorderly life. He longs to establish his own army and to do so, he needs money from his father's lands. To this end, he seeks to separate himself from the old general whom he had joined in his youth and establish himself as a better warlord. He discloses his plans to Wang the Second when his brother questions his need for silver:

> … I will establish myself somewhere north of our region and I will make myself lord of that whole territory! Then when I am lord I will enlarge myself and my lands, and I shall grow greater and more great with every war I wage until--"
>
> … Wang the Tiger rose suddenly to his feet, "Until there is none greater than I in this whole nation!" he said … (Buck, *Sons* 83).

Wang the Tiger's agency increases once he separates from the general. His force of men who initially number one hundred and eight soldiers with one hundred and twenty-two guns grows to a force of nearly eight thousand men, "all young and strong and fit for war" (Buck, *Sons* 120, 204). Since he has no son Wang the Tiger knows that in order to secure his position and the loyalty of his army he would need to establish a

bureaucracy that would support him. Wang the Tiger takes two actions to ensure that his power and agency within his militia do not weaken. First, he places the two sons of his brothers in positions close to him and second, the one hundred men who had joined his army in the beginning were established as "captains and sergeants over the new men" (Buck, *Sons* 205). Pearl Buck details the infrastructure of Wang the Tiger's army as strategy to explain the operation setup of Chinese militia units and the motives of militia commissioners in doing so. Early military commissioners such as Zeng Guofan (of the Hunan Army) and Li Hongzhang (of the Huai [Anhui] Army) created a personalized bureaucracy within their militia units. These commissioners "chose their own subordinate commanders, often from among their relatives, friends, or classmates. These commanders then selected their subordinate officers, who in turn personally supervised the recruitment of their soldiers" (Mccord 22). Wang the Tiger's actions reveal the hierarchal nature the warlord armies consistent with the social stratification of society. Just as individuals within a social class build agency through mutual identification, Buck reveals how the warlords established their agency and military might through cohesive and loyal units that identified closely with their commanders.

Wang the Tiger aims to establish a firm code of conduct for his soldiers. He seeks to dissociate his army from the robber armies that he fights against and be true to the heroic image that his men and the common people have created of the "Black-browed Tiger" (Buck, *Sons* 127). He issues a code of conduct that was firm and honorable:

> We are not robbers nor bandits and I am no robber chief! No, I shall hew out for myself a better road than that to greatness and we will win by skill of arms and by honorable means and not by preying upon the people. What you need you are to buy and I will pay for it. You are to have your wage every month. But you shall not touch any woman unless it be such as are willing … But if I hear that any man of mine has taken unlawfully a virtuous wife or a virgin daughter, that man will I kill before he has time even to say what he has done!" (Buck, *Sons* 126-27)

Wang the Tiger's idealistic speech underscores Pearl Buck's intent to showcase good-intentioned warlords from Chinese history such as Feng Yuxiang whose "forces were subjected with severity to their commander's puritan morals: no drinking, gambling, swearing, or resort[ing] to prostitutes was permitted" (Gray 190). Such well-meaning warlords were uncommon; the majority of these warlords were "savage brutes" whose "extravagance, cruelty and indifference to the behavior of [their] troops" often left their regions in "a state of total anarchy and impoverishment" (190). Pearl Buck highlights the negative militaristic tendencies in specific scenes such as the reign of the robber chief Leopard who controlled the valley of the Double Dragon Mountain (Buck, *Sons* 154-55). The actions of the robber chief's men and those of the valley magistrate's soldiers are dishonorable and in sharp contrast to the code of conduct that Wang the Tiger has established. The conflicting attitudes of Wang the Tiger and Leopard provide the opportunity for Wang the Tiger to wage a war against the latter as it aligned with his identity as the "tiger." Considered a "man-killer" and a symbol of bravery, Wang the Tiger's personality is infused with the symbolism of a tiger (Leach 1113). By virtue of

his occupation as a soldier and warlord, he is a killer of men who is considered both brave and honorable because of his code of conduct. He is also considered benevolent due to his concern for the people of his region.

From the time of its inception to its eventual decline, the warlord period lasted from 1916 to 1928. These were twelve years of political fragmentation, ceaseless wars (small and large), and untold suffering for the Chinese people (Sheridan 58). As Wang the Tiger's army grows to over twenty thousand men so also grows a gradual discontent of his rule in the rural community. Upon encountering his army on a southern campaign, Wang the Tiger notes how the people "scowled," "grew silent and pale," or "cursed aloud" (Buck, *Sons* 321-22). Two motives can be ascribed to Pearl Buck's depiction of the suffering experienced by the villages ruled by the warlords. The first motive showcases the chaotic Chinese political scene that is responsible for the resentment and anger that common people feel towards warlords. Wars to control regions hurt the people of that region in terms of human resources, taxation and revenues and food resources. The fragmented nature of warlord rule leads to "continuing territorial disintegration of China that began with the waning of central control in the mid-nineteenth century" (Sheridan 104).

As a means to curb warlordism and unify China, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintag (KMT) established a Nationalist government in China in 1925. Previously, warlord rule had restricted the growth of peasant associations and other political organizations. The KMT worked at the national and rural levels to strengthen and unify the people. The

KMT also built an "organizational structure that would keep the army obedient to political leaders" (Sheridan 163). The in 1926 the KMT government charged Chiang Kai-shek with the responsibility of "conquering all the warlords along the way" during his Northern Expedition from South China to Peking in the North (164). This army was aided by peasant uprisings along the way.

Through *Sons* and *A House Divided* Pearl Buck chronicles the brutality of warlordism and its decline. Wang the Tiger is forewarned of a "new war", a "people's war" that is "a war for the common people (Buck, *Sons* 451). However, Wang the Tiger fails to understand the changes in the Chinese political scene and his disbelief eventually leads to his downfall. When he visits his brother Wang the Second in the latter's town, he boasts of his military might, which inflames the local community. One day the farming folk together with revolutionaries and robbers attack the town and loot Wang Lung's great town home. The family is forced to flee from the area, but Wang the Tiger is captured in his father's old earthen home where he is beaten and left hanging to die. The uprising of the villagers and tenants is representative of their resentment and anger against the upper classes who historically had used and abused them. The establishment of the KMT and Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition represented a new political scene that offered peasants agency in contrast to the historical scene of governance in China.

A second motive can be ascribed to Pearl Buck's narrative of the mass uprising against Wang the Third and his defeat. In March 1927, the Northern Expedition reached

Nanking, capital city of Anhwei province where Pearl Buck lived with her husband, father Absalom, sister Grace and her two children Carol and Janice. The KMT forces battled for two days, March 23 and 24, in Nanking that left "hundreds of Chinese and at least six foreigners dead" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 90). This event is known as the Nanking Incident. The Buck family survived the battle by hiding in a "tiny, windowless room not far from their own home" (91). Although they survived, the family lost everything including "the manuscript of [Buck's] first novel" (93). Just as the military campaigns of the warlords had displaced numerous Chinese from one region to the other, Pearl Buck and her family identified with such displaced people when they were forced to flee Nanking in the aftermath of the Incident.

Following the decline of the warlords, the political scene of China shifted to a situation in which Nationalist and Communist forces competed against one another for control of the government and the nation. In the final novel of the *House of Earth* trilogy Pearl Buck continues her "inquiry into China's civil wars and the consequences… "of competing socio-political forces on both the urban and rural population of China (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178). The protagonist in *A House Divided* is Wang the Tiger's son Wang Yuan who although "intelligent and introspective" was disillusioned by Confucian teachings of the past and the Nationalist and Communist impulses of modern China (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178).

As Wang the Tiger's heir and military successor, Wang the Tiger takes actions to build identification with his son and seeks to begin his military training in early life. His

first act is to separate the child from his mother when he was yet a child. Wang the Tiger repeatedly admonishes his son to be more warrior-like; however, the child is "stiff and withdrawn and barely suffered his father" despite his father's attempts to engage with him (Buck, *Sons* 376). Yuan's further dissociation from his father's warlordism is evident in his reaction to being called "little general" by the men. Although his father feels proud in those moments, Yuan blushes "a burning dark red" and would not look at the men (376-77). The difference in the social aspirations of the father and son become painfully evident during an army review trip. During this trip, Wang the Tiger notes the army, their weapons and march, whereas his son observes "a little sunburned naked lad in the next field who lay across a water buffalo's back… and the boy said 'I would like to be that boy and lie on the buffalo's back'" (377).

An analysis of the ratios of scene and act reveals the conflicts in ideology through the father-son clash. Wang the Tiger's reprimand to his son that he "might wish higher than to be a cowherd!" reinforces the hierarchal tendencies inherent in the traditional Chinese class system. At the same time, Yuan's desire for the simple life contradicts with the Confucian principles of social hierarchy and order where sons step into their fathers' hereditary roles. When Yuan asks to learn agriculture and the farming life, his father vehemently objects and reminds his son, "We are lords of war, and you shall go to a school of war or no school at all, …" (447). Using forceful language such as "we are" and "you shall go" Wang the Tiger seeks to enforce his paternal authority to elicit his desired outcome from his son and remind him of the source of their identity and status in society.

Yuan rejects his father's social identity and joins the revolutionaries; however, he is not devoted to their cause and soon parts ways with them and his father. His actions are representative of "young men and women [who were] unable to make any lasting commitments…" in the modern socio-political scene of China (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178). Yuan seeks out the earthen home of his grandfather in an effort to reconcile his attitudes with those of his father. At his grandfather's village, he learns of peasant attitudes towards the upper class (represented by his family). As the nephew of their landlords and son of a powerful warlord, the peasants perceive Yuan as yet another agent of the upper class. He attempts to identify with them by speaking the truth just as they have honestly shared their views about his family. He recounts the events that led to his arrival in the village:

> There is a revolution coming from the south, and it comes against the lords of war in the north, and I, my father's son, could not take arms against him, no, not even with my comrades… I came home and my father was angry when he saw my garb… And I thought I would take refuge here for a while…
>
> I came also because I have the greatest love for the quietness of land. My father shaped me for a lord of war, but I hate blood and killing and the stink of guns and all the noise of armies. (Buck, *A House Divided* 17)

An analysis of the ratios of agent and purpose explains Yuan's motive as identification with the peasants. By speaking of a revolution and presenting himself as a revolutionary, Yuan attempts to persuade them that he is against warlordism that

oppressed peasants. The implied reason for his personal inability to act against his father is filial piety, a virtue he assumes the peasants would understand. Furthermore, by claiming an aversion to "blood," "killing," "stink of guns," and "noise of armies" Yuan hopes to assure the peasants that he is no lord of war and dislikes wars just as much as they do and, therefore, is no threat to them. Finally, by aligning his interest in farming with their way of life, Yuan unsuccessfully attempts to assuage their fears and have them accept him as a guest in the village.

The elders of the village listen to Yuan's explanation, but refuse to believe in his explanation. Their disbelief is indicative of deep-rooted suspicions and social attitudes where the lower classes are historically oppressed by the upper classes.

> … the men looked at each other again, none understanding or believing that anyone could envy the life they had, because to them it was so bitter. They were only more filled with doubt of this young man who sat there speaking in his eager willful open way because he said he loved an earthen house … and they looked with coming hatred and with fear upon this young man, saying in their hearts they knew he lied, because they could not believe there was in the whole world a man who would choose an earthen house when he might have a great one. (Buck, *A House Divided* 17)

The villagers' inability to comprehend Yuan's sincerity along with his desire for a farmer's life as anything more than lies represents a hierarchal mystery; mystery is established as a result of the differences between the social perceptions of the peasants

and Yuan's modern attitudes. The attitudes of the villagers reaffirm the traditional hierarchal social order established through the "old Confucian orthodoxy" (LaTourette 378). Although social changes and reforms were ongoing constantly between 1894 – 1945, these changes were not universal. In fact, the Chinese port areas experienced greater and faster social changes; and from there only gradually did the new ideas spread to interior regions of China (378).

Pearl Buck charts several major shifts in social attitudes in *A House Divided* through the experiences of young Yuan. Historian Fabio Lanza argues that "China's twentieth century is marked and in large part defined by a seemingly continuous stream of political movements inspired, animated, and organized by young people" (32). One such movement of the early twentieth century was the May Fourth Movement of 1919 that led to a "longer process of cultural and intellectual experimentation and organization" which became known as the "New Culture Movement" (Lanza 36). The movement sought to address "economic change, social reorganization, and political transformation" and "promised… a radical liberation of the present time from the past" (36). Lanza postulates that the social category of "youth" was an integral component of this movement since it signified two meanings: "First, 'youth' stood as the yet-not corrupted and unsullied, almost a biological metaphor of the strong body not yet enfeebled by the poisonous miasmus of "traditional society" (37). Pearl Buck styles Yuan as a representation of "Young China," a member of its "rising generation trapped between the future and the past" who makes multiple attempts to find meaning in his life (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 178). By emphasizing several young characters such as Yuan,

Sheng, Meng, and Mei-ling in *A House Divided,* Buck examines how these youths attempt to find their meaning through different socio-political means.

Over the course of the novel, Yuan engages in various aspects of the new urban scene of Chinese society. For example, he is a member of the revolutionary army, seeks to further his education, explores Communism, and attends parties and dance halls. His cousin Sheng (the Poet) is a representative agent for the urban Chinese scene whose attitudes reflect a disdain for the struggles of the common people and instead focus on his own pleasure. Sheng articulates his perspective in terms of the idea of beauty:

> I love my life too well, and I love only beauty. I am moved only by beauty. I have no wish to die in any cause… I have no wish to suffer for the common people. They are filthy and they smell of garlic. Let them die. Who will miss them? (Buck, *A House Divided* 72)

Sheng's comment about beauty can be understood in terms of Chen Duxiu's articulation of the word "youth." As an agent of the present, Sheng represents its youth; however, Chen draws a distinction between "new youth" and "old youth" where the latter is "young in age but old in physique and in mentality" (Lanza 37). Sheng's philosophy of life with its love of beauty connects his mentality back to the traditional social order where people of the upper class are oblivious to the conditions and struggles of the masses. Just as his father (Wang the Eldest) cares only for his pleasures, Sheng is only concerned with things that pleased him. Furthermore, his question "Who will miss them (common people)?" suggests the callous attitude of a person who does not know where

the income that he lives on comes from. Without the common people to cultivate his father's lands, they would not have any money for their pleasures, but Sheng is oblivious to this fact.

Yuan's cousin Meng is Communist and hates foreigners, but through his dedication to the Communist cause and anti-foreign attitudes, he "taught [Yuan] how to see the country's soul" (Buck, *A House Divided* 77). Instead of outrightly rejecting Communist thinking, Yuan recognizes that it is just another cause similar to those of the warlords and the Nationalist government. Yuan's attitude mirrors Pearl Buck's own skepticism regarding the new modern forces of the Nationalist and Communist movements. As a participant in the Nationalist movement, Yuan sees first-hand the lack of impact of such movements to the large section of people who live in the rural areas and for the urban poor. Meng's harsh criticism of the foreigners who live and work in China presents a prevalent attitude in China's late imperial age (Buck, *A House Divided* 79). Through Meng, Pearl Buck articulates the voices of discontent that grew louder towards the end of the Qing dynasty that resulted in the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901). A primary reason for the anti-foreign attitudes of the Chinese was the increase in "privileges and power of the missionaries and their followers seemed to … symbolize China's humiliation and their own" (Gray 136). The increased agency of missionaries and foreign economic powers competed against China's worldview creating a clash in ideology where anti-foreign attitudes persisted alongside China's modern outlook of "willingness and ability to change" (Gray 139). Yuan's response to Meng's hateful attitude is a smile and silence that reveals his reluctance to join in the anti-foreign

sentiment and therefore, his lack of identification with Meng's cause (Buck, *A House Divided* 80).

A second meaning of the term "youth" draws on Chinese writer and activist Chen Duxiu's definition where "'youth' is the will to fight today for the possibilities opened in the youthful present, the determination to construct today the foundations of a possible future" (Lanza 37). Three characters in the novel represent this definition of youthfulness, namely Yuan's stepmother, Mei-ling and Yuan. Through the characters who are agents from two consecutive generations, Pearl Buck draws on the vital importance of education to the modernization of the China. The actions of these characters are representative of the slowly-forming modern Chinese scene. Traditional Chinese education system focused on the civil service examinations, but the influx of Christian missionaries and Westerners to China fueled the reform movements of the early twentieth century in the field of education. Buck presents some of the progressive attitudes in education in the form of Yuan's experiences. As an educated woman, Yuan's stepmother encourages both Yuan and Mei-ling to pursue their studies. For Yuan further studies included a six-year stay in American where he graduated at the top of his class (Buck, *A House Divided* 137, 213-14). His visit to America is reminiscent of Pearl Buck's own sojourn to America for higher education and her "awareness that she was an outsider in a remote place … in spite of the academic and social distinctions she earned" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 49). Historian Zhang Yufa notes that "Between 1846 – 1949 about 150,000 Chinese students studied abroad" and, of these, the number of Chinese students who studied in America was "frequently larger than the number of students from any other foreign country" (52-

53). In this era of social reform, these "returned students" help modernize the nation in many areas such as politics, public health and education.

A House Divided illustrates how Yuan contributes to the nation-building efforts in society as a foreign-educated returned student. Upon returning from America, Yuan decides to work as a teacher and takes his students out into the fields for manual labor (Buck, *A House Divided* 302-06). An analysis of the ratios of act and purpose suggests that Yuan's actions are based on an actual education project developed by the University of Nanjing's (Nanking) department of agriculture which "refused to admit any student unwilling to do manual work in the famine relief areas" (Gray 243). Additionally, Yuan's experiments with foreign grain seeds and farming practices identify with Pearl Buck's first husband Lossing Buck's focus on the "benefits of scientific agriculture" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 57). The scene where the farmers mock Yuan's modern approach to farming highlights the contrasting attitudes towards agriculture that Lossing Buck's research revealed during his and Pearl Buck's stay in Nanhsuchou in northern Anhwei (57). Lossing Buck's theories of modern farming were revolutionary within the traditional Chinese agricultural scene, yet his trials, with seeds of wheat, proved successful (58). In identifying Yuan's actions with those of her agriculturist husband, Buck predicts success for Yuan and the Chinese peasant.

Mei-ling is Wang Yuan's love interest in *A House Divided* who is studying to become a doctor at a "foreign school of medicine" in China (225). The character Mei-ling functions as an agent of nation-building and social reform in a rapidly modernizing

China; her actions in the form of her education and professional career conform to the nation-building efforts of the early Republican era. Yuan's stepmother sends Mei-ling to the "foreign school" so that she can learn "cutting and sewing up again" from skilled foreign physicians (Buck, *A House Divided* 226). Both Mei-ling and Yuan function as agents, within an evolving socio-political scene, who have the potential to transform China into a modern nation as a result of their higher education.

The central government and Chinese academics realized that the old educational system "had been irrevocably disabled with the collapse of the imperial system" (Zen Sun 368). Mei-ling and Yuan also recognized the "improvement of higher education as an aspect of national regeneration, and the extension of central authority into the interior in the continuing effort to achieve national unity" (390). Furthermore, Mei-ling's career choice is another significant aspect of nation-building. Her decision to attend medical school to become a doctor is revolutionary when considered from the traditional Chinese perspective, which regarded the medical profession "as a lowly craft" (Gao 174). However, by the early twentieth century, the Chinese government began to recognize the importance of healthcare as "the foundation for the health of citizens, and healthy citizens are a symbol of the culture of a nation" (173).

Mei-ling's training is at an institution run by foreign doctors, not Chinese doctors. The scene here is indicative of the "the modernization of medicine" during which China sought to imitate foreign medical models so as to develop its own model for medicine and public health care (196). Within this scene of improvements in the field of medicine,

traditional Chinese attitudes related to Chinese medicine (*zhongyi*) clashed against the newer attitudes represented by Western medicine (Scheid and Lei 247). The Nationalist government championed the idea of "national medicine" (*guoyi*) "to make Chinese medicine a part of the educational and health care system of modern China" (247). Through the actions and experiences of Wang Yuan and Mei-ling, Pearl Buck highlights China's efforts at nation-building in the modern era. Led by young, educated men and women, these Chinese were concerned about national unity and progress and sought to rise above the trappings of social class to rebuild their nation.

In "On Human Behavior Considered 'Dramatistically" Kenneth Burke explains that inherent to man's nature as a "symbol-using animal" is the need for property. Property within the context of any "complex social order" gives rise to the mystery in people's relationship with one another (*Permanence and Change* 283). Pearl Buck's *The House of Earth* trilogy provides a panoramic view of the highly stratified and hierarchal nature of Chinese society and how each of the main characters attempts to improve his or her agency by means of specific hierarchal goals. Burke suggests that to overcome hierarchal psychosis "… those in authority [should] guard against the natural tendency to protect their special interests in ways that ultimately impair those interests by bringing the society as a whole into disarray" (*Permanence and Change* 291). Pearl Buck has a similar perspective to Burke's where she draws a correlation between too much wealth and the "loss of moral bearings" (Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 132).

The trilogy illustrates how those in authority such as Wang the Eldest, Wang the Second, and Wang the Tiger, who as persons in authoritative social roles of landlord, merchant, and warlord, focus only on their self-interests and in the process further their socio-economic agency. Their actions result in grave consequences for each of them. Wang the Eldest is burdened by exorbitant costs of living in an urban center and supporting his extensive family. His brother Wang the Second suffers a worse fate when he and his family are attacked during a peasant uprising and have to flee Wang Lung's great home in their town and leave behind all their possessions. Lastly, Buck's narrative of Wang the Tiger's fall in status and agency is indicative of the reactionary violence and chaos of the early modern era in China. As a warlord, Wang the Tiger represents oppressive authority against whom the common people retaliate with impunity. By losing their connections to the land, Wang Lung's sons choose to identify no longer with their father's peasant origins. In doing so, they establish mystery and hierarchal distance between themselves and the peasants in their community. To Pearl Buck the attitudes of Wang Lung's sons are concerning as they represent a loss of "moral bearings" which directly affects the lives of the common Chinese people (Conn Conn, *Pearl S. Buck* 132, 179).

Pearl Buck was not alone in her concern for the social condition in China. During the reform years of the early twentieth century, intellectuals such as Li Dazhao and Mao Zedong shared a similar vision that "China might still have a future as great as her past" (Gray 198). Li Dazhao, Professor of History and Librarian at Beijing University, believed that "the motive force of historical change was not the individual, either as hero or as free

citizen, but the masses… in this process, the educated must provide the initial impulse" (Gray 199). Li and his follower Mao Zedong called for the educated to build the consciousness of the masses by means of knowledge that would lead to action – mass action. Buck's trilogy concludes on a hopeful note in which Yuan and Mei-ling represent the impulse articulated by Li and Mao, who with their education and concern for the land and its people are essential to the stabilization and modernization of China and its people.

CHAPTER V

THE HUMAN BRIDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: PEARL BUCK'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERATURE AND SOCIETY THROUGH *THE HOUSE OF EARTH* TRILOGY

American impressions of China and the Chinese were formed as a result of accounts by "American traders, diplomats, and missionaries in China" along with American engagement with early Chinese immigrants (Lee 25). The discovery of gold brought Chinese immigrants in large numbers to California around 1848. These early immigrants were "targets of racial hostility, discriminatory laws, and violence" as a result of an "American Orientalist ideology that homogenized Asia as one indistinguishable entity and positioned and defined the West and the East in diametrically opposite terms, using those distinctions to claim American and Anglo-American superiority" (25). The perceived threat from Chinese immigrants to American citizens in terms of employment and security led to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which was "the country's first significant restrictive immigration law; [that] … was also the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race, nationality, and class" (24). The Chinese Exclusion Act remained in effect for the next sixty years and was finally repealed in 1943. The presence of Chinese immigrants in America along with perceptions about the Chinese nation created an attitude of "otherness" towards the Chinese in nineteenth and twentieth century-American society.

Kenneth Burke notes that "the conditions for 'mystery' are set by *any* pronounced social distinctions, as between nobility and commoners, courtiers and king, leader and people, rich and poor, judge and prisoner at the bar, 'superior race' and underprivileged 'races' or minorities" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 115). A "mystifying condition" existed regarding China and the Chinese, which was a result of incorrect and incomplete impressions that persisted well into the twentieth century in America (123). Mystery occurs "where different *kinds* of beings are in communication… there must be *strangeness…*" (115). Nobel-prize winning author Pearl Buck was uniquely situated to address the mystifying conditions that existed between America and China. She had lived in China for thirty-four years and developed a keen understanding of the nation and its people (Conn, "What the Remarkable Legacy"). Using the novels of *The House of Earth* trilogy, Pearl Buck appoints herself as "our most persistently illuminating guide" whose goal was to depict realistically "The China she saw" to American readers (Thomson, Jr. 15). This study uses Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism and the five terms: act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. These elements serve as the investigative tools to examine Pearl Buck's representations of China and the Chinese in the novels of *The House of Earth* trilogy. Her motive in illustrating the lives of common Chinese men and women was to lift the existing *strangeness* and show that both Americans and Chinese were "capable of communion" as a result of their concerns regarding gender, economics, and social class (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 115).

Burke's theory of dramatism along with the five pentadic terms- act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose- provide the rhetorical framework to analyze the novels of the

House of Earth. These pentadic terms "codify the dramatistic logic of inquiry" which allow for "the explanation of human action" (Overington 141). The Confucian underpinnings of traditional Chinese society emphasized the unequal relationship between men and women. In a culture that greatly valued harmony and balance, these two values were maintained by means of a superior-inferior relationship between the sexes. Different female characters in *The House of Earth* trilogy function as representative agents who through their actions and inactions reveal the varying levels of agency available to them in the shifting socio-political scene of China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The dramatistic analysis using various pentadic ratios reveals the cultural constraints and changing social attitudes that, initially, impaired and then improved the social positions and conditions of women in China. The reform-arc that evolves through the three novels suggests identification draws attention to American women's fight for rights during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nineteenth century was a period of intense social reform in America where reformers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton fought for the rights of women. To them, "The very concept of 'right'… was predicated on a world where those rights were to be exercised free of the legal and social restraints imposed by obligations to others" (Clark 43). The turbulence of the gender scene in America was mirrored in the East in China at the turn of the twentieth-century on a smaller scale. Select female characters in *Sons* and *A House Divided* serve as representative agents who reveal the struggles of Chinese women to gain agency within the emerging Nationalist and Communist political scene where

Chinese and foreign reformers sought to improve the socio-economic and political status of women.

A combination of the pentadic ratios and the concepts of identification and hierarchy reveal the commonalities in socio-economic attitudes between the Chinese and Americans. In the trilogy, the actions of Wang Lung and his descendants reveal the existing and growing opportunities for social and economic growth. Early 19th century America had much in common with the China of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 19th century, America was also a "predominantly agricultural economy" that rapidly modernized with the advent of the steamboat, railway, and the telegraph (Hormats 60). Buck's use of the specific characters, their social roles, and sources of economic development represent her rhetorical strategies to establish common identification with America's own socio-economic history. In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Burke clarifies that the concept of hierarchy goes beyond "the mere arrangement whereby each rank is overlord to its underlings and underling to its overlords" (138). He argues that, "It is complete only when each rank accepts the *principle of gradation itself…*" where "the reversal of social status makes as much sense as its actual mundane order" (138). Over the course of the three novels, Pearl Buck traces the social ascent and eventual descent of the Wang family. These characters face "a choice between the frozen order of the *status quo* and the reversal of that order, through its "liquidation" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 139). The characters Wang Yuan and Mei-ling are agents who signify a new China's ability to adapt to modern socio-economic and political changes without losing the connections to the land and its people. The actions and attitudes of these characters serve as rhetorical

strategies that Buck uses to build identification with America's struggles to modernize itself throughout the 19th century (Hormats 61).

Pearl Buck tackled the various misconceptions regarding the Chinese prevalent in the American culture through *The House of Earth* trilogy and many other novels that focused on Chinese themes. In *Counterstatement*, Kenneth Burke argues that:

> … the creative artist should be an advocate of values antithetical to those advanced by his particular time and society. Each era and culture will be marked by one overwhelming set of values … and this emphasis leads to a lack of attention to other 'perennial' aspects of human experience. (Overington 137)

Buck's novels highlight the Chinese human experiences that found their counterparts in the struggles and hardships of the American people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At her Nobel-prize acceptance ceremony on December 12, 1938, Pearl Buck spoke at length about the history of the Chinese novel and its novelist. She emphasized that the primary motivation for a novelist "is human life as he finds it in himself or outside himself" ("Pearl Buck – Nobel Lecture").

She stressed the significance of this motivation as being audience-driven:

> Are his creatures alive? That is the only question. And who can tell him? Who but those living human beings, the people? … they are absorbed only in themselves, in their own hungers and despairs and joys and above all, perhaps, their own dreams. These are the ones who can really judge the work of a novelist, for, they judge by that single test of reality. And the standard of the test is not to be made

> by the device of art, but by the simple comparison of the reality of what they read, to their own reality. ("Pearl Buck – Nobel Lecture")

Pearl Buck's novels are representative of her instincts to produce art that reflect the realities of the audience. Through the characters, settings, actions and inactions, and relationships of the characters in *The House of Earth* trilogy, Pearl Buck teaches the world "to see the individuals in that great mass of people" who form the Chinese nation and reminds readers of "those qualities of thought and feeling which bind us together as human beings on this earth" ("Pearl Buck – Banquet Speech"). Pearl Buck's works enrich not just the field of American literature; her works offer possibilities for interdisciplinary and multicultural research and study. She broadened the scope of her writing to focus on other Asian countries and America that may serve as additional areas for investigation and research.

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