

Oppressing and Discriminating Women as Depicted in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*

A Research Paper by:

Asst. Lecturer: Dlnya Abdalla Mohammed

University of Sulaimani, faculty of physical and Basis Education,
school of Basis Education, Department of Englisg

Introduction

The research contains the introduction which sheds light on Buck's career and literary background. The second part deals with the status of women in the ancient Chinese culture. The third part presents women's trauma through the practices of keeping concubine, foot binding, female infanticide, and selling daughters as slaves. The fourth part concludes the findings of the research on the subject.

Pearl S. Buck was an enduring feminist, and she took a feminine tone towards the suffering of women in China. She depicted the inferior status of women in traditional China with sensitive impressions.

Buck's *The Good Earth* clearly portrays the cruelties and unfairness suffered by Chinese women. She uses the character O-lan to illustrate the extreme injustices suffered by Chinese women and the lack of options they have in life. Buck's primary source for *The Good Earth* can be traced back to her own experience in rural China.

Pearl S. Buck was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, on 26 June 1892. She was the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1938. When she was three months old, her missionary parents brought her to China where she spent most of the first forty years of her life. She was raised by a Chinese nurse who told her popular tales and myths, and she could speak and write both English and Chinese by the age of four. Her life in the rural areas of China gave her deep understanding into the thinking of the Chinese people. Peter Conn, Buck's scholarly biographer, says that Buck lived in two distinct worlds "the small white clean Presbyterian American world of [her] parents and the big loving

merry not – so – clean Chinese world” (Conn, 1998: 24). Consequently, she grew up a bilingual.

While studying in Miss Jewell’s School in Shanghai, an establishment that educated privileged Western girls, she volunteered at The Golden Door, a shelter for Chinese slave girls and prostitutes. Throughout her years in China, Buck was deeply affected by the condition of oppressed and the inferior status of women and girls and continued to pay particular attention to them. She was preoccupied with the social problems around her. She described women’s trauma in the Chinese society. Buck was a lifelong feminist, and she took a feminine tone towards the oppression of women in China.

The theme of her works made her different from other writers of similar concerns. Buck emphasized equality for all through social revolution. Her efforts on behalf of equality included tireless support for women's rights. Throughout her early formative years racial equality was ingrained into her. As far as she was concerned there was no one race that was better than any other one (Ibid.: 290).

Spending most of her life in China, Pearl Buck wanted to be remembered and thought of as an interpreter of China and Asia. In her autobiography, *My Several Worlds* 1954, she described herself as having a missionary impulse to inform her fellow countrymen about Asia. She expanded on those same feelings in one of her last books, *China: Past and Present* (1972), when she wrote with considerable emotion, “My beloved people of China . . . You formed me, fed me, you shaped me as I am forever.” And she added, “To the best of my ability, I have tried to speak for you” (Buck: 176-177).

Peter Conn simply stated: “For two generations of Americans, Buck invented China” (Conn, 1946: 1). Other scholars go even further, saying that Buck’s writings so changed the average American’s impression of Chinese people in the years before the Second World War that Americans became eager supporters of China in its war against Japan. Pearl Buck did more than write books that influence people. She used her celebrity to raise money for war-relief efforts in China in the 1930s and 1940s, fight racial

discrimination in the United States, and promote cultural understanding (Melvin: 27).

Through her writings Pearl Buck tried to talk about China and introduce it to the West. The first Chinese translation of *The Good Earth* was serialized in *The Oriental* magazine from January 1932. The years that followed saw a number of Chinese scholars and writers translate works by the foreign woman writer who lived among them and interpreted their nation to the West. As a result, most of Pearl Buck's books on China published in the 1930s and 1940s have Chinese translations. They include *The Good Earth* 1931, *East Wind: West Wind* 1930, *Sons* 1932, *The Mother* 1934, *A House Divided* 1935, *The Promise* 1943, *The Patriot* 1939, *The Chinese Novel* 1939, *The First Wife and Other Stories* 1933, *Today and Forever* 1941, *Dragon Seed* 1942, *Pavilion of Women* 1946, and *The Journey of Life*. No other book by any foreigner has ever achieved such popularity in China (Haiping: 58).

Her breakthrough novel, *The Good Earth* sold 1,800,000 copies in its first year. It has been translated into more than thirty languages and was filmed in 1937. Many historians believe that the novel's style, a combination of biblical prose and the Chinese narrative saga, increased the dignity of its characters (Isaacs: 155). Some Chinese critics of the book condemned Buck's depiction of China. From small details such as how tea is made in China, to larger topics such as the relationship between slaves and masters. Many questioned Buck's sincerity, arguing that no matter how long Pearl Buck lived in China or how well she knew the culture, she was still a foreigner, and thus not allowed to judge on Chinese way of life. Buck's true depiction of the reality of Chinese life belongs to her trips with her first husband, John Lossing, through countless villages across the North China plain, he looking for data, she talking to the people, that Pearl Buck discovered the Chinese people especially the peasant's life. Nothing else in her life would ever be quite as important as that discovery (Thomson Jr.: 9).

Through her writings Buck tried to talk about China and introduce it to the West. She criticized women for enduring bitter realities of life doing so many works and sacrificing their life for the sake of others. They had no will in their choices and had a

bitter life yet they remained loyal to their families. She believed that the only solution is to educate women into independent human beings.

Buck was a humanitarian writer. Throughout her life she devoted much of her energy and money to the welfare of children. In particular, she worked for children who were mentally or physically disabled, or were disadvantaged because of their race. Buck's simple but passionate faith in human solidarity led her to ground an organization to be a place for these children and put them in real homes. So, in 1949 she established Welcome House (Conn, 1946: 3).

She knew how the orphaned children felt, being outsiders and rejected, because she was essentially a Chinese child born of white parents. She grew up Chinese, but she would not be totally accepted as one, and even though she was white, the West would not totally accept her because of her Chinese ways of life (Buck, D.: 37). The conflict she faced all her life can be summed up in a quotation from *My Several Worlds*: "I grew up in China, in one world and not of it, and belonging to another world and yet not of it" (Buck: 51). As a result, in 1964 she set up the Pearl S. Buck Foundation. Buck died of lung cancer in 1973.

1. The Status of Women in the Ancient Chinese Culture.

Chinese family had a hierarchical structure. At its head was the father who had full authority over the other family members. He had complete control over his wife and could divorce her if she displeased or disobeyed him. Chinese women stood at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They had no rights of property ownership and lacked formal decision-making capacity within the family. The low position of women came from the belief that they were temporary members in their family, and strangers in their husbands' families. Because of the male-dominated family structure, women were always looked upon as outsiders. The only way for a woman to gain any status was to bear male children (Tamney: 132).

Women in ancient Chinese culture underwent a hard life. They were disgraced and humiliated before men. They were abused and disrespected. Women lived according to the rules set by Confucius. The essential wisdom of Confucianism is borrowed

from the concept of “yin” and “yang”. “Yin” stands for femininity which is weak and passive while “yang” represents masculinity which is strong and active. Based on this concept, men and women were not equal; they were as dissimilar as heaven and earth. Men were significant and superior while women were unworthy and inferior (Hong: 21).

Men governed the Chinese society while women were dependant on their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. During maturity, they had to listen to their fathers and other male members of the family. After marriage, they would serve their husbands like slaves and should not raise their voices. When she was widowed she should submit to her son. They had no right to conceive their thoughts and feelings. They were not permitted to make any decisions regarding their families.

Young women were not able to choose their husbands; the traditional Chinese marriage system was organized by the parents which left women with no voice in the society. Usually, the groom's parents chose a suitable bride for their son. Therefore, traditional marriage process was a business contract between families not a ceremony of celebrating love between two people. Men were allowed to have more than one wife. If the husband of a young Chinese woman died, she was not allowed to remarry. If a man was not satisfied with his wife for any reason, it was enough for him to divorce her. If a couple had any children, the husband took them after divorce, not the wife. The woman would have to go back to her parents' house and even that was too much of a shame for her family. As young girls they were taught to be good housewives and good mothers. The main job of a woman in ancient China was to take care of households and to bear sons (Tamney: 133).

2. Women's Oppression in *The Good Earth*

In *The Good Earth*, Pearl S. Buck clearly describes and portrays women's oppression in ancient Chinese society. She shows the tough life faced by many women in Chinese community.

The Chinese traditional view was that a woman provides for the family, that she was only capable of working around the house and be under a complete control of a husband not like an assistant

but more like a slave. Women were inferior to men; they were treated differently according to their classes. Rich women had authority and certain rights. They could have their own slaves, mostly women slaves, to help them with the household duties. As for the poor women they had to suffer regular criticism and suppression.

Although women's role diversifies, all were subservient (Yao: 199). Women could be a household slave, like Cuckoo; a slave who worked in the House of Hwang and was a concubine of the old lord. She could be a prostitute serving any man's pleasure in a tea house, like Lotus Flower. She could be a concubine serving only her master's pleasure, again like Lotus; who was a prostitute at the tea shop until Wang Lung purchases her.

Eleanor Pam stated that the primary focus of the novel is Wang Lung's three relationships. These relationships emphasize and distinguish conventional roles of females in a traditional Chinese society. O-lan, his wife, serves as his working class partner who sustains the family and home. Lotus, his concubine, symbolizes his status and provides him with pleasure. Pear Blossom, a young servant girl, offers comfort and company when he is old. However, none of these women can achieve success on their own. Rich or poor, they are obliged to serve Wang Lung.

Men's superiority over women was the essential belief in a traditional Chinese society. The author manages to display the truth by using serious examples of the practice of keeping concubines, foot-binding, female infanticide, selling and buying daughters in the society (Pam: 123).

2.1 Bad Omen

In the ancient Chinese society, the birth of a daughter was always not accepted by any family, which indirectly showed the great prejudice towards women during that time. Daughters were always associated with misfortune, bad luck, and the burden to the family that might bring great harms and disadvantages than benefits to the family. The birth of a female child was considered to be both a time of sadness and a time of an evil omen. She was

thought to be only a temporary member of the family; someone who had to be supported until she could be married (Huntley: 2).

The inequality between male and female was quite obvious. They regarded women as a weaker gender. This situation is clearly demonstrated in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, whereby women continue to be suppressed. Controlled by the traditional Chinese society's belief, women were expected to be inferior groups in every aspect of life. They were only capable of becoming a concubine, a wife, and a mother (Tamney: 131). Moreover, a birth of a girl was thought to be a great disaster in a family as they were believed to bring evil destiny. Because of this attitude, women were subjected to high-levels of infanticide or sold as slaves to wealthier families because they believed that female children only brought shame to a family. This showed the injustice of gender as females were continually oppressed and had to face hardships forced by ancient Chinese society's belief in their whole life from abuse in childhood to servitude in adulthood.

The belief that the birth of a female child in a family was a misfortune continues throughout the book. When O-lan gives birth to her first daughter, she herself is distressed as she knows that a girl would not satisfy her husband. She tells Wang Lung that the child is not worth mentioning. Because it is only a girl, it does not deserve any recognition. she says "it is only a slave this time-not worth mentioning". The novel describes Wang Lung's displeasure, "A sense of evil struck him. A girl! A girl was causing all this trouble in his uncle's house. Now a girl had been born in his house as well" (Ch.7: 65).

Wang Lung considers the birth of his daughters to be signs that the gods are not favoring him. He is extremely distraught and depressed. He thought of that new mouth come into his house and it stuck him. He even went as far as to think that an era of bad luck has begun for him, "he groaned a loud. It was an evil omen" (Ch.7: 66) because daughters are raised only to be given to other families. Even at the temple, Wang Lung always requests for a grandson rather than a granddaughter from the two earth gods.

Women's oppression was obvious. However, when it came to bearing boys, they were given a little bit of respect. Such change in the feeling toward a woman is presented in the novel when O-lan

gives birth to a boy child Wang Lung says, “I will go into the city and buy a pound of red sugar and stir it into boiling water for you to drink” (Ch.3: 38).

He never offers to give O-lan anything or any favors but when she gives birth to a son, he begins to treat his wife with some kind of respect. This shows that women were just seen to be child bearing machines.

Female babies were regarded as worthless and burdensome. In order to avoid evil spirits from their firstborn son, O-lan and Wang Lung pretend that their child is an unacceptable female with a terminal disease. He opened his coat hastily and thrust the child's head into his bosom and he said in a loud voice, “What a pity our child is a female whom no one could want and covered with small pox as well! Let us pray it may die” (Ch.5: 51).

Another concrete example that shows that women are discriminated by men is the way Wang Lung calls his eldest daughter which is another form of oppression of women. He calls her “Little fool” or “poor little fool” which shows that he does not like her as much as his sons.

2.2 Female Infanticide

By using the act of killing female infant, Pearl S. Buck manages to show that women had a low base status in the ancient society. Infanticide was widespread and it almost became a common issue and trend during that time (Yao: 90).

When the whole family starves without food, but a few beans from a neighbor, O-lan swiftly kills her daughter, right after the girl's birth. “There was no second cry, and over the house the stillness became impenetrable” (Ch.9: 81). Female infanticide occurs regularly during a famine or simply because the family does not want a girl.

2.3 Selling Daughters

Women had not been valued as human beings but more as items in Chinese society for centuries. The sense that female children were commodities to be constantly bought and sold persists throughout the book. During the famine, men sold their

daughters in exchange for money or farming tools with which they would rebuild their lives.

In poor families, a daughter could be sold as a slave to a rich man; O-lan, for example, was sold when she was a young girl. When Wang Lung faces famine and has nothing to eat, his wife suggests to sell their daughter so that the family can move back to the land, "There is nothing to sell except the girl... I was sold...I was sold to a great house so that my parents could return to their home" (Ch.13: 117). Overcoming grief and reluctance, she knows that selling her daughter is the only option. From this, one can conclude that marketing girls was common in China.

During their journey back to their land Wang Lung saw a man ploughing, from the distance, using a strong ox. He liked the ox so he called out "what will you sell it for..." the farmer called back, "I would sooner sell my wife than this ox..." (Ch.15: 139).

As Wang Lung returns to the land, he discovers that his uncle, in order to feed himself, sold all of his girl cousins during the famine. Even the ugly ones were sold to provide every last bit of money. "The girls... were sold, the prettiest first, for the price they could bring, but even the last one, who was pock-marked, was sold for a handful of pence to a soldier who was passing through to battle" (Ch.15: 142). These clearly show that women were considered more as items than human beings.

When Wang Lung becomes rich he buys slaves, girls from poor families, for all the members of his household. Girl servants worked hard and tried to do exactly what they were told to; nevertheless, they were abused and mistreated by lords and even by male servants. Women were considered inferior even among the slaves. They were robbed of the chance to enjoy what they deserve; money, love, and respect. They were physically and sexually abused. In support of this, Pearl S. Buck portrays abuses of women in her book via her character, O-lan, when she says,

I was beaten with a leather thong which had been halter for one of the mules, and it hung upon the kitchen wall". On the next breath she continues, "Aye, beaten or carried to a man's bed, as the whim was, and not to one man's only but to any that might desire her that night, and the young

lords bickered and bartered with each other for this slave or that and said, 'then you tonight, I tomorrow,' and when they were all alike wearied of a slave the men servants bickered and bartered for what the young lord left, and this before a slave was out of childhood – if she was pretty (Ch.14: 133).

2.4 Obedience

Chinese society's emphasis on women's submissive nature clearly showed feminine oppression. Once born, girls had no place to claim in the family. Most families expected their daughter to behave like a lady as a child, faithful as a wife and loyal as a daughter-in-law (Hong: 21).

Pearl S. Buck introduces O-lan as a perfect example of an ideal woman. In her childhood, she had no right to argue against her parents' wish to sell her as a slave to the House of Hwang. She was constantly beaten and raped by the lords of the house. This already tells about the dilemma of women of a lower status, and because the society thinks that they are incapable of performing anything other than housework. They are put into harsh slavery; they work for the rich, cleaning their houses, making meals for them, and working on their farms.

When Wang Lung needs a wife, his father arranges to buy O-lan for him from the House of Hwang, where she is a slave. A revealing discussion occurs when Wang Lung arrives to take her away from the Hwang family. The Hwangs deny her any control over her life even on the decision of marriage. The Old Mistress from the Great House of Hwang sells O-Lan to Wang Lung and orders her to carrying out her duty by obeying to Wang Lung's demands and instructions absolutely without any questioning and providing him with a lot of sons. To Wang Lung she says, "Take her and use her well" and to O-lan she says, "Obey him and bear him sons and yet more sons" (Ch.1: 18).

Before their marriage, Wang-Lung expects her to work and serve faithfully, "Now the father and son could rest. There was a woman coming to the house. Never again would Wang Lung have to rise summer and winter at dawn..." (Ch.1: 3).The book reflects

Chinese value of women as property of their husbands. For example, when O-lan cooks her first meal for Wang Lung, he really enjoys the meal yet, as he believes he must be firm to his wife, he says, "It is poor stuff. It is badly prepared" (Ch.1: 23). She spends most of her life in the kitchen and around the field to make her husband's life comfortable and simple for him. Wang Lung barely lauds her for her achievements in the house and her outstanding help at the farm; she receives neither appreciation nor passion from him in return. Even if Wang Lung has a slight thankfulness in him for his wife, he would have refused to show it because of the Chinese traditional cultural belief (Rebeca: 64).

Even though Wang Lung does not love her and later takes home a beautiful concubine, O-lan makes no comment and continues to serve him sincerely, "...and she went her way silently. In the morning she heated water and presented it to the old man, and to Wang Lung..." (Ch.21: 203).

O-lan's regular work without complaints carry the family through hard times. As a wife, she is constantly expected to obey her husband without question. For example, when Wang Lung discovers that O-lan has a sack of jewels, he asks for them and she obeys without question, except for the bold request to keep two small pearls which she later surrenders to him when he demands them; he takes away her luxurious possession, the two pearls, because he wanted to give them to a girl he met in a tea house,

Then slowly she thrust her wet wrinkled hand into her bosom and she drew forth the small package and she gave it to him and watched him as he unwrapped it; and the pearls lay in his hand and they caught softly and fully the light of the sun, and he laughed. But O-lan returned to the beating of his clothes and when tears dropped slowly and heavily from her eyes she did not put up her hand to wipe them away; only she beat the more steadily with her wooden stick upon the clothes spread over the stone (Ch.19: 186).

Not only women's subservience show oppression, but required behavioral conduct also shows the strict rules Chinese

women had to follow. Husband and wife could never walk together on the streets. While O-lan and Wang Lung were walking back from Hwang's house to theirs, "Once or twice he looked back at her. She plodded along steadily on her big feet..." (Ch.1: 19). Many women acted with fear toward their male counterparts, "...when he called her she put up her arm suddenly in her sleep as though to defend herself from a blow" (Ch.1: 23). Before the birth of her first son, O-lan almost begs for three pieces of silver to buy clothes, "If you will give me three silver pieces..., she said fearfully" (Ch.3: 34). When O-lan saw her daughter-in-law for the first time she became content for "...she knew her duty and she moved about the house quietly with her eyes downcast. She was careful and correct in all her behavior..." (Ch.26: 259).

Men's superiority over women was the central ideology in a traditional Chinese society. They believed that men must never submit to women. When Wang Lung and his bride, O-lan, reach their home, Wang Lung's father intentionally ignores her. The book describes it as, "It would have been beneath him to notice her. Instead he feigned great interest in the clouds and comments on the weather" (Ch.1: 21). His ignorance of O-lan illustrates his scorn for women. To him, she is merely a person to be used for the household duties, not someone to be appreciated. Besides, Wang Lung's father holds on strongly to traditional Confucian sex-role beliefs.

He is insistent that women are meant to be used as servants. He is portrayed as impatient for his evening meal, he cries out, "I'm too old to wait for my food like this" (Ch.2: 31). He says this to O-lan when she returns home from the fields with Wang Lung. He refuses to prepare his own meals since she is now staying with them. His attitude shows that he holds women responsible for all domestic chores.

Similar to his father, Wang Lung views women in inferior terms. He feels that they are not worth thinking of or mentioning. Wang Lung is ashamed of his interest in O-lan, thinking "She was, after all, only a woman" (Ch.3: 34). This line of thinking strongly demonstrates Wang Lung's perception of women. He regarded O-lan as improper for all this attention because she is a female.

O-lan obeys Wang Lung completely. She suffers the insult of Wang Lung bringing the concubine Lotus into the house. She bursts into tears “but she answered nothing except to say over and over, moaning, ‘I have borne you sons--I have borne you sons’” (Ch.20: 194).

2.5 Foot Binding

Besides obedience, society's claim on specific behaviors illustrates the brutality faced by many women in their homes and in marriages. Different circumstances throughout the book force women to commit certain actions without considering the consequences. One of the horrible practices includes foot-binding.

Small feet were considered an attractive female feature in traditional Chinese culture. Chinese women at that time had to bind their feet because it was a mode and men preferred bound feet. Therefore, women with bound feet would be more likely to get married. Just to please men, women had to suffer the pain from their early years to the rest of their lives. Binding young girl's feet was a custom that was practiced for almost a thousand years. When a girl was between the ages of five and seven her mother would fold all her toes except her big toe beneath her foot, and then tightly wrap a thick bandage around the foot, so that it actually prevented the bones from growing and eventually caused the foot to fold in half. The ideal product of foot-binding was known as a lotus foot, a foot that, on a grown woman, was not more than three inches long (Blake: 676).

Since people valued tiny feet so much, it became impossible for a girl to marry into a wealthy family if her feet grew uncontrollably. For several centuries, foot-binding had been limited to women of the upper classes, but eventually it spread, in the nineteenth century over half of all Chinese women bound their feet. Though almost crippled by this process, yet Chinese women were expected to endure it to increase their appeal and beauty and become more acceptable for marriage.

Foot-binding was intended to please men and to enhance a man's status by showing he was wealthy enough for his wife or concubine not to work. *The Good Earth* tells how Chinese culture

embraced foot binding and how the size of women's feet was important (Hayes: 20). When Wang Lung first sees O-lan, he immediately notes that her feet are not bound and he becomes frustrated, "he saw with an instant's disappointment that her feet were not bound" (Ch.1: 17). O-lan's unbound feet will continue to bother and repulse Wang Lung.

Wang Lung begins to carefully examine O-lan as he becomes wealthier and more idle. Realizing that she is ugly, Wang Lung is defeated by her appearance. In a rush of anger, he hints at her unbound feet, and O-lan is immediately ashamed and apologetic. She promises to bind the feet of her daughter.

It seems as though a woman who wishes to be loved by her husband needs to have small, bound feet. This is what O-lan seems to have instilled in the second daughter.

Wang-Lung did not love O-lan because of her large feet even though they help her accomplish all her daily chores and farming work. He says heartlessly, "I would have my wife look less like a hind. And those feet of yours..." She replies and says, "My mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young" (Ch.18: 169). As a result, O-lan believes that the best future for her daughter lies in delicate small feet. Despite extreme pain and cruelty, she tightly binds her daughter's feet. "...her mother had bound her feet well, so that she moved about with small graceful steps. The girl cries every night because of the pain caused by the binding of her feet. But when Wang Lung looked at her thus closely he saw the marks of tears on her cheeks...". He asks her why she cries, she replies "because my mother binds a cloth about my feet more tightly every day and I cannot sleep at night" (Ch.25: 248). O-lan has also told the daughter that her future husband will not love her unless she keeps her feet small with constant binding. The physical torture given to women for the transformation of their feet is an example of women's oppression in the novel.

Thus as Wang Lung becomes wealthier, foot-binding takes on more significance to him. Even though he noticed on their first meeting that O-lan had big feet, yet during the years of work, this fact did not bother him. When he has more money and leisure, however, he looks at O-lan, and she seems to him that "she was altogether hideous, but the most hideous of all were her big feet in

their loose cotton cloth shoes” (Ch.18: 169). Now that he has money, Wang Lung begins to realize that something is lacking in his life. It is then that he discovers the concubine Lotus, and his attraction for her is based, in part, on her small bound feet.

The practice of foot-binding symbolized many things to the Chinese man. To Wang Lung, it symbolizes, among other things, the aristocratic society from which he was excluded. In Wang Lung's case, it is enjoyable to have a woman with bound feet. She is almost useless as she could not work in the fields or carry heavy loads, as O-lan did. She is kept as a "toy" to show other men that the master of the house can feed a mouth that does not work for its pay. The possession of Lotus by Wang Lung causes the villagers to respect him more. It shows that he is rich enough to afford his pleasures; he does not worry where his next meal is coming from.

When Wang Lung moves Lotus into his house and builds her own separate court, she never goes out. One reason for this is simply that she could not walk long distances nor even stand for longer than a few minutes on her bound feet. She has to be carried to Wang Lung's house because her bound feet were too delicate to make the journey. She is kept like a toy or a pet, one who is expected to serve no other function than being a sex object.

2.6 Concubine

The practice of having concubine was a logical outgrowth of the Chinese family structure, particularly as it applied to the position of women in the Chinese family, in which the male was the supreme authority.

Though women's roles varied, all were subservient. As a peasant wife a woman worked both in the house and in the fields, like O-lan. She could be a household slave, like Cuckoo. She could be a prostitute serving any man's pleasure in a tea house, like Lotus Flower, or a concubine serving only her master's pleasure, again like Lotus when she assumes this role in Wang's house. Finally, she could be an upper-class wife like the eldest son's wife in the Great House, with servants to wait on her and do the housework. Rich or poor women exist only to let others benefit by being available at the disposal for men; to get sold, killed or to be used as commodity.

The possession of a concubine was a sign that a man had wealth and enough money to devote himself to some of the finer refinements and joys of life. Thus the possession of a concubine brought Wang Lung prestige and respect (Hu).

The duties of the concubine were quite simple. She existed entirely to entertain and delight her master. She was not expected to accomplish any household duties or to have any responsibilities other than those of the bed chamber. She was provided usually with a separate court of her own, and she was expected to remain there and always be ready for her master's desires. She had to use whatever power she possessed to attract her master and to gain his total favor. This was easy for Lotus Flower since Wang Lung has desire for her. Her beauty, including her small feet, totally fascinated him.

There are certain differences between how the poor and the rich women were treated in the traditional Chinese society. Rich Chinese women could have their own slaves to do work for them; however, they did not have the rights to study and become scholars. Only men at that time were considered to be able to receive education and achieve a higher status. Overall, rich women had a lower status than rich men, because in the Chinese culture, they considered men as the king of the house. On the other hand, poor women were born to work for the rest of their lives; they were either bought or sold into slavery. Even when they married, they were left with the house duties and became slaves for the husband. In conclusion, a wife was expected to bear male children, while the concubine was expected only to please her master. Furthermore, the wife had limited duties and was in charge of running the household, including the training of the female children in the proper way to manage their own households. The concubine, however, had no duties except to keep herself beautiful for her master and to satisfy his every sexual desire (Huntley).

Conclusion

Chinese society was an exclusively masculine society with laws written by men; society was managed mainly by males. As a result, there was a persistent belief in men's superiority over

women. This belief eventually became the ruling ideology throughout the society.

Chinese culture held significant influence in molding the character's behavior. Chinese women were destined for prejudice since birth. Women were consistently mistreated and thanklessly used as tools to make the lives of their husbands better. Women of that era, no matter how clever, beautiful, or helpful, were subservient in their roles as children, as wives, as mothers, as slaves, or as general members of society. Women's role and status were clearly defined in a Confucian society. In Chinese society women's behavior was governed by the obedience; a woman must obey her father as a daughter, obey her husband as a wife and obey her sons in widowhood. Many Chinese women had limited freedom because of the emphasis on subservience, certain behavioral demands and cruel yet popular practices in the society. Women were always being referred to as the second-class humans while men were the first-class humans.

Pearl Buck is a humanitarian writer and her writings are of moral issues that deal with many aspects of the sordid atmosphere of the modern world and the inner torments of women. Throughout the book, Buck shows all the false values of contemporary society which denies the importance of individual personality. She has successfully portrayed the ugly side of the ancient Chinese society which oppressed and discriminated women. Through the character of O-lan, Buck explores the position and trauma of women in traditional Chinese culture, focusing on the hardships and limitations faced by women, from abuse in childhood to servitude in adulthood.

In her novel, *The Good Earth*, she portrayed women in such a way as their society expected them to be; women were expected to be calm, passive, patient and obedient. She enlightens us about dilemmas faced by masses of Chinese women.

Pearl S. Buck strongly opposed discrimination and oppression that were practiced against women. She calls for equality between men and women as both are equal and worth respect and dignity. She criticizes women's passive role and doing nothing in order to improve their situation in a society dominated by men.

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الملخص

كان المجتمع الصيني مجتمع ذكوري بشكل حصري حيث ان قوانين مكتوبة من قبل الرجال و كان المجتمع يدار بشكل رئيسي من قبل الذكور. ونتيجة لذلك، كان هناك اعتقاد باستمرارية تفوق الرجال على النساء. هذا الاعتقاد أصبح في نهاية المطاف فكر الحاكم في جميع أنحاء المجتمع.

الثقافة الصينية لها تأثير كبير في سلوك الافراد. كانت المرأة الصينية معرضة

للمساس منذ الولادة. فقد كانت النساء يتعرضن لسوء المعاملة باستمرار و تستخدم كأداة لجعل حياة أزواجهن أفضل. النساء في تلك الحقبة، مهما كانت ذكية، جميلة، أو مفيدة، كانت خاضعة للعمل في أدوارها كطفل، كزوجة، كأمهات، كعبيد، أو كأعضاء عامة للمجتمع. دور المرأة ومكانتها في مجتمع الكونفوشيوسية كانت محددة بوضوح ؛ حيث يجب على المرأة أن تطيع والدها كابنة، تطيع زوجها كزوجة و تطيع أبنائها في الترميل.

كان للعديد من النساء الصينيات حرية محدودة بسبب التركيز على التبعية. ودائما ما يشار إليها بان النساء بشر من الدرجة الثانية في حين أن الرجال كانوا بشرا من الدرجة الأولى.

بيرل باك كاتبة إنسانية وكتاباتهما تدور حول القضايا الأخلاقية التي تتعامل فيها مع الجو الدنيئ للعالم الحديث و العذاب النفسي للنساء. باك تعرض في الكتاب، القيم الزائفة للمجتمع المعاصر الذي ينكر أهمية شخصية الفرد. و صورت الكاتبة في روايتها. بنجاح، الجانب القبيح للمجتمع الصيني القديم التي تضطهد المرأة من خلال شخصية اولان، بيرل باك تستكشف موقف والصدمات النفسية للمرأة في الثقافة الصينية التقليدية، مع التركيز على المصاعب والقيود التي تواجهها المرأة، من سوء المعاملة في مرحلة الطفولة إلى العبودية في مرحلة البلوغ. في روايتها، الأرض الطيبة، صورت النساء بالشكل الذي يتوقعه لها مجتمعهم أن تكون؛ وكان من المتوقع أن تكون المرأة هادئة، صبورة و مطيعة. و تنور لنا الكاتبة العضلات التي تواجهها المرأة الصينية.

بيرل باك تؤكد وجود التمييز والاضطهاد ضد المرأة بقوة. وانها تؤكد المساواة بين الرجل والمرأة على حد سواء. كما و انها تنتقد دور المرأة السلبي وعدم القيام بأي شيء من أجل تحسين وضعهم في مجتمع يسيطر عليه الرجال.