



Shared Values Of Eastern And Western Cultures And Their National-Cultural Semantics In The Trilogy Of Pearl S. Buck

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how values shared by Eastern and Western cultures — labour, family, filial respect, justice, and attachment to the land — are artistically represented in the trilogy of Pearl S. Buck, and how these universal values acquire distinct national-cultural semantics within the Chinese context. Applying narratological and psychopoetic criteria, the study argues that shared values are structured on two inseparable layers: an axiological universality that preserves the human core of a value, and a cultural-semantic particularity that retains its concrete national interpretation. The findings offer a basis for re-evaluating Buck's prose within cross-cultural poetics.

KEYWORDS: Shared values, national-cultural semantics, axiological universality, cultural-semantic particularity, psychopoetics, cross-cultural commonality, Pearl S. Buck.

INTRODUCTION

The question of which values human beings share across cultural boundaries has become central to contemporary literary study. Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973), an American writer formed at the meeting point of China and the West and awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938, made this question the substance of her major fiction. Her trilogy, which follows a Chinese peasant family across three generations, represents values common to East and West not as abstract ideas but as lived experience. Yet critical scholarship has often read her prose as plain realism, overlooking the artistry through which these shared values are rendered and culturally differentiated. This thesis addresses the following problem: how are values common to Eastern and Western cultures represented in the trilogy, and how do they acquire specific national-cultural semantics?

Methods

The study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology combining close textual reading with comparative, narratological, and linguocultural analysis. The empirical basis consists of the three novels of the trilogy, read as a single whole, together with Buck's Nobel lecture *The Chinese Novel* (1938). Episodes in which a shared value is placed under cross-cultural tension were identified and analysed on two levels: the universal value-core they express and the culturally specific semantic content they carry. The concept of narrative economy — the generation of maximal meaning through minimal means — links these levels, and a two-layered model of axiological universality and cultural-semantic particularity serves as the interpretive framework.

Results

The analysis shows, first, that shared values in the trilogy — labour, family, filial respect, justice, and attachment to the land — function as universal axiological concepts recognisable across cultures. Second, under the influence of social and cultural determinants these values acquire distinct national-cultural semantics: attachment to the land, for instance, signifies property and independence for a Western reader, and continuity with the ancestors and spiritual rootedness within the Chinese context. Third, shared values are therefore represented on two inseparable layers — an axiological universality preserving the human core of the value and a cultural-semantic particularity retaining its concrete national interpretation. Fourth, these values are conveyed chiefly through indirect psychologism and narrative economy, so that the shared core is made legible across cultures while its culturally specific form is preserved.

Discussion. The two-layered model indicates that the trilogy does not level cross-cultural difference into a bland sameness but figures commonality as universality that preserves distinctiveness. This finding carries consequences beyond a single writer: the model of “axiological universality within cultural-semantic particularity” offers a general method for reading cross-cultural literary texts, and it has practical value for translation, where both the shared value-core and its national semantics must be preserved together, including in Uzbek renderings of Buck’s prose. The representation of shared values is further shown to be dynamic rather than static, developing across the three novels along a trajectory of harmony, conflict, and re-conceptualisation.

Conclusion

Values shared by Eastern and Western cultures are represented in Pearl S. Buck’s trilogy as a two-layered structure in which an axiological universality is inseparably joined to a cultural-semantic particularity, and they are conveyed through indirect psychologism and the principle of narrative economy. Recognising the movement from universal value to national-cultural semantics as an organising principle of Buck’s art makes it possible to re-evaluate her prose within psychopoetics and cross-cultural poetics, and provides a model for understanding how literature mediates between cultures while preserving their differences.

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