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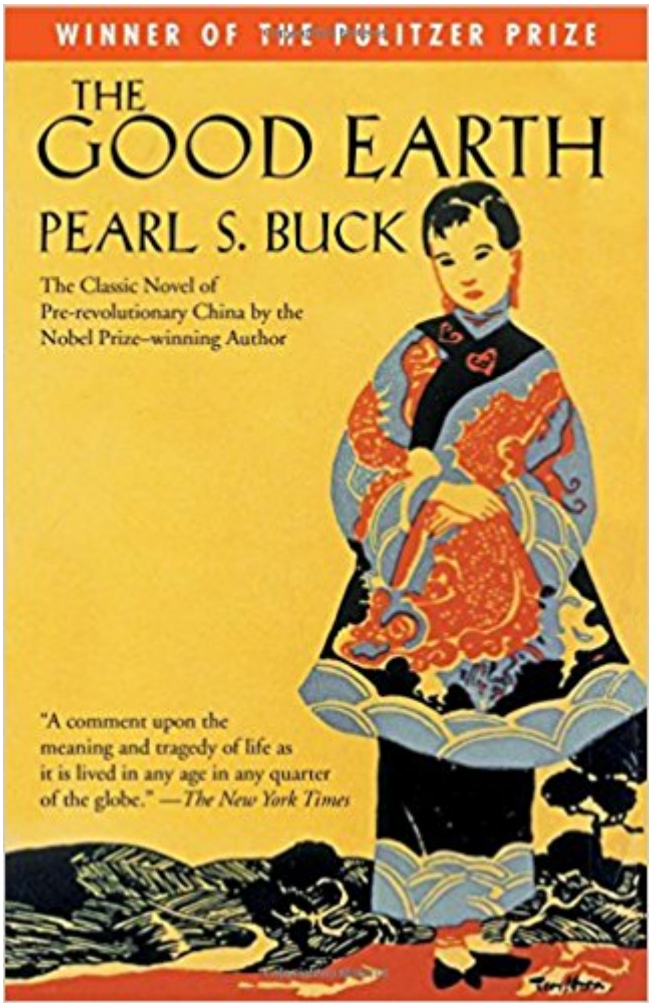
The Good Earth (Oprah's Book Club)



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Synopsis

Nobel Laureate Pearl S. Buckâ ™s epic Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and Oprah Book Club selection about a vanished China and one familyâ ™s shifting fortunes.Though more than seventy years have passed since this remarkable novel won the Pulitzer Prize, it has retained its popularity and become one of the great modern classics. In The Good Earth Pearl S. Buck paints an indelible portrait of China in the 1920s, when the last emperor reigned and the vast political and social upheavals of the twentieth century were but distant rumblings. This moving, classic story of the honest farmer Wang Lung and his selfless wife O-Lan is must reading for those who would fully appreciate the sweeping changes that have occurred in the lives of the Chinese people during the last century. Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck traces the whole cycle of life: its terrors, its passions, its ambitions and rewards. Her brilliant novelâ ”beloved by millions of readersâ ”is a universal tale of an ordinary family caught in the tide of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This 1932 Pulitzer Prize winning novel is still a standout today. Deceptive in its simplicity, it is a story built around a flawed human being and a teetering socio-economic system, as well as one that is layered with profound themes. The cadence of the author’s writing is also of note, as it rhythmically lends itself to the telling of the story, giving it a very distinct voice. No doubt the author’s writing style was influenced by her own immersion in Chinese culture, as she grew up and lived in China, the daughter of missionaries.This is the story of the cyclical nature of life, of the passions and desires

that motivate a human being, of good and evil, and of the desire to survive and thrive against great odds. It begins with the story of an illiterate, poor, peasant farmer, Wang Lung, who ventures from the rural countryside and goes to town to the great house of Hwang to obtain a bride from those among the rank of slave. There, he is given the slave O-lan as his bride.Selfless, hardworking, and a bearer of sons, the plain-faced O-lan supports Wang Lung's veneration of the land and his desire to acquire more land. She stays with him through thick and thin, through famine and very lean times, working alongside him on the land, making great sacrifices, and raising his children. As a family, they weather the tumultuousness of pre-revolutionary China in the 1920s, only to find themselves the recipient of riches beyond their dreams. At the first opportunity, they buy land from the great house of Hwang, whose expenses appear to be exceeding their income.With the passing of time, Wang Lung buys more and more land from the house of Hwang, until he owns it all, as his veneration of the land is always paramount. With O-lan at this side, his family continues to prosper. His life becomes more complicated, however, the richer he gets. Wang Lung then commits a life-changing act that pierces O-lan's heart in the most profoundly heartbreaking way.As the years pass, his sons become educated and literate, and the family continues to prosper. With the great house of Hwang on the skids, an opportunity to buy their house, the very same house from where he had fetched O-lan many years ago, becomes available. Pressed upon to buy that house by his sons, who do not share Wang Lung's veneration for the land and rural life, he buys the house. The country mice now have become city mice.This is a potent story, brimming with irony, yet simply told against a framework of mounting social change. It is a story that stands as a parable in many ways and is one that certainly should be read. It illustrates the timeless dichotomy between the young and the old, the old and the new, and the rich and the poor. It is no wonder that this beautifully written book won a Pulitzer Prize and is considered a classic masterpiece. Bravo!

While reading this book, I was totally struck by the honest and compassionate way Pearl Buck told her story. Born and raised in China, I can see my great grandparents in Wang Lung and his wife O-Lan, although in the end they didn't make it to the riches but stayed in the middle class among farmers and had put all their kids through schools which was the first ever in their village.What I love most about this book is that it shows the Westerners what life was REALLY like in rural China at the turn of the century instead of the usual stereotype or common cliche. In that sense, Pearl Buck was more Chinese than Chinese, for Amy Tan, Dai SiJie and the alike are just commercial writers in my opinion, who more or less only wrote what they thought would sell.The book itself is certainly well written too. It's as if walking through a living museum of the past and one could vividly envision what

Wang Lung and O-Lan had gone through as the story unfolds. Pearl Buck used simple yet powerful narrative language in which I felt Wang Lung's pain, suffering, ambition, agony, pride and all sorts of emotions and couldn't help but empathized with him as a human being.There are also small things that delighted me in Perl Buck's writing. To name just one, she had faithfully translated the characters' dialogs into English and I have to say you can't get more authentic than that. For example, she used moon for month, old head for old man, etc., and those are exactly how we say in Chinese, literally.It's a pity that neither in the US nor in China Pearl Buck is recognized or respected as much as she should have been. Though I went to Nanjing University where Pearl Buck had taught for years in China, little have I heard of her until just now, after finishing the Good Earth. Then I found that she also did a lot of humanitarian work in addition to writing after her return to the US, including pushing for the legalization of interracial/international adoptions that now has benefited so many families.I would recommend Camel XiangZi by Lao, She (Original in Chinese and translation in English available) which is the tale of a urban pedicab driver in the same era if you enjoy the Good Earth. I think the two authors have similar styles in story-telling.

Every soul that has the ability to read should absorb this book! These are the lessons we all encounter at some point in our lives.Wang Lung and his family's journey through life serves as a passage we all can travel through and come away better people for having done it. His wife O-lan represented such great strength, and I hurt when I knew she was hurting from the actions of her husband but was unable to show it. Her life went the way of so many women's lives, unfulfilled and short-changed. Likewise, I hurt when Wang Lung hurt. I felt his confusion, guilt, stubbornness, etc. These are brilliantly crafted people that I am honored to have met.I totally understand why this book transcends space and time. Over 30 years after her death, Pearl S. Buck's legacy is still changing people for the better....thank God for good storytelling.

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