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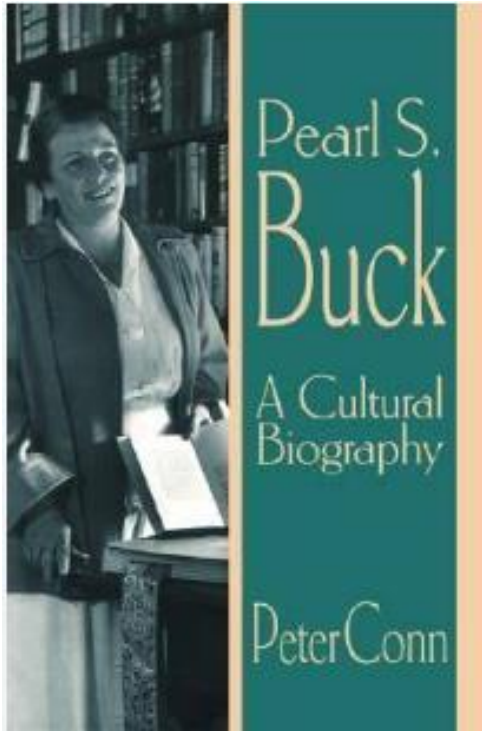
A Study of the Influence of Chinese Wisdom on Pearl S. Buck's Transnational Feminist Consciousness

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Why did I choose this topic?



1996

他者视角与赛珍珠文学建构的中国妇女解放*

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关键词: 妇女解放; 赛珍珠; 他者视角; 女性主体意识; 社会主义女性主义

摘 要: 美国作家赛珍珠是 1938 年的诺贝尔文学奖获得者。她有 40 多年的中国生活经历, 目睹了从晚清到第二次世界大战期间中国各阶层、各地区女性生存状态的变化。她的中国书写关注妇女地位的历史演进, 呈现了从皇太后、女族长、女仆、农妇、女知识分子到女革命者等近一个世纪的中国妇女群像, 尤其刻画了知识女性从身体、就业到精神的解放历程。她还发表了大量评论, 从跨国跨文化视角对比中美妇女解放存在的问题, 分析妇女解放目标的分层差异, 为中国妇女解放研究提供了不可多得的他者视角与多维的学术考量。

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**The Other's Perspective and Pearl S. Buck's Literary
Construction of Chinese Women's Liberation**

Zhu Hua. The Other's Perspective and Pearl S. Buck's Literary
Construction of Chinese Women's Liberation

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Although scholars recognize the profound influence of Buck's Chinese experiences and classical Chinese philosophy, they often treat her feminist thought as an exception.

- **Buck:** holding ambivalent attitudes toward Confucianism
- **Confucius:** “Of all people, girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to.”

A paradox?



Question: Does Buck's feminist thought have little to do with classical Chinese philosophy?



Arguments:

- Buck's feminist thought continued to evolve after 1942, displaying transracial and transnational characteristics. Western sources alone **cannot** fully explain the driving forces behind her feminist thought.
- Buck's Chinese experience and wisdom she drew from Chinese philosophy are **key** in guiding her beyond the limitations of Western-centric perspectives, helping her address humanity's common challenges with a broader vision.

Statement:

Buck's feminist ideology integrates elements such as the “bifocal perspective”, “seeking common ground while reserving differences” and “holistic thinking”, highlighting the profound impact of Chinese wisdom on her feminist consciousness.

I. “Bifocal Perspective” and the Chinese Model of American Women’s Liberation

Buck's bifocal perspective

- 40 years in China (1892-1934)
- Chinese nanny: Wang Ama (Chinese enlightenment)
- mother: Carrie (American values)
- free traveler between two different worlds (American Presbyterian community VS. Chinese society)

Finding strength in Chinese women

- agricultural research expedition to Suzhou with her husband, John L. Buck
- *Chinese Women: Their Predicament in the China of Today* (1931)
- employing a female savior model in her early 1930s novels: *The Good Earth* (1931) and *The Mother* (1934)

Criticism of American women when returning

- publishing *American Medieval Women*(1938): condemning traditional gender norms that confined women to domestic roles
- *American Gunpowder Women*(1939): expressing discontent without taking action has no help for self-liberation
- using the same logic she applied to analyzing Chinese men's inferiority

Buck's utilization of the Chinese perspective

- *Of Men and Women*(1941) : encouraging American women to model Chinese counterparts to fulfill personal values outside homes
- *This Proud Heart* (1938): women could be both mothers, wives, and professionals.

Evaluation of Buck's feminist thought about American women's liberation

- not challenging the gendered division of labor within the household
- limiting her focus to the liberation of white middle-class women, neglecting women of other races and classes
- having significance in encouragement of American women to challenge gender restrictions

II. “Seeking Common Ground While Reserving Differences” and the Liberation of Colored Women

Buck's concern of racial issue

- “The whole country is divided in two; except for sharing the same government, it is as if there were two independent nations”.
- delivering speeches and published essays on racial issues, later compiled into works such as *America and the Alliance with Asia* and *What America Means to Me*
- de-constructing the ideology of white racial superiority: the logic is the same as how she deconstructed Chinese male superiority

Resources on how Buck transcends the limitations of white identity

- the 1927 “Nanjing Incident”
- her reception of Chinese classics, especially Confucian idea of “within the four seas, all men are brothers”
- the logic: If blood and regional boundaries can be surpassed, why not racial ones?

Buck's application of Confucian wisdom flexibly

- proposing an alliance between women and colored people
- criticizing the narrow-mindedness and prejudice of white middle-class women: post-war novel *The Angry Wife* (1947)

Evaluation of her feminist thought about racial equality

- approaching black women's oppression primarily from a racial rather than a gendered perspective
- recognizing the divergent demands within the broader category of women
- proposing to unite marginalized groups rather than isolate them, which distances her from most women's organizations.

III. “Holistic View” and the Goal of Global Women's Liberation

Buck's attention on Asian women

- the opening of the Asian theater, American interest in Asia—especially China—intensified
- her expertise on China gained renewed importance, and she earned the title of an "expert on Asian affairs"

Buck's attitudes towards American and Asian women

- pessimistic about American women, expressed in the speech *Women and Victory*(1942)
- optimistic about Asian women, displayed in *Dragon Seed* (1941)
- her using self-criticism of American women's inability to enjoy the equality as an opportunity to critique the hypocrisy of American democracy and challenge its hegemonic status

Resources on how Buck transcend the limitations of Western centrism

- as early as 500 years before Christ, Confucius had articulated the responsibilities individuals owed to their families, nations, and the world.
- Confucian ideals of a “universal harmony”

Buck's elaboration of the “universal harmony”

- *Dragon Seed*(1941): we share the same moon and sun under the heaven.
- *Peony*(1948): “if there is truly one God, He would not place one person or nation above another; under the heavens, we are one family”.

Application of holistic vision of universal harmony to address women's issues

- Women's liberation is a common goal for women worldwide, requiring the collective wisdom of the global community to achieve.
- Buck viewed the world as a web of interrelated elements, with women's issues as just one crucial node in a network that also encompassed race, ethnicity, and other factors.

Evaluation of Buck's feminist thought on world women emancipation

- Buck shifted her attention to women in other parts of the world, especially those in the Third World, acknowledging their equal rights with American counterparts. Her idea was not fully recognized until the 1980s.
- Buck placed women's issues within the context of global concerns, demonstrating the dynamic and holistic nature of her thinking, which offers valuable insights for addressing the challenges of women's liberation worldwide.

Conclusion

- Buck's transnational feminist perspective was largely attributable to her unique experiences living in both Eastern and Western cultures, as well as her assimilation and adaptation of Chinese philosophical insights. The wisdom she gleaned from Chinese thought endowed her with a capacity to transcend narrow national, racial, and ethnic limitations, enabling her to approach the issue of women's liberation with a broader perspective.

- Her concept of “Seeking Common Ground While Reserving Differences” made her position gender issues within the same framework as racial and national liberation, acknowledging the structural similarities among these struggles. Besides, she identified the diverse needs of women within these movements, which were often ignored by mainstream feminists.

- Her holistic vision expanded the scope of the feminist movement by incorporating colored women and Asian women into the struggle for women's rights, advocating for a dynamic assessment of gender issues within the broader network of social relations.

- Her bifocal perspective allowed her to identify the strength of Asian women and proposed using Chinese women as a model for addressing gender issues. In doing so, she reversed the hierarchical relationship between East and West. This critical internationalist stance highlighted her broader critique of hegemonic global power structures.



Thank you!

