

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Chinese people are generally known to be hard working, disciplined, punctual, and very respectful. According to index china.com, Chinese people are known to be ‘. . . peaceful, hardworking and easily contented. They respect elders, love children and are patient with their fellows. Chinese in general are reserve and humble. They believe in harmony and never look for confrontation’ (china.com n.d).

One of the twentieth century American writers who often write about the life of Chinese people is Pearl S. Buck. She ‘. . . is the first American woman to win the Nobel prize for fiction . . . she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the William Dean Howells Medal for the Most Distinguished Work of American Fiction1930-35’(Melvin 2001). In my opinion to win the Nobel Prize for fiction is a great achievement; that is why I am of the opinion that her works are worth analysing. Moreover, Phyllis Bentley, a critic gave his opinion of Pearl S. Buck as follows:

An attempt is made to present China from within, as the Chinese see it . . . in the same way, Mrs. Buck aims to present the Chinese custom as familiar, natural, and correct, because so would her characters regard them. (These customs) are all copiously illustrated, but always presented, as it were, unselfconsciously, as part of natural process of living; never by the slightest word or turn of phrase does Mrs. Buck call attention to the difference of these customs from our own. (Egbe 2005)

In my thesis I would like to analyse one of her works The Good Earth.

This novel ‘. . . is Pearl S. Buck’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel (1931) about the Chinese peasant Wang Lung and O-Lan, and one of the most widely translated books in the world’ (Melvin 2001). The protagonist of the novel is Wang lung. He is a modest farmer, but he has a strong will to make his family become wealthy. To bring more fortune to his family, Wang Lung works very hard; but then wealth changes some of his characteristics. The development of the protagonist’s characteristics leads the readers to find out the theme of the novel. William Kenney, in his book How to Analyze Fiction, said that ‘As a major element in fiction, character is obviously of major importance for theme (94). Thus, I would like to analyse the theme through the protagonist of the novel. Theme is ‘. . . the total meaning discovered by the writer in the process of writing and by the reader in the process of reading’ (Kenney 94).

Statement of the Problem

The problems which I would like to analyse are:

1. What is the theme of the novel The Good Earth?

2. How does the portrayal of the protagonist help to reveal the theme?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study are:

1. To show the theme of the novel The Good Earth.
2. To show how the portrayal of the protagonist help to reveal the theme.

Method of Research

The method of research used is library research. First of all, I begin my research by reading the primary text The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck. Then, I continue by reading several books that can be used to support the research. I search for the information needed in some references and material from the Internet to support the analysis. Finally, I gather and use the data that I have found to help to complete my analysis, from which I later draw some conclusion.

Organization of the Thesis

I present this thesis in three chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two deals with the discussion of theme through the protagonist of the novel. The last one is Chapter Three, the Conclusion of the thesis. This thesis ends with the Bibliography, which presents the list of references and various sources that have been used in the writing and, the Appendices, which present the synopsis of The Good Earth and the biography of the author.