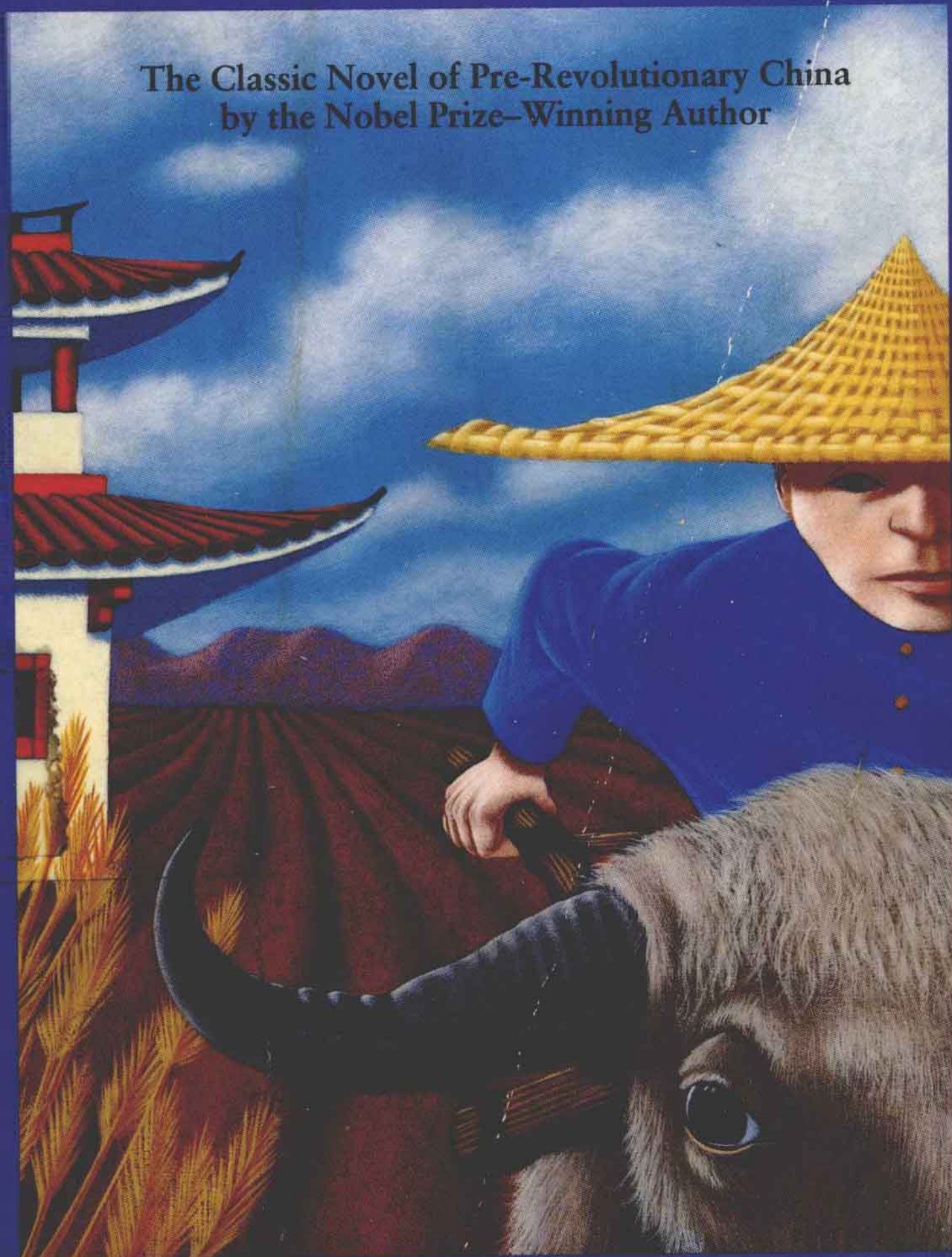


PEARL S. BUCK

The Good Earth

The Classic Novel of Pre-Revolutionary China
by the Nobel Prize-Winning Author



E N R I C H E D C L A S S I C

*The Good
Earth*

Pearl S. Buck

Introduced and Edited by
Peter Conn



POCKET BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore

The sale of this book without its cover is unauthorized. If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that it was reported to the publisher as "unsold and destroyed." Neither the author nor the publisher has received payment for the sale of this "stripped book."

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright 1931 by Pearl S. Buck
Copyright renewed © 1958 by Pearl S. Buck
Introduction and Notes copyright © 1994 by Peter Conn
Supplementary materials copyright © 1994 by Pocket Books

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce
this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.
For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue
of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-671-51012-6

First Enriched Classics printing December 1994

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of
Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-800-456-6798 or
business@simonandschuster.com

Cover art by John Nickle

Printed in the U.S.A.

Born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, in 1892 to a pair of Southern Presbyterian missionaries, PEARL COMFORT SYDENSTRICKER was taken to China at the age of three months, where she would live for forty years. Pearl married John Lossing Buck in 1917 and they spent the next few years in Nanhsuchou, a rural village and home to several thousand impoverished farmers. This village, and many like it, became the foundation for her first writings, including her most enduring novel, *The Good Earth*. Pearl's first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, was published by the John Day Company in 1930. *The Good Earth* was published by Day in 1931, and it quickly became a bestseller, winning the Pulitzer Prize and the Howells Medal in 1935. It was adapted by MGM as a major motion picture in 1937 starring Luise Rainer.

In 1935, Pearl divorced John Buck to marry her publisher, Richard Walsh; they subsequently moved to Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In 1938, she became the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature, and she became an activist for China in its opposition to Japanese invasion. She was also active in the campaigns for African-American civil rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and a nuclear test ban. In 1949, Pearl Buck founded Welcome House in order to find homes for the thousands of mixed-race children who had been fathered by American servicemen in Asia, and established the Pearl S. Buck Foundation to provide foster care for Asian-American children who could not be adopted by American families. Eventually she moved to Danby, Vermont, where she died in 1973 at the age of 80. She is buried in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, beneath a tombstone upon which her name is inscribed in Chinese characters.

TITLES AVAILABLE IN THE ENRICHED CLASSICS SERIES

Aristotle	<i>The Pocket Aristotle</i> , Edited by Justin D. Kaplan
Emily Brontë	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>
Pearl S. Buck	<i>The Good Earth</i>
Willa Cather	<i>My Ántonia</i>
Geoffrey Chaucer	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
Kate Chopin	<i>The Awakening</i>
Stephen Crane	<i>The Red Badge of Courage</i>
Charles Dickens	<i>Great Expectations</i>
	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
F. Scott Fitzgerald	<i>This Side of Paradise</i>
Thomas Hardy	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i>
Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
Thor Heyerdahl	<i>Kon-Tiki</i>
Homer	<i>The Odyssey</i>
Henry James	<i>Washington Square</i>
James Joyce	<i>Dubliners</i>
	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes	<i>Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions</i>
Jack London	<i>The Call of the Wild</i>
Herman Melville	<i>Billy Budd, Sailor</i>
	<i>Moby-Dick</i>
Plato	<i>Dialogues of Plato</i> , Edited by Justin D. Kaplan
George Bernard Shaw	<i>Pygmalion</i>
Mary Shelley	<i>Frankenstein</i>
Sophocles	<i>Oedipus the King</i>
Robert Louis Stevenson	<i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>
Mark Twain	<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>
	<i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>
Edith Wharton	<i>The Age of Innocence</i>
	<i>Old New York</i>

OTHER CLASSICS

F. Scott Fitzgerald	<i>The Beautiful and Damned</i>
	<i>Flappers and Philosophers</i>
Robert Frost	<i>Robert Frost's Poems</i>
Victor Hugo	<i>Les Misérables</i>
Franz Kafka	<i>The Basic Kafka</i> , Edited by Erich Heller
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
Edgar Allan Poe	<i>Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe</i>
Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i>

I am always glad when any of my books can be put into an inexpensive edition, because I like to think that any people who might wish to read them can do so. Surely books ought to be within the reach of everybody.

CHINA

Peking

Grand Canal

Nanhsuchou

KIANGSU

Chinkiang

Nanking

Yangtze River

ANHWEI

Shanghai

Kuling

TAIWAN

Hong Kong



INTRODUCTION

Pearl Buck and *The Good Earth*

From the day of its publication in 1931, *The Good Earth* has been one of the most popular novels of the twentieth century. Sales figures and prizes tell part of the story. Several million copies of the book have been sold in more than sixty countries, including the United States. The book won the Pulitzer Prize and the William Dean Howells medal for fiction. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer paid the then-record sum of \$50,000 for movie rights. The film version of the novel, released in 1937, was seen by over twenty million people around the world. One of the movie's stars, Luise Rainer, won an Academy Award for best actress.

The influence of *The Good Earth* has perhaps proven even more remarkable than its popularity. For at least thirty years, well into the 1960s, Pearl Buck's novel played a greater role in shaping Western attitudes toward China than any other book. In *The Good Earth*, for the first time, American and European readers encountered Chinese characters who thought and behaved like ordinary, believable human beings rather than cartoon "Orientals."

This is the main achievement of Buck's novel, and the source of its lasting significance. Prior to *The Good Earth*, Westerners had reduced Asian people to a cluster of simplified stereotypes, most of them insulting: the Chinese were dishonest, cruel, inscrutable; they were addicted to opium and delighted in torture; their society was backward and decadent.

INTRODUCTION

These vulgar but durable clichés were rooted in the fertile soil of Western ignorance. In 1931, when *The Good Earth* appeared, Americans knew almost nothing about China. Only a handful of merchants, diplomats, and missionaries had set foot in China or in any Asian country. In the absence of accurate knowledge, Americans replaced Chinese reality with stick figures of vice and immorality, transforming Asians into caricatures like the villainous Fu Manchu and Bret Harte's comic "Heathen Chinees."

Pearl Buck restored humanity to her Chinese subjects. The main characters in *The Good Earth*—the farmer, Wang Lung, and his wife, O-lan—share the experiences, the desires, and the fears of men and women in any rural community. While they are convincingly Chinese, there is nothing mysterious or exotic about them. In addition, *The Good Earth* provides a valuable record of life in the Chinese countryside in the early years of this century. Professor Liu Haiping, dean of the school of foreign languages at Nanjing University, has called the novel, and Buck's many other stories about China, a "treasure trove" of Chinese history.¹

The Good Earth was written out of Pearl Buck's long, firsthand experience in China. Her parents were an ill-matched pair of Southern Presbyterians named Absalom and Carie Sydenstricker. Pearl was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, in 1892 while her parents were on a home leave, but she was taken to China at the age of three months and lived there most of the next forty years. Her father was a humorless, zealous man who tried for decades to convert the Chinese to Christianity. Her mother was an unhappy woman who felt permanently exiled in a strange land.

Compared with the childhood of other Americans, Pearl's was extraordinary. By the time she was four, she spoke and wrote Chinese as well as English. Her only playmates were Chinese children who let her join their games but called her a "foreign devil" because of her blue eyes and blond hair. Though Carie tried to discourage the practice, Pearl's Chinese amah (governess) told her some of the most popular Chinese tales, such as "The Kitchen God," "The Jar of Silver," and "Why the Gods Stood Up." Pearl heard stories

INTRODUCTION

of devils and fairies, of magic swords and daggers, of the fearsome dragon that was imprisoned in a nearby pagoda.

When she was a child, Pearl spent many afternoons sitting on the hard benches of the local Chinese theater. Wide-eyed, she watched colorful melodramas in which costumed figures of good and evil battled for mastery. Good invariably triumphed, sometimes at the expense of villains who represented Western invaders. Pearl found herself cheering the massacre of red-haired foreign devils. Almost uniquely among white American writers, she spent her childhood as a minority person, an experience that had much to do with her lifelong passion for interracial understanding.

As a girl growing up in a relentlessly patriarchal, Christian household, Pearl was especially attentive to the Chinese girls and women she met. She found that they, too, were trapped in a sexual caste system throughout their lives, a system even more punishing than the one she had seen at home. She was puzzled by the embarrassment that accompanied the birth of girl children: in China, boy babies are called "big happiness" and girls are only a "small happiness."

She grieved when she learned about the practice of female infanticide—an ancient and ruthless method of population control among the poor. On more than one occasion, she found an unmarked, shallow grave in which the nude body of a baby girl had been buried. At least once, she chased away a dog that had dug the body up and she reburied the tiny corpse. She was angry that boys were educated and girls were not. Appalled but fascinated by the bound feet of her amah and other Chinese women, she understood, even as a child, that this barbaric custom symbolized male supremacy.

At the same time, however, Pearl observed how powerful Chinese women often were. The legends of women warriors—in which heroic, mythical female figures triumphed over men, dragons, and demons—were among the most popular stories in the Chinese common culture. Pearl knew those stories, and she also knew that social fact often echoed folktale: among farmers and gentry alike, homes were typically ruled by the senior women in a kind of domestic matriarchy. Beyond that, the Chinese nation itself was

INTRODUCTION

governed throughout Pearl's childhood by a woman, the Dowager Empress Tz'u-hsi,² whose remarkable career had taken her from imperial concubine to imperial authority in the 1860s. As a child, young Pearl was dazzled by Tz'u-hsi, and hoped that she might one day grow up to become empress herself.³

Chinkiang, where the Sydenstrickers lived during Pearl's childhood, was a small port city in Kiangsu province, a day's ride east of Nanking. Lying at the intersection of the Yangtze River and the ancient Grand Canal that linked the Yangtze with the northern capital city of Peking, Chinkiang was a maze of narrow streets and alleys. The crowded lanes bustled with merchants, scholars, messengers, vagrants, beggars, lepers, soldiers, and children.

Pearl spent hours wandering these streets, overhearing the talk of ordinary people, and watching the barbers, herbal doctors, food vendors, carpenters, and slaves go about their business. Occasionally an aristocratic woman would be carried past in a lavishly decorated sedan chair, borne on the shoulders of four sweating men. Pearl watched New Year's festivals and weddings and funerals; she learned that red was the color of good luck, white the color of death and mourning. She often ate with her family's servants and acquired a taste for the local cuisine.

In 1900, Pearl's unusual but peaceful life was shattered by the Boxer Uprising. The Boxers were Chinese nationalists who wanted to exterminate Western intruders. They attacked several Western settlements, and killed hundreds of men, women, and children, including a number of missionaries.

The Sydenstrickers spent several fearful months during the uprising wondering what their fate might be. The violence was centered mainly north and west of Chinkiang, but Westerners along much of the coast and inland also were molested and killed. Absalom was sometimes stoned and spat upon as he continued relentlessly with his preaching. On one frightening occasion, he was tied to a post and forced to watch as an angry mob tortured a Chinese Christian convert woman to death.

It was in these days, Buck later wrote, that the two worlds

INTRODUCTION

of her eight-year-old childhood finally split apart. Chinese friends now shunned the family, and Western visitors were fewer; the streets were alive with rumors—many, of course, based on fact—of brutality to missionaries and converts. Carie, Pearl, and the new baby, Grace, were evacuated to the relative safety of Shanghai, where they spent nearly a year as refugees, living in a boardinghouse near Bubbling Well Road. Absalom remained at his mission post, prepared to add his name to the list of Christian martyrs.

Carie waited anxiously in Shanghai through the long months of separation; she received only a few letters from her husband and fragmentary reports from other refugees. Each night, his daughters Pearl and baby Grace would pray, "God, please keep our father from the Boxers." When Absalom finally rejoined his family, he was exhausted, dispirited, and prepared to take an extended home leave.

In July 1901, the Sydenstrickers sailed from Shanghai for San Francisco; they would not return to China until September of the following year. When they landed in California, Pearl was shocked to see white men loading cargo and carrying baggage. "Mother," she asked Carie, "are even the coolies over here white people?"

The family spent most of the year's leave at Carie's family home in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Pearl's memories of those months eventually distilled themselves into a sequence of pleasant but rather vague images: cousins to play with, an orchard of fruit trees, cows and horses, an unwalled meadow. The big white house in West Virginia, so much larger than Chinese houses, was surrounded by acres of open fields, in sharp contrast to the crowded streets of Chinkiang and the minutely cultivated plots of rural Kiangsu province. In the summer, red and white grapes hung from the arbor, low enough for a little girl to reach, and the fall brought a radiance to the trees on the hillsides that she had never seen in China. For the first time in her life, she heard English being spoken on the streets and in the shops of the towns she visited.

As the furlough year drew to a close, Carie worried that China's political instability made a return to Chinkiang unwise. Absalom scoffed at his wife's misgivings, and the

INTRODUCTION

Sydenstrickers went back to their mission post in the fall of 1902. For the next few years, Absalom continued his missionary work, but Pearl now realized that her family and all Westerners were regarded as unwelcome outsiders.

In 1909, Pearl was enrolled at Miss Jewell's School in Shanghai, once the most highly regarded English school in Asia, now shabby and declining in prestige. From the first day, Pearl heartily despised the place. The school had little to teach her, but to the teenaged Pearl, Shanghai, the largest city in Asia, was a revelation. As she put it years later, Shanghai was "the most amazing city in the world's last century." It was a gathering place for people from all over the world, a magnet for commerce, culture, and organized crime. The vast international settlement was a symbol of both worldly diversity and foreign oppression; signs in the public parks warned that both dogs and Chinese were forbidden.

Pearl's sojourn at Miss Jewell's introduced her to the best and worst of Shanghai, a sequence of experiences that marked her for life. Most memorably, she did volunteer work at the Door of Hope, a shelter for Chinese slave girls and prostitutes. Because Pearl could speak Chinese, she was also able to talk with the women, who told her stories of incalculable brutality. Pearl's embryonic feminism was undoubtedly nurtured by the squalor and suffering she saw in the Door of Hope, a place that one Western visitor described as "more a sorrowful jail than a bright haven." Here were women and girls whose lives had been crushed solely because of the bad luck of their gender and poverty.

After a few months in Shanghai, Pearl returned to Chinkiang, then traveled with her family to the United States. She had been admitted to Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she enrolled in September 1910. Her college years were not happy ones. She earned good grades and a measure of acceptance from her classmates—in her junior year she was elected president of her class—but she always felt like an outsider.

Pearl had intended to remain in the U.S. after her graduation, but she was called back to Chinkiang to nurse her mother, whose health was declining. During Pearl's

INTRODUCTION

years in America, China had been transformed. In the winter of 1911–1912, the Ch'ing dynasty of the Manchus had been swept away by revolution. On February 12, 1912, the last emperor, five-year-old Pu-Yi, abdicated in favor of a republic.

In spite of its early promise, the major preliminary result of the upheavals was multiplied confusion. The conglomeration of groups and individuals who made the revolution had little in common except their opposition to the Manchus. Once the goal of eradicating the monarchy had been achieved, the coalition began to dissolve into its more radical and conservative elements.

Among the radicals, the most widely known leader was an English-speaking physician and Christian, Sun Yat-sen, the expatriate head of the Revolutionary Alliance. Sun learned about the revolution while traveling through the American West on a fund-raising tour. He returned to China to be inaugurated as China's first president, but he resigned almost immediately to make room for Yuan Shih-k'ai, a powerful general who soon began to exhibit imperial tendencies of his own.

Deposing the emperor proved easier than governing the nation. The history of China for nearly the next forty years, until the Communist victory of 1949, was a turbulent, ceaseless struggle among warring factions for legitimacy and control. Millions of people died in the years of turmoil that followed the Revolution.

Pearl's life also changed dramatically after she returned from Randolph-Macon. At Kuling, a summer retreat for Westerners in the mountains south of Nanking, she met John Lossing Buck, a Cornell graduate and an expert in agricultural economics. In 1917, Pearl and Lossing were married, and spent the next several years in Nanhsuchou, in rural Anhwei province. Nanhsuchou was a barren, dusty village, home to several thousand impoverished farmers who tried to scratch a living from the thin soil. From time to time, the peasants were terrorized by local warlords.

The Anhwei years were pivotal for Pearl Buck. She learned a great deal about the daily lives of China's poorest inhabitants, and she became intimately familiar with the

INTRODUCTION

cruelty and hardship that marked existence in a rural society. A decade later, Nansuchou provided the primary setting for Buck's first stories of China, including *The Good Earth*.

In 1920, Pearl and Lossing left the countryside and moved to Nanking, where he had received an offer from the University of Nanking. The couple moved into a faculty house on the university grounds; Pearl helped Lossing with his research, and also taught English and religion at several local high schools and colleges.

Over the next few years, Pearl Buck suffered a succession of tragedies. She had always wanted children, and was delighted when she became pregnant. In 1921, she gave birth to a daughter, a beautiful child whom she named Carol. Her joy was short-lived. After the difficult delivery, Buck's doctor discovered a uterine tumor, which necessitated a hysterectomy: she would have no more children. Shortly afterward, she learned that Carol was retarded. At about the same time, her beloved mother, Carie, died. Her marriage to Lossing began to disintegrate, partly because of deep personal differences, but also because of the strain caused by her sterilization, Carol's condition, and Carie's death. These were years of intense sorrow for Pearl Buck.

She and Lossing spent the winter of 1924-1925 at Cornell, where Lossing completed the course work for his Ph.D., and Pearl earned an M.A. in English. Her master's thesis, "China and the West," won a cash prize as the best essay of her year. She also met Eleanor Roosevelt for the first time, when Mrs. Roosevelt lectured at Cornell's home economics department. The acquaintance would ripen into a lifelong friendship. During the year, Lossing and Pearl adopted a baby girl, Janice.

When they returned to China, the country was gripped by spreading civil war. Sun Yat-sen had died in the spring of 1925. Chiang Kai-shek had emerged as Sun's successor, but he was savagely opposed throughout much of the country by warlords and Communists. It was one of the most chaotic periods in Chinese history.

In March 1927, the battles reached Nanking. The vice president of the university was killed, and the Buck family

INTRODUCTION

spent an entire day hiding in a windowless hut while their house was looted. If they had been discovered, they would almost surely have been killed. They fled to Shanghai on an American gunboat, then moved to Japan, where they lived most of the following year.

Pearl Buck began to rebuild her life, redefining her relationship with her daughter, her husband, and her work. She had found that she could not provide Carol the constant care she needed, so she traveled to the U.S. and installed her daughter in the Vineland Training Center in New Jersey. Pearl had also concluded that her marriage could not be salvaged. Though she did not file for divorce until 1935, she had told Lossing Buck that she intended to leave him several years before that.

Finally, Pearl Buck dedicated herself to her writing. In the first half of the 1920s, she had published a couple of stories and essays, but she now worked diligently on a novel. She wanted to earn enough money to pay for Carol's care, and she also wanted to have her own identity, apart from her husband and the missionary community. In 1930, her first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, was published by the John Day Company, a small firm in New York. Buck's literary career was under way. Within a few months, her father, Absalom, died, thus cutting another link that bound her to the past, to China, and to the missionary enterprise. Buck now decided that she would move permanently back to the United States with Janice. She wanted to be closer to her daughter Carol, and further away from Lossing.

The Good Earth was Pearl Buck's second book. A main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, it was published on March 2, 1931. Pearl Buck was still in China, so she left all the details of publicity and marketing to her publisher. In a flurry of letters in March and April, Buck learned of the reception *The Good Earth* was enjoying from readers and reviewers. Every leading newspaper and magazine gave the book a major notice, and almost all the reviews were ecstatic. Sales were so strong that the John Day Company had to borrow copies from the Book-of-the-Month Club inventory to meet bookstore demand. *The Good Earth*

INTRODUCTION

would eventually prove to be the best-selling book of both 1931 and 1932.

Since Buck was unknown and virtually out of reach in Nanking, John Day's publicity department had little material to work with. "It is a curious feeling," John Day's publisher, Richard Walsh, said in one of his many letters, "writing to you at so great a distance about these matters. We sit here in a genuine whirl of excitement about the book which you have written and you the author are completely detached from it."⁴ Buck turned back Walsh's pleas for detailed biographical information, taking the lofty (and allegedly "Chinese") position that the work was more important than the author. More pertinent, she wanted to protect her own privacy and conceal Carol's condition from the public's remorseless curiosity. Carol's illness also subtracted from the happiness Buck enjoyed in her accomplishment.

The book that changed Pearl Buck's life forever was at once innovative and familiar, groundbreaking in its subject matter but thoroughly conventional in its techniques. *The Good Earth* is set in Anhwei province, in a rural landscape identical to Nansuchou, where Pearl and Lossing Buck had spent the early years of their marriage. The novel's simple but eventful plot follows the life of its principal character, the Chinese farmer Wang Lung, from his marriage day to his old age. Wang Lung's triumphs and defeats map the encounter between traditional China and the revolutionary future.

He has grown up in an isolated, illiterate community, where patriarchal piety is the core value, and survival depends on an endless round of crushing physical labor. Because he is the son of a poor farmer, Wang Lung has few options in choosing a wife. To save money, his father has directed him to buy a slave from the House of Hwang, the leading family in the region. The woman, O-lan, is the novel's most memorable character. She accepts her status and fate without complaint, submerging whatever personal desires she might have in her tasks as wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. At the same time, she is portrayed as the story's