Research on Intercultural Discourse Model of “The Good Earth” by Pearl S. Buck Based on Orientalism Perspective

Yan Huang
Normal School, Hubei Polytechnic University, Huangshi 435003, China

Abstract

Pearl S. Buck, also known by her Chinese name SaiZhenzhu, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature and was an extremely influential American writer and novelist. She once experienced and realized that one people has something against other peoples. In her writing career, she advocated the writing attitude of mutual integration of Chinese and Western culture all along and took own life experience in China as main creation basis of "The God Earth", a novel with oriental theme, which introduced China that was unfamiliar to western world at that time to many western countries under the perspective of orientalism thoroughly and was provided with significant realistic meaning to open the way for dialogue and communication between Chinese and Western culture for the future. The Good Earth exhibits the special affection of people in rural area of our country for land and their family values, and shows the identification and affirmation of author towards the great concept of Chinese farmers from another perspective. This paper analyzes intercultural discourse model of The Good Earth by SaiZhenzhu and aims to further construe the literary and artistic connotation of The Good Earth in depth, unfolds its distinctive technique of literary creation and the idea so as to provide the favorable reference for more communication between Chinese and Western culture.

Keywords: Orientalism Perspective, Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth, Intercultural Communication.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1 Literature overview

Pearl S. Buck’s attention and something reluctant to abandon is still that traditional oriental image prevailing and widely spread among western countries, which is the Chinese original model with unequivocal rural pastoral color (Wang, 2014). The image of China under her words is not the image that is imaginary or made without basis, but is the classic model based on the specific culture and specific times with regard to some subject, which is the optimal expression found for the special culture in social formation and the unconscious original image of group in particular era at that time. Although Pearl S. Buck created a story about an oriental country, the American spirit is the true connotation what she really wanted to express, which objectively exists in real life and truly embodies the subjective initiative of Pearl S. Buck’s composition. Pearl S. Buck lived in China for nearly thirty years, fully contacted with more affairs in China comprehensively and understood the life status in all social classes. As same as Chinese in the same age, Pearl S. Buck also experienced various large-scale reforms in modern history of China and witnessed the development speed and huge transformations of our country in decades of years. Therefore, the special affection of Chinese farmers for the land and their family values became the fundamental source of Pearl S. Buck’s literary creation (Zhang, 2014). The works shows the idealism rather than an oriental country that is backward and advantage of the countryside. For the fictionists of Chinese studies of our country in the later period of the 1911 Revolution, the most important contribution of Pearl S. Buck is not the comprehensive interpretation of China’s revolution, but the close concern to Chinese society. Although to present a China that had not been affected by the West is the purpose of her works, China had been a country under the influence of the West where she lived in. The customs, people’s conditions, habits and other ideas in late feudal period of the Feudal Socialism of our country is what Pearl S. Buck praised.

1.2 Research purpose

In current development situation of increasingly frequent intercultural communication among countries, no matter what kind of culture, the true sustainable development is wanted to be achieved and the exuberant vitality is wanted to be always maintained, they must fully embrace the world, continue to strengthen cultural exchanges
and communication between the countries around the world, establish a long-term effective collaborative relationship so that the strong adaptability fit to the great changes worldwide can be obtained only in this way (Cui, 2015). Currently, Pearl S. Buck has become an envoy who enhances the cultural exchanges between China and Western countries, and builds the platform of effective cultural exchanges between China and Western countries, which bring her back to the sight of common people. The Good Earth is considered as the most representative and the most excellent works in Pearl S. Buck’s literary career by numerous experts, so its intercultural communication idea and thought can be more reflected. This paper, based on orientalism perspective, carries out the detailed discussion about several ways of intercultural communication and further interprets the China’s image in Pearl S. Buck’s writing so that the value of literature and art of The Good Earth can be emerged in an all-round way.

2. THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF THE GOOD EARTH BY PEARL S. BUCK UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORIENTALISM

2.1 Realistic writing technique

Pearl S. Buck applied the realistic writing technique to the creation of The Good Earth to fully and truly unfold the life style and appearance of China’s rural area. With thirty years of life experience in China, Pearl S. Buck treated China as her second homeland. She lived together with ordinary people of our country and experienced parting and meeting, happiness and sadness and so on of her own and others, and there is no difference between each other (Zhang, 2015). The Chinese image is mostly simple and kind, authentic and emotional, and is not something as described in some literatures of western countries. China is a country with distinctive oriental color and a mysterious force always, but many people from western countries simply thought people in China worship in conformity or looked down upon without any reason and had no ideas that Chinese is flesh and blood actually, with thoughts and feelings, pace and rules of life as same as the normal people. Thus, “Wang Long” in her words is not the saint who is perfect in every respect or is not even the demon or ghost, but a brave and kind, diligent and simple peasant image, with broad mind as the sky alike, at the same time, cannot escape from the fragility of human nature, which is the so-called “know by oneself whether it is cold or warm”. After making a fortune, Wang Long began to dislike his wife who accompanied him to fight and share hard lot, found his new love, and then left this piece of land forever (Li, 2014). This narrative way of Pearl S. Buck can make western readers feel the authenticity of character. It seems that this person is somebody around and lives in their real lives, which can fully shorten the distance between readers and works. Since ancient times, the farmers have always occupied large proportion of China’s population, and Wang Long is just a farmer and represents the image of majority of Chinese. Through such an extremely realistic way of creation, Pearl S. Buck had more and more people around the world understand and know China afresh, and changed the inherent image and opinion in the minds of western people as before. It can be seen from this that Pearl S. Buck was making efforts to change the image of easterner in the world and further pushed forward the exchange and development between Chinese and Western culture as well (Sun, 2014).

2.2 The intercultural narrative view

The Good Earth fully stands in the narrative point of view in that the story takes the central character Wang Long’s viewpoint to look at the whole world and Wang Long is a typical farmer image who lives in rural area for generations and looks forward to having more lands every day, because the land in his mind is the support and hope for him to live on. The beautiful natural scenes and comfortable climate in the countryside of our country are mentioned heaps of times in the novel in the tone of Wang Long (Sun and Yuan, 2015). It is written at the beginning of novel, “A small soft wind blew gently from the east, a wind mild and murmur us and full of rain. It was a good omen.” in which the description of rural natural scenery is obvious the sight that can be often seen and is the words what the farmers blurt out in their daily lives. The farmers will rely on their own many years of experience to judge whether there will be any effect on the crops according to climate change, which is not pure pleasant scenery in western literatures. Moreover, there are many paragraphs in The Good Earth that portray natural scenes in narrative point of view. Through the common observed perspective of Chinese farmers, Pearl S. Buck described natural scenes in simple and short, clear and orderly way, and definitely informed readers of which natural scenery is provided with another meaning for farmer Wang Long, which represents hard working achievement of the whole family in this whole year and directly determines the fate of this whole family for the next year. Pearl S. Buck employed Wang Long’s perspective to look at the whole world, not only showing more real China to western people, but also helping China argue in words that is the silent language better than speech power. She stood in the Chinese perspective to view the world, let all countries of the world hear the true sound of far East and present the excellent traditional culture of our country incisively and vividly (Yin and Yan, 2016).
This creative method can make western readers practically feel a more authentic China, catch the unique charm of oriental country and further understand the specific disparity between Chinese and Western culture, which plays a key role in intercultural communication between China and the West.

2.3 The main body of Chinese rural novel

The Good Earth tells a story that takes rural area of our country as the main body and portrays true events of Chinese farmers, but the readers that Pearl S. Buck catered to is the public of western countries. As a result, the full text of this novel by Pearl S. Buck is written in English. Literary works is an important carrier of culture and main medium of cultural communication. The communication is the course to use information encoding and translation code to give a certain meaning. Encoding must be truly understood by audiences group as the basic premise, otherwise, will be unable to carry out an effective delivery (Zhang, 2013). For intercultural communication, owing to different encoding modes used by two main bodies of delivery, it will seriously hinder the communication and then further affect the effectiveness of cultural communication. According to Rodgers’s thought, in intercultural communication, if one cultural group is wanted to be integrated into another fresh cultural group, the transformation of past ideas, the change of means of expression and so on are needed so that one side can be accepted by the other side genuinely.

3. THE IMAGE OF CHINA IN THE GOOD EARTH BY PEARL S. BUCK UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORIENTALISM

3.1 Homesickness and family values

After careful and comprehensive analysis of actual conditions in China, Pearl S. Buck used the written language to authentically present the China with a bumpy fate within the words and described the poverty situation of the lower and bottom people in detail. In the novel, the serious sufferings on the farmers caused by natural disasters and imposed by illegal actions of governmental organs are naturally touched, which reveal the vulnerable point that all Chinese farmers commonly had at that time. As the key theme of farmers and the land put forward in this works, Pearl S. Buck didn’t laugh at these farmers, but added some idealized color to the realistic predicament in the point of view of indiscriminate love relatively and in the way full of interest, put a dazzling bright halo on it according to individual subjective wish, even treated, with a broad mind, the weakness of the Chinese farmers as a virtue to exalt, turned the original agricultural civilization into the most perfect and lofty realm of human nature, and raised the oldest farming mode and conservatism up to the ancient pastoral life mood (Zhou, 2013). In Pearl S. Buck’s opinion, the habits and customs of rural areas was the most real-life state in China and regarded such life as the reality of China. And the romantic color in the words also becomes the basic principle of sharp contrast between city and country. In the whole novel, as long as the land involved, Pearl S. Buck would involuntarily emerge the inner warmth from her heart, if town and city are mentioned, she would immediately change into an extremely cold attitude to state sarcastically or ironically. The simplicity and kindness of Chinese countryside and the city with no reality whatever, red lanterns and green wines, and incessant stream of horses and carriages produce sharp contrast, and reflect the strong emotion of Pearl S. Buck longing for the return to the land (Liang, 2013).

What something really wanted to be expressed in The Good Earth is the full understanding of Pearl S. Buck for the future development of Chinese farmers and rural area. The protagonist, Wang Long, takes the land as his hope to live on. When his children want to sell land, Wang Long cannot control his anger, reprimands them as “spendthrift” and threatens that the person who sells land would be cursed very soon. As the representative figure of Chinese farmer’s image described by Pearl S. Buck, Wang Long believes that only the land cannot be taken away after drought and flood or banditry (Ye, 2012). For the family values shown in the novel as Pearl S. Buck lived in China, it is mainly expressed by heroine, Alan. The character of Alan stands for the good traditional virtues of Chinese women. The family values are also fully demonstrated in The Mother, another novel with strong representativeness by Pearl S. Buck. This novel totally starts from the personal subjective emotion of Pearl S. Buck, tells the whole story in first person tone from the beginning to the end and narrates a female who lives in widowhood in grief and yearns for sexual life. The family values of Pearl S. Buck are still unacceptable and incomprehensible in contemporary society, but truly unveil the vast majority of appearance of women in the social development at that time to a certain extent (Zhang and Qu, 2012).
3.2 The conclusion of history impacted by Chinese and Western culture

Although the Good Earth overall exudes Chinese rural pastoral smell and leaks the simple and succinct beauty of rural area, as a historical material for comprehensive understanding of China, especially countryside in China, such statement is not entirely true and there is adulteration of author’s subjective imagination to a great extent in the production process, (Sun, 2012). The idealized writing style about the special emotion of Pearl S. Buck towards Chinese rural land and her family values cannot completely represent the long-term backward agricultural civilization of China as well as the addresser. Although she had a longer life in China, the presentation is still the description of peasant class in western thought. It is undeniable that it plays a key role in the exchange between Chinese and Western culture. As an American in China, Pearl S. Buck had a comprehensive understanding of Chinese classical literature, Confucianism and the history of human civilization development with thousands of years in China. So, before this, China was only a sense of geographical position in the impression of most westerners. Through Pearl S. Buck’s words, the truest image of China is presented to the vast readers of western countries for the second time, which effectively changes their original views, make them recognize China comprehensively and profoundly, gives a powerful explanation and response for our country and lays a solid foundation for further exchange between Chinese and Western culture (Lu and Shao, 2017).

4. CONCLUSION

Although this novel, The Good Earth, portrays the true appearance and image of Chinese countryside and farmer, the fundamental purpose of Pearl S. Buck is to make more westerners understand China afresh, change their previous attitudes towards China, rebuild the image of China and boost the intercultural communication and development.

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