

Document 1.3: Excerpts from *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, 1931

*Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973) was born in the United States, but her parents took her to China, where they worked as missionaries, when she was an infant. Except for her years in college, she lived in China until 1933. She wrote many articles and stories about China, which were published in American magazines between 1923 and 1931. In addition, she wrote about one hundred books. She is best known for *The Good Earth*, her novel about a peasant family. In 1938 she was the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for her novels about China.*

*At the beginning of *The Good Earth*, Buck describes Wang Lung's home and his observations of his wife's work.*

[Wang Lung] went into the shed which was the kitchen, leaning against the house, and out of its dusk an ox twisted its head from behind the corner next to the door and lowed at him deeply. The kitchen was made of earthen bricks as the house was, great squares of earth dug from their own fields, and thatched with straw from their own wheat....

Hitherto he had had to prepare the meals when he came in [from the fields]... Now whatever there was, was ready for him... The earthen floor was swept and the fuel pile replenished. The woman, when he had gone in the morning, took the bamboo rake and a length of rope and with these she roamed the countryside, reaping here a bit of grass and there a twig or a handful of leaves, returning at noon with enough to cook the dinner. It pleased the man that they need buy no more fuel.

In the afternoon, she took a hoe and a basket and with these upon her shoulder she went to the main road leading into the city where mules and donkeys and horses carried burdens to and fro, and there she picked the droppings from the animals and carried it home and piled the manure in the dooryard for fertilizer for the fields....

And she took their ragged clothes and with thread she herself spun on a bamboo spindle from a wad of cotton, she mended and contrived to cover the rents in their winter clothes.... Day after day she did one thing after another, until the three rooms seemed clean and almost prosperous....

Source: Buck, Pearl S. *The Good Earth*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1994 edition. 2, 27–28.