



**WOMEN UNDER PATRIARCHY: AN ANALYSIS ON LEE SU KIM'S MANEK
MISCHIEFS: OF PATRIARCHS, PLAYBOYS, AND PARAMOURS**

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchal oppression changes across time which results in the change in the form of women oppression and subordination as well as the adaptation of resistance by women to combat the established gender injustice. Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours* is a Malaysian literary work that uncovers the influence of patriarchy heritage on the portrayal of women as subordinates which has refrained them from gaining the courage to establish their sense of identity. Drawing from the postcolonial feminism perspective, Western feminists tend to overlook the oppression faced by women from the Third World, as they neglect the element of ethnicity which can cause further complexities in resisting the oppression. The purpose of this research is to analyse and discuss the portrayal of women characters and the resistance applied to emancipate from the chain of patriarchal oppression in the Peranakan community. I conducted a textual analysis to distinguish the components in four selected short stories and to extensively interpret the presence of patriarchal oppression, portrayal of women and the forms of resistance shown with the support of textual evidence. It is observed that the patriarchy system generated from the participation of the male and female is the main cause of the sustainability of female oppression and subordination in the society. Besides, men who conform to the Chinese patriarchy tend to appear as the victims under its strict cultural practices. I conclude that participation of women in the practice of patriarchal oppression is the impetus of the prolonged patriarchal practices and the gender of male should also be reconceptualised in future Peranakan literary analysis. As modern changes emerge, women uphold a sense of courage in forging their self-identities in order to emancipate from this circle of oppression.

Keywords: patriarchy, patriarchal oppression, postcolonial feminism, ethnicity, social class, gender, identity

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

During the 15th century, traders from mainland China who had migrated to Peninsula Malaya settled at the British Straits Settlements which were located in Malacca, Penang, and Singapore. While they lived in these settlements, some had married to the indigenous Malays. The descendants are known as the Peranakans, a term used to refer to those who are locally born Malaysian with mixed parentage. Due to their mixed cultural background, the Peranakan community consists of people from three different races, namely Chinese, Malay, and English who practise the same sets of lifestyles. As these peranakans are well educated and able to write, they have shed light to a new form of literature. Chinese Peranakan literature provides opportunities for readers to understand more about the unique setting of the Chinese Peranakan culture and society. Peranakan writers introduce the community as Chinese but at the same time they are the British or Dutch subjects as the community's identity is formed after colonization takes place (Williany, 2020). Due to imperial colonization, the Peranakans are able to attain better encounter such as higher educational opportunities, exposure to the Western culture, and improved communication typically for business trading purposes using the colloquial Malay language that derives from the mixture of Chinese and Malay languages. The Peranakans openly accept that being a colonized subject has enabled them to create a “modern” identity and actively promote their hybrid cultural beliefs and practices to outsiders using literature as the medium of communication. According to Pamungkas, Suwanti, and Rohmadi (2019), literary works function as a tool to represent the culture and values of a specific community by uncovering the socio-cultural reality which in turn shows the imbalance in the community life in terms of the partial distribution of social class power and resources between genders.

Postcolonial feminism is a branch of feminism that rises during the Third Wave of Feminism which focuses on justifying the differences of how women from the colonized Eastern countries are often portrayed in a stereotypical and marginalized way, to which the postcolonial female authors are finding ways to define the challenges faced by these women to fight against the dominant culture of oppression (Nejat & Jamili, 2014). Postcolonial feminists challenge the ethnocentric viewpoint of the Western white feminism who claim that all women experience similar form of oppression without considering the conjugation of imperial conquest, slavery, and discrimination based on the distinct historical and cultural factors that have affected how female victims survived the oppression imposed by patriarchal and social injunctions (Suhaila et al., 2020). They highlight the issue of women oppression from several aspects like gender differences, race, ethnicity, and social class to conduct a more detailed investigation on how these women confront the pressure imposed by the society as well as patriarchy so that it helps the women community to be conscious towards the injustice acts and reinterpret the notion of gender equality.

According to Sultana (2010), the concept of patriarchy originates from the word ‘patriarch’ and is initially applied to describe male-dominated household that has the patriarch or father as the ruler of the family. In terms of literature, “patriarchy is a social structural phenomenon in which males have the privilege of dominance over females, both visibly and subliminally” (Guarneri & Poston as cited in Barli et al., 2017, p. 235). This typical patriarchal ideology has exaggerated the existing gender stereotypes, especially the biological differences, which further reinforces men’s power, hierarchy, and competition towards women, making women feel more inferior and suppressed while living under their control.

Using the qualitative textual analysis method, this research aims to analyse the portrayal of women characters in the selected stories of *Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys, and Paramours* and to identify the forms of resistance used by these women against the patriarchy system of the Peranakan society. While surviving across the timeline of British colonization to achieving independence, these women are observed in terms of how they transcend cultural characteristics and geographical boundaries while resisting patriarchal practices in a multicultural context. As such, this chapter comprises the background of the study, statement of problem, research objectives, research questions, significance, definition of terms and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Research background

In past literature studies ranging from poetry to novel, women have been portrayed as the exploited group with no rights or lack of authority to be freed from all kinds of oppression, including the invasion of imperial power, slavery coercion, implementation of migration activities, and even eradication of the indigenous nation (Tejero, 2013). Female writers embark on an endeavour to bring the idea of gender equality to the centre of attention yet the surrounding factors such as imperialism and male domination tend to prevent women from obtaining equal opportunities as men in the industries available, and worse, women have no rights to decide on family chores which this leads to a more challenging task to raise awareness on the vitality of self-consciousness (Suhaila et al., 2020). Postcolonial feminists believe that gender difference is the impetus that accelerates the practice of patriarchal power (Aboudaif, 2012). They go beyond the boundaries to improve the studies about the gender roles and status of women based on the specific context to eliminate the conservative perspective about Western women being modest, well-educated, and empowered whereas the Asian ones are rather voiceless and passive (Bulbeck as cited in Ahmed, 2019). However,

there is a difference between the type of oppression encountered by women from the Peranakan society and women from other races. It is found that these Peranakan women (the *Nyonyas*) tend to struggle in different degrees of patriarchal oppression(s) or defeat(s) rather than the oppression derived from imperial colonization (Williany, 2020). Although most of the *Nyonyas* are from the middle-class family, and they have received at least primary education, they are still forced to adhere to the Chinese patriarchal system that serves as the primary source of oppression in both the public and private spheres. The concept of public and private sphere is differentiated through the portrayal of women, and normally these women are portrayed as objects, faulty, or gender with submissive roles such as homemakers, servants under the control of men as men being viewed as the villains.

Lee Su Kim is a new generation Peranakan female writer who is well-known for her love and passion towards the promotion of Peranakan Babas and Nyonyas culture. Her trilogy of short stories specifically “Kebaya Tales: Of Matriarchs, Maidens, Mistresses and Matchmakers”, “Sarong Secrets: Of Love, Loss and Longing” and “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” have enabled her to govern the title of Malaysia’s best-selling collection. Besides, her non-fiction works such as “Malaysian Flavours: Insights into Things Malaysian” and “Manglish: Malaysian English at its Wackiest” are widely adored by the public with more than 10,000 copies being published (Lee, n.d.). In 2017, she was invited to attend both the Ubud Writers and Readers’ Festival and the Singapore Writers festivals as a guest speaker. Apart from that, she hosted a talk at TEDx Petaling Street to share her passion for writing and her background as a nyonya heritage (Lee, 2018). Lee attracts readers with her gentle sense of humour which enfolds the richness of the Peranakan cultural aspects and lifestyles. She uses expressions which make a conversation appear livelier, for example, “I screamed like crazy, I thought it was a snake. *Siau char boh* (mad lady)... (you) cock-eyed

or what?” (Lee, 2017, p. 68), “Baba? What is that? I oni (only) know Baa baa black sheep...” (p. 143). By doing that, not only she gets to preserve her fine heritage but also offers the locals an insight on the uniqueness of multi-diversified use of languages and cultural patterns of the Peranakan community which helps to sustain the transmission of the hybrid culture to readers from different ethnicities or overseas.

“Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” consists of the traditional cultural practices and gender roles with reference to the Peranakan community (the *Babas* and the *Nyonyas*) ranging from the British colonization era, Japanese invasion, and post-independence era of Malaysia. The fundamental reason for selecting this novel for analysis is because of the inclusion of strong women characters such as Ta Chi and Loo Loo who possess the courage to stand up for themselves and fight against the partial treatment which is considered ordinary in the Chinese patriarchal society. Lee highlights the significant issues of women’s lives and status along with illustrating the female characters, and at the same time represents women’s voice from the Peranakan’s viewpoint in the Malaysian literary world. The use of a Malay term Manek in the novel “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” depicts the specialty of the Peranakans in the art of beading and embroidery. Ever since the mid-19th century, the affluent Peranakan families would ensure that their daughters are skilled in producing beadwork items so that they are qualified to become proper wives and homemakers. This is a required test to evaluate the level of skills and patience through the refinement and creativity of beadwork in order to determine whether the nyonya daughter is well brought up. In this context, the fine beadwork is used to reflect the sophisticated living situations of the nyonyas (women in the Peranakan community) in which they struggle to survive under the control of imperial and patriarchal power. The female protagonists in different stories devote themselves to confront the challenges to realize their

self-importance and inherent values to be freed from the coercion of the traditional Chinese patriarchal system.

There is a total of four short stories selected to be analysed by using the elements of postcolonial feminism and the concept of Chinese patriarchy as the research framework. The way Lee expresses the lives of women characters, the genuine feelings from the narrators themselves, and the hidden form of oppression according to different discourses and family settings which will be discussed in this research. Therefore, this study serves to analyse the portrayal of women characters of the Peranakan community in different timelines as well as to identify the method of resistance used by these women characters towards the imposed Chinese patriarchal system to develop a sense of empowerment.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The discussion on women as a colonized subject has been the focus of postcolonial feminism study for many decades. However, there is a lack of research on women's empowerment which enable them to emancipate themselves from the control of oppression (Neo et al., 2019), typically when both genders are manipulated by the traditional cultural beliefs and practices and are forced to strictly abide by the rules established under the hybrid cultural setting like the Peranakan society. As the Peranakan community is a unique ethnic group formed during the period of colonization, there is a need to reexamine whether women deserve to be oppressed and remain as subordinates while living under the command of men in order to adhere to the prescribed gender roles (Hyunanda et al., 2021). Postcolonial feminists evaluate the issue of women representation beyond how the mainstream feminists have initially defined the superiority of Western white women as they are aware that the scope of feminism study should not solely refer to individualistic perspective (Riyal, 2019).

As women gradually receive standardized and proper education, they begin to realize the importance of establishing self-identity and strive to achieve emancipation from the patriarchal clutches (Mishra, 2013). Even so, it is also notable that even if the situation is being improved for women, critiques have pointed out that existing bureaucracies continue to subjugate women in the society, which the opportunities for knowledge-gaining and experience are defined by the imposed biased standards (Apple et al., 2010). Besides finding faults on the pre-constructed standards on gender politics, Mishra (2013) also implies that it is essential for women to pursue their rights instead of merely realizing their oppressed selves so that they get to enjoy mental freedom even though they are still physically colonized by men due to the non-extinguishable cultural values. Hence, this research aims to bridge the gap between the society's standards of gender distinctions and women's determination to combat the traditional gender stereotypes and demonstrate women's capability to generate a sense of identity.

Other than that, Tyagi (2014) depicts those Western White women overlooked racial, cultural, and historical specificities which caused them to underestimate the impact of colonization on women from developing countries. The idea to homogenize and universalize women's experiences from all over the globe should be reinvestigated. Postcolonial feminists encourage studies that take up a variety of aspects from the cultural, racial, and historical context to justify the situation that non-Western women have been through before they draw focus to "the way female writers portray the construction of gender differences and representation of women in the four phases of colonial discourses which include the pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial, or anti-colonial era" (p. 45). The prominent goal of postcolonial feminists is to bring justice to the subjugation faced by women from the third world and criticize the mainstream Western feminists' perspective which excludes the

tendency pertaining to the race, culture, religion, political, social, and settings of women in a colonized territory in their scope of study (Mishra, 2013). By engaging the postcolonial feminists' viewpoint, women from previously colonized countries should no longer be stigmatised neither represented as 'others'. Instead, society should begin to build mutual respect and understanding between genders to achieve a balance in heterogeneity.

In Lee's "Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours", based on the narration of the protagonists, both the roles of men and women are closely observed in relevance to the practice of Chinese patriarchal system to investigate and evaluate how women characters are portrayed and how they defend themselves against the injustice treatment derived from the inhuman remarks and social settings. Moreover, men's position, privilege, and power given by the patriarchal system are the factors required to determine the impact of Chinese patriarchal culture on women's progress to obtain empowerment by retrieving their civil rights.

Thus, this study is used to obtain an insight on the portrayal of women characters across the emerging timeline and the forms of resistance applied by them to resist Chinese patriarchal oppression, as well as to form a more comprehensive means of debate against the Western feminists' homogenized viewpoint on women oppression by including the discussion of elements like ethnicity and the existing patriarchal oppression which can be used to rectify the cause of oppression.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the portrayal of women characters in the selected short stories of Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys, and Paramours by Lee Su Kim.

2. To identify the forms of resistance demonstrated by the women characters in the selected short stories while resisting the patriarchal oppression.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How are the women characters being portrayed in the selected short stories of “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” using the concept of Chinese patriarchal system?

2. What are the forms of resistance shown by the women characters in the selected short stories of “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” while emancipating themselves from the patriarchal oppression?

1.5 Research Significance

According to Holden (2009), Chinese Peranakan appears to be the first group of writers who produce extensive writing during the early 19th century before it evolves into a part of Malaysian literature in English (MLE), in which their works are published by the Straits-born Chinese magazines and newspapers including *The Straits Chinese Magazine* (1897-1907), *The Straits Chinese Literary Association Recorder* (1918) and *The Straits Chinese Annual* (1930). They depend largely on translating literary works from other languages to sustain local readership and establish a sense of group identity by placing the focus on the Peranakans who live in the colonial public sphere of the Straits Settlements. Their primary objective is to encourage intellectual activity like reading and writing and most importantly to remind the locals about their heritage. Even though the overall production of literary works seems to advocate a one-sided culture, the inclusion of interesting culture

elements and the use of mixed language are undeniably vital to indicate the difference between Western and the colourful Eastern literature.

Until the present day, Malaysian Literature in English (MLE) plays an integral part in advocating the societal issue of gender equality in the country that practices multiculturalism yet there is hardly any research addressing the significance of feminism study in the Malaysian context. The influence caused by the multi-ethnic cultural practices in the portrayal of women should not be overlooked. There are many literary works written by local authors that won over many awards and recognition overseas such as “Crossing the Peninsula and Other Poems” and “Joss and Gold” written by Shirley Lim Geok-lin, “The Weight of Our Sky” by Hanna Alkaf, and the showcase of authentic Asian girl in “The Principal Girl: Feminist Tales from Asia” produced by Sharifah Aishah Osman and Tutu Dutta.

Lee is the sixth generation nyonya who contributes her best in preserving the cultural practices and the unique identity of the Chinese Peranakans by writing fiction novels to display how the use of colloquial Malay can bring more insights to the way of writing and expressing one’s thoughts. In “Manek Mischief: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours”, all female characters are being viewed as a specimen for certain purposes in marriage, family, and colonial discourses. They represent the gender that is being oppressed, controlled, exploited in the Peranakan community, and undergo tough challenges to bring balance to the pre-established gender roles. By using the theoretical framework of postcolonial feminism to study the situations experienced by these women, it can help to verify whether females are the minority group that are born with the disadvantages of being compared and have to go through all kinds of tests without having the right to oppose. Moreover, this research also

identifies the forms of resistance applied by women as their way to minimize society's discrimination and achieve their respective authority.

As Western literature has achieved its maturity in justifying the concept of feminism perspective, Asian literature studies typically Malaysian literature in English require close attention and development especially the biased opinion towards women who have already suffered from the coercion of both the colonial power and patriarchy social system. Since the Peranakan community is formed by the heritage of two races, namely the Chinese and the Malays, with a little influence from the English culture, it affects the community's language, lifestyles, traditional delicacies etc. which in turn holds the significance in improving postcolonial feminism research.

For the researcher, the advantage of conducting this research would be gaining new knowledge on how the difference in the mixed cultural setting will result in the change of feminist viewpoint in literature.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Postcolonial feminism - a concept proposed to fight against the mainstream Western feminism that associates with the latter liberal movements and offers respect to women from different historical inheritance (Tejero, 2013).

Third World Feminism - a concept signals the perseverance of women in the face of oppression to express solidarity and define the notion of "women with colour" for women of all over the world. It is used as a modern interpretation of the Feminist Poetry Movement (McTague, 2019).

Gender Equality - a concept that adapts the values, preferences, needs, and priorities of both women and men into consideration, where the diversity of different groups of women and men are recognised to sustain the people-centred development process (Apple et al., 2010).

Patriarchy - the social structure system that neglects the significance of biological determinism and exploits women until they are totally deprived of rights, resources, and proper respect of the society (Walby as cited in Sultana, 2010).

Oppression – “The coercion of stigmatised ideology and imperialism that exert a culture of discrimination against the targeted group by forbidding their human rights, freedom, and retrieval of basic requirements which comprises the access to health care, education, and employment.” (Leaven, 2003). In this paper, it refers to the prolonged unjust treatment that men exercise towards women.

Gender - The ascribed meanings assigned by the societies and individuals to men and women (Copenhaver, 2002). The constructed and reinforced labeling used to identify whether a person is masculine or feminine (Stets & Burke, n.d.).

Social class - A subjective perception towards the ranking in the society which reflects the cognitive patterns and actions of the self on resources such as income, education, and occupational prestige (McGinn & Oh, 2017).

Ethnicity - "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define

the group's identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance" (Bulmer as cited in Gilman, 1998, p. 19).

Self-consciousness – the state of being aware of ourselves and our personal existence, including our character traits and standing features, our train of thoughts and the feelings we experience (Kriegel, n.d.). In this paper, it refers to the women's consciousness towards the negative effect of colonial and patriarchal oppression which is important for them to construct their own identity (Gardiner, 1981).

1.7 Scope and limitation of study

The scope of this study covers the use of postcolonial feminism study as the framework to define the roles and status of the Peranakan women and identifies how women resist the Chinese patriarchal oppression while being treated as the servant of the household, tool of childbearing, and colonized subjects under the restriction of Chinese patriarchal system.

The limitation of this study does exist as the study on the patriarchal concept varies according to the social and cultural contexts which gives space for more in-depth analysis and discussions to be conducted. For instance, the Bangla and the Malay communities stick close to their religious teachings which may affect the society's expectations towards gender distinctions, and this results in a different form of patriarchal oppression. Apart from that, not all the eight short stories in Lee's *Manek Mischiefs* are being analyzed due to time constraints which causes the research outcome to be less convincing. As the short stories are written based on an emerging timeline, the portrayal of women tends to change, same goes to the forms of resistance applied to fight against the Chinese patriarchy. This emphasizes the

need to include all the stories to obtain a comprehensive solution to resolve the problem stated. Likewise, Malaysian literature in English (MLE) is still in its progress to receive worldwide recognition, and Chinese Peranakan literature has the potential to boost the status of MLE in the globe due to the inclusion of creative Peranakan expressions and mixture of various cultural elements in writing which help to attract more readership.

This study merely covers the discussion on the representation of women in fiction and thematic aspects identified by looking at the way the women characters defend themselves from the recurring Chinese patriarchal oppression. The exempted area of studies which involve sociology, cultural and humanity, gender, or other aesthetic aspects in writing require further exploration and analysis as this particular research does not cover these fields as a whole.

1.8 Conclusion

The components in this chapter discuss the general background of the study. Postcolonial feminism is used as the theoretical framework to analyze “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” by looking into how the female characters from different story settings are being portrayed in the novel. In the next chapter, the study discusses the theoretical framework used in this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Background of the Chinese Peranakan literature

In literature, apparently, the Chinese Peranakans or “The Straits Born” Malaysians were the first community who produced extensive writing. The Peranakan Chinese community originated from the 15th century when Chinese traders from the regions of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou in the Fujian province of mainland China migrated to the British Straits Settlements in Malaya and Indonesia due to economic hardships. According to Yoong and Zainab (2004), the Straits Settlements established in the Peninsula Malaya is a crown colony consisting of Malacca, Singapore, and Penang, in which they are regarded as the birthplaces of the descendants of both the Chinese traders and the local Malay women. It is proven that this cross-racial marriage has contributed to the formation of a “rare and beautiful blend” culture that is derived from the dominant races, which are Malay and Chinese, as well as the inclusion of certain elements of the English culture from Javanese, Batak, Siamese and European (Lee, 2008).

Owing to the trade relationship between China and the Malay world, the Chinese Peranakan literature is developed among the new generation Chinese peranakans who are educated and capable of writing. Their distinct cultural backgrounds have enabled them to incorporate a blend of cultural elements such as clothes, dishes, architectural buildings, traditional customs and ceremonies, and language into literary works, which these elements contributed in making them unique. By doing so, their works provide a strong sense of ethnic identity and bring further acknowledgement to the community itself. The period from the 1890s to the 1930s is known as the “golden age” of Chinese peranakan literature as it marks the flourishing achievement in terms of having large support from the local printing and

publishing houses to produce their written works in newspapers, magazines, books, and translated Chinese stories (Shin, 2016 as cited in Williany, 2020). During that time, the development of Chinese Peranakan literature depended heavily on translated works to obtain more readers from their own community. The writers realize that these translated works not only serve the locals' interest to read for knowledge and entertainment, it also offers them an opportunity to be involved in printing and publications (Ding, 2011).

Unfortunately, when the Japanese invaded in 1942, all translation work was halted which also resulted in the change in the thematic aspect in literary writing. The writers began to use literature as a way to express agony, frustration, and as a tool to fight against the injustice treatment as the ruthless Japanese army had captured all the journalists and authors who contributed to the production of patriotic works. From then onwards, the new generation of Malayan writers gradually realized the importance of writing for education and expression, instead of solely writing for entertainment.

2.1 Background of Malaysian Literature in English (MLE)

Based on Holden's (2009) report, the second and third community of writers are specifically the Malayan writers who became Malaysian citizens after 1965, and Malaysian writers during the 1970s. The Malaysians struggled through their way to construct a sense of unique nationality during Singapore's separation in 1965, causing many local authors like Ee Tiang Hong, Wong Phui Nam, Kassim Ahmad, Lloyd Fernando, and Lee Kok Liang were prohibited from producing works written in English despite having higher social privileges where they had gained from the overseas. Malayan authors who began to write between the 1950s and 1960s were forced to write in Malay due to the unfavourable political changes including the National Language Act established in 1967, the traumatic May 13 incident back

in 1969, and the resultant constitutional changes. The use of the English language was greatly hindered by the law implemented. The fourth community which is the Malaysian writers in the 1970s encountered the period when English language has become the second language whereas Malay language advanced to be the medium of education gave birth to the production of literary works using a mixture of languages but was then highly criticised due to its perplexity of cultural aspects which can be hardly defined. Back then, the practice of writing literature in English was still regarded as a marginalised activity despite the effort contributed by the students from the University of Malaya who took the initiatives to promote Malaysian writings (Nimura, 2016).

The conflict where the use of English Language as a medium in Malaysian Literature writings has been the source of why Malaysian Literature in English is less recognised at the international level compared to Western literature. Nimura (2016) denoted that English Language is viewed as a threat that disrupts the language policy and constantly undergoing turbulence in the education field even after independence. Besides, the most difficult obstacle faced during the expansion of Malaysian Literature in English appears to be the intercultural communication among people from different social, historical, and cultural contexts. Researchers are often concerned about whether there is a possibility to eliminate the potential stereotypes in order to expedite the growth of postcolonial literary texts even when they are positive that postcolonial literature can offer some contributions to the literature studies. Despite the addition of political constraint, the lack of readership and freedom of writing have inhibited the local authors' talents to openly discuss societal issues which resonate well with the Malaysian community. For local writers, they are forced to abide by the change of official language from English to Malay due to the execution of National Language Act 1967 which is later replaced by the Amendment Act in 1971. Some of the writers chose to migrate

to other countries as they have lost the feeling of close attachment towards their country (Quayum, 2008; Ramakrishnan et al., 2019); some cope with the drastic change by continuing to write in English. For instance, the novel “Green is the Colour” by Llyod Fernando is used to portray the possibility of multicultural practices under imperial power and the emergence of a new generation of the 1990s.

MLE covers diverse thematic scopes as Malaysia is a nation and home to the different and unique races, cultures, and languages which coexist peacefully in the society. This has led to the dominant focus on nationalism in which the local authors normally aimed at distinguishing the differences caused by the hierarchies in castes, genders, social classes, and races and established a uniform identity among Malaysians. However, there is a need to shift from the national identity-based concerns and place the relatively new thematic concern on the representation of women and the multi-layered oppressions or injustice faced by them that is often embodied under the patriarchal society (Ramakrishnan et al., 2019). Moreover, Zainab has found out that Malaysian female authors tend to deliver the essence of sensitive issues in the discourses of sexual harassment, domestic violence, drug abuse, or any abusive acts towards teenage girls, wives, and women in a more progressive way compared to male authors which provide a clearer vision on how women are critically harmed both physically and mentally (as cited in Ramakrishnan et al., 2019). This depicts the need to explore more literary works produced by the local female authors to understand women’s struggle in a holistic manner.

2.2 Malaysian female writers and their writings

In the past, female writers received less recognition for their works and even experienced some hardships to ascend to the field of literary writing. When Malayan Chinese

literature debuted in the early 1920s until 1974, many young female writers wrote for the magazines and newspapers, and they had demonstrated that they had the potential to be on par with the males' achievement in writing (Wang, 1982). The same situation was also applied to Malay literature writing where there was a scarcity of opportunities for female writers to showcase their skills; they were only able to write short stories and novels and their works were frequently criticized as superficial and shallow without addressing the domestic concern of a family (Tahir, 1986). Prolonged prejudice and discrimination viewpoint towards women's writings persists to the extent that it prevented many female writers from expanding their boundaries to research and write on other topics than just the theme of family.

Even so, women writers do not halt their progress in contributing their voice to represent the gamut of women from pre-colonial and colonial era. As women continue to write in 2004, scholars have noticed that this group of women writers have successfully innovated "a literature of their own" (Hashim et. al., 2011, p. 392) which presented their concerns, world views, and aesthetics (Hashim et al., 2011; Noor & Termizi, 2017) in a more meticulous manner and different from the way male writers have expressed in their works. The fact that contemporary women writers explore issues by reflecting the controversial realities of the environment other than solely from their own female experiences have effectively empowered the women community to resist against the traditional gender norms in the production of quality works (Noor & Termizi, 2017). Hence, their works are pertinent to be scrutinized as these articulate the life of Malaysian women without having a sugar-coated layer.

Tahir (1986) states that women writers address the issue of family differently compared to males as they portray female characters as 'victims of circumstances or

misfortunes' (p. 163) especially when they are involved in a forced marriage where they are repressed by their husbands or those who hold a secondary or subordinate role that is given little authority in decision making. "Mariah" written by Che Husna Azahari revolves around the aspects of religion, love, and the practice of polygamy among the Islam community in a male dominated Kelantanese society. The author brings readers to focus on the female characters typically Mariah, a young woman who sells nasi lemak, and Cik Yam, a modest woman who is the first wife of an Imam (the guardian chosen by Allah who is highly respected among the Muslims). It is said that Cik Yam resembles the good and pure Muslim woman who performs her roles well as a wife and also the one that is looked up by women from the entire Molo village due to her virtue and modesty. Unfortunately, she became the victim of the polygamy institution when she chose to obediently agree to her husband's decision to take in Mariah as his second wife after listening to his love confession towards Mariah. Mariah is portrayed as an independent divorcee who gained income from selling nasi lemak, yet accidentally involved in the polygamy relationship with Imam as he looks at her as an object of passion and love since she very much reminds him of his first love. Most of the Muslim men have used religion as a reason to make polygamy a divinity (Muslim et al., 2011) but they do not realize the psychological impact of a second marriage will affect the first wife even though it happens in a male dominant Kelantanese society where women's thoughts or decisions are often neglected.

Next, in "The Fat Woman" written by Dina Zaman narrates the story of a nameless Malay woman who is a prostitute but granted with several unfavourable titles as she slowly experiences sexual abuse. Based on the Malay patriarchal norm, female virginity is viewed as more important than male virginity. Just because this woman has no proper name and never received formal education, she is nicknamed as "Virgin Killer", "Jabba the Hutt" and "Mek

Bab” where each of them resembles certain meanings. “Virgin Killer” literally refers to females who often engage in sexual intercourse activity which results in the loss of chastity; “Jabba the Hutt” simply depicts women whose body shape appear to be obese from a male’s angle, and “Mek Bab” infers the word pigs (babi in Malay) which carries a negative connotation among the Islamic culture. Besides being a victim of sexual abuse, this female protagonist has to suffer from the disrespectful behaviour shown by the Kelantanese Malay society (Kudus, 2013). Dina posits a ‘female consciousness’ on the oppression faced by the female character which allows her to write in a unique style and structure which is innately different from how men deliver their ‘masculine mind’ in their writings.

Hashim et al. have suggested that contemporary Malaysian female writers have highlighted the issue that the life of Malaysian women are gradually shifting to be on par with modernity and the fast development in Malaysia (as cited in Noor & Termizi, 2017). It uncovers the sufferings faced by contemporary Malaysian women to live up to the society’s expectations and accept the necessary changes until they see delusions in the urban life due to excessive loneliness, which then affect their psychological and sentimental states.

From a male writer’s perspective, women characters are either being portrayed as bright subjects where they have the confidence and courage to do what they do best and are able to carry out their responsibilities in a detailed manner, or the opposite, where they are illustrated as sex objects, uphold dubious morals, being illegitimate or sinful which these characteristics make them less amiable in the readers’ eyes. In the play “The Sandpit: A Monologue” by K.S. Maniam, he illustrates the miserable life of a female protagonist named Santha due to mental conflict ever since she is involved in a working-class Indian family that supports the culture of polygamous marriage. Maniam expresses that remaining silent is also

a form of abuse as people will not treat those who are not bold enough to protect themselves as an ordinary object. Furthermore, if women continue to remain silent, they are seemingly obeying the prescribed gender roles established from the older, traditional-minded generation and supporting the practice of male oppression (Roselezam, 2003).

2.3 Lee Su Kim and her Writings

Lee Su Kim is nominated as the Chairlady of the Peranakan Baba Nyonya Association of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (TED, n.d.) of her generation. She has obtained several educational qualifications including a master's degree in Education from the University of Malaya, and a Doctorate in Education from the University of Houston (SoLLs, n.d.). With a remarkable educational background and skills, she accepted the role of the Associate Professor of English at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and contributed to the research field for over 30 years. As a researcher, she shows great interest in the exploration of the relationship between culture and identity, the use of various languages, World Englishes, and intercultural communication.

Some of Lee's magnificent achievements in writing consist of *Manglish: Malaysian English at its Wackiest*, *Malaysian Flavours: Insights into Things Malaysian* and *A Nyonya in Texas: Insights of a Straits Chinese Woman in the Lone Star State*. These books are among the best-selling series due to the use of Manglish which it reminds the local readers about the unique ways of expression in their everyday life that Standard English cannot express, the showcase of Malaysian culture which facilitates national unity and identity, and the transmission of the Peranakan language and cultural practices which allow readers to know more about the ancestry of the Straits Chinese. Lee's writings are highly praised and supported by scholars or educators from overseas such as Professor Alastair Pennycook from

University Technology of Sydney, Professor Alan Maley of Leeds Metropolitan University located in the United Kingdom, and Dr Neil Khor, the director of Think City's Programme.

The way she tells stories using Manglish (the new variety of English) and the expressions in Baba Malay while instilling a humorous tone has enlightened readers on the richness and diversity of the Peranakan culture and she is granted the title of being colloquially elegant in writing. She once mentioned in an interview that she strongly supports the practice of open-minded thinking and discussion to be implemented in Malaysia as a way to enhance critical thinking process, cultivate world-class talent, and enable the widespread of Malaysian culture to the globe without the need to avoid sensitive topics like politics, sex, or religions (Ding, 2010). During the postcolonial era, new generations are highly encouraged to bravely express their thoughts to the world instead of getting themselves to live up to the rigid standards fixed by the society as this contributes to develop a worthwhile future especially for literature writing. Her trilogy of the Peranakan stories – Sarong Secrets, Kebaya Tales, and Manek Mischiefs focused not only to share the exquisite Baba and Nyonya culture, but also delivered how the traditional practices have hindered the capability and values women acquire.

2.3.1 “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours”

Manek Mischief belongs to the final piece of Lee's writing which completes the trilogy of the Peranakan stories after Sarong Secrets and Kebaya Tales. This book comprises a total of eight fictional short stories that revolve around themes like love, family, marriage, and social culture (Lee, 2017). Lee tremendously divulges the idiosyncrasies of the Peranakan heritage through the use of cultural aspects and unfolds the multi-layered world with her great sense of humour and passionate love towards the succession of cultural propagation. The book title itself gives readers an insight that its contents highlight the

domination of patriarchal culture and indirectly depicts the practice of polygamous marriage among the Peranakan society.

There are four short stories with shared themes of gender, social class, and traditional gender roles selected for an in-depth textual analysis to understand how female characters are portrayed in the stories while resisting the partial treatment and Chinese patriarchal system imposed by the society on them. The stories are specifically “The Bride Who Refused to Strip”, “The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea”, “The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan”, and “A Light Bulb Moment” where the author narrates them from both male and mostly female perspectives to delineate the life of homemakers, the role as subordinates in a polygamous marriage, and the responsibility that has been priorly designed to suit women’s capability. The following provides a brief summary on the stories written by Lee:

Lee adapts the first-person perspective to narrate the stories of the three women in *The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan*, the youngest daughter of the Lim clan in *The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea*, and Sau Ping, who is the female protagonist in *A Light Bulb Moment*. It is believed that she intends to drive readers’ focus towards the experiences and unfair treatment faced by these women as they are oppressed while upholding the roles of housewives, daughters, mothers, reproductive tools, and daughter-in-law. All these women are assigned with the submissive role of doing household chores and childbearing as if they are born to do them. Looking from the females’ perspectives, they have no rights to voice their opinions or negotiate on the distribution of tasks as men are the head of the family who are given the authority to command. For instance, Wife Number One and Two serve the purpose as Baba

Gan's slaves as they keep on doing the endless and repetitive household chores without gaining any respect or recognition on their work. Besides, the youngest daughter of the Lim clan together with her two elder sisters are instilled with the mindset that being born as females are destined to do household chores whereas males are completely exempted from touching which made her realized the prescribed gender discrimination practiced within a patriarchal family. Next, Sau Ping as the daughter-in-law lives under the control of patriarchal oppression as she is forced to obey her mother-in-law's orders and is refrained from acting on her own in terms of childcare, household management, and choice of career which cause her to experience a critical state of mental oppression. By using the first-person pronoun "I" in the narration, Lee demonstrates the genuine thoughts, feelings, and oppression encountered by these women characters to portray the actual lives of living under the Peranakan society that supports the practice of patriarchal domination.

On the other hand, Lee narrates the short story of *The Bride Who Refused to Strip* from the male character's perspective so that readers can have a better understanding on how the Chinese patriarchy system runs in an authentic Peranakan family. Tan Teik Seng as the male protagonist is involved in a matchmaking process as his mother intends to arrange his marriage with the female lead named Choon Neo. Throughout the story, this newlywed couple is not given the opportunity to comment on anything regarding the marriage as it is the parents' decision to make typically the male's family according to the traditional Chinese marriage custom. As Choon Neo is oppressed while experiencing a tremendous change of life from being a young lady to a wife, Lee also depicts the patriarchal oppression faced by Tan Teik Seng as she portrays his character to be anxious, helpless, and lacking the confidence to exercise his power of dominance on his wife even though the patriarchy system tend to

support men's wellbeing. This implies that the victim under the Chinese patriarchal system can involve men instead of merely women based on the family setting.

This research aims to apply postcolonial feminism as the theoretical framework to analyze how women withstand the pressure exerted by living under the control of the Peranakan society and the forms of resistance shown by them to be freed from the chain of patriarchal oppression.

2.4 Patriarchy on Subordination and Oppression on Women

The term "patriarchy" can be traced back to the Latin language and in Greek terminology (Barli et al., 2017; Hossen, 2020; Qasim et al., 2015). From the Latin language, patriarchy is made up of the two terms, to which *pater* means father and *arch* means rule (Barli et al., 2017); the Greek terminology on the other hand, similarly sees patriarchy as a combination of two words, with *patria* that indicates father and *arche* means rule. Sultana (2010) sees patriarchy as males who express dominance over others. She further highlights how Aristotle has belittled women, where women are individuals who are born soulless and thus require the dominance from men to survive in life. Across time, Aristotle's belittlement has indeed been challenged and such a statement would, undoubtedly, fail to represent any women in today's era (Sultana, 2010). Evidently, patriarchy has long existed since historical times and carries a straightforward meaning of the ruling by father (Qasim et al., 2015). Rawat (2014) believes patriarchy is present in all aspects of life, covering political, economic, social, and legal aspects that transcends all organizations and civilizations. Like most civilizations, patriarchy has led to the practicing of patrilineal lineage among families, as shown in China (Zuo & LaRossa, 2009).

Centralising the focus on men and across the literature available, patriarchy is a system that continues to demean women from all aspects, further to which men express hegemony, dominance, oppression, and subordination over women (Barli et al., 2017; Fitri & Suparti, 2016; Pamungkas et al., 2019; Qasim et al., 2015; Ridwan & Susanti, 2019; Sultana, 2010; Zuo & LaRossa, 2009). As a result, women have long been in a disadvantaged situation where their desires to be free are often hindered by men as opportunities available to them are eradicated by men (Hirschman, 2016; Pamungkas et al., 2019). Part of the outcome of practicing patriarchy is the existence of the terms, masculine and feminine that are used to characterise men and women (Sultana, 2010). Barli et al. (2017) have summarized the characteristics of masculine and feminine in the following:

...men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, strong, coolheaded, in control of themselves, independent, active, objective, dominant, decisive, self-confident, and unnurturing. Women... unaggressive, shy, intuitive, emotionally expressive, nurturing, weak, hysterical, erratic and lacking in self-control, dependent, passive, subjective, submissive, indecisive, and lacking in self-confidence (p. 234).

Patriarchy practices have generally placed women as the belonging of the house. To be specific, brides are usually required to stay with the husband's family, do the house chores, and take care of children (Barli et al., 2017; Qasim et al., 2015; Sultana, 2010). Even in today's society where women are equally present as a workforce in paid employment, household chores have become a second shift to them, and they are still required to do so even after coming back from work (Hirschman, 2016). As Fitri and Suparti (2016) mentioned, such practices have firmly rooted in any woman's background and even if times have changed, it remains a big challenge to eradicate it.

By attributing the characteristics to women, patriarchy has resulted in a great disproportionate division of power between men and women (Qasim et al., 2015; Ridwan & Susanti, 2019). The patriarchy system has brought to the constant practice of the following four elements, “male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and male’s obsession with control” (Barli et al., 2017, p. 234) that have led to men treating women as inferior beings which further allow men to be abusive towards women and women can only be submissive (Barli et al., 2017; Qassim et al., 2015). More commonly, women are sexually objectified as tools to fulfill men’s sexual gratification (Pamungkas et al., 2019). Sultana (2010) has also emphasized that patriarchy has allowed several degrading behaviours to be exhibited by men on women. Notably, she has mentioned that on a daily basis, women tend to be controlled, disregarded, exploited, insulted, and oppressed (Fitri & Suparti, 2016; Sultana, 2010). In regards to this, Fitri and Suparti (2016) have mentioned that men are more commonly viewed as villains for objectifying women. Such portrayal has persisted not only in the reality people live in but also in most literature (Fitri & Suparti, 2016).

Finally, localizing to the Malaysian context, Hirschman (2016) has extensively discussed how patriarchy acts in this country where there is a diversity in culture, ethnic, and religion. Other than Malaysia, many countries in Southeast Asia who belong to this continent generally do practice patriarchy. Specifically in Malaysia, the Malaysian Chinese and Indian communities are often tied to patriarchy and it has become a culture that has been continuously oppressing women even in modern society. Zuo and LaRossa (2009) have previously mentioned that in Chinese history, women are always treated as subordinates to men and such a situation still persists. As aforementioned, one of the practices that is widely found in Malaysia is where women who are married typically move into the husband’s family, regardless of extended family or living in a nearby household (Hirschman, 2016).

Additionally, other than moving into the husband's family, married women are expected to bear sons to ensure that the patrilineal lineage along with the inheritance can be continued (Hirschman, 2016). As a result, married women in Malaysia are often subjugated to the desires, preferences, and unseen obligations as asserted by the men, resulting women to be constantly at a disadvantaged situation (Hirschman, 2016). Ridwan and Susanti (2019) concluded that such oppression of women in households is simply a form of hegemony expressed by men over women.

2.4.1 Past research using the theme of patriarchy

Numerous research has been done to analyse the portrayal of women and their struggle under patriarchy based on various cultural contexts. However, despite the previously established idea that women are the victims of patriarchy, it is found that men are also bound to be the victims as they fail to adhere to the expected gender stereotypical characteristics set by the society, and similar to women, their voices have gone unheard. In fact, both genders have become the victims of oppression under the patriarchy system. The two novels below, specifically "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe (1958) and "Season of Migration to the North" by Tayeb Salleh (1966) highlight the impact of patriarchy on both genders.

Achebe's (1958) novel, "Things Fall Apart", demonstrates the practice of patriarchal oppression when Okonkwo, the pillar of the family, exercises physical violence towards his family which consists of three wives and one daughter. His aggressive temper has made his wives scared of him as he holds no control over his actions which easily lead to serious injuries or death. In the novel, he nearly beats his third wife to death just because she returns late to cook for the family, and he is not able to stop even when the other two wives beg him for mercy. Another scene of violence is shown when he hears the second wife murmur

something about guns that cannot shoot before he departs to hunt in the jungle. Without hesitation, he immediately brings out the loaded gun and fires at her. Fortunately, no one dies as this is his way of demonstrating his power in the family so that the family members stay obedient and only act on his command. Gender division of patriarchy is strongly portrayed in this novel when Okonkwo conforms to the traditional gender roles in a family. For example, “Okonkwo's wives had scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light” (p. 32) indicates the heavy labour work imposed on women. Other than that, Okonkwo also thinks about having Ezinma, his only daughter, to be a boy who would make him happier solely because she has the spirit of a boy” (p. 57). However, when Ezinma asks for his company to watch the wrestling competition, he refuses her request by saying “that is a boy’s job” (p. 38) which depicts the way females are marginalised from performing desired actions due to their feminine gender. However, looking from the male’s perspective, the violent acts he has attempted are used to cover up certain emotional aspects which are inherent to his character, and in order to meet the expectation of male dominance, which is established by the African society, he pretends to be someone he is not as he fears that he would end up follow his father’s footsteps to be called unmanly (Tennakoon, 2021). Men as a victim of patriarchy is subtly shown as the main focus has been drawn to the oppression imposed on women and how badly they are affected in order to adhere to their gender roles.

The postcolonial Arabic novel, “Season of Migration to the North” is the story of a Sudanese man named Mustafa Sa'eed with his five European wives who ended up committing suicide or being murdered on the hands of the husband. Tayeb Salih (1966) visualizes the male protagonist Mustafa Sa'eed as a ruthless and vengeful character who thinks that having a series of sexual relationship with European ladies would be a perfect revenge to the British for making his life suffered when they invaded his homeland, Africa

(Muttaleb & Jelban, 2020). "Everything I did after I killed her was an apology; not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life" (p. 29). Sa'eed does not feel sorry for his wrongdoings to the targets but only for what he has done previously. He chooses to relieve his excruciation by first making all the five women fall in love with him and crushes them in the bedroom which he referred to as "the theatre of war" and "a patch of hell" (Salih, 1966, p. 33-34). He declares that he becomes a soldier who devotes his life to settle the remnants in the battlefield even though he is not even chosen as the rightful soldier. As the protagonist proceeds with his delusional justice, he interchanges between several identities to make women fall deep into his trap, which is a success as the five of them are lured into the graveyard he has prepared. In this novel, the author emphasizes on the patriarchal practice imposed by the male lead on his five European wives after experiencing the trauma of having his homeland being destroyed by the British imperial power. Even so, he indirectly displays the fact that Sa'eed is also the victim of the colonized society who blindly adheres to the idea of men's dominance over women and their obsessiveness with control while oppressing women. It is obviously shown that he does not have the intention to oppress the European women but it is the effect of colonial power that has driven him mad until he 'unconsciously' regards them as the objects to release his vengeance.

Both novels demonstrate the use of similar themes and elements of polygamous marriage, gender discrimination, physical violence, abusive acts, and feminism as compared to the fictions in *Manek Mischief*. Analyses and outcomes from these two novels are used as references when elucidating the representation of women and a little focus on men in the four selected short stories.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview on the development of Chinese Peranakan literature to Malaysian Literature in English (MLE), the contribution of local female writers and their writings, background of Lee Su Kim and her previous writings, the concept of patriarchy, and the past studies that applied the theme of patriarchy in clarifying the oppression imposed on both genders. “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” will be analysed using the postcolonial feminism framework that associates with patriarchy to analyse how the women characters are being presented and the way they defend themselves from being exploited while experiencing the patriarchal oppression exercised within the Peranakan society. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the conceptual framework for this study, typically the evolution of postcolonial feminists’ criticism and the elements of postcolonial feminism.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

The concept of postcolonial or third-wave feminism will be used to analyse women's roles in the postcolonial fiction named *Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys, and Paramours* written by one of the award-winning female authors in Malaysia named Lee Su Kim. To restate, this paper focuses on discussing the representation of postcolonial women and the forms of resistance applied to combat the Chinese patriarchy system initiated under the male-dominating Peranakan society. This research aims to discover how women are being portrayed in the context of postcolonial Peranakan fiction and identify women's ways of resisting the patriarchal clutches.

3.1 History of Postcolonial Feminism Theory

The postcolonial theoretical approach is based on the generic conformity built between anti-colonialism and European imperialism which tend to overlook the internal issues regarding marginalization, injustices, and silences (Chambers & Watkins, 2012). On the contrary, feminists emphasize the descriptions of women from a more Eurocentric view which also neglected the condition faced by international women. As mentioned by Said, "Feminism is undoubtedly part of the colonial knowledge-discourse system in the construction of third-world women as an undifferentiated 'other' (p. 84) (as cited in Riyal, 2019). Women have always been depicted in an unchanging state that does not favour them: oppression towards women is a transhistorical state that is difficult to be changed and the desire for feminists to intervene and break this obstacle has long been existing (Chambers & Watkins, 2012). Although the differences persist, the similar goal to attain independence and

rights serve as the bridge which connects both approaches to the formation of postcolonial feminism perspective as initiated by Chandra Talpade-Mohanty. She introduces the notion of the Third World Women as a 'single monolithic subject' to magnify the difference between the West and non-West women community using the specific theoretical approach of postcolonial feminism which at the same time allows these women to acknowledge the actual consequences caused by mute voices (Mohanty, 1988; Parashar, 2016).

Postcolonial feminism or third-wave feminism emerges to challenge the hegemony of patriarchy and colonisation to raise the awareness of the multidimensional marginalisation faced by women. Struckmann (2018) defines postcolonial feminism as follows:

The theory adopted to analyse and critique the disciplines which vary in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences and therefore contribute to the acquisition of knowledge regarding the socio-ontologies of gender and sexuality, race and class, typically their impacts on the representation of women outside the Western locations which are more extensive and highly diverse (p. 20).

In this theory, Struckmann (2018) asserts that postcolonial feminists seek to criticise how gender is represented in the society through reexamination of problems based on conceptual, methodological, and political aspects. According to Mohanty's (1988) criticism, there are two provisions in which postcolonial feminists attended to: 1) the analysis should be supported by information obtained from reliable and credible sources typically the local conditions and the historical specificity to generate better understanding on the multifaceted oppression experienced by women from the third world, and 2) ultimate respect is compulsory towards women who are involved in the local activism of the Third World. They advocate women to take an active role to fight against the injustice of social obligations,

overthrow, and eliminate the fascist ideology as it is their right to enjoy freedom and equal treatment with men instead of drawing lines between both genders with the classification of capabilities and specific skills (Herr, 2014). Regardless, one of the end products of postcolonial feminism is the existence of double colonization, which is generally understood as women suffering from oppression and patriarchy (Tyagi, 2014) and as extensively discussed in the previous chapter.

There is no absolute judgement on the way to define this particular wave of feminism as it supports pluralism, even the contradictory ones can be noted as feminist. The pioneer of the third wave, Rebecca Walker has mentioned to approach equality and freedom from the shade of insulting hegemonic norms:

“...women from the third world struggle to create a new form of feminism that debunks the conservative viewpoint of having only one lifestyle or proclamation of women empowerment, but inaugurate a pathway for self-possession, self-determination, and endless possibilities which override all the contradictory discourses” (Mohanty, 1988; Hall, 2010; Herr, 2014; Riyal, 2019).

The study of Third World Feminism has refuted the Western feminism’s assumption about universality of feminism which hinders further exploration on how cultural differences affect the ‘authentic’ representation of women. This notion became prevalent after the powerful critique by Mohanty on the “white feminists’ pernicious mischaracterization of Third World women’s oppression as merely a worse case of gender oppression” (p. 2) (as cited in Herr, 2014). On behalf of women from the third world, postcolonial feminists disagree to implement the Eurocentric view to study the collective group of women who were originated from different historical, political, socio-cultural backgrounds as it was not solely

the differences between black and white women which led to the consequences of the discrimination or exploitation of women but also required detailed integration of the multicultural identities to understand the challenges faced by these women in the new millennium (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014).

3.2 The Evolution of Postcolonial Feminists criticism

Postcolonial studies that took place in the 1980s had proven to be one of the most diverse and sophisticated studies to be carefully inspected as it involves many intertwined aspects between the colonized and colonizer deriving from the political, social, and economic concerns (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014). Under the massive influence of globalization and capitalist worldview, the status of women had developed to become a more critical issue to deal with which also led to the focus of feminism as it shared the same ideology to resist the domination of imperialism and patriarchy towards the subordinates. Both fields strived to elevate the presence of women in terms of their voice, marginalised status, and rightful authority in the society.

The first wave of feminism justified the differences between men and women by exaggerating issues on male-oriented myths and male's conquest of the land where women's specificity was displaced and neglected (Torrents, 1987). The feminists concern more on the marginalised status of women in the society and are mobilized around the ideology of "New Woman" (Malinowska, 2020) where women suffer as they have limited authority in education, occupation, property division, and decision regarding marital status and reproduction.

The second wave of feminism poses questions on the constituents of the differences between gender roles and women's sexuality, the interest is placed more on the construction of womanhood in daily social practices and their actual life experiences. During this stage, women are more likely to commence liberal movement as they start to realize their self-importance and feel empowered to deal with the partial treatment imposed by the society. However, the focus is merely on the Western women without attempting to investigate the situation faced by women in the Eastern countries which causes the justification to be insufficient and incomplete (Breine as cited in Mann & Huffman, 2005).

The third wave of feminism, also known as the postcolonial feminism, has arrived with the key concept of self-representation in Alice Walker's womanism (Malinowska, 2020) wherein women have to be aware and conscious of their status. Due to the advancement of new information and communication technologies, there is a potential for women to gain emancipation as they obtain the strength to demonstrate their professionalism and become socially independent to achieve a balance in their disparity with men. The three main tenets in Postcolonial Feminism theory are as below (Wulan, 2015):

1. Third world women or Eastern women are oppressed by the impact of modern imperialist conquest and patriarchy.
2. Eastern women possess the freedom to live and work according to their preferences.
3. Eastern women are still being marginalised even when the modern colonization has taken initiatives to infuse a change in the social life aspects.

Through analysing the matter of women representation from a comprehensive angle, one would realize the root cause of matter is not only the men but the whole society that

encouraged the practice of devaluing women which delayed the emancipation of women from the control of imperialism and patriarchy. Malaysian female writers address this injustice through literature to raise the community's awareness and deliver concerns over the sufferings experienced by the local women.

3.2 Elements of postcolonial feminism

Literary works that are analysed based on postcolonial theories often focused on issues of gender and sexuality, race, nation, and empire to conduct a detailed. There are three elements circulating the concept of postcolonial feminism which contribute to this study, namely gender, social class, and ethnicity. These elements are presented in the conceptual framework following the subsection of methodology, with the aim of interpreting the portrayal of the Peranakan women's roles in literary works.

Gender is a socially constructed identity which is divided into men and women (Apple et al., 2010; Liao & Wang, 2020). The assumption is developed based on the historical context which has pervasively structured the world's view on the classification of gender. In postcolonial feminism studies, gender oppression analysis is incorporated towards women, the collective group, which is regarded as marginalised, colonised, and subjugated. Women are known as 'material' subjects in which the idea is arbitrarily constructed by the social culture with no implications of direct identity. They are no longer bound to the biological essentials but on the basis of shared oppression and discrimination.

From the perspective of Third World Feminism, Western feminist writings prudently focus on the political effects on global hegemony of the Western scholarship specifically in their production, publication, distribution of literary works, and the consumption of information by their own kind despite acknowledge the existing differences hold by the

potential others (Al-Wazedi, 2021; Mohanty, 1988). This results in the formation of ethnocentric universalism ideology where all the cross-cultural elements such as class, race, and ethnic contradictions have been intentionally neglected. Analogically, the literary works produced by the Whites often include objectifying terms like the colonized victims, victims of the male violence, and victims for sexual pleasure. It is not about the issue of being exempted from obtaining privileges due to being a marginalised gender group, but the way how they position the gender of women with the explanatory potentials has aroused opposition. Since the term ‘third world’ is inherently oppressing and coerced, literature often describes these women as constantly seeking for dependencies or experiencing powerlessness in the society, resulting in great inequalities to occur (Bahri, 2016). Al-Wazedi (2021) highlighted that regardless of how women are represented in a society, it is never their choice or decision to be presented that way but rather, something that is imposed on them without any considerations.

Lee portrays the female protagonist Choon Neo from “The Bride who Refuse to Strip” is pressured by the traditional Peranakan culture in which the newlywed couple is required to have sexual intercourse within twelve days after the official marriage ceremony to consummate the marriage. By adhering to the Peranakan tradition, it is expected that men should behave in a masculine manner in terms of being more dominant, competitive, and autonomous in executing their assigned tasks (Stets & Burke, n.d.). This case, Tan Teik Seng’s ultimate task is to bed his wife, Choon Neo, as the families from both sides will check on the outcome, to affirm that the bride is deemed ‘pure’ as being a virgin. However, the expected qualities are not shown by Teik Seng, and he tends to hesitate and feel anxious to conduct the sexual activities which turns him to be the victim of the Chinese patriarchal system. On the other hand, Choon Neo who secretly hides her interest in girls (a lesbian) as

she is aware of the family's strict cultural practices and tries to conform to the socially accepted gender identity by being feminine. She is cautious towards her manners as she walks elegantly, speaks in a gentle and soft tone, and tries her best to endure the struggle of being 'dominated' by her husband as they lie side to side on their bed. Therefore, both genders are being oppressed by the Chinese patriarchal system as they agree to compromise to the expected gender identity ascribed by the Peranakan society.

Social class is the pre-constructed perception towards the hierarchy of the society in which the resources held by men and women are distributed unequally. Women have always been categorised to being inferior and submissive as they uphold minimal resources, interests, power, and predicaments. At this stage, they are challenged by the practice of power relations, suppressed, and not to mention the right to enjoy equal treatment as men (Liao & Wang, 2020). The patriarchal gender construction of womanhood has refrained them from reaching a higher ground, as they only suit the role of homemaker which is responsible for gaining additional income for the family expenses by learning some practical skills including sewing, crafting, and snack making (Hyunanda et al., 2021). Simply, women are placed in a hierarchy that does not allow them to be benefitted in the male-dominated society (Liao & Wang, 2020). It is observed that women are depicted as the loyal supporters and can never escape from the fixed domestic sphere of patriarchal control. Surviving in such a society, as Liao and Wang (2020) placed it, is to conform to such autonomy and obey the gender norms constructed, even when they are aware of the difference in equilibrium established on men and women, as the social priorities are mostly given to men in advance typically schooling opportunities and financial resources (Arat, 2015). Postcolonial feminists strive to advocate the idea of women empowerment by stating the fact that women are equally important as men as they uphold full responsibilities in terms of household management, where they spend time and effort to

take care of the family members' physical and emotional state of conditions which such importance should not be omitted. Through literary works, the main concern is to advocate gender equality, consciousness, and awareness for all readers (Liao & Wang, 2020).

Lee pictures the female characters in all the four selected short stories as a group of individuals who strive to be recognised and to climb up the social ladder. According to McGinn and Oh (2017), “the division of unpaid labor within households and across societies is a gendered struggle as well as a class-based struggle” (p. 85). As the women characters are confined at home to deal with the household chores and care for the elderly and children, they tend to experience endless oppression as their contribution is not being recognised by the Peranakan society. Most of them including the daughters of the Lim family and the two wives of Patriarch Baba Gan have no proper names to be addressed which depicts the fact that women are placed in a low social class level without receiving the least acknowledgement. Even when women are given the opportunity to work outside the house, they have to minimize the working time for the paid labour to remain focused on their domestic role as housewives (McGinn & Oh, 2017). For instance, Sau Ping, who works as a full-time admin and a part-time health supplement promoter, is expected to stay loyal to her role as a dedicated wife by managing the household chores in order to achieve the condition of a good wife in the eyes of her mother-in-law (MIL) who is believed to be the beneficiary of the Chinese patriarchal system. Hence, due to the restriction of the Peranakan practices, women struggle to obtain social recognition as they are refrained from demonstrating their capability by working outside the house and this also exploited their opportunity to prove themselves as being worthy like men.

Ethnicity is “the deliberate and conscious tracing of one's identity to a particular ethnic group and allowing such feeling to determine the way one relates with people and things around it” (Ayatse & Akuva as cited in Sarumi et al., 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, Bradford (2010) uses the term ‘ethnicity’ to describe the population of people who are distinguished by ancestry, traditions, religious affiliations, values and norms by discrediting the “genetically organized hierarchy of race” (p. 47). To maintain the hybridity of a particular culture, it is ordinary for the locals to instill the feeling of fear in the younger generations or even outsiders who are relatively new to the cultural setting as a way to promote respect towards the culture. In a mixed cultural setting like the Peranakan society, ethnicity is always the polemic in the aspects of social life as it associates closely with the cultural beliefs, values, and practices in which people who belong to the same ethnic group often resist the practice of other ethnic groups’ culture (Sarumi et al., 2019). For instance, the Chinese patriarchy system serves as the basic rules and regulations among the Peranakans and the locals tend to deliver the established sets of practices across generations to ensure its continuity.

The short story “A Light Bulb Moment” portrays the modern era during the post-independence of Malaysia where the people are free to choose or do things based on their will, typically women are allowed to obtain a higher level of education and manage to secure a job at the workplace. However, despite gaining more social status and recognition, the female lead, Sau Ping is criticized by her mother-in-law (MIL) for being a Hailamese instead of an indigenous nyonya. Even though both of them come from different ethnic backgrounds, the MIL expects Sau Ping to adhere to and fully adapt the Chinese patriarchy system as well as to fit in the social standards of a good wife that are acknowledged by the Peranakan society. She has to learn the way a nyonya dresses, cooks, takes care of the household, and assists the husband by spending most of the time at home caring for the elderly and child. As a woman

with a modern mindset, Sau Ping tries hard to match the expected standards stated by her MIL as a way to express filial piety although she thinks it is unnecessary to do so. Similarly, the elderly from another three short stories have been insisting on the Chinese patriarchal practice of the Peranakan culture by refraining the younger generation of women from deviating away from their respective duties and roles in the family. For example, in “The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan”, Wife Number Two who travels from the remote village in China to Millionaire Avenue, Penang to marry Baba Gan is required to learn the nyonya culinary skills including “...how to pound spices into perfection, how to slice the turnips, carrots and cabbage at lightning speed...(Lee, 2017, p. 65) to produce authentic and unique nyonya dishes. Thus, even if the prolonged practice of culture can retain the heritage of certain ethnic groups, it is difficult for those who are conservative to accept the modern changes.

These elements may have persisted in postcolonial feminism for years, yet the goal has never changed (Chambers & Watkins, 2012). What postcolonial feminism seeks to achieve is not merely to help women living in a society that is of “austerity, neo-conservatism, and backlash” (p. 299) but also to be productive in making a difference for women.

3.3 Methodology

Textual analysis is defined as a qualitative and transdisciplinary method of analysing and understanding a text which can be extracted in the form of academic transcript, books, and anything where one can retrieve meanings or information from; sources such as films, videos, images, and symbols can be analysed using textual analysis (Nicolas, 2020; Smith, 2017). From a research philosophical stance, textual analysis belongs to the interpretive research philosophy as it inherently makes use of various theoretical foundations for

interpretations to achieve qualitative research such as “symbolic interaction, phenomenology, critical theory (such as race and feminist theories), and ethnography” (Smith, 2017, p. 3).

From the perspective of literary analysis, textual analysis is regarded as a close reading process to break down all components in the literary texts, and focus on the language use, narrative, word choice, the concept of imagery, writer’s intention and perception, and organisation of the entire text (Walsh & Horowitz, 2011). It helps to generate insights that one may not be able to notice (Ilinska et al., 2016). When doing textual analysis, paraphrasing the sentences helps in identifying the categories that are further needed for analysis (Kuckartz, 2019). Each line of the texts is accounted for and rich categories that conform to the theory being investigated can be generated (Kuckartz, 2019). Another important prospect that should be accounted for is the relationship between the written texts and the surrounding factors which comprises political, social, economic, and religious context. From these relationships identified, themes and thematic summaries pertaining to the context of the study are generated and these can be discussed in detail in an analytical manner (Kuckartz, 2019). Ultimately, the researcher is able to generate tables, diagrams, and figures that visualise the text that has been thoroughly analysed (Kuckartz, 2019).

Within textual analysis, it is crucial for the researcher or reader to be able to identify the types of texts available (Walsh & Horowitz, 2011). Commonly, texts are divided into two different types known as primary texts and secondary texts, which Walsh and Horowitz (2011) define the texts as follows:

Primary sources are the sources in which people have direct connection to whereas secondary sources are obtained in the form of quotations, recitations, or

borrowing of ideas and the outcomes are usually coated with additional interpretation and analysis (p. 29).

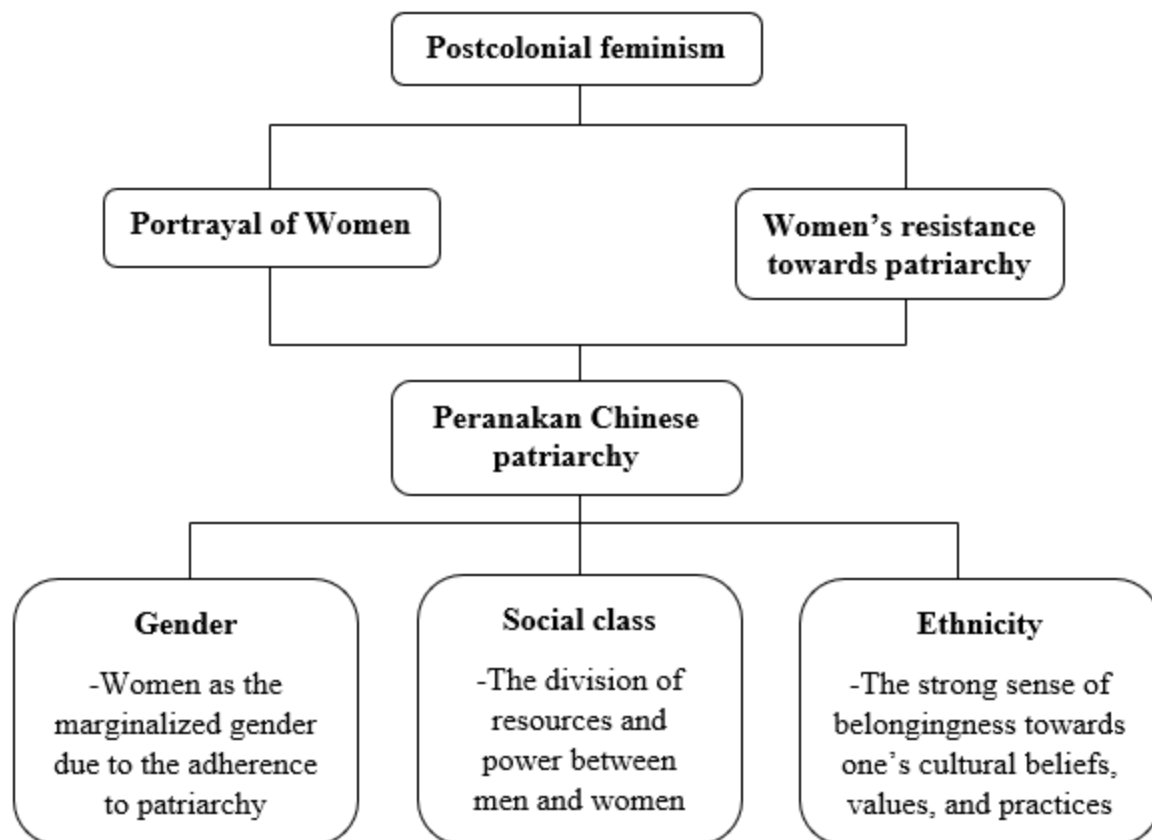
Textual analysis frequently occurs on anyone who reads and typical activities from textual analysis like text paraphrasing, examination of details and concealed meanings, and self-reflection to the text to attain a deeper insight (Ilinska et al., 2016; Walsh & Horowitz, 2011). In addition, Walsh and Horowitz (2011) provide examples that can guide a reader in doing textual analysis. The guiding questions are as follows (p. 30):

1. What implicit and explicit messages does the author try to convey or deliver?
2. What much do you know about the author? Is it possible that his or her beliefs or background have affected the presentation of content?
3. Who assembled the target audience or readers? Was this source meant for one person's eyes, a focused group, or the public? How does that affect the nature of the source?
4. Is it prescriptive or descriptive? (either it aims to tell you what people thought should happen or things that are meant to happen)
5. Does this text represent a certain perspective? Is it about the beliefs/actions of the elite, or of "ordinary" people?
6. What questions can you answer? What are the shortages that this type of source normally shows? What are the historical perspectives that have been left out intentionally?
7. What kind of assumptions have been made? What are the unexpected issues that surprises you from this text?

Using the framework of postcolonial feminism to conduct a textual analysis on the portrayal of women characters in the four selected short stories of “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarch, Playboys, and Paramours,” the researcher’s objective is to identify, integrate, and discuss the different forms of resistance that are evidently shown by Lee in the stories which play a part to resist the practice of Chinese Peranakan patriarchy. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has thoroughly discussed the history and elements of postcolonial feminism from several scholars' point of view. The definition of postcolonial feminism is discussed in detail and how this theory functions is explored. Further in this chapter, the conceptual framework is established through the use of three elements from the postcolonial feminism study and the Chinese patriarchal system to determine how women are portrayed through the lens of gender, social class, and ethnicity. In the next chapter, it looks at the findings and discussion made on Lee's work.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis conducted on Lee Su Kim's "Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys, and Paramours" to depict the various issues related to feminism in the society. As aforementioned, the researcher has sought to achieve two objectives: (1) To identify the change in the portrayal of women across time in Lee Su Kim's Manek Mischiefs, and (2) To identify how women show resistance towards patriarchy in Lee Su Kim's Manek Mischiefs. Subsequently, the chapter provides a detailed analysis and discussion on the themes that are uncovered through the textual analysis conducted on the selected four short stories in Lee Su Kim's work. To restate, the four short stories are: (1) The Bride Who Refused to Strip, (2) The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea, (3) The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan, and (4) A Light Bulb Moment. This chapter begins by presenting the timeline where the events have taken place in Lee's work. Then, the two identified themes which are the portrayal of women and resistance of women towards patriarchy are extensively discussed.

4.1 Position of Lee's Short Stories in the Historical Timeline

Across the short stories read, several keywords and phrases within each short story have revealed the timelines where the setting of the story has occurred. Generally, a total of two timelines can be identified, to which these two timelines are: (1) First British colonization and (2) Post-independence in Malaysia.

First British colonization refers to the era where the British had first stepped into Malaya (the then Malaysia after 1957) which subsequently colonized the land since 1824

following the establishment of the British-Dutch Agreement. The first British colonization in Malaya ended when the Japanese attacked on December 8, 1941. This simply means that the British had colonized Malaya for at least 117 years before Malaya was taken over by the Japanese. In Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischief*, two of the short stories selected fell under the first British colonization period, namely, *The Bride Who Refused to Strip* and *The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan*. The evidence to such claims is as follows: In *The Bride Who Refused to Strip*, the sentence "It is the 1920s, well into the twentieth century..." (Lee, 2017, p. 19) had directly informed the position of the timeline while in *The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan*, the sentence "His own father had seven wives but this is the 1930s..." (Lee, 2017, p. 62) was the evidence that the setting took place during the first British colonization.

The second timeline that was identified was the post-independence in Malaysia. In post-independence, it refers to the status of Malaya who had achieved independence in 1957 after the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj had led a team to England to strive for independence. The remaining two short stories, which were *The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea* and *A Light Bulb Moment* respectively, had their settings belonging to this timeline. Evidently, in *The Stump in the Hole Under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea*, the female protagonist talks about her past upon returning to her homeland, "...I returned to my homeland and drove to Malacca to visit Sherwood Villa, a three hours' drive away from K.L. in the 1970s" (Lee, 2017, p. 57). This meant that she was in the 1970s when she started to talk about her past. In *A Light Bulb Moment*, while it is not explicitly stated in any part of the short story, several pieces of evidence suggested the setting of the story was indeed in post-independence Malaysia, further in the 21st century. As an example, several keywords had

histories that began at least in the 1970s: "...in Hello Kitty slippers..." (p. 152), according to its history, Hello Kitty first made its appearance and debut in March 1975; "Donald's noisy old Mitsubishi drove up the driveway" (p. 153) also suggested that the Mitsubishi automobile that Donald drove had its history at least dated back to the 1990s, when Mitsubishi released the Diamante/Sigma. Perhaps the most significant evidence that greatly suggested that the setting was in the modern 21st century when the following terms were mentioned: "cheesy Hollywood movie" (p. 157), "Whatsapp meme" (p. 157), "Ikea glass" (p. 158), and "Jurassic Park" (p. 158). By tracing back to the history, WhatsApp was first established in 2009 (Pahwa, 2021); Ikea came to Malaysia and established its first store at 1Utama, Petaling Jaya, Selangor in 1996 (Yunus, 2019); the first Jurassic Park movie was in 1993 (Spielberg, 1993); "cheesy Hollywood movie" may suggest a romance movie but the first romance movie can be dated back to at least 1896. Given the term cheesy, it also suggested that the short story was referring to some modern romance movies produced by Hollywood.

Tracing back to history, it can thus be concluded that the short stories written by Lee Su Kim in *Manek Mischiefs* transcended across time, with the earliest time dated back to the first British colonization period to the modern 21st century. It further reaffirmed that feminism alongside patriarchy had long been existing in Malaysia and continues to be present in today's Malaysian society.

4.2 Portrayal and Resistance of Women in the Selected Short Stories of Manek Mischiefs

Using textual analysis on the selected four short stories in Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs*, generally there are two themes that can be identified. The first theme addresses the portrayal of women in the short stories and the second theme addresses the resistance

attempted by the women in these short stories. In the following subsections, detailed analysis and relevant examples are provided with reference to the theme identified.

4.2.1 Portrayal of Women in Selected Short Stories

There are seven subthemes allocated under the main theme of portrayal of women: Ideal feminine appearance and behaviours, educational opportunities, practice of arranged marriages, preferences of sons over daughters, burden of household chores lies on the shoulders of women and young girls, sex figures or reproductive objects, and oppressive naming. Based on the timeline from the first British colonization to the post-independence era of Malaysia, the women characters demonstrate a subtle progress from being confined at home to being able to work outside the house and obtain a tertiary level of education.

Ideal feminine appearance and behaviours

The Peranakan society in the 1920s had a stereotypical standard towards how women should behave to be regarded as ideal. There are many ways to define 'ideal', yet this particular term comprises the elements of oppression as it is used to refrain women from outshining men. They are taught to present themselves as weak, exquisite, and soft as depicted in the following: "...the female sex is like the porcelain my mother amasses – fragile, colourful, decorative..." (p. 19). Furthermore, in terms of behaviour, they are expected to be feminine, in which they have to walk elegantly, stay delicate in whatever they do, including the way they greet the elders as seen in the following description, "...she is...respectful, well-mannered,...the way she walked, the way she sat...so ladylike" (p. 25). Besides, the way to show respect is by addressing the elderly with accurate titles, which is also a condition to be a good wife, "she addressed us properly, used all the correct names" (p. 26). Hence, these characteristics have restrained women from expressing their actual thoughts and feelings as

they are taught to obey orders instead of understanding the reason why they should behave accordingly.

On the other hand, Ta Chi or Dorothy, is a distinguished character who deviates from society's standard of 'ideal' woman. In Collin's Dictionary (n.d.), the word "ideal" refers to the imagined standard established by the society of how a person should behave. In the context of Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs*, the word "ideal" refers to the imagined standards imposed onto women which strictly restrain their behaviour and actions. Distinctly, in 'The Bride Who Refused to Strip', Ta Chi is "...strong-willed and gutsy, attractive in a handsome sort of way", "...liked to dress in pants and man-sized shirts whenever she could" (p. 24) which perfectly fits the traits of a tomboy, a term used to refer to girls who do things which are normally expected to be done by boys. Her tastes and behaviours are more boyish and manly which differ from the stereotypical feminine look. Furthermore, she is caught red-handed when she tries to imitate the way her father smokes by "trying out his expensive cigars in the library, her legs propped up on his posh mahogany table in a most unbecoming manner" (p. 24) which further emphasizes that she is viewed as being less feminine and uncivilized. Ironically, while Ta Chi's behaviour is viewed as an "unbecoming manner" for mimicking men, it is questionable how men view Ta Chi's attitude as being uncivilized, yet it is acceptable for men to do the same thing. This further implies that there is a double standard in how men and women are treated in society.

Educational opportunities

Williany (2020) pointed out that traditional women's roles are limited within the house and solely needed to serve the virtues of the patriarchal practices, and that their opportunities to pursue education have been restrained. In 'The Bride Who Refused to Strip',

Choon Neo, the female protagonist, has pursued a minimum level of education and is forced to quit studying in order to pick up the domestic skills required as a nyonya, "...educated to Standard Five. Then... nasib baik (in relief)...her parents pulled her out of school to concentrate on becoming a good wife" (p. 26). In reality, such action aims to prevent women from outsmarting men so that men will forever remain superior and possess the upper-hand control over women in the sense that they are more educated. The society does not require women to be outstanding, yet they need to be obedient as in obeying men as the head of the family, be dutiful as in to handle the household chores and respect the elderly so that the traditional expectation on gender is well maintained. As the story proceeds to the post-British colonization era, the youngest sister in 'The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea' obtains the opportunity to pursue her studies in the United Kingdom, "...I had gone overseas, obtained a postgraduate degree" (p. 56). This shows that women have slowly gained access to a higher level of education and are recognised over their capability which allows them to interact more freely with the world.

Practice of arranged marriage

According to Zeng (2017), matchmaking entrenched with gender discrimination as the matchmaker conducts a background check between both families to ensure that the family background, wealth, and social status are perfectly matched. This practice of matchmaking derives from the traditional Chinese culture which involves a matchmaker (in this case the matchmaker is referred to a lady named Bibik Megawatt) as the middle person to liaise between the family of both spouses. It is believed that men should obtain a higher level of education whereas women are required to be young in order for them to execute their duties as both a wife and a mother. Such is evident in the following dialogue taken in 'The Bride Who Refused to Strip': "She is younger than you by a few years..., ...she can cook, sew, jaga

rumah (taking care of the house)...intelligent but not too educated, thank goodness! She is healthy and will bear many children..." (p. 26). In terms of zodiacs, it is believed that females who are born in the Year of Sheep tend to carry misfortunes and might end up childless or widowed if they are married (Zeng, 2017), "your stubborn cousin Leng Neo, insisted on marrying Terence, even though their birth dates clash...see lah, barren how many years!" (p. 25). This greatly depicts how rooted the belief is in the marriage culture where zodiacs are the determinant of the continuation of family lineage, "she is a rooster and you are a dragon, It's not easy to find (a) bride for boys born in the Year of the Dragon, you know..." (pp. 24-25). Therefore, women have no rights to speak a word or voice an opinion on the arrangement even when they are the ones to get married, for instance, Choon Neo has never raised her viewpoint on whether she agrees to the outcome of matchmaking. During the postmodern era, the procedures of marriage changes as Sau Ping and Donald decide on marriage instantly without the need to go through the hustles from the parents' side, "he proposed marriage after a brief courtship...I was in love and found him charming, courteous and kind" (p. 144), which is purely a simple love relationship.

Preferences of sons over daughters

Peranakan families prefer sons over daughters as the society values the birth of male heir to succeed the family (Deepikadas, 2017). This also explains why in 'The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea', Lim Gan Seong's family is overjoyed when they finally get a son, "after two daughters, the arrival of a son brought much joy and celebration" (p. 43). Moreover, based on the parental kinship established under the indigenous Peranakan Chinese culture, daughters are meant to be married away to other families, they have no positions to dispute, so the sons will have the inheritance by default (Bempa, Kasim, & Jasin, 2017). Men naturally own the right to inherit

the entire wealth and property of the family while women receive nothing, as shown in the following evidence: "...my brother Lim Gan Seong had inherited this magnificent property which Grandpa and Pa had looked after so lovingly. In its entirety. My two sisters and I did not get even a slimmest share..." (pp. 42-43).

Likewise, the longing for sons enhances the discrimination against daughters as they are devalued and unidentified since they are born. In 'The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan', "I (was) born a girl, is a porblum (problem). Father (and) mother want boy but get girl...When I (was) born, mother want (wanted) to kill me, use the cord that come (comes) along with baby stomach" (p. 64). From the monologue, Wife Number Two's mother attempts to commit the crime of infanticide as she wishes to get rid of her own daughter exactly the moment she is born as if she is a disgrace to the family. In fact, Wife Number Two is also seemingly belittling herself when she states that "I (was) born a girl, is a problem (problem)," which is a clear sign of self-devaluing. Further, being unidentified is certainly evident as well in the story as Wives Number One and Two are not named in the story. While both have made some contributions to the family further serving Baba Gan, not presenting names continues to undermine their presence and devalue them as individuals who are not worth mentioning and are replaceable by others. Similarly, in 'The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea', with the exception of the only son, Lim Gan Seong, who is named in the story, neither his three sisters have their names mentioned throughout the story. Their presence in the Lim clan is briefly acknowledged while the entire story revolves around Lim Gan Seong's life as the heir to the clan.

Burden of household chores lies on the shoulders of women and young girls

Women are being oppressed in the sense that their civil rights are exploited. Regardless of the endless and repetitive housework women have contributed, still, their contributions are discredited as it is deemed normal to do so while men who work outside tend to gain extra cultural legitimacy (Kandiyoti as cited in Jackson, 2010). In ‘The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea’, the three daughters are vulnerably exploited even though they actively participate in reproduction of their own subordination by fulfilling their duties of “...doing household chores, while Seong, the only son, was exempted from having to lift a finger” (p. 43) as the family typically prioritises the male heir by offering him comfort while staying in the house. In ‘The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan’, Wife Number One conforms to her submissive role as a homemaker by handling all the household chores and childcare, in which she “...serves the most splendid nyonya meals, coffee is exactly the way he likes, clothes are beautifully pressed, cars are all polished gleaming in the sunshine...” (p. 62) without complaining. However, Baba Gan never appreciates the efforts made as he is “...too busy with his business and extra-curricular activities (that) he doesn’t even know his children’s birthdays!” (p. 62) which is his excuse for being irresponsible. Both the three daughters and Wife Number One willingly accept their roles even though they are oppressed with impunity, since the men of the house would never recognise their contribution.

Sex figures or reproductive objects

Women are always objectified as they often serve the physical and sexual needs of men (Barli et al., 2017). This is because they abide by the traditional patriarchal values of the society and proclaim the production of male offspring as a supreme achievement, “...I (am) the only one who give (gives) Baba Gan sons. Number One cannot and Number Three

forever trying” (p. 72) which gives space for the social injustice to take place. Next, Wife Number One too nurtures the practice of patriarchy by conforming to the need to bear sons for her husband as she keeps “...eating pig stomach, hoping to get a boy” (p. 62). The Chinese believe that the pig stomach is shaped like a male's reproductive organ so if a family wishes to have a son, the pig stomach is believed to provide a boy (Baidu, n.d.). Adhering to the traditional patriarchal practice, women do not seem to have the choice to choose whether they wish to bear children regardless of sons or daughters, or decide on how many of them, as these are solely determined by their husbands (Hossen, 2020). For instance, Wife Number One tries her best to bear sons, but Baba Gan chooses to neglect her sincerity, by being “...totally disinterested in their matrimonial bed” (pp. 62-63).

Oppressive naming

In the selected short stories, only a few women and men are given Chinese names. For example, Choon Neo and Tan Teik Seng in *The Bride Who Refused to Strip*, the third wife of Baba Gan, Loo Loo in *The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan*, Lim Gan Seong in *The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea*, and Sau Ping in *A Light Bulb Moment*. With reference to the Chinese language/Hokkien dialect, when these English names are translated, they indirectly suggest meanings that are subtly hidden in the names other than merely for addressing purposes.

Firstly, in ‘*The Bride Who Refused to Strip*’, Choon Neo, when the name is translated to the Chinese language, is referred as 春娘 (chūn niáng). By taking its literal meaning, the name is literally referred to as the blossoming spring season. It also suggests that the person has beauty that one, usually a man, can hardly resist from being tempted by the figure. This name also carries the high expectation of parents who are in hopes that the daughter can

bloom into a beautiful flower as she grows. In the story itself, Choon Neo indeed lives up to her family's expectations by having an outstanding appearance, being gentle and respectful in front of the elders, and equipping herself with all the predetermined qualities to become a good wife. "Her face is oval-shaped like a melon seed, she has pearly white teeth, (and) a most enchanting smile. And such dainty ankles and wrists" (p. 26). Her supposedly married husband, Tan Teik Seng can be literally translated to 陈得胜 or 德胜 (dé shèng). Literally, the name itself means to be successful at something, shows a strong tenacity in achieving goals, or persistent in serving humanity with a righteous attitude. By taking the possible interpretation into account in this story, Teik Seng does indeed have a goal to consummate the marriage by bedding his wife within the twelve days period. It is a task imposed to him by tradition which is considered necessary to be fully acknowledged as a husband. While not explicitly stated, the name Teik Seng is oppressing Choon Neo by eliciting a stronger presence of domination to bed her after the marriage ceremony.

In 'The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan', among the three wives only one wife has her name explicitly stated, Loo Loo. In the Chinese language, Loo Loo can be translated into 璐璐 (lù lù). The Chinese name, 璐璐 carries the meaning of either a white jade or beauty with profound intelligence. The former is often used to describe a white jade that is pure and demanding. In the story, although Loo Loo is less fortunate for not being born and raised in a complete family, she still manages to live her life through by surviving in a brothel as a prostitute then later gets close to Baba Gan who has gotten himself deeply attracted to her. Upon gaining Baba Gan's attention, she is welcomed to his family and has made excessive demands which all of them are fulfilled by Baba Gan. Loo Loo thus lives in a comfortable shelter with lots of money for her to spend on clothing and travelling as she pleases unlike the unnamed, first two wives. Additionally, Loo Loo shows her intelligent side

when she approaches her “gold mine” Baba Gan. Given her experience in the story where her mother was a prostitute and she was a nobody for a moment after her mother died, the adult Loo Loo then emerged and showed herself as a victorious figure when she “hit the jackpot” (p. 68) by meeting Mr Gan (Baba Gan) in Pink Flamingo Cabaret. Further, her victory was shown and asserted when she was monologing in the story:

I knew Baba Gan was rich but I didn't know I had struck a goldmine! This mansion is like a palace compared to my dingy ratty room. I am waited upon by a whole retinue of servants, cooks, butlers, (and) slave girls... The two wives (Wives Number One and Two) are no competition at all (p. 72).

In ‘The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea’, the only named character was the only son and elder brother in the Lim family, Lim Gan Seong. When translated to the Chinese/Hokkien language, the possible name was 林敢雄 (lín gǎn xióng). By accounting each word other than the family name Lim (林), 敢 literally means “brave” while 雄 means “masculine.” With the gender being a male, the two words do indeed show a nod towards masculinity as it greatly suggests the only son at home should be presented as a brave and masculine figure. This is further asserted as Lim Gan Seong is the only son in the Lim family, who is expected to inherit the family’s fame and wealth to continue maintaining its status in the society. As the word 敢 can be associated with being aggressive, Lim Gan Seong is portrayed as a brother who is aggressive towards his youngest sister. In the story, Lim Gan Seong is extremely self-centred and refuses to listen to others except himself. This is evident when his sister is trying to advise him to be mature and not to be disrespectful in the ancestral hall, where he is shown to use mean expressions: “Oh shut up, little sister. Thank your lucky stars it wasn't a condom” (p. 45).

Lastly, in ‘A Light Bulb Moment’, the word Sau Ping can be translated into 晓萍 (xiǎo píng). In a literal sense, the word 晓 means dawn or the light rays emitted in morning; it also means to understand someone well. The word 萍 on the other hand is referred to a type of floating plant, much similar to a lotus. The connotations of 晓 may mean being understanding and considerate towards others’ feelings while 萍 gives a sense of nature, calmness, and warmth. Despite the positive connotations of her name’s meaning to her character, Sau Ping’s personality gradually changes from being extroverted, carefree, and a happy-go-lucky kind of person to someone who frequently feels nervous and agitated further suffers from anxiety attacks (Lee, 2017) ever since she meets her mother-in-law who constantly oppresses and forces her to conform to the traditional Peranakan norms and practices. This is certainly evident in some of the phrases where she has used to narrate her experience living with her and Donald: “Soon I stopped cooking altogether, unable to bear her unpleasant presence in the kitchen” (p. 151). When Donald’s mother intentionally taunts her on their marriage, Sau Ping almost loses her composure as seen in the following dialogue: “Just what the fuck is wrong with marrying a Hailam?” (p. 153). Unlike the meaning that is blessed in her given name, towards the end of the story in the light bulb incident, Sau Ping has decided to leave the house when Donald’s mother accuses her of killing her son when Donald is merely trying to fix the light bulb on his own, as shown in the following:

I left them in the kitchen fussing away over the light bulb. I ran upstairs, grabbed my suitcase from under the bed and threw in a whole pile of clothes. Gently taking Suzanna by the hand, we crept down the stairs, out of the house and into the car. I started the engine, glided down the driveway and sped away towards my mother’s home. I had had enough. This was the very last straw (p. 161).

To summarize, women in Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs* had names that when translated in the Chinese/Hokkien language, have subtle or direct meanings that are filled with expectations and imposed onto them. Names like Choon Neo, Loo Loo, and Sau Ping have connotations that are related to being a feminine figure while Teik Seng and Gan Seong are associated with being masculine. Further, the masculine-associated names are seemingly evident in oppressing women as well due to the meaning given.

4.2.2 Resistance of Women in Selected Short Stories

In all four selected short stories in Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs*, towards the climax of the story, the women have begun to realize their strengths and opportunities they possessed and have initiated a series of actions to liberate themselves from the control of patriarchy. As a general point-of-view, the women have decided to make their stand and strove to establish a sense of presence which allowed them to enhance their social status and further gain recognition. The form of resistance comprises embrace of a new sex, reimagining women's value, and retrieval of women's voice.

Embrace of a new sex

In 'The Bride Who Refused to Strip', Choon Neo confronts her true self by accepting her nature as a lesbian the moment she decides to bravely embrace Ta Chi, who is believed to be her 'lover', as she "doesn't sequel or cringe...with her eyes shine with unseen tenderness,..gazes lovingly at the thing beside her (Ta Chi)" (p. 33) as they engage in sexual intercourse. According to Amaya & Gonzalez (2019), the Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender (LGBT community) refers to the coalition of diverse groups with respect to the socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity to fulfil the sexual needs of the non-heterosexuals. However, the portrayal of lesbian sex to gratify their sexual needs is

strictly prohibited in the Peranakan society as women are not allowed to display their sexual desire like how men do (Deepikadas, 2017). The way Choon Neo willingly stripping herself, both mentally and physically to Ta Chi demonstrates her comfort while being with Ta Chi even when Ta Chi uses “her right leg to coil around her body in a slithery embrace” (p. 33). Choon Neo has no concern over the thought of getting caught is the sign of her resisting the unfair patriarchal practice imposed on different genders. On the other hand, her action verifies the fact that having an affair is a share of rights for both genders, as women also possess equal sexual needs as men, and it should be common for women to behave out of genuine desire.

Reimagining women’s value

The form of resistance towards patriarchy varies according to the women’s way of retrieving higher social status and recognition. In ‘The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan’, Loo Loo transcends from being the daughter of a lowly prostitute to Wife Number Three of a blissful bachelor which reveals her perseverance in striving towards her target. She applies her intelligence and skills learned in the brothel to pester Baba Gan to become one of his wives, which she thinks is “a safer bet as she is aware that no millionaire will gladly accept a prostitute” (p. 71). Rather than giving in, she takes full advantage of her “beauty and youth,...creamy-smooth skin, shapely hour glass (hourglass) figure,...husky, breathless voice” (p. 68), seducing Baba Gan and squandering his wealth to buy her “the most extravagant jewellery, cheongsams of pure silk and exquisite brocade from Shanghai, expensive Western clothes and ball gowns from London and Paris” (p. 68). Nevertheless, men are actually the sex slaves of love and sexuality, as they are unable to control their undying sexual desire to have sex with women as revealed by Wife Number One: “young firm body and already he gets horny...think I don’t know...that’s my husband for you” (p.

64). This again emphasizes that women have the right to redefine their values and protect themselves from being a reproductive tool to the patriarchs and perpetuate the family line, but instead, they should resist the oppression and climb up the social ladder, as the way Loo Loo does, and she has successfully made others recognize her presence despite continue being a nobody at the Pink Flamingo Cabaret.

Retrieval of women's voice

In 'The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea', the youngest daughter has always been rational about what is going on in the house as she observes the way her elder brother "Seong...was spoilt by his mother, both grandmothers and everyone around", accepts the existing inequality that "...daughters are expected to do household chores, Seong, the only son, was exempted from having to lift a finger" (p. 43) but she chooses to adhere to the subservient image in which women should follow men's orders and perform their assisting roles. However, as she neglects the shameful deeds done by Seong, "the pride of the Lim clan, the male offspring tasked to perpetuate the family" (p. 46) tends to ruin the name of the entire family. She decides to speak on behalf of her family by shouting "Don't you dare sell those, you moron!" (p. 48), which implies his lack of common sense, immaturity, and feeble-mindedness as he casts away all the family's possessions and shows no respect to the sacred ancestral hall that has been valued along generations. Ironically, although he is entrusted with the family's property, he has yet to show any attempts to properly manage the inheritance received. For instance, he collaborates with his partner to open a nyonya restaurant without sufficient research and proper planning, and he despises the nyonya delicacies by mentioning, "Easy lah. Just make the same old dishes but name everything 'nyonya'...If you say it is 'nyonya', then it is" (p. 49), which later leads to bankruptcy.

Moreover, Chinese mother-in-laws are the beneficiaries or guardians of family patriarchy who are in charge of “the discipline and surveillance of young couples” (Zuo & LaRossa, 2009). In ‘A Light Bulb Moment’, Sau Ping, the daughter-in-law is forced to live under the extreme supervision of her MIL in whatever she does which severely oppresses her previous self. Her distress originates from her MIL’s “...domineering and intrusive character...” as she asks for a “...a big grand wedding... fifty tables at least and nothing less than a six-star hotel” (p. 146) which is difficult for the newlyweds to afford based on their financial situation. There is a difference in mindset between Sau Ping and MIL as MIL insists her traditional beliefs that women should place more emphasis on her family by choosing a career that requires only a half-day’s work whereas Sau Ping practices modern thinking that women are allowed to work in the office as a full-time employee (Lee, 2017) which results in strong dissatisfaction towards whatever Sau Ping does. For example, “...you pakai baju (dress up) (and) go to office while I do all the donkey work...cook, wash, bring up your children...you (are a) low class woman...bangun pagi ta’da lipat selimut (wake up early but do not fold your blanket)...go to work (and) come back...that’s all you do...I am your maid...you kurang ajar (lack of education)” (p. 159). The phrases “donkey work” and “kurang ajar” are a form of irony for two evident reasons: First, MIL willingly takes care of the household chores and has been actively stopping Sau Ping from doing anything in the house yet she pushes the blame to Sau Ping for her lack of contribution to the household; while she reprimands Sau Ping for being “lack of education”, it simply highlights that women do indeed need education yet the culture prevents women to have any sort of education, and Sau Ping herself has obtained high educational qualifications as well. Even so, Sau Ping manages to hold her grudge as she values the peace of the house, thinking of not bothering her husband, “...keeping silent, being respectful, absorbing all the hurts, retreating into the peace and quiet

of my bedroom” (p. 155) might be the most suitable choice but instead it has severely oppressed her.

However, as the story continues, the frustration gradually expands in Sau Ping as on many occasions she has narrated her experience as shown in the following: (1) “I wondered why my husband even needed a wife!” (p. 151), (2) “This constant scrutiny was harmless yet irritatingly harmful, like having to listen to someone scratching her fingernails across a chalkboard. All the time.” (p. 54), (3) “...and like a bull prodded far too many times, I finally snapped... and stomped upstairs to my room, tears of fury blurring my vision” (p. 156), and (4) “I turned cold, aghast at how my words were misinterpreted. I did not have the time nor the energy to explain, nor was she in the mood to listen” (p. 159). The frustration that has been building throughout the story finally erupts during the light bulb incident where MIL is in full delusion and accuses Sau Ping of murdering her son when he falls from the ladder while changing the light bulb. To requote, Sau Ping has had her last straw and leaves the house with her daughter, Suzanna:

I left them in the kitchen fussing away over the light bulb. I ran upstairs, grabbed my suitcase from under the bed and threw in a whole pile of clothes. Gently taking Suzanna by the hand, we crept down the stairs, out of the house and into the car. I started the engine, glided down the driveway and sped away towards my mother’s home. I had had enough. This was the very last straw (p. 161).

Towards the end of the story, Sau Ping narrates herself as a fully independent woman capable of providing herself with a better life and free from all the oppresses, traditional practices previously imposed by MIL. The ending of the story depicts Sau Ping is now living a life that is way better and wonderful than living together with Donald and MIL. As

mentioned in her Chinese name, 晓萍 which suggests light, her leaving the house and living apart from MIL has once again brought her light and she is no longer engulfed by the dark customs that have done nothing but bringing misery to her marriage, as shown in her narration: “My life is serene again, no more jangled nerves bordering on a nervous breakdown. I’m glad the light bulb blew, no more darkness, only a lightness of being” (p.162).

As mentioned earlier, the setting of each story is generally between the first British colonization and post-independence Malaysia. Evidently in the selected short stories taken from Lee Su Kim’s *Manek Mischiefs*, across the span of at least 50 years, Lee has portrayed women characters as gradually resisting patriarchy and gaining more voice throughout her work. From embracing new sex as narrated in *The Bride Who Refused to Strip* to retrieving voice in *A Light Bulb Moment*, women in these short stories have actively challenging the notion of being socially imposed definition of being feminine in the society. As Lee’s *Manek Mischiefs* is written in the 21st century, it is evident that Lee continues to voice out the concerns of the female community in today’s society by highlighting the patriarchal oppression faced in the past.

4.3 Conclusion

As the story proceeds from the first British colonization to the post-independence of Malaysia, the portrayal of women changes from being submissive to receiving more recognition in the society. As Lee writes different stories, women, as depicted by Lee, are given the opportunity to leave their house to pursue education overseas or get a stable career at the workplace which is certainly a remarkable milestone. It is proven that they have changed from being powerless, insecure, and low self-esteem to becoming ambitious,

independent, and confident in the things they wish to achieve. Women are gradually moving towards an awareness of expressing their actual needs in terms of physical and emotional development which has led them to discover the sense of courage to construct a change in their oppressed lives under the patriarchy system. Apart from the findings on women, Lee implies the oppression faced by male characters as they struggle to fit the society's standards of being more manly and masculine. They are forced to hide their emotions and incapacities from the Peranakan society's supervision to remain bold as that is the image constructed by the Chinese patriarchy system. The characteristics shown by these male characters including anxious, unconfident, feeble-minded, and confused towards the patriarchal practices and beliefs have made them question their value and reconsider their power of dominance in the family.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Lee Su Kim adopts a humorous and empathetic writing style as she draws readers into the multi-layered Peranakan culture and enfold the hidden Peranakan heritage which is formed by a mixture of people from various ethnicities. She tells stories in an entertaining yet informative way when she unravels the traditional practices of the culture which creates an insight to outsiders who wish to understand more about this uniquely blended community of the Babas and Nyonyas. Furthermore, she highlights the way women transgress the social mores that have kept them confined for many decades which allows readers across Southeast Asia to gain a collective consciousness over tradition, sexuality, family heritage, and intimacy. Her work delivers the beauty of a Peranakan community in association with the use of diverse languages, cultural communications, and the interactions among people from separate origins.

The book entitled “Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours” has disclosed the content of all the eight stories; Lee describes manek as ‘beads’ in Malay, which refers to the ‘minuscule’ glass beads that are brought over to Malaysia for trading purposes (Lee, 2017, p. 9). With reference to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the word ‘Mischiefs’ means the action done to cause damage or one who pulls a trick on others; ‘Patriarchs’ refers to the father or man who is the head of a family; ‘Playboys’ indicates men who devote their lives to the pursuit of pleasure, and ‘Paramours’ is used to refer to men’s illicit partner which also indicates their secret lovers and concubines. Lee has implied that the short stories are about the series of ‘mischiefs’ or dishonoured deeds done by men to satisfy their personal desire, and subsequently highlights the subordination of women as their ‘toys’. From the way Lee portrays the circumstances faced by men and women living in the patriarchal society, the

context of the words is extensively discussed in the selected short stories. On the contrary, the title itself delivers an implicit meaning that regards men are also the victims who struggle to fit the standards of the Peranakan society in which they are forced to abide by the pre-constructed gender roles, image, and behaviour to portray the imagined version of themselves. The Chinese patriarchy system serves as a model to shape men's behaviour and advises them on how they should act to be considered appropriate, which leads to the lack of self-consciousness on their original selves.

Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours written by Lee Su Kim comprises a series of short stories that fall in different timelines, ranging from the British colonization, the Japanese colonization to the post-independence era. Out of the eight short stories available in Lee's work, four short stories are chosen for research purposes, specifically *The Wife Who Refused to Strip*, *The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea*, *The Merry Wives and Concubines of Patriarch Baba Gan*, and *A Light Bulb Moment*. The selected stories focus on the ways women emancipate themselves from patriarchal oppression by gradually becoming courageous to fight against the traditional patriarchal practices that have long been exploiting women across decades.

Patriarchal oppression is a recurring issue which is closely associated with women subordination and oppression, and due to its sophisticated nature, resolving patriarchal oppression requires a series of complex actions. The patriarchy system has had several impacts on the aspects of women's life, as a result, women are experiencing the following: (1) Exploited from sexuality, physical, and psychological aspects, (2) bound by the traditional gender roles in family institutions that are demeaning towards women, and (3) lived in a

society where their voices have gone unheard. Despite the implementation of laws and regulations that have now addressed the wellbeing of women and discarding the different treatments due to gender differences, it remains an undeniable truth that female subordination and oppression continue to persist in the Malaysian setting typically when it involves the participation of women of different ethnicities. Pertaining to Lee Su Kim's *Manek Mischiefs*, this research adopts textual analysis as the main method to analyse the two identified themes, which are (1) the portrayal of women characters living in a patriarchal society across history and (2) the attempts of these women resisting patriarchy to achieve freedom. It is found that women in the selected short stories do suffer from the oppression and subordination regardless of their family background, social position, and races. Moving to the 21st century, resistance towards patriarchy is overtly shown as women begin to receive higher education, work outside the house, and realize their inherent values which support their well-being.

Regardless, this research is not without its limitations. The study of patriarchal culture is mostly applied in the analysis of Western feminism study, however there is a lack of research on the effects of patriarchy on the Third World women who come from different races and ethnicities such as the Peranakan nation. Since there is a blend in cultural practices, the concept of patriarchy has been enforced which affects the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the descendants of this particular nation on how they can deal with the challenges and restraints imposed on them. By analysing Lee's work, it can only serve as a start towards realizing how women can choose to participate in the patriarchal society and prevent themselves from being critically exploited. Other than that, the analysis on patriarchal oppression can be carried out by looking from men's perspectives, as most of the focus has been placed on women's subordination but tend to neglect men's perception on the specific roles and power assigned for them under patriarchy. Secondly, not all short stories in Lee Su

Kim's Manek Mischiefs are fully analysed due to time constraints. The remaining short stories as listed, The Kueh Brothers, Green Eyes, Moonlight Bay, and Through Lara's Eyes can be incorporated for a complete and detailed analysis in future studies. Further, all information is solely analysed within Lee Su Kim's Manek Mischiefs itself. Previously, it has been stated that Manek Mischiefs is a part of a trilogy and there is a potential possibility that other findings that may have been valuable for the analysis are not included in this research. As such, future studies can incorporate all three works of Lee Su Kim to provide a richer analysis by making a comparative analysis to reveal significant results of feminism in the Malaysian context, specifically to the Peranakan setting.

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