

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

According to Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature (1995: 819), novel is 'a fictional prose narrative of considerable length and of a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience.' Among the three genres of literature, namely novel, drama and poetry, generally novel has the most details to support the readers' understanding because novel contains more detailed information about characters, events, setting, plot, and other literary aspects.

I have chosen Pearl S. Buck's Imperial Woman. It has a unique story because it is not common for an empress to be very powerful in China. No one in public realizes that it is she that makes every single decision in the empire.

There are actually other novels about this empress but Buck's novel is said to be the most representative since it is based on the novelist's past memories of her life in China (Buck, 1956: foreword). In this novel, Buck tries to portray the empress as accurately as possible from available resources and from her own memories of the Chinese. This novel presents the nearest truth about this empress: "Buck

manages to work carefully around actual, recorded events and still maintains a vital plot of broad human appeal, full of spirit, love, and intrigue centered on the unrecorded parts.’ (<http://www.literatureclassics.com/essays/237/karenbishoff,p1>)

I would like to analyse the theme of the novel because theme is the most important aspect of a literary work. Theme is ‘the meaning the story releases; by theme we mean the necessary implications of the whole story, not a separable part of the story.’(Kenney, 91) Theme is also ‘the total meaning discovered by the writer in the process of writing and by the reader in the process of reading.’ (Kenney, 94) By analysing the theme, she hopes that she will be able to find out what the novelist really wants to reveal in this particular novel.

I find that the theme of the novel is clearly revealed through the portrayal of the major characters. Since the theme is revealed through the major characters, I intend to analyse the theme through Tzu Hsi (Yehonala), Tzu An (Sakota), and Jung Lu, all of whom are major characters.

Statement of the Problem

In order to analyse the theme of Pearl S. Buck's Imperial Woman through the major characters. I would like to state the problems as follows:

1. What is the theme of the novel?
2. How does the portrayal of the major characters help in revealing the theme?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To show what the theme is.
2. To show how the portrayal of the major characters helps in revealing the theme.

Method of Research

In my analysis I would like to use library research. I read Imperial Woman as the primary text. I also read reference books about the Qing dynasty, a dynasty of Manchu people that reigned in China from 1644 to 1911. I also search in the Internet to collect reliable data about the empress.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis begins with the Preface and the Abstract; it is followed by the Introduction in Chapter One, in which I present the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research and the Organization of the Thesis. The analysis of the theme of Imperial Woman is presented in Chapter Two, and the Conclusion is presented in Chapter Three. The Bibliography contains a list of references used in writing the thesis. Finally, a brief synopsis of the novel and the biography of the novelist are presented in the Appendices.