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Feminist Fiction in a “Non-Feminist” Age: Pearl S. Buck on Asian and American Women, 1930–1963

ROBERT SHAFFER

When the editors at W. W. Norton were preparing to release Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in late 1962, they called on novelist Pearl S. Buck, who had just turned seventy, to host a reception for women journalists to meet Friedan, and to create, as we would say today, some “buzz” around the new book.¹ The connections between Buck, the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1938, and one of the best-selling American authors of the mid-twentieth century, and Friedan, the pioneering tribune of the new feminism of the 1960s, were deeper than simply those among two female writers in the US, however. In Buck’s work, from the early 1930s until the late 1960s, as in Friedan’s career, we see a strong attention to women’s status, including both their oppression and their potential strength. Moreover, Friedan’s analysis of “the problem that has no name”—the dissatisfaction of middle-class, educated housewives in the US in the 1950s with too few options for productive work outside of their households—echoed a theme in Buck’s earlier writings. Thus, I argue here that Buck and her colleagues in the literary milieu of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s—reviewers, fellow authors, and readers—helped prepare the ground for modern feminism, and that the Norton editors were quite astute in associating Friedan with the elder writer.

Numerous historians have recently identified continuities between the feminism of the 1910s and that of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as precursors of 1960s feminism in the women’s movements of the 1940s and 1950s for peace, civil rights, labor rights, and gender equality.² Indeed several commentators have gone so far as to call into question the familiar “first-wave” (1840s–1910s) and “second-wave” (1960s–1970s) periodization of American feminism, arguing that such classification does a disservice to our understanding of what historian Nancy Hewitt has called the “multiple and overlapping

movements, chronologies, issues, and sites” of feminist activism.³ Buck’s popular fiction in the mid-twentieth century certainly corroborates Hewitt’s survey of recent scholarship that has debunked the notion that the years 1920 to 1960 were “feminist-free zones” (5).

I will show, too, that Buck, who was best known as a writer and commentator on Chinese life, increasingly used her position as an “expert” on Asia, not to show that women’s roles in the US were better than women’s roles or status in China, but to critique women’s status in American society itself. In this way, Buck, who lived most of her first forty years in China, exemplified “critical internationalism”⁴: utilizing the cross-cultural perspective that her life bestowed upon her to point out changes and improvements that needed to be made in the US, rather than to uphold the viewpoint that American society constituted a model for the world. As part of this challenging perspective, Buck rejected the idea that “modernization” or “Westernization” in and of themselves would lead directly to the improvement of women’s status.

Moreover, Buck analyzed divisions among women, not just commonalities or unity, especially in China but also in her analyses of the US. This insight—that women of different classes, marital statuses, or ages could have divergent or even conflicting interests—was submerged in the renewed feminist upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s but is now very much at the heart of feminist scholarship.⁵ In this, as in so many other things, Buck’s writings from the 1930s to the 1960s speak to contemporary issues of scholarship and societal analysis, even though a central paradox that runs through her work may make it seem less relevant to today’s efforts to understand the role of women in both China and the US. The paradox is that, over time, Buck became more accepting of a sexual division of labor for Asian women and men, but she consistently portrayed her American heroines in her fiction and in her essays as struggling against relegation to a private, or women’s, sphere.

Born in 1892 and raised in China by missionary parents, Pearl Sydenstricker Buck has been remembered primarily as the author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *The Good Earth* (1931), which remained on the best-seller list for two years. But Buck also wrote fifteen additional best-sellers on Asia between 1933 and 1968, as well as many novels, collections of essays, book-length interviews, and other works on Asia, the US, and world affairs in general. She published in venues as diverse as *Good Housekeeping* and *Pacific Affairs*, *Woman’s Home Companion* and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the *New York Times Magazine* and the *Christian Century*.⁶ Scholars in recent years have begun to rectify the long-standing neglect of both Buck’s literary works and her political activism, but even feminist literary criticism has tended to focus mainly on *The Good Earth* to the exclusion of her other works on Asian and American life.⁷ This essay, drawing on her fiction, contemporary reviews (especially those by women), and correspondence with readers and other writers, surveys Buck’s analyses of women’s roles in Asia and the US from the 1930s to the 1960s, showing similarities and differences, and changes and continuities, across space and time.

Buck’s early images of the patriarchal Chinese family include starkly opposing portraits of hardworking and resourceful—but unappreciated and long-suffering—

Chinese wives, alongside the sensual but economically unproductive and physically weak women of pleasure. The lasting images here are indeed in *The Good Earth*, as the peasant wife, O-lan, uncomplainingly rises in the morning before her husband and her father-in-law to start the fire and to cook, and then works in the fields alongside her husband, Wang Lung. O-lan gives birth on her own, without a midwife and without bothering her husband, and returns to strenuous farm labor within hours. She endures rather than enjoys Wang Lung's clumsy sexual efforts. But O-lan is also responsible for slyly seizing the valuable jewels from an aristocratic household during an uprising of a poverty-stricken mob—jewels that provide the basis for the Wang family's rise into the class of rich farmers. Taking O-lan for granted, Wang Lung turns his attention—as soon as he can afford it—to the delicate and, ultimately, parasitic prostitute and concubine, Lotus. The dualistic representation of women's roles, one is tempted to say, builds on the traditional Christian dichotomy between “madonna” and “whore,” although the madonna's sphere here expands to include a wider range of productive labor, practical strength, and shrewdness. As Wang Lung reflects, “So these two women took their place in his house: Lotus for his toy and his pleasure and to satisfy his delight in beauty and in smallness and in the joy of her pure sex, and O-lan for his woman of work and the mother who had borne his sons and who kept his house and fed him and his father and his children.”⁸

Pearl Buck's inclusion of O-lan's agricultural labor was significant, in that many Westerners at the time assumed that all Chinese women were secluded in the home. As historian Kay Ann Johnson points out, it was Pearl's first husband, John Lossing Buck, whose pioneering agricultural survey of China has given scholars the only real figures on the extent of women's labor in rural China before the Communist revolution. According to Lossing Buck, in his study published in 1937, women provided, on average, 13 percent of the agricultural labor in China, although Johnson has concluded that these figures “probably underestimate women's contribution.”⁹ Regardless of the exact percentage, two things are certain. First, Pearl Buck based her depiction of O-lan's labor on what she witnessed as she traveled with her husband and helped him compile his statistics. Second, her impressionistic portrayal had more of an impact on the American image of the labor of Chinese women than his dry statistics, valuable as they were, published in an academic book.

While almost all contemporary reviews of *The Good Earth* were favorable, only a few mentioned the gender politics of the book. Florence Ayscough, a longtime resident of China and herself a scholar of Chinese literature who would later influence Buck's view of Chinese women, observed that the book broke from the usual Western representation of China as a setting of luxury—of wily mandarins and beautiful leisured ladies—to show both O-lan's “unquestioning devotion” to her husband and the critical importance of her labor to the household system.¹⁰ Eda Lou Walton noted that Buck's “woman characters, even the most inarticulate of them, are more clearly interpreted than are her men characters.”¹¹

Buck presents a view of the subjugated status of Chinese women in other early novels as well. The hardworking and long-suffering peasant wife returns in an even more

pitiable aspect in *The Mother* (1934), a less commercially successful work, as the nameless protagonist tries to retain her respectability after her husband abandons her.¹² She adds his farm tasks to her own but nevertheless becomes ever more the victim of China's arranged-marriage system. Indeed the reviewer in the *Christian Century* called *The Mother* "the most frightful indictment of China's ancient family system" and virtually a demand for "Christian truth and modern enlightenment."¹³ Several women reviewers, however, interpreted the novel, and especially the main character's lust—no other word will do—to bear and raise children, in a proto-feminist light. Ayscough compared this sympathetic portrait of "the Universal Mother" to "the full-breasted goddess of fertility whom prehistoric sculptors loved to carve."¹⁴ She went on to call this image one of strength, not weakness, counterposing the woman's endurance to the absent husband's childish flight from work and commitments. Indeed the image of the husband as childlike pervades the novel. On the other hand, novelist Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who had earlier been responsible for the selection of *The Good Earth* by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and who became fast friends with Buck on their first meeting, saw the work less as a celebration of maternalism than as a critique of societies around the world that allowed women to express themselves only as mothers.¹⁵

Buck, who had been criticized in some religious circles for the relatively overt discussion of sexuality in *The Good Earth*, includes in *The Mother* not only a depiction of a woman's sexual desire but a graphic portrayal of sexual harassment of the peasant woman by her evil landlord. More shocking still, Buck portrays an abortion. This vignette, which demonstrates on the one hand women's medical knowledge and a rudimentary shared women's culture that protected them from the consequences of sexual desire outside of marriage, nevertheless also leaves the woman who undergoes the abortion racked with guilt and physically scarred.¹⁶ It was surely no coincidence that, within a year after the publication of *The Mother*, Buck gave a major speech in Washington, DC, at the "Birth Control Comes of Age" anniversary dinner, an event celebrating the twenty-one years of activism since Margaret Sanger opened her first clinic.¹⁷

Far less sympathetic than this victimized mother, and more of a parasitic figure once again, is the upper-class grandmother, who is also an opium addict, in *The Patriot* (1939). Moreover, the person whose life she most victimizes is a female servant. Young Peony endures insults and accusations of theft from her mistress and earns the scorn of the modern grandson, a student, for "pandering" to the old lady by preparing her opium. "I have to do what I'm told!" retorts the servant.¹⁸ As in the conflict between the first wife and the concubine in *The Good Earth*, Buck explores here the theme of conflict between women arising from China's system of gender relations.

Nor was Westernization necessarily a solution for Chinese women, according to Buck, in this drudge-versus-parasite dichotomy. For example, the wealthy, educated, Westernized daughter in *A House Divided* (1935) becomes a useless wastrel, beautiful to behold but contributing nothing to society. As her mother observes ruefully about the exquisite Ai-lan, the society belle in the newly fashionable coastal city, "She has needed to do nothing. She has not needed to use her mind or hands or anything—only to let

people look at her, and praise flowed in upon her and desire and all that others work to gain.”¹⁹ Moving in the most modern circles, Ai-lan soon becomes pregnant, and a hurried marriage ensues. Her mother laments, “It is a sorry end to all my care for Ai-lan, to train and school my daughter in such freedom as this! Is this the new day, then?” (243).

The industrialization that accompanied Westernization in a few areas also led to problems. In *The Patriot*, whose setting spans the 1920s and 1930s, I-wan, the student revolutionary, examines the new silk-spinning workshops with the half-urban, half-rural shantytowns of their employees. He finds not only the poverty and exploitation that all of the workers and their families experience but, worst of all, the hands of the women and girls, “swollen and red” from submersion in the very hot water used to soften the cocoons and draw out the silk threads. Significantly, the patriotic student returns home thinking, “There is one smell worse than the opium in this house—it is the smell of the silk mill.”²⁰ Indeed strikes by workers in the foreign-owned silk workshops and cotton factories were among the most important manifestations of Chinese nationalism in the 1920s.²¹

But even in these early novels Buck goes beyond the dichotomous drudge/parasite model to emphasize not only the labor but also the power of women in Asian households. In *A House Divided*, the last of the trilogy that begins with *The Good Earth*, the estranged wife of a warlord not only endows an orphanage for abandoned girls but helps one of these girls, Mei-ling, to grow up to be a doctor.²² Mei-ling, in turn, wants “a hospital of [her] own one day in some city, a place for children and for women” (245). Of course in China orphanages generally existed only for girls, as the Confucian family system highly prized boys. Buck here is inverting the traditional expendability of many girls into a refuge that could nurture their talents; some institutions of this sort were indeed established by Christian missionaries and under the patronage of Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Soong May-ling).²³ Moreover, on the last pages of *A House Divided*, Mei-ling and Wang Yuan—Wang Lung’s grandson—join in a companionate marriage dedicated to serving the new nationalist China. Thus, in Buck’s portrayal, the women’s sphere could become a site of power and solidarity among women, but at the same time she identifies a progressive future as one in which such separate spheres would no longer exist, and in which a professional woman would have a role equal to a man’s.²⁴

But Buck, who by 1932 had developed a trenchant critique of missionary work in China,²⁵ emphasized more the costs and challenges to Chinese women of “modernization” than the potential for liberation. While she saw, as a college instructor in China in the 1920s, that some of her male students wanted educated women as wives, she notes more caustically that as they grew older they became more ambivalent about what they wanted in a marriage, longing for “the perfect woman, a college graduate who in the evening with fascinating intelligence will stimulate his mind and in the morning with sweet stupidity will fetch him his tea.”²⁶ More tragically, perhaps, she describes in both essays and short stories the suffering of women who did not have “modern” education, and yet who had been married by their families to young men educated in the West or in the coastal cities. The psychological stress on such women leads to suicide in one story.

Or, with divorce now legal, uneducated women might be left without any of the status that traditionally inhered in the Chinese first wife and in the Chinese concubine. The emphasis in China in the 1920s and 1930s on “modernization,” moreover, threatened the status not only of the older male head of a household but of the older woman, who in the past might have looked forward to gaining power and prestige within a family as she aged.²⁷

This conflict between mother and child appears in several novels and short stories in which the son or daughter joins the Chinese republican rejection of the Confucian family system and rebels against arranged marriage. In *The Mother*, for example, the younger son, who had secretly become a Communist, angrily rejects his mother’s announcement that she would find him a wife, an idea she was sure would bind him to the family home. He declares, “I have been waiting for you to say some such thing—it is all that mothers’ heads run upon, I do believe! My comrades tell me it is the chiefest thing their parents say—wed—wed—wed! Well then, mother, I will not wed! And if you wed me against my will, then shall you never see my face again!”²⁸ In “The Communist,” a short story first published in 1930, it is a young woman student who rebels against her betrothal to a Confucian scholar, by taking instead the Communist leader as a lover. Condemned to death, she refuses her family’s efforts to save her and declares, significantly, “The Revolution is my father and my mother,” and “I am married to—to the Revolution!”²⁹ Historian Christina Gilmartin’s accounts of Chinese Communism and women’s issues in the 1920s testify to the basic accuracy of Buck’s picture of the importance of the rejection of arranged marriage to the early revolutionary movement.³⁰ At the same time, it is evident that her portrayal draws on Christian imagery, especially of the early women martyrs in the Roman Empire, who rejected their families in favor of their Christian faith, and who welcomed their martyrdom as the women revolutionaries in “The Communist” and in *The Mother* also seem to do.³¹

Buck’s first published novel focusing on the US, *This Proud Heart* (1938), mirrors many of the themes about gender relations that she had developed in her Asian novels. Appearing just months before Buck received the Nobel Prize, the novel discusses the issues of unequal power relations in marriage, male mistreatment of women, the challenge that independent professional women posed to the accepted American ideology of gender, and the need for American housewives to abandon this economically and socially unproductive role. In the story, sculptor Susan Gaylord can only fully develop her talents after her first husband dies and after she walks out on her second husband. Moreover, Susan faces the overt prejudice of art critics, who belittle her work because she is a woman. As her (male) mentor comments, “It’s all bosh about there being any equality. . . . A woman hasn’t a ghost of a show. If she’s good she makes the men rage. . . . You’re damned the day you’re born a woman—that is, if you do anything to compete with men.”³² This plotline echoes Buck’s self-perception that her creativity was stifled during her first marriage to Lossing Buck. However, her second marriage to her publisher Richard J. Walsh in 1935, soon after she returned to the US for good, was far more successful.³³

Susan, in *This Proud Heart*, naively conceptualizes art and work as transcending gendered spheres: “There ought not to be man or woman in work. Work is a sort of heaven, where there is neither male nor female.”³⁴ And in terms strikingly relevant to recent ideas about the social construction of gender, Buck comments that, when one suitor of Susan declares that he hates women who are financially self-sufficient and thus independent, he thus negates her identity as an artist and a worker and “ma[kes] her a woman” (223). Indeed, in one of the classic formulations of modern feminism, Simone de Beauvoir observes, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”³⁵

Meanwhile, Susan’s sister, Mary, chooses to give up her career to marry a wealthy man she does not love. Mary prefers to be taken care of rather than to make her own way, leading the creative, independent Susan—obviously the vehicle for the author’s own thoughts—to rail that “women like you set us all back for centuries.”³⁶ Thus, even as Buck develops the idea that American men excluded women from full participation in the public arena, from the world of work and creativity beyond the nuclear family, she asserts that too many women were complicit in this construction of separate spheres for men and women. Indeed, clinging to their roles as housewives, several women characters not only fail to exercise their own potential but trap their husbands into domestic situations that crush these men’s creative or artistic dreams.

While Buck keeps Susan always at the center of attention in the novel and presents with full sympathy her fight to be taken seriously as a self-reliant working woman, a critical reader might note that Buck portrays her more as an exception among women than as typical. Susan’s expertness in all things—cooking, sewing, child-rearing, piano-playing, sculpting—strains credibility, as almost all contemporary reviewers noted, and which two of them independently called “tiresome.”³⁷ In addition, Buck presents Susan’s artistic talents as inherited—from her father.³⁸ In other words, readers might have interpreted the novel not as a full-scale protest against separate spheres but as a plea that some exceptional women should be able to breach the barriers of these spheres.

But many contemporary critics and readers, especially women, did perceive the novel, which rose to number five on the *New York Herald-Tribune*’s national best-seller list,³⁹ as challenging the limits on women’s rights and roles in a society that supposedly had no such limits. The novel exemplified the concern of many professional women during the interwar years, as historians Nancy Cott and Jill Lepore have pointed out, that they be allowed to combine marriage, motherhood, and careers.⁴⁰ Thus, Mary Ross, in the *Herald-Tribune*, believed that Buck had presented a convincing portrait of a woman who needed to be more than a housewife; the reviewer described Susan sympathetically as “a woman whose integrity included her relationship to herself as well as to those she loved.”⁴¹ Margaret Wallace’s judgment, in the *New York Times*, that the book concerned a woman who wanted to “have everything” echoed the publisher’s own sales memos that the book featured a woman who was not satisfied merely with life in the private sphere, but who needed “love, children, home, and work besides.”⁴² Winfred Garrison, in the *Christian Century*, concluded that *This Proud Heart* raised questions about the

contradiction between popular prejudice and individual potential.⁴³ Frances Woodward, whose evaluation in *Saturday Review* was the most favorable, denounced the literary double standard that held books about men were important to both men and women, while men did not need to bother with books about women. Thus, she asserted that *This Proud Heart* held important lessons for all, even as she emphasized that it would appeal especially to women. Through this book, wrote Woodward, women could fantasize about the accomplishments they could achieve were they not tied down to men and families, just as men fantasized that in the absence of matrimony they could be adventurers. Woodward perceptively observed the continuities between Buck's portrayal of competent Chinese peasant women and this accomplished American sculptor: "Remember, Mrs. Buck likes splendid women. O-lan was the fine woman of China victimized by the Oriental attitude toward women. Susan Gaylord, fine to the cracking point of credulity, is the fantasy life of every woman in this too-enfranchised country."⁴⁴

Indeed women readers let Buck know of the deep impression that the novel made on them, insisting that they would put into effect what they felt rather than let it rest at the level of fantasy. A Pennsylvania woman wrote to the author, "Although I love my babies, husband and home so all completely . . . your great story showed me that I must spend a little time on some of the things I want to do so much or I will regret it later on."⁴⁵ Another reader was pleased that the novel did not have the traditional "happy ending" reconciling husband and wife.⁴⁶ A typed, three-page letter from Marion Sheldon of New Jersey showed the depth of identification of some readers with the story and the characters: "I had almost an uncanny feeling of seeing my very deepest thoughts spread out in letters before me." Sheldon added that she regarded the novel, not as a portrait of an exceptional "genius, but of all women, only lately awakened and conscious of that inner part of themselves . . . following their own free course in living as unfettered human beings."⁴⁷ One might even conclude that Susan Gaylord represented in middlebrow fiction for American women what Wonder Woman, who made her debut in the comics just three years later, represented in that more decidedly lower-brow format for American girls.⁴⁸

Reviewer Woodward had pointed to the similarities between Buck's portrayals of O-lan and Susan Gaylord. There were other ways, too, in which Buck's observations about Chinese gender and family relations influenced her writing in *This Proud Heart*. When in the novel Susan executes a series of sculptures on representative American types, the one Buck describes in greatest detail is of a large, strong African American woman, whose portrayal, like that of O-lan, challenges traditional American conceptions of beauty and femininity. Just as women's labor undergirded Chinese economy and society, Buck points to the importance of African American women in US history, through this statue of "that great dark female creature who, summoned from Africa to serve, poured the stain of her black blood into the white veins of a new America."⁴⁹ Wife-beating, so prominent in Buck's characterizations of the patriarchal Chinese family, also appears in *This Proud Heart*, although limited, it seems, to the American lower classes. Susan's immigrant

housekeeper counts her blessings that her late husband “worked steady, and he never hit me once, and what more could you ask of a man, I’ve always said” (131). Delia, the model for the sculpture of the African American woman, by contrast, leaves her husband because he beats her too often (285–86).

Buck’s critique of tea-house prostitution and of concubinage in *The Good Earth* may have led some readers, used to Western monogamy, to have their idea of Christian and American superiority over Asian culture reinforced. Buck sought to puncture some of these pretensions in *This Proud Heart*, with her vignettes of Susan’s second husband engaging in an affair with a woman whose status as a dancer, significantly, corresponds closely with the Chinese “sing-song girls” (298). Buck continued to present such implied comparisons in later novels. In *Other Gods* (1940), which had first appeared as a serial in *Good Housekeeping*, Buck includes a scene of an American husband entranced by the Folies Bergère in Paris, while his much smarter wife sees the dancers in this sexual spectacle as tired and exploited women workers.⁵⁰ In *Command the Morning* (1959), male American scientists think nothing of having a business dinner at a nightclub with a sexy floorshow, a practice that echoes scenes of wealthy Chinese men conducting business in tea-house brothels in *The Good Earth* and in *Sons*.⁵¹

Buck wrote several important and wide-ranging essays in the late 1930s about the status of American women, including “America’s Medieval Women” and “America’s Gunpowder Women,” both in *Harper’s*, followed by a meandering, almost stream-of-consciousness 1941 book, *Of Men and Women*, comparing the lives of Chinese and American women.⁵² Three insights from both the book and essays would remain at the heart of much of Buck’s thinking and writing for years to come. First, as she reentered American society, Buck came to believe that the nuclear family home—as contrasted with China’s multigenerational family—did not provide an adequate mediating structure between the individuals in it and the larger society, especially since so little productive work occurred in modern American households. Thus, Buck concluded, there was greater psychological tension between men and women in the smaller American households; consequently, she came to appreciate neo-Confucian family relations. Second, the provision of education for American women without accompanying opportunities for productive work led to a tension for women, leaving many unfulfilled. This classic description of conflict produced by raised expectations gave rise to what Buck called “gunpowder women”—women ready to explode, to rebel against their situations. This analysis, of course, calls to mind earlier works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as well as Betty Friedan’s later “problem with no name.”⁵³ Indeed the *Smith College Monthly*, for which Friedan was an editor at the time, published an article in 1941 that drew specifically on Buck’s analysis of women’s roles.⁵⁴ Third, Buck began more and more to portray Chinese women as tough and practical as a result of their harsh upbringing as girls in a male-oriented society, while she came to see American women as weak because of being placed on a pedestal, shielded from the realities of work and production.

This dialectical analysis had its appeal, although it could be taken too far. In its best aspects, Buck drew on Florence Ayscough’s influential *Chinese Women: Yesterday and*

Today (1937), which demonstrated, Buck wrote at the time, that Chinese women “learned by deprivation to be self-reliant, courageous, determined, and industrious.”⁵⁵ Ayscough here first popularized in the US the story of the female warrior Mu-lan, and she carefully explicated the long tradition of women writers and educators in the Chinese upper class.⁵⁶ Buck also drew heavily on the ideas of Lin Yutang, a witty and urbane Chinese scholar, and a good friend in the 1930s and early 1940s, whose runaway best-seller *My Country and My People* (1935) was published by the John Day Company, owned by Richard J. Walsh, Buck’s second husband. Lin pioneered the comparative approach to Chinese women’s situation. He acknowledged freely, for example, the horrors of foot-binding but then went on to compare this failing of modern Chinese society to the harmful effects of whale-bone corsets in Britain and the US in the recent past: “Women may be frail in China, but it has never been the fashion to faint,” he observed.⁵⁷

Buck’s *Of Men and Women* and the related articles occasioned wide and often favorable comment. The Seattle Public Schools ordered fifty copies of the book, and numerous professors and publishers included sections of it in textbooks for high school or college composition classes.⁵⁸ Prominent political columnist Anne O’Hare McCormick told Buck that the comparisons between Chinese and American women led her to question whether American women were as advanced as she had previously assumed.⁵⁹ Anthropologist Margaret Mead praised Buck for “point[ing] out the no-man’s land in which educated American women now live, all dressed up and no place to go.”⁶⁰ Reviewer Margaret Marshall, alluding to Buck’s earlier conceptualizations of women in fiction, agreed with the author that “both men and women should be much happier if women were allowed, or forced, to function, not as angels or as concubines or both, but as human beings.”⁶¹

Buck included many of the ideas that she expressed in “America’s Gunpowder Women” and in *Of Men and Women* in her fiction of these years, both in short stories written for mass-market women’s magazines and in major novels. In the very didactic “More Than a Woman” (1941), Buck describes an American woman doctor who gives up her practice upon her marriage, only to find that she is miserable with no meaningful work—that is, as “nothing but a woman.” With the encouragement of a working-class patient who needs her expertise, and of her doctor-husband, who, after all, married her precisely because of their shared interest in medicine, she returns to work and finds fulfillment as “more than a woman.”⁶²

The young servant in *The Patriot* was among the first “gunpowder women” Buck depicted in fiction. Peony had been taught to read but is still treated as a slave in the household. She protests, “I’m not a servant, to be happy among servants. I’ve been taught to be something more—but still not enough to be free. . . . It’s so wicked to let people know there are good things in life and then deny them!”⁶³ Peony resolves the dilemma by fleeing the house and joining the Communist guerrillas, with whom she wears “a boy’s uniform, a soldier’s cap on her short hair” (336). “Golden Flower” (1940) features the heroine of that name commanding a Chinese guerrilla unit against the Japanese after her husband dies. Moreover, even when the husband was alive, Golden

Flower had been the real leader. As Buck writes, “Was there anything he did which she did not think of and plan and put into his head to do?” Appealing to the same Chinese historical examples that Ayscough had unearthed, Golden Flower observes, “I am a woman, but other women in our history have led men to battle.”⁶⁴

Buck more clearly describes the emergence of women’s strength as a dialectical result of oppression in “There Was No Peace.”⁶⁵ In this 1940 story, an upper-class Chinese woman had recognized her own oppression as a child and had rebelled by becoming educated and more competent than her husband, a man who epitomizes Buck’s spoiled upper-class male. Mme. Chien comes to dominate her own household, and then, when the Japanese invade, she applies these skills on behalf of the developing nation. These strong Chinese women, Buck writes, are like actresses, “having played for many years the part of a woman always amiable and never too clever for men’s comfort” (47). This toughness and shrewdness beneath a seemingly subservient exterior made women ideally suited for guerrilla work under Japanese occupation. Buck, therefore, was presenting the women’s sphere as a boundary that women stretched and appropriated for their own purposes.

Buck advances a similar portrayal of the need for women to participate in public life in *China Sky* (1943), set in China but focused around American characters. This novel, like *A House Divided* and *This Proud Heart*, provides contrasting portraits of women: a selfish, weak, useless but pretty woman versus a competent, self-sacrificing woman doctor, both vying for the love of a male doctor in wartime China. Literally dramatizing her warnings in *Of Men and Women* that women who evaded their public responsibilities could become attracted to fascism, Buck depicts the weak woman as a collaborator with the Japanese in her vain attempt to win a reprieve from bombings. The competent career woman, on the other hand, possesses the independence and strength necessary to withstand the Japanese, and in the end she wins the male doctor’s love as well.⁶⁶ Buck was thus demonstrating, in a novel that conforms to both romantic and propagandistic formulas, that marriage between equals would make both parties happier—and that women active in the public arena would not have to abandon marriage after all, as Susan Gaylord had done in *This Proud Heart*.

Dragon Seed, a major novel of the Chinese peasant resistance to the Japanese, brought this theme to an even larger audience. It appeared a month after Pearl Harbor brought the US into World War II, and its sales thus benefited from a huge growth in demand for stories about our now-official Chinese ally. While there were a few negative reviews, several critics called it Buck’s best work since *The Good Earth*, and a poll of two hundred book reviewers ranked it the fourth best novel of 1942.⁶⁷ Among its most important subplots is the demand of young Chinese women, through the character of Jade, to participate in public meetings about how to defeat the enemy, to acquire literacy, and to establish equality in relations between husband and wife as part of the process of building a society that can resist the Japanese. Thus, Buck’s representation of the struggle of Chinese women was similar to her prescriptive advice at the time to American women. Jade’s mother-in-law, representing the more traditional Chinese

woman, does not demand such equality and such open participation in public life, but Buck makes it clear that she, too, contributes to the resistance in her own understated way.

Buck's later novels on China and Korea, which generally concerned upper-class or middle-class households rather than peasant or poorer families, tended to portray the power of women in family relations in such a way as to influence her readers to appreciate "the good of the past" in Asia.⁶⁸ She returns to the theme of women appearing to be subordinate but in fact dominating Chinese men—as well as their daughters-in-law and female servants—through their competence at administering the traditional, large, elite Chinese households in *Pavilion of Women* (1946).⁶⁹ In this family saga, production is still centered in the household. Economic transactions between households, and between landowner and peasants, look more like sophisticated business administration on the part of Madame Wu, who oversees them, than the seemingly pettier tasks of an American housewife. Madame Wu as matriarch retains traditional women's knowledge of medical care and midwifery, as well as the upper-class women's tradition of literacy. But Buck's depiction of the power of some women based on this continued fulfillment within the Chinese household of activities, which in the West occurred outside, does not imply equality, or solidarity, among women. Madame Wu tyrannizes her daughters-in-law, and, in the plot's pivot, at age forty she decides to purchase a concubine for her dull husband so she can be liberated from the sexual duties that she had never enjoyed anyway.

Pavilion of Women, which had run as a serial in *Woman's Home Companion* to enthusiastic response, was on many best-seller lists. While the novel confused some critics, others noted that it would appeal to American women in its depiction of a woman struggling for freedom from "conventional formalities," as Mary Pinchot put it.⁷⁰ Similarly, Fanny Butcher, who declared it to be the best novel of 1946, described it as the search of a woman for a "life of her own."⁷¹ Ann Wolfe also noted its protest against the idea that "husband and children [are] the fulfillment of an intelligent woman's life."⁷² Buck herself commented that she only realized how "strong and powerful the Chinese woman is" after returning to American society and seeing the imbalance of gender relations here.⁷³

Reviewer Sterling North perceptively observed that Buck was here using China as a setting for morality tales, adding that women such as Madame Wu, selfish and frigid as she may have been, had been created by "inadequate males" the world over.⁷⁴ But perhaps the morality tales had more to do with Buck's American audience than with conditions in China. Indeed, Helen Foster Snow, who had been a friend of Buck's in China and who wrote extensively on Chinese women, later argued that much of the book was simply not authentic, that not even the elder wife and mother in an elite family could have acted in the ways that Madame Wu did. Perhaps most significantly, Snow observed that women of the landowning class did not handle the economic transactions with tenants and vendors, unless the husband was an opium addict or there were other extraordinary circumstances. In sum, Snow charged that *Pavilion of Women* was oriented more to

promoting the emerging American concept that life for women “begins at 40”—when they could begin to explore ideas and activities that had been closed to them when they had small children—than in analyzing real Chinese households.⁷⁵

In a deeply researched epic novel about the development of Korean nationalism, *The Living Reed* (1963), Buck ascribes greater empathy with ordinary Koreans, and greater resistance against foreign aggression, to the nineteenth-century queen than to her husband, the king. While the novel includes the standard romantic formulations of women’s beauty, it is women’s intelligence and activity that emerge more clearly. The queen, for example exerts an almost palpably sexual attraction over her main male adviser due to her wisdom, rather than simply her physical beauty: “it was true that some enchantment always came into his mind when he was with the Queen. He could look at any beautiful geisha and feel no desire to look again. But when a woman, such as the Queen, spoke with grace and intelligence, when she had a mind, then her body was illumined and he looked.”⁷⁶ Buck projects onto these Asian characters sentiments she hoped would come to characterize modern American society.

Buck also describes in respectful detail the skilled work of Korean women in raising silkworms, preparing kimchee, the national dish, and carrying out other productive duties in the vibrant household.⁷⁷ Buck elevates further the position of Korean women in this admittedly elite setting by contrasting it with negative features elsewhere, East and West: “[Sunia, the wife of the royal adviser,] sank gracefully to a floor cushion, well aware that in an ordinary household she would not have appeared so easily before her husband’s father, although it was true that here women were proud and never knelt before their husbands as women in Japan did, or had their feet bound small as Chinese women did, or their waists boxed in, as it was said that western women did. No, here husband and wife were equal in their places, nor were mothers browbeaten by their grown sons” (70). Buck was showing Americans that other systems of gender relations might be as valid as their own. In effect, she promotes a preindustrial family relationship in which there was a distinction between public and private, but in which women could take justifiable pride in home-centered productive activities, and in which arranged marriage itself became companionate marriage because of separate but complementary spheres of production.

As Buck was developing a more benign portrait of life for women in pre-Communist Asian societies, her critiques of the role and outlook of white, middle-class American women grew harsher, especially over the issues of race and militarism. During World War II, she criticized racism in the US in general, but she also specifically challenged white women’s organizations to commit themselves to racial equality. For example, in a 1940 speech to the National Woman’s Party, an organization that historians have called insensitive to or complicit with racism, Buck compared the discrimination that women faced to that suffered by African Americans. “Neither of these great minorities,” she declared, “ought . . . to forget the plight of the other, nor should either think that democracy has been achieved so long as the other is still in the position of a minority.”⁷⁸

Buck developed this critique in her postwar fiction, as well. *The Angry Wife* (1947),

written under the pseudonym of John Sedges, is set in Buck's native West Virginia in the aftermath of the Civil War, but it is a parable for American society after World War II. The labor upheaval of the 1870s described in the book clearly alludes to the strike wave of 1946, for example. The novel centers on the adjustment of a former slaveholding family to abolition. Pierce runs his plantation as closely as he can to antebellum lines, while his brother, Tom, falls in love and begins a family with a mulatto former house slave, Bettina. Pierce is willing to let his brother's interracial love affair continue, but his wife, Lucinda—the “angry wife” of the title—is not. In the inevitable confrontation, Tom accuses Lucinda of opposing his love for Bettina on the narrow grounds of competition for husbands: “‘You care,’ [Tom] repeated, ‘because you’re afraid of losing your men and you keep the other women down under your feet, because if you don’t they’ll be your equals and they will invade your sacred homes and rival you and excel you because men love them and escape you.’”⁷⁹ Even more strikingly, Buck has Tom voice this accusation: “As long as there are women like you, Lucinda . . . there will be no justice on this earth. You will keep your foot on the neck of any woman who threatens your sacred position in the home” (122).

As Buck had seen the marriage system in China pit woman against woman, and as she saw as well the insecurity for women in the American system, where the individual man proposed marriage and a divorced woman might lose all status,⁸⁰ she was here interpreting women's relegation to the domestic sphere as a cause for racial discrimination, as women attempted to retain what power this constricted sphere provided. Buck returned to her attack on this destructive power of white southern women five years later, in *The Hidden Flower*, in which the domineering matriarch of a socially prominent Southern family rejects the Japanese wife that her GI son brings home after World War II.⁸¹

Regardless of this pessimism about women's consciousness, Buck's fictional American heroines of the 1950s and 1960s continued to be strong, publicly active women, juggling marriage, motherhood, and work. There is the scientist, Jane, in *Command the Morning* (1959), who finally decides to work against the spread of nuclear weapons. Similarly, the scientist and wife, Laura, in *The New Year* (1968), acts far more decisively than her husband to do right by the son he had fathered with a Korean woman years before, while stationed as a soldier in that war-torn nation.⁸² As one review of *The New Year* put it, although in a less-than-complimentary tone, “Readers of Mrs. Buck's novels know that however frail and erring the male of the species may be, the female of the species will come smiling through.”⁸³ While Buck had greater difficulty publishing in the popular women's magazines in the 1950s than earlier, her fiction still appealed to a wide audience of women. Its focus on strong women lends credence to Joanne Meyerowitz's reevaluation of mass-market women's magazines in the 1950s, in which she contends that Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* had exaggerated the prescriptions of domestic passivity in such venues.⁸⁴

How do we resolve the paradox of Buck's increasing acceptance of a sexual division of labor in Asian societies along with her continued exhortations to American

women to participate actively in the public political sphere? There are several explanations. First, especially after 1937, Buck was influenced by two writers, Ayscough and Lin, who articulated well-publicized interpretations of Chinese gender relations and women's history that softened the harshness of Chinese women's status. Moreover, these writings appeared at the very time that a "new China" seemed to be emerging in the fight against Japan; thus, a widespread, and somewhat naive, optimism about women's future in China suffused Buck's writing. Finally, because Buck did not return to China after 1935, and she was unhappy with the direction of both Communist and Nationalist China by the mid-1950s, she tended to fall back later more on Confucian ideals.

Second, Buck was writing primarily for an American audience, and she came to realize that, while she could urge her American readers to act based on what they read in her novels, stories, and essays, the best that she could hope to achieve for Asian women was a sympathetic understanding by Americans for their conditions. Thus, she was concerned to avoid reinforcing Western attitudes of superiority over Asian societies, while she eagerly sought to challenge her readers to examine their own prejudices and complicity with injustice in American society. In this sense, Buck was rejecting in the later decades of her career what historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu has termed "women's Orientalism," in which Western women saw Asian women as needing to be rescued from without.⁸⁵

Third, as noted above, Buck often projected onto Asian women her desires for American women. Indeed some of the pride and achievements that she attributed to Asian women's roles in the domestic sphere, especially after 1940, related directly to her attempts to encourage American women to expand their own roles beyond what she saw as a constricted domestic sphere in the Western nuclear family. Rather than reinforcing Western sentiments of superiority, Buck's method of contrast between societies highlighted flaws or restrictions in American, Western, and Christian societies, a hallmark of Buck's career-long "critical internationalism," and reminiscent of eighteenth-century neo-Confucianists such as Voltaire.⁸⁶ As the *Times Literary Supplement* of London put it in 1942, Pearl Buck had been "fitted by the architecture of her life to be a critic of her own race," returning home, after having lived abroad, filled with "wonder and discovery which is the finest basis for criticism."⁸⁷

Buck's internationalist feminism resembled in some ways the identification of networks and ideological currents that other scholars have located as influencing US feminism from the mid-1800s to the late 1900s,⁸⁸ although with far less sustained contact after 1934 with explicitly feminist or radical women activists from China or other parts of East Asia. Nevertheless, in her popular fiction about both Asian and American women, Buck added an internationalist dimension to the efforts that she and other writers and activists made to preserve and expand a feminist current in literature and in public discourse in the US in the decades between the two more prominent periods of twentieth-century American feminism.

Notes

¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963); and Eric Swenson to Pearl S. Buck, 29 October 1962, and Pearl S. Buck to Eric Swenson, 1 December 1962, W. W. Norton & Co. Records, Columbia University Libraries.

² See, for example, Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Jacqueline Castledine, *Cold War Progressives: Women's Interracial Organizing for Peace and Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); and Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³ Nancy Hewitt, introduction to *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 1. See also Kathleen A. Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore, and Leandra Zarnow, "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor," *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010): 76–135.

⁴ Robert Shaffer, "Pearl S. Buck and the American Internationalist Tradition" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2003), 5.

⁵ See, for example, Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), xii; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), especially 51–80.

⁶ See Daniel B. Ramsdell, "Asia Askew: US Best-Sellers on Asia, 1931–1980," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 15, no. 4 (1983): 2–25. For an almost complete list of Buck's published writings, see Lucille S. Zinn, "The Works of Pearl S. Buck: A Bibliography," *Bulletin of Bibliography* 36, no. 4 (1979): 194–208.

⁷ See especially Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Hilary Spurling, *Pearl Buck in China: Journey to The Good Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). See also Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907–1932* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Robert Shaffer, "Women and International Relations: Pearl S. Buck's Critique of the Cold War," *Journal of Women's*

History 11, no. 3 (1999): 151–75; Robert Shaffer, “Pearl S. Buck and the East and West Association: The Trajectory and Fate of Left-Liberal Internationalism, 1940–1950,” *Peace & Change* 28, no. 1 (2003): 1–36; Emily Cheng, “Pearl S. Buck’s ‘American Children’: US Democracy, Adoption of the Amerasian Child, and the Occupation of Japan in *The Hidden Flower*,” *Frontiers* 35, no. 1 (2014): 181–210.

For recent surveys of American women writers that only superficially discuss Buck’s work, see Taimi Olsen, “Buck, Pearl Sydenstricker,” in *The Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140; and Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 357–59.

⁸ Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: John Day, 1931), 184, see also 4, 125–26, 145. In modern American terms, the distinction might be encapsulated in the dichotomy between “mother” and “trophy wife.” Buck continues, “And it was a pride to Wang Lung in the village that men mentioned with envy the woman [Lotus] in his inner court; it was as though a man spoke of a rare jewel or an expensive toy that was useless except that it was sign and symbol of a man who had passed beyond the necessity of caring only to be fed and clothed and could spend his money on joy if he wished” (184).

⁹ Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 15–16, 162. John Lossing Buck published his findings in several books, including John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China* (Nanking: University of Nanking, 1937). Pearl Buck’s second husband, Richard J. Walsh, who she married in 1935, was president of the John Day Company, which published almost all of her books. Walsh also edited *Asia* magazine (renamed *Asia and the Americas* in 1942), in which many of her writings appeared.

¹⁰ Florence Ayscough, “The Real China,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 21, 1931, 676.

¹¹ Eda Lou Walton, review of *The Good Earth*, by Pearl S. Buck, *Nation*, May 13, 1931, 534.

¹² Pearl S. Buck, *The Mother* (New York: John Day, 1934).

¹³ George Grose, “The Primal Curse of Poverty,” *Christian Century*, April 4, 1934, 465–66.

¹⁴ Florence Ayscough, “Pearl Buck’s Story of an Elemental Woman,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, January 13, 1934, 401, 403.

¹⁵ Dorothy Canfield, review of *The Mother*, by Pearl S. Buck, *Asia*, February 1934, 123–24. See also Mark Van Doren, “Abstract Woman,” *Nation*, January 17, 1934, 78. On low sales of *The Mother*, see David Lloyd to Critchell Remington, 28 March 1934, Box 96, and Richard Walsh to David Lloyd, 14 February 1935, Box 112, Archives of John Day Company, Princeton University Library. See also Dorothy Canfield (who also went by her married name, Dorothy Canfield Fisher) to John Day Co., n.d., reprinted in *The Book of the Month: Sixty Years of Books in American Life*, ed. Al Silverman (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 27; Dorothy Canfield

Fisher to Pearl S. Buck, 7 November [?], Letters Written to Pearl S. Buck, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College; and Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Reminiscences of Dorothy Canfield Fisher: Oral History, 1955*, transcript, Book-of-the-Month Club Project, Columbia University Libraries, 414–16.

¹⁶ Buck, *Mother*, 164–69; and Richard Walsh to Jespio, 9 January 1934, Box 96, Archives of John Day Company. For criticisms of the depictions of sex in *The Good Earth*, see, for example, “Plea to Censor Pearl S. Buck Made to Board,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, April 18, 1933, 11. For a perceptive discussion of Buck’s depictions of sexuality, see John Erskine’s syndicated column, “Pearl Buck, Missionary,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 20, 1933, clipping in Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.

¹⁷ “Pearl Buck Speaks on Birth Control,” typescript of speech, 12 February 1935, Margaret Sanger Papers Microfilm Edition, S10:364–67, Smith College Collections. On Buck’s continuing friendship with Sanger, see Robert Shaffer, “Buck, Sanger, West, East,” *Margaret Sanger Papers Project Newsletter* 13 (1996): 4–7.

¹⁸ Pearl S. Buck, *The Patriot* (New York: John Day, 1939), 18–19.

¹⁹ Pearl S. Buck, *A House Divided* (New York: John Day, 1935), 242.

²⁰ Buck, *Patriot*, 54–56.

²¹ See Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986); and Kazuko Ono, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850–1950*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), chapter 6.

²² Buck, *House Divided*, 86–87.

²³ Buck described orphanages for girls run by American missionaries in *Dragon Seed* (New York: John Day, 1942). In the US as in China at that time, many of those “orphaned” children had one or two living parents, who gave up the child due to poverty or sexual scandal.

²⁴ Buck, *House Divided*, 349–53.

²⁵ See Pearl S. Buck, “Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?” *Harper’s*, January 1933, 143–55. This essay was adapted from a November 1932 speech.

²⁶ Pearl S. Buck, “New Modes of Chinese Marriage,” *Asia*, August 1927, 653.

²⁷ See Buck, “New Modes of Chinese Marriage,” 650–53; Pearl S. Buck, “Chinese Women: Their Predicament in the China of Today,” *Pacific Affairs*, October 1931, 905–9; Pearl S. Buck, “Says Chinese Wives Hold Unsure Place,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1932, II-5; Pearl S. Buck, “The First Wife,” in *The First Wife and Other Stories* (New York: John Day, 1933), 35–105; and Pearl S. Buck, “The Old Mother,” in Buck, *First Wife*, 107–24.

²⁸ Buck, *Mother*, 242–43.

²⁹ Pearl S. Buck, "The Communist," in Buck, *First Wife*, 235, 236. (The story was originally published in *Asia* in 1930 as "Singing to Her Death.") Cf. Pearl S. Buck, "A Man's Foes," in *Today and Forever* (New York: John Day, 1941), 277–309.

³⁰ See Christina Kelley Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895–1980* (New York: Viking, 1981), 123–31; and Ono, *Chinese Women*, chapter 5.

³¹ Compare Buck, "The Communist," and Buck, *Mother*, 292, 296–97, with the account of Perpetua in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 313–18.

³² Pearl S. Buck, *This Proud Heart* (New York: John Day, 1938), 313.

³³ On Buck's feelings of being stultified in her first marriage, see especially Spurling, *Pearl Buck in China*. By contrast, China expert Helen Foster Snow, a friend of Buck's in the 1930s, later commented that the relationship of writer Buck and publisher Walsh constituted "one of the most productive and successful marriages in the history of the literary profession." Helen Foster Snow to Nora Stirling, 9 July 1976, Box 11, Nora Stirling Collection, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College.

³⁴ Buck, *This Proud Heart*, 344–45.

³⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1953; repr., New York: Knopf, 1993), 291.

³⁶ Buck, *This Proud Heart*, 303.

³⁷ Frances Woodward, "Woman's Woman," *Saturday Review of Literature*, February 12, 1938, 10; and Mark Van Doren, "Wonderful Woman," *Nation*, February 12, 1938, 187. This literary technique of presenting a smart, accomplished heroine as exceptional is not uncommon even in twenty-first-century fiction; contrast the portrait of Dr. Temperance Brennan with other female characters in Kathy Reichs's popular *Bones* series.

³⁸ Buck, *This Proud Heart*, 332.

³⁹ Richard Walsh to Mary Baker, 14 March 1938, Box 133, Archives of John Day Company.

⁴⁰ See Cott, *Grounding*, especially chapter 7; and Lepore, *Secret History*, 121.

⁴¹ Mary Ross, "Pearl Buck Comes Home," *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, February 13, 1938, IX-4.

⁴² Margaret Wallace, "Pearl Buck Writes of Americans," *New York Times Book Review*, February 13, 1938, 6; and press release, "This Proud Heart," n.d., Box 133, Archives of John Day Company.

- ⁴³ Winfred Garrison, "Mrs. Buck Comes Home," *Christian Century*, April 6, 1938, 436–37.
- ⁴⁴ Woodward, "Woman's Woman." For less favorable reviews by men, see Ralph Thomson, review of *This Proud Heart*, by Pearl S. Buck, *Yale Review* 28 (June 1939): viii; and Van Doren, "Wonderful Woman."
- ⁴⁵ Olga [illegible] to Pearl S. Buck, 7 January 1938, Box 133, Archives of John Day Company.
- ⁴⁶ Clara Grant to Pearl S. Buck, 24 January 1938, Box 133, Archives of John Day Company.
- ⁴⁷ Marion Sheldon to Pearl S. Buck, 23 February 1938, Box 133, Archives of John Day Company.
- ⁴⁸ See Lepore, *Secret History*.
- ⁴⁹ Buck, *This Proud Heart*, 288.
- ⁵⁰ Pearl S. Buck, *Other Gods* (New York: John Day, 1940), 254–55.
- ⁵¹ Pearl S. Buck, *Command the Morning* (New York: John Day, 1959), 30; and Pearl S. Buck, *Sons* (New York: John Day, 1932), 92.
- ⁵² Pearl S. Buck, "America's Medieval Women," *Harper's*, August 1938, 225–32; Pearl S. Buck, "America's Gunpowder Women," *Harper's*, July 1939, 126–35; and Pearl S. Buck, *Of Men and Women* (New York: John Day, 1941).
- ⁵³ See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892; repr., Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1973).
- ⁵⁴ See Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 65.
- ⁵⁵ Pearl S. Buck, "The Asia Book-Shelf," *Asia*, December 1937, 88.
- ⁵⁶ See Florence Ayscough, *Chinese Women: Yesterday and Today* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), especially 214–32 and 232–49.
- ⁵⁷ Yutang Lin, *My Country and My People*, rev. ed. (New York: John Day, 1939), 155. Lin and his family lived with Buck on their arrival in the US; see Pearl S. Buck to Emma Edmunds White, n.d. [1936?], Emma Edmunds White Collection, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College.
- ⁵⁸ See clipping, n.d., Box 167, Archives of John Day Company; and varied correspondence with professors, Boxes 7 and 17, David Lloyd Agency Records on Pearl S. Buck, Princeton University Library.
- ⁵⁹ Anne O'Hare McCormick to Pearl S. Buck, 11 July 1941, Box 1, Anne O'Hare McCormick Papers, New York Public Library.
- ⁶⁰ Margaret Mead to Richard Walsh, Jr., 29 June 1941 and attachment, Box 159, Archives

of John Day Company.

⁶¹ Margaret Marshall, "Notes by the Way," *Nation*, June 14, 1941, 698.

⁶² Pearl S. Buck, "More Than a Woman," *Good Housekeeping*, April 1941, 66.

⁶³ Buck, *Patriot*, 75–76.

⁶⁴ Pearl S. Buck, "Golden Flower," *Woman's Home Companion*, March 1940, 24.

⁶⁵ Pearl S. Buck, "There Was No Peace," *Collier's*, November 2, 1940, 9–10, 46–49.

⁶⁶ Pearl S. Buck, *China Sky* (New York: Triangle Books, 1943). See also Edith Walton, "Doctors in China," *New York Times Book Review*, March 7, 1943, 24; and memos and correspondence on *China Sky*, Box 167, and Richard Walsh, Jr., to Richard Walsh, 16 February 1944, Box 189, Archives of John Day Company.

⁶⁷ See Katherine Woods, "Pearl Buck's New and Exceptional Novel of China," *New York Times Book Review*, January 25, 1942, 3; Robert Littell, "Outstanding Novels," *Yale Review* 31 (1942): x; "Results of the Book-of-the-Month Club Poll of Critics on the Outstanding Books of 1942," Box 102, Writers' War Board Papers, Library of Congress; and "The War Is a Best-Seller," *New Republic*, May 11, 1942, 621. For a negative review, see Howard Mumford Jones, "Japanese Gentility," *Saturday Review of Literature*, January 17, 1942, 5.

⁶⁸ Pearl S. Buck, review of *A Daughter of Han*, by Ida Pruitt, *Asia and the Americas*, February 1946, 94.

⁶⁹ Pearl S. Buck, *Pavilion of Women* (New York: John Day, 1946).

⁷⁰ William Birnie to Richard Walsh, 5 December 1946, and numerous additional reviews and reports on *Pavilion of Women*, Box 212, Archives of John Day Company; and Mary Pinchot, review of *Pavilion of Women*, by Pearl S. Buck, *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1947, 111.

⁷¹ Fanny Butcher, clippings, *Chicago Tribune*, 1 December 1946, and 8 December 1946, Box 212, Archives of John Day Company.

⁷² Ann Wolfe, "By a Dedicated Storyteller," *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 23, 1946, 11.

⁷³ Pearl S. Buck, statement for *Woman's Home Companion*, June 13, 1946, Box 212, Archives of John Day Company. For a nonfiction account published just before *Pavilion of Women* about a similarly powerful Chinese matriarch, see Pearl S. Buck, "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Ever Met," *Reader's Digest*, October 1946, 69–73. Such accounts of clan matriarchs have deep roots in Chinese literature; for a modern retelling in English of the classic eighteenth-century Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see Pauline Chen, *The Red Chamber* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

⁷⁴ Sterling North, clipping, *Citizen Magazine*, 1 December 1946, 7, and Pearl S. Buck, typescript, 3 June 1946, Box 212, Archives of John Day Company.

⁷⁵ Helen Foster Snow to Nora Stirling, [10 October?] 1977, Box 11, Nora Stirling Collection.

⁷⁶ Pearl S. Buck, *The Living Reed* (New York: John Day, 1963), 119.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 55–62. Buck's idyllic description here of women's handcrafted silk production differed entirely from her depiction in *The Patriot* of Chinese women's unremitting toil in modern foreign-owned silk workshops.

⁷⁸ Pearl S. Buck, "Woman's Place in a Democracy," *Congressional Record*, January 16, 1941, A123. For a similar article urging African Americans to support women's rights, see Pearl S. Buck, "Women—A Minority Group," *Opportunity*, July 1940, 201–2. On racism in the National Woman's Party, see, for example, Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, especially chapter 7.

⁷⁹ John Sedges [Pearl S. Buck], *The Angry Wife* (New York: John Day, 1947), 122.

⁸⁰ For an essay and a short story on such insecurity due to American marriage systems, see Pearl S. Buck, "When a Daughter Marries," *Good Housekeeping*, September 1949, 38, 241–45; and Pearl S. Buck, "A Husband for Lili," *Woman's Home Companion*, November 1953, 44–45, 51–57.

⁸¹ Pearl S. Buck, *The Hidden Flower* (New York: John Day, 1952). Intermarriage by race, nationality, or class was at the heart of many of Buck's other novels too (all published by the John Day Company): *East Wind, West Wind* (1930); *The Patriot*; *Other Gods*; *Portrait of a Marriage* (1945); *The Angry Wife*; *Peony* (1948); *Kinfolk* (1949); *Come, My Beloved* (1953); *Letter from Peking* (1957); and *The New Year* (1968).

⁸² Pearl S. Buck, *The New Year* (New York: John Day, 1968).

⁸³ Martin Levin, "Reader's Report," *New York Times Book Review*, March 24, 1968, 28.

⁸⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229–62. See also Elizabeth Janeway, "The Optimistic World of Miss Buck," *New York Times Book Review*, May 25, 1952, VII-4; and Nancy A. Walker, introduction to *Women's Magazines, 1940–1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy A. Walker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), especially 8–9. Walker includes Buck's 1940 essay, "Women and War," in this collection.

⁸⁵ Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Peace Activism and Women's Orientalism," in Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves*, 193–220.

⁸⁶ See Voltaire, *The Works of Voltaire*, vol. II (Paris/London: E. R. DuMont, 1901), 93–94.

⁸⁷ "Patterns of Life," *Times Literary Supplement*, August 8, 1942, 394.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Nancy Hewitt et al., "From Wollstonecraft to Mill: What British and European Ideas and Social Movements Influenced the Emergence of Feminism in the

Atlantic World, 1792–1869?” Women and Social Movements, accessed June 11, 2016, <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/awrm/intro.htm>; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

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