

## THE WAY WOMEN'S FIGHT AGAINST PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS TOWARDS PEARL S. BUCK'S IMPERIAL WOMAN

Wennyta<sup>10</sup>

**Abstract:** *This research is conducted to show that woman not always passive, weak or inferior side, but she can use her inferiority (from patriarchal point of view) as a tricky strategy to get the equality between men and women. It is described in Imperial Woman, where Yehonala succeeds in arranging many strategies inside the oppression from patriarchal system. In collecting the data, the writer conducts a library research. A novel by Pearl S. Buck, entitled Imperial Woman and also the biography of Buck are chosen as the primary data of this research. From the sources the writer takes any data about the women's struggle toward patriarchal system. Furthermore, the writer uses descriptive method. So, the writer will write a thesis by describing the result of this research in descriptive way. The result of the analysis shows that Feminist approach and Buck as a female author teaches and reminds people that woman is a very special creature. Woman is not a weak person. She explores all and she has to attack the man's position and in order to be respected by man like Yehonala did.*

**Keyword :** *Patriarchal System, Pearl S. Buck's Imperial Woman*

### INTRODUCTION

Women's passivity is often considered as a weakness by many circles of feminists. In fact, this matter is considered as a virtue and natural value by patriarchal system. In essence, there are other hidden aspects behind the matter of women's passivity. It can be called as woman's strategies to fight against patriarchal system but this movement doesn't count as the rebellion movement from patriarchal system.

This research is conducted because the various hidden aspects toward women's strategies in Pearl S. Buck's Imperial Women are difficult to decipher. Therefore, a profound literary research is urgently needed. The writer chooses Pearl S. Buck's Imperial Women as the object of this research because

---

<sup>10</sup>Wennyta adalah Dosen Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Batanghari

this novel implies several of woman's strategies in fight against patriarchal system.

This research is also conducted to show that woman not always passive, weak or inferior side, but she can use her inferiority (from patriarchal point of view) as a tricky strategy to get the equality between men and women. It is described in Imperial Woman, where Yehonala succeeds in arranging many strategies inside the oppression from patriarchal system.

The last reason is because this novel is written by female author so we can see how woman describes a woman character in literary works. So we can see the woman's perspective toward the literary work. Buck describes Yehonala really differently. It must be something the author wants to tell, which makes me challenged to find.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

There are three steps in conducting this research. The first step is collecting the data. In collecting the data, the writer conducts a library research. A novel by Pearl S. Buck, entitled Imperial Woman and also the biography of Buck are chosen as the primary data of this research. From the sources the writer takes any data about the women's struggle toward patriarchal system. And some sources such as article or theory. The writer gets from books and websites are secondary data to support this research.

The second steps is analyzing the data, qualitative data is used in the form of words, statements and paragraph. As the steps, the novel must be read first to get any evident that is related with the research. After that, the relationship between the content of the novel with the biography of the author to get the correlation between the novel and the background of the author must be found out because in this study an expressive approach is applied. The last step is presenting the data; descriptive method is used.

### **PEARL S. BUCK'S LIFE AND CARIER**

Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker was born on June 26, 1892, in Hillsboro, West Virginia. But she spends a half of her life in China. Her parents, Absalom and Caroline Sydenstricker, were Southern Presbyterian missionaries, stationed in China. She is the fourth of seven children (and one of only three who would survive to adulthood). Pearl's father spent months away from home, itinerating in the Chinese countryside in search of Christian converts; Pearl's mother ministered to Chinese women in a small dispensary she established.

Buck is well in speaking English and Chinese, since she was child was taught principally by her mother and by a Chinese tutor, Mr. Kung. In 1900, during the Boxer Uprising, Caroline and the children were evacuated to Shanghai, where they spent several anxious months waiting for word of Absalom's fate. Later that year, the family returned to the US for another home leave.

( [www.Pbsi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PSBH\\_PearlSBuckBio.com](http://www.Pbsi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PSBH_PearlSBuckBio.com))

In 1910, Pearl enrolled in Randolph-Macon Woman's College, in Lynchburg, Virginia, from which she graduated in 1914. Although she had intended to remain in the US, she returned to China shortly after graduation when she received word that her mother was gravely ill. In 1915, she met a young Cornell graduate, an agricultural economist named John Lossing Buck. They married in 1917, and immediately moved to Nanhsuchou (Nanxuzhou) in rural Anhwei (Anhui) province. In this impoverished community, Pearl Buck gathered the material that she would later use in *The Good Earth* and other stories of China.

The Bucks' first child, Carol, was born in 1921; a victim of PKU, she proved to be profoundly retarded. Furthermore, because of a uterine tumor discovered during the delivery, Pearl underwent a hysterectomy. In 1925, she and Lossing adopted a baby girl, Janice. The Buck marriage was unhappy almost from the beginning, but would last for eighteen years.

From 1920 to 1933, Pearl and Lossing made their home in Nanking (Nanjing), on the campus of Nanking University, where both had teaching positions. In 1921, Pearl's mother died and shortly afterwards her father moved in with the Bucks. The tragedies and dislocations which Pearl suffered in the 1920s reached a climax in March, 1927, in the violence known as the "Nanking Incident." In a confused battle involving elements of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist troops, Communist forces, and assorted warlords, several Westerners were murdered. The Bucks spent a terrified day in hiding, after which they were rescued by American gunboats. After a trip downriver to Shanghai, the Buck family sailed to Unzen, Japan, where they spent the following year. They then moved back to Nanking, though conditions remained dangerously unsettled.

Buck had begun to publish stories and essays in the 1920s, in magazines such as *Nation*, *The Chinese Recorder*, *Asia*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. Her first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, was published by the John Day Company in

1930. John Day's publisher, Richard Walsh, would eventually become Pearl's second husband, in 1935, after both received divorces.

In 1931, John Day published Pearl's second novel, *The Good Earth*. This became the best-selling book of both 1931 and 1932, won the Pulitzer Prize and the Howells Medal in 1935, and would be adapted as a major MGM film in 1937. Other novels and books of non-fiction quickly followed. In 1938, less than a decade after her first book had appeared, Pearl won the Nobel Prize in literature, the first American woman to do so. By the time of her death in 1973, Pearl would publish over seventy books: novels, collections of stories, biography and autobiography, poetry, drama, children's literature, and translations from the Chinese.

In 1934, because of conditions in China, and also to be closer to Richard Walsh and her daughter Carol, whom she had placed in an institution in New Jersey, Pearl moved permanently to the US. She bought an old farmhouse, Green Hills Farm, in Bucks County, PA. She and Richard adopted six more children over the following years. Green Hills Farm is now on the Registry of Historic Buildings; fifteen thousand people visit each year.

From the day of her move to the US, Pearl was active in American civil rights and women's rights activities. She published essays in both *Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, and *Opportunity*, the magazine of the Urban League; she was a trustee of Howard University for twenty years, beginning in the early 1940s. In 1942, Pearl and Richard founded the East and West Association, dedicated to cultural exchange and understanding between Asia and the West. In 1949, outraged that existing adoption services considered Asian and mixed-race children unadoptable, Pearl established Welcome House, the first international, inter-racial adoption agency; in the nearly five decades of its work, Welcome House has assisted in the placement of over five thousand children.

### **Woman's strategies in Patriarchal System**

After being a favorite concubine, Yehonala has been being a part of patriarchal system. So she begins to fight against patriarchal system by following her strategies.

#### **1. The Strategies to Step into Second Consort**

a) Enrich her Knowledge.

Since, Yehonala has been a part of patriarchal system. She prepares herself to be ready if she becomes the Empress later, one of them is reading to enlarge her knowledge. She reads many kinds of book; arts, govern, culture, and also war strategies: " She knew already how to read and write, thanks to her

uncle's goodness, but her thirst for real learning was never satisfied. Book of history and poetry, music and painting, the arts of eye and ears, these she would ask to be taught." (14)

b) Emperor's Adviser.

Due to her thirst of knowledge, Yehonala begins to control the Emperor position. The weak Emperor who always cries and sighs toward her every night, it is the good point for Yehonala to attack the Emperor position : " That night when the Emperor received her she found him too frightened for habitual lust, a desire made fierce because his body could no more obey his mind : "What shall we do with this Bowring Englishman? Does he not deserve to die?" (81) The quotation above show how the Emperor is depend his life on Yehonala. Only Yehonala can help him in solving many problems that is faced by Imperial. Yehonala's strategies to control Emperor's life is succeeds.

Moreover, Yehonala is believed by the Emperor to sit behind the throne, to know all the problems that are faced by the Imperial, and later, Yehonala will find the solution to help the people. At night, when the Emperor calls her, the Emperor will be asking the solution to tell to the people who need the solution.

" Help me," he besought her again and yet again. " Help me – help me, lest I die of this dreadful heat unslaken."

I will help you my Lord. Throw half your burden upon me. Let me always sit behind the screen in the Throne Hall at dawn and listen to your ministers. I can hear the inner meaning of their complaints and when they are gone I will tell you what I think but leaving all decision to my lord, as is my duty."(69)

The quotation above, explain the way she runs her strategy. Slowly but sure, Yehonala has a respectful position in Emperor's eyes. The Emperor is just not use her "body", but the Emperor is more need her brain to help him. So, indirectly all decision in Imperial life is in Yehonala.

c) Second Consort

Her position is more powerful, because she gets pregnant. In fact, she born a son, son of the Emperor. It means her child will become the next Emperor in the Imperial. This opportunity she uses to ask the higher position. In previously, she is only the favorite concubine, but now she is asking the equal position with the consort. And she gets it.

" If I am to brin good fortune, I must have my weapons, she said.

" True, Venerable," the Chief Eunuch replied and waited.

" My first weapon," she continued," must be the power of rank."

“ True, Venerable,” the chief Eunuch said again and waited.

“ Return to the Emperor,” Yehonala commanded. “Put into his mind that the Heir is in danger. Put into his mind that only I can protect our child. Put into his mind that he must raise my rank equal that of the Consort, so that she cannot have power over the heir, or be used by those who crave such power. (64)

Through her faithful Eunuch Li Lien-ying, she succeeds in persuading the Emperor to up grade her rank in Imperial life. And it means her goal is getting closer.

**The strategies to step into The Empress Mother.**

After being the second consort, she has the same right with the first consort, even more. She is not only second consort but she has control the Emperor. But unfortunately, Emperor’s health is getting worst so she has to arrange some strategies to keep her position from another patriarchal system that wants to rob her son position as the young Emperor.

a) Approaching the Consort.

First consort is influenced by patriarchal system. So if something happens with the Emperor, Yehonala has no partner to fight against some princes who want to rob the Emperor position.

First Consort is her cousin, but after living in Forbidden City they haven’t seen each other. So, Yehonala tries to approach her cousin to stand in her side : “ It is for our son that I ask your favor, Yehonala said, “ and never for myself. I have no need of anyone. Yet I must be sure that you are for our son and not against him”(61). From this quotation, Yehonala uses word “Our Son”. It is her strategies to melt the first consort’s heart. She knows well how to approach her cousin. She understands that someday her cousin can be her dangerous enemy that is way she has to take her to support her, not to against her.

Yehonala stepped forward while she gave her son to a lady to hold for her. “ Give me your hands, Cousin.” Her voice was smooth and resolute.

“ Promise me that none can divide us. We must live out our lives together here within these walls. Let us be friends and not enemies.” (61)

And its strategy does well, Yehonala succeeds in control first consort position to help her.

b) Minimizing the enemies who will attack her.

After approaching the Consort, Yehonala still tries to minimize her enemy. Lady mai is her servant, but she is also the daughter of her enemy; Su Shun. He is one of the princes who want to attack her. So she has to keep his daughter to not betray her.

Yehonala has her weakness. Mai is falling in love with Jung Lu, Yehonala soul mates. But in this situation, Yehonala is forcing to sacrifice her true love for her son's future.

“Child, it is nothing to me to whom you love. Why should you not wed the commander of the imperial guard? A handsome man, and young”

The lady could not believe what she heard. Her face flushed delicately, tears come to her dark eyes, and clung to the kind hands.

“Venerable,” the lady's voice trembled, “to me you are the Goodness of mercy herself”

Tzu Shi smiled serenely, and put down the little hand she held.

“Now-now-no flattery, child! But I have a plan.”

“A Plan?” (108)

In doing her strategies, Yehonala is ignoring about herself. She is sacrifice all she has for the sake of her son's future, no matter if it is her heart. One thing that she wants to get is her goal to become the Empress.

#### c) The Empress Mother

Emperor's health is getting worst. Many kind of medical treatments have come to Palace tries to examine him but it doesn't work well. So Yehonala has to get child's regent to tenacious her position.

“ My Lord,” She said imperiously,” I must be the child's regent. None but I can guard his life against those who would destroy him. Move your right hand once more to signify your wish.”

“ You must sign your will, my Lord,” she said distinctly to the dying Emperor. “I take your hand – so. Your fingers about the brush, so-“

He yielded her his hand, she held it, and the fingers moved, or seemed to move, to make his name.

“ Thank you my Lord,” she said, and put the parchment in her bosom.

“ Rest now, dear lord.” (148)

After signing the child's regent, the Emperor passes away. And automatically, Yehonala's son becomes young Emperor, and Yehonala is the Empress mother.

#### **The Strategies to Step into the Empress**

Young Emperor is just the shadow of the real Empress; Yehonala. As the Empress Mother, she arranges all the decision in the Imperial. The real

highest is in Yehonala: “ Thus began the reign of the young Emperor but all knew that whatever her propriety and her courtesy to all, the Empress Mother reigned supreme.” (166)

After commanding the imperial for 12 years, the Emperor gets mature. But unfortunately, he gets black smallpox. And several months after that, the young Emperor passes away. And Yehonala become the Empress.

As for the Emperor, before he could decide what next to do he fell ill of black smallpox, caught somewhere in the city when in disguise he went out to amuse himself. In the tenth month, after many days of restless fever while his skin broke out in pox, he lay near to death. (271)

And it means Yehonala gets the highest position in Imperial life. She succeeds in fight against patriarchal system. Because the Empress is the highest position who has a right to ask anyone and to decide all the decision in Imperial life.

From the strategies above, Buck as the author show us her Feminist Agenda in getting the equal position between man and woman through her Novel Imperial Woman.

#### **Gynocriticism toward Pearl S Buck’s Imperial Woman.**

Woman and man have different style in writing a literary work. This statement supported by Endraswara in his book Metodologi Penelitian Sastra:

“keduanya sering kentaldenganhal

halperjuanganterhadapnasibmerekamasing-masingdanmengarahkeperjuanganhak” (147:2003). By gynocriticism the writer analyzes feeling, thought and Buck’s idea as the woman author who create a woman character Yehonala. There are four aspects in describing woman’s style in writing. It also creates feminist critics known as Gynocriticism proposed by Elaine Showalter. According to Bressler the four aspects are: *The biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural* (1999:183), but in this research the writer only focuses on *cultural* aspects because this aspect appears dominantly in the novel Imperial Woman. Cultural explains about how the society in which female authors work and function shape women’s goals, responses and point of view. (1999:183).

As stated in Kritik Sastra Feminis: Sebaliknya ,perempuan yang bercita-cita untuk dengan berbagai cara mengembangkandirimenjadi manusia yang mandiri lahir batin akandidukungolehgerakan feminis. (2003:52). From the previous quotation we assume that many kinds of woman’s movement is supported by feminist, the important thing is the aim is to get the equality between man and woman.

In writing her novel, Buck is influenced by her cultural background. She is western woman who spent a half of her life in China, like the writer mention in Chapter III that Buck was born in Virginia but she grew up in China. She learns two cultures; Western and Chinese culture. So it makes sense if Buck is able to describe about Imperial life perfectly like serve in the novel Imperial Woman.

Buck in her novel Imperial Woman delivers many messages for woman's reader. It makes sense if the Buck is a feminist, because after graduated her school. She continues her college to Randolph – Macon Woman's College in United States who develops her feeling as the woman who wants fight against patriarchal system and gets the equality between man and woman. The society around her is building her to think feminist. Her interests in feminist also appear when she joins a shelter for Chinese slave girls and prostitute. As I mention in Chapter III, Buck has developed her ability in writing since she was a student in college. In her college she is believed as a president of her class. It influences her ideas in telling about how Yehonala as the main character become the Empress who leading the Chinese people in the novel Imperial Woman.

Her social life, as a marriage woman also impact in her literary work. As we see in Imperial Woman. As the writer writes in Chapter III; Buck is unhappy marriage woman. She has to keep her marriage for several years but life unhappily. Implicitly, it is reflected in her literary work Imperial Woman. Yehonala is succeeds in reaching her goal as the Empress, but in her love's life Yehonala has sacrifice it. The man that she loves is Jung Lu. But she has to be the Emperor's concubine, but Yehonala tries to survive life without love. It is really happens in Buck's life. Until she finally divorce and married with another man, as the writer has mentioned in chapter III.

You love no man, do you? Alas, I know now that I do love. Here is the mystery! If I did not love. I could be careless. What is woman's body? It is only a thing, to be kept or given away. There is no pride in it when one does not love. It is only priceless when one loves- and is loved again. (38)

This is the quotation from Imperial Woman, that show how torture Yehonala is, but she never gives up with the condition.

As a daughter, Buck loves her family especially her mother. Her customs teach her to respect her mother. As the writer has said in Chapter III, Buck keeps her mother when her mother gets ill. She flights from United States to China only to see her mother, her sincere is reflected in her character

Yehonala. Yehonala is really respect and care with her mother, she always heard and remember what her mother said.

She drew her hand away and wiped her eyes gracefully on the edge of her satin sleeve. “ I have yearned all day for my mother, she said.”  
“And I don’t know why. Can it be that I have some unfilial? I have not looked up her face since I entered these walls at your command. I don’t know how she is.(85)

In Imperial Woman, Yehonala also describe about a mother who has to divide her time between being the Emperor’s brain and being a mother. As we can find in chapter III, Buck also has a child. As a carrier woman she has to divide her time, but unfortunately her child was sick and Buck has to lose her child in younger age. It is also reflected in her novel Imperial woman. Yehonala has to lose her child because he got black smallpox, and dies in younger age.

As for the Emperor, before he could decide what next to do he fell ill of black smallpox, caught somewhere in the city when in disguise he went out to amuse himself. In the tenth month, after many days of restless fever while his shin broke out in pox, he lay near to death. (271)

Buck social life also reflected in how see explain about any rebellion in her novel Imperial woman.

The Empress sat at audience in the Winter Palace. She had returned to the Forbidden City the day before, leaving the autumn beauty of the Summer Palace behind her. The boxers, without any permission, had burned the railway to Tienhsin. ( 340)

As the writer writes in chapter III that Buck has felt how to live in rebellion environment. She has ever felt how frighten she is and how suffer she is when she has to hide from the rebellion who attack her.

## CONCLUSIONS

By using Gynocriticism, it can be seen how Buck as the author describes a woman in her literary works as a strong figure but never forgets her fate as a woman influenced by four aspects above. That’s the reason why the writer explains it in two part; first, Woman’s strategies to fight again patriarchal system and Gynocriticism toward Pearl S Buck’s Imperial Woman.

Woman’s strategies to fight against patriarchal system explain about how buck delivers her idea about Feminist agenda or the step to get the equality between man and woman. In getting her goal Buck describes Yehonala who has to follow some steps before she becomes the Empress of China; concubine,

second consort, the Empress Mother and finally she becomes an Empress. In each step Yehonala has different strategies to move on to next step in her life. Yehonala looks like follow what the patriarchal system wants but behind that she has a big plan and strategies to take over the man's position.

The second is Gynocriticism toward Pearl S Buck's Imperial Woman. In this part explain more about Buck's feeling and her social background which influences her in writing Imperial Woman. In this part we can see the conjunction of chapter III that explain about Biography of pearl S Buck with the literary work itself. And the writer finds that this novel is the reflection of Buck's life. Because many aspects have the similar feeling and condition between Buck as the author with Yehonala as her main character for example; as being mother, being daughter, unhappy marriage, and etc.

So this literary work is using Feminist approach and Buck as a female author teaches and reminds people that woman is a very special creature. Woman is not a weak person. She explores all and she has to attack the man's position and in order to be respected by man like Yehonala did.

#### REFERENCES

- Buck, P.S. 2004. Imperial Woman. Moyer Bell.
- Djajanegara, S. 2003. Kritik Sastra Feminis: Sebuah Pengantar. Gramedia Pustaka: Jakarta.
- Endraswara, S. 2003. Metodologi Penelitian Sastra: Epistemologi, Model, Teori, dan Aplikasi. Pustaka Widayatama: Yogyakarta.
- Roberts, E.V. 1983. Writing Themes about Literature. Prentice Hall PTR.