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THE PHILOSOPHICAL-ETHICAL ESSENCE AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CHILD IMAGE IN PEARL S. BUCK'S "THE BIG WAVE"

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Abstract. This article examines the philosophical and ethical essence as well as the artistic interpretation of the child character in The Big Wave by the American writer Pearl S. Buck. The work is imbued with profound philosophical ideas concerning the meaning of human life, the harmony between nature and humanity, the continuity of life, courage, patience, resilience, and the significance of family values. The research employs literary theory, character analysis, typological analysis, and philosophical-ethical approaches as its principal methodological framework. The findings demonstrate that, through the child character, the author conveys some of humanity's noblest qualities, including compassion, trust, loyalty, and a deep appreciation for life. Furthermore, the child is portrayed not merely as the protagonist of the narrative but as a symbolic embodiment of hope, spiritual growth, and the enduring human capacity to overcome adversity. The study concludes that the child character occupies a central place in Pearl S. Buck's artistic worldview and serves as an important medium for expressing the novel's humanistic and moral ideals.

Keywords: Pearl S. Buck, The Big Wave, child character, philosophical interpretation, ethical values, typological analysis, poetics, humanism, literary analysis.

Introduction. Literature, as a form of art that expresses the deepest layers of the human psyche, portrays every stage of human life, including childhood, through artistic images. In literary theory, the child character is regarded as a unique artistic device for revealing the purest human emotions, such as compassion, love, fear, hope, and innocence. The inner world of a child is often intertwined with philosophical reflections on life, thereby enriching a literary work with profound symbolic and ethical meanings. Among the prominent twentieth-century writers who successfully explored this aspect is Pearl S. Buck, whose literary legacy represents a harmonious synthesis of Eastern and Western cultural traditions.

Although The Big Wave (1948) was written primarily for young readers, it is distinguished by its profound philosophical and ethical dimensions. Through the lives of two children, Kino and Jiya, who live in a small fishing village in Japan, the novel explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the cyclical nature of life, the coexistence of fear and hope, and the processes of loss, resilience, and renewal. Rather than presenting childhood merely as a stage of physical development, Buck depicts it as a period of moral and spiritual formation during which essential human values are tested and strengthened. Consequently, the child characters become central to the author's humanistic vision, embodying courage, empathy, perseverance, and faith in life despite adversity. The philosophical depth of The Big Wave lies in its portrayal of natural disasters not simply as destructive forces but as an inseparable part of the natural order. The devastating tsunami functions both as a real event and as a symbolic representation of the inevitable challenges of human existence. In this context, the child

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characters' responses to tragedy reveal their emotional maturity and ethical growth, illustrating the novel's central message that life must be embraced with courage rather than fear. Thus, the narrative transcends the boundaries of children's literature and becomes a universal reflection on human existence and moral responsibility.

Despite the international recognition of Pearl S. Buck's literary achievements, scholarly attention has primarily focused on her major novels, such as The Good Earth, while The Big Wave has received comparatively limited academic analysis, particularly with regard to the philosophical and ethical functions of its child characters. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the artistic representation of childhood in The Big Wave from literary, typological, and philosophical perspectives.

Materials and Methods. The primary research material for this study is Pearl S. Buck's novella The Big Wave (1948), which serves as the main source for analyzing the philosophical, ethical, and artistic representation of child characters. The study focuses particularly on the protagonists, Kino and Jiya, whose experiences provide the foundation for exploring the novel's humanistic message and artistic structure.

To achieve the objectives of the research, a combination of complementary literary methods was employed. The literary analytical method was used to examine the narrative structure, characterization, thematic development, and artistic devices that contribute to the portrayal of childhood. Particular attention was given to the psychological development of the protagonists, their emotional responses to natural disasters, and the symbolic significance of their actions throughout the narrative.

The typological approach was applied to identify and classify the child characters according to their psychological, ethical, and social characteristics. This method made it possible to compare Kino and Jiya in terms of their personalities, moral choices, emotional development, and responses to loss, fear, and responsibility. Such classification contributes to a deeper understanding of the artistic functions performed by child characters within the narrative. Furthermore, the research employed a philosophical and ethical approach to interpret the novel's underlying concepts concerning life, death, nature, courage, hope, human dignity, and moral responsibility. This approach enabled the study to reveal how Buck transforms the experiences of childhood into broader reflections on the meaning of human existence and the ethical principles that guide individual behavior. A comparative literary approach was also incorporated to identify similarities and differences between Pearl S. Buck's representation of child characters and selected examples from Uzbek children's literature. This comparative perspective highlights both the universal and culturally specific aspects of childhood portrayed in different literary traditions and contributes to a broader understanding of Buck's artistic worldview.

Finally, the interpretation of the findings was supported by concepts from modern literary criticism, including character theory, narrative analysis, and symbolic interpretation. The integration of these methodological approaches provides a comprehensive framework for examining the philosophical and ethical significance of child characters in The Big Wave and for evaluating their role within Pearl S. Buck's humanistic literary vision.

Results and Discussion. The analysis demonstrates that the child character occupies a central position in the humanistic and philosophical vision of Pearl S. Buck’s The Big Wave. The novel is structured around a series of contrasting yet complementary concepts, including life and death, humanity and nature, fear and courage, loss and renewal. Through these interconnected themes, Buck presents childhood not merely as a biological stage of development but as a profound spiritual and moral journey.

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From a philosophical perspective, the sea functions as the dominant symbol of the eternal cycle of life. Although the giant wave appears to destroy human lives and settlements, it simultaneously symbolizes the continuity and regeneration of existence. Following the loss of his family, Jiya struggles to comprehend the meaning of life and death. Through his inner reflections and emotional development, Buck suggests that death is not an absolute end but rather an inseparable part of the natural cycle of life, emphasizing the continuity of human existence and the resilience of the human spirit.

From an ethical perspective, the child characters embody the ideals of moral purity, compassion, perseverance, and responsibility. Kino represents friendship, loyalty, kindness, and unwavering support, while Jiya symbolizes courage, resilience, and the restoration of hope after tragedy. Their friendship reflects the fundamental importance of mutual trust, family, and love, demonstrating that emotional solidarity enables individuals to overcome even the most devastating experiences.

Buck's artistic style is characterized by linguistic simplicity combined with remarkable emotional depth. Through the perspective of child protagonists, she communicates complex philosophical ideas in an accessible yet deeply moving manner. Natural elements such as the sea, the sound of the waves, the wind, sunlight, and mountains function not merely as descriptive details but as symbolic expressions of emotional states and spiritual transformation. The effective use of symbolism, metaphor, imagery, and contrast enriches the narrative and reinforces its philosophical significance. The typological analysis of the child characters reveals two distinct psychological models. Kino represents emotional stability, wisdom, responsibility, and devotion to family values. In contrast, Jiya embodies spiritual rebirth, psychological recovery, and the triumph of hope over despair. Their contrasting personalities create a dynamic artistic balance that illustrates two complementary dimensions of human existence: peace and suffering, fear and courage, despair and hope. Rather than opposing each other, these characters collectively express the complexity of human life and emotional development.

The educational significance of The Big Wave is equally noteworthy. The novel encourages young readers to develop resilience, patience, respect for nature, empathy, and appreciation for family values. Buck conveys the idea that despite inevitable losses and suffering, individuals should continue to live with hope, love, and moral responsibility. Consequently, the novel possesses not only literary value but also considerable pedagogical importance, promoting ethical education through artistic representation.

The broader examination of Pearl S. Buck's literary works indicates that humanism, moral responsibility, and spiritual integrity constitute the core principles of her artistic worldview. In The Big Wave, these principles are expressed primarily through the emotional experiences of child protagonists. By presenting the world through a child's sincere and innocent perspective, Buck addresses profound philosophical questions that have challenged humanity throughout history: Why do people suffer? What is the meaning of death? How can one continue living after experiencing profound loss?

Rather than providing direct philosophical answers, the author responds to these questions through compassion, empathy, and hope. Jiya's gradual psychological recovery and reconciliation with nature symbolize not only the personal growth of an individual child but also the spiritual maturation of humanity itself. Consequently, the child character acquires metaphorical significance, representing innocence, faith in life, and the eternal possibility of renewal. From the perspective of literary theory, the child characters in The Big Wave may be interpreted as metaphysical characters, whose primary function extends beyond representing external reality. Instead, they serve as artistic instruments for exploring the fundamental meaning of existence. Throughout the narrative, the

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protagonists undergo psychological transformation, overcome emotional trauma, and emerge as morally stronger individuals. This developmental process demonstrates the dynamic typology of Buck's child characters and distinguishes her work from the conventional representation of child protagonists frequently found in Western children's literature.

Furthermore, Buck reveals the harmony between humanity and nature through the perceptions of children. The sea, the wind, the sun, and the surrounding landscape become symbolic reflections of the protagonists' emotional experiences. Rather than perceiving nature as an enemy, the children ultimately recognize it as an inseparable component of life itself. In this respect, The Big Wave may also be regarded as an ecocritical text that promotes ecological awareness and environmental ethics alongside its philosophical and moral themes.

Buck's educational philosophy is clearly reflected in her portrayal of childhood. She demonstrates profound understanding of children's psychological development while simultaneously expressing universal ethical values such as compassion, forgiveness, courage, hope, and devotion to life. The novel encourages readers to cultivate emotional resilience, empathy, and moral responsibility, making it significant not only as a literary achievement but also as a work of philosophical and educational importance. From a literary-critical perspective, Buck places the child character at the center of the narrative conflict. The struggle against natural disasters, the fear of death, loneliness, grief, and eventual psychological recovery all unfold primarily within the child's consciousness. Consequently, the child becomes not merely an observer of reality but an active interpreter and transformer of experience. This narrative strategy substantially enhances the psychological depth and artistic realism of the novel.

Overall, the findings confirm that the child character in Pearl S. Buck's The Big Wave constitutes a harmonious synthesis of philosophical, ethical, psychological, and aesthetic dimensions. Through the artistic representation of childhood, Buck illustrates the continuity of life, the unity of humanity and nature, and the enduring strength of the human spirit. The child thus emerges not only as the protagonist of the narrative but also as the central symbolic embodiment of hope, moral integrity, and the universal human capacity for renewal.

Conclusion. Pearl S. Buck's The Big Wave presents the philosophical and ethical essence of human existence through the artistic portrayal of child characters. By depicting the purity and sincerity of a child's heart, the author explores profound themes such as the continuity of life, harmonious coexistence with nature, the overcoming of fear, and the development of courage and moral resilience. The novel encourages readers to reflect upon the meaning of life and inspires them to confront adversity with dignity, compassion, and hope. In this respect, the child character functions not only as a representative of the younger generation but also as a symbol of humanity's purest virtues and moral ideals.

Therefore, The Big Wave should be regarded not only as an outstanding work of children's literature but also as a significant philosophical and ethical narrative that addresses universal questions concerning life, death, and the human condition. The study demonstrates that Buck successfully transforms the child character into a powerful artistic medium through which fundamental human values are expressed and interpreted. Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Pearl S. Buck introduced a distinctive typological model of the child character that occupies a unique place in modern literary studies. Her representation of childhood transcends cultural and national boundaries, presenting humanity as a universal value shared by all people regardless of their social or cultural background. Consequently, the child characters in The Big Wave serve not only as literary figures but also as symbols of universal humanism, moral responsibility, and spiritual development.

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Furthermore, the philosophical and ethical significance of the child character in The Big Wave is revealed not only through the protagonists' individual emotional experiences but also through their relationships with society, family, and the natural environment. Buck demonstrates that genuine personal growth emerges from the interaction between the individual and the surrounding world. By portraying the harmony between humanity and nature through the perspective of children, she emphasizes the intrinsic value of life, the importance of patience and perseverance, and the enduring power of love and compassion.

The psychological development of the child characters represents a broader process of spiritual maturation and self-discovery. Their experiences of loss, fear, suffering, and eventual recovery illustrate the universal human capacity to adapt, heal, and find renewed meaning in life. Through this artistic transformation, Buck conveys the message that emotional resilience and moral integrity are essential elements of human existence.

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