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# Resistance and Oppression in Su-Chen Christine Lim's Novels:

## A Radical Feminist Analysis

Santhi Mathy Ramdas<sup>1</sup>

Shakila Abdul Manan<sup>2</sup>

Elangkeeran Sabapathy<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** This study analyzes the Chinese women's resistance to oppression by women themselves in Su-Chen Christine Lim's novels: "A Bit of Earth", "Fistful of Colours", "Gift from the Gods" and "Rice Bowl". These novels depict the problems faced by Chinese women owing to the patriarchal practices and the long-standing Confucian beliefs that are found to be inherent within the Chinese society. It is found that oppressions by women unto women in the Chinese society happen due to a number of reasons. This study attempts to answer the "when", "how" and "why" of oppressions of women by women in the selected novels.

This study also aspires to delve into the counter-measures that women as victims take to reduce, to stop or even to face the adverse effects of oppression. Concepts like subjugation, alienation, separatism, confrontation and escapism mark the kind of resistance that the female characters in Su-Chen Christine Lim's novels adopt to cope with various forms of "accepted" oppressions.

This study also highlights the quest for discovery of "self" or the assertion of self-identification- a perpetual area of women's struggle. The Radical Feminist Theory is used to analyze and highlight female oppression and resistance found in the novels, and this will shed more light on the existence of oppression by women unto women, especially in a quagmire with women's mind-set moulded by just being in a patriarchal society.

**Key Words:** Su-Chen Christine Lim; Chinese women's resistance to oppression

"The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."  
Aristotle

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Sek. Men. Chio Min, Kulim 09000, Kedah Darulaman e-mail: shansmr@yahoo.com.sg.

<sup>2</sup> School of Humanities, University Sains Malaysia 11800 Minden, Penang, Malaysia e-mail: shakila@usm.my.

<sup>3</sup> Universiti Teknologi MARA, Academy of Language Studies, Dungun 23000 Terengganu, Malaysia.

E-mail: keeran@tganu.uitm.edu.my.

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## **CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORY**

According to Jacobus (1979), in an article entitled "The Difference of View", there is a separate nature to women's writing but due positive criticism is not accorded. Patriarchy, it seems values masculine, which is identified with the language of "reason, government and administration – a rationale approach". In contrast, the feminine is identified with "sentiment, feeling, emotion, the irrational – even madness". Writings by women novelists are not given due prominence or recognition because of this kind of segregated view; they are viewed as poor works of art laced with irrationality unless the writer is able to write "akin to the language of men".

Lenggermann and Niebrugge (1996:299) view the development of the feminist theory as dictated by a woman-centered perspective. The theory is generalized as an array of ideas on social life and human experiences of women in a three-fold manner – as 'object', 'subject' and as seeking the betterment of women. The stimulus for contemporary feminist theory began with a few simple questions. The first one being: "And what about the women?" (301) and this has led to many consequences because the question itself is revolutionary to say the least. Lenggermann and Niebrugge (1996:299) noted that generalized conclusions may be drawn from the question over years of inquiry. They claim that the presence of women is felt in most social situations; and where they are not noticeable, it can be traced to efforts consciously made to exclude them or their contributions belittled. Where women's contribution is not to be ignored, then a toned down role, like that of a passive wife or mother, is projected. When women play an active role in public spheres, as scholars or as social agents, the community has turned a blind eye to their presence. Hence the role of women, although essential in most social settings, is subordinate to that of men and this phenomenon is dubbed by Lenggermann and Niebrugge (1996:301) as "less privileged". This, according to them, is a clear indicator of inequality in gender treatment.

The second question posed by Feminism is "Why then is all this as it is?" (301). The answers that sprung from this question explains what the world perceives of women's role in society. A theory of universal importance has evolved from Feminism's attempts to answer this question (1996:301). The third question propagated and adopted for inquiry by Feminist theoretical works is "And what about the differences in women?"(301). It was found that social locations like "class, race, age, affectionate preference, marital status, religion, ethnicity and global location (302) play an important part to answer this question. A general conclusion may be derived from looking at the invisibility, inequality and role difference in relation to men and other women within a social setting.

Lenggermann and Niebrugge (1996:302) further emphasizes that a new perception of the world is created when Feminism's basic theoretical questions are answered. This perception in turn brings home the realization that the universal truths of the world we perceive are actually based on the experiences of men rather than women. The experiences of women were deemed as punitive in nature and take a complementary stance when recognized as worthwhile to be considered. These universal truths and perceptions, arising from answering the questions, bring home the notion that they have been etched into our way of life and have direct bearings in our general behaviour and actions. In Lenggermann and Niebrugge's overview of the varieties of feminist theories (309), Gender Oppression is of particular interest in this study. In Gender Oppression it will be seen that women are oppressed, not just different from, or unequal to, but actively restrained, subordinated, moulded, and used and abused by men. Radical Feminism is used as the platform, to delve deeper into the Gender Oppression that Lenggermann and Niebrugge have highlighted, thereby providing the guiding factors to analyze the material found in the novels by Su-Chen Christine Lim.

## **GENDER OPPRESSION**

Lenggermann and Niebrugge (1996:322), reiterate that the practice of domination is the forte of men with basic interests to control, use and subjugate women as a consequence of power relationship between men and women. However, this study will bring forth evidence that women actively oppress other women rather

than men being the source of the woe experienced by women. Women, acknowledging the patriarchal settings, play the role of agents of oppression. By domination, the subordinate's independence to voice out is suppressed or significantly used as an instrument to carry out the will of the dominant party. Andermahr et.al (1997: 159) views this pattern of oppression as obviously "incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic structure of domination called patriarchy". Stacey (1993:53) sees oppression that occurs in patriarchy as "not unintended". It does not stem from secondary consequences like "biology, socialization, sex roles or the class system". It is a primary structure characterized by strong and deliberate intentions (159). Oppression of women brought about by women is in some instances considered as a secondary consequence of patriarchy. The oppression can be deluging in some manner, and the overwhelming occurrences of oppression in the novels by Su-Chen Christine Lim should not be mistaken to be isolated from the concept of patriarchy. Oppression by women upon other women is a direct spin-off of patriarchy and discussions on this matter always lead to the obvious – a vicious cycle where women have become active agents of oppression while patriarchy sets the platform for the subtle designs of men.

## **PATRIARCHY**

Analyzing the problems of "women's subordination in society" is one of the most significant roles of feminist theory (Stacey, 1993:52). Challenging this notion of subordination and putting to right the gender inequality appears to be the prime motive of feminists. Patriarchy has been chosen as the main cause of concern of oppression of women by feminists and this study proposes to answer the question of "why?" too.

The contemporary understanding of patriarchy has been broadened to that of "an over-arching system of male dominance" by Andermahr et. al., (1997:159). According to Palmer (1989:69), fictional writers are attracted to concepts such as "patriarchy and patriarchal relations". In this regard, it appears as though Su-Chen Christine Lim herself had utilized these concepts to frame her novels. Palmer stresses that the imprecision and confusing diversity of meanings evident in patriarchy provided creative writers with opportunities and the scope to create "complex, multifaceted representations of male dominance" (69).

An antagonistic relationship is presented between men and women within the realms of patriarchy. Patriarchy fails to account for the social and economic differences dividing them. Bearing this in as a crucial point of contention, analyzing the depth of patriarchal influences and how it influences a woman to be its agent in oppressing other women in Su-Chen Christine Lim's four novels is in itself a challenge.

## **CONCEPTS OF PATRIARCHY**

Male dominance in society is best described by the term "patriarchy", for it provides a conceptual form and allows the means to account for the presence of women's oppression in a structured manner. Many feminists have different purposes for using the term "patriarchy". Delphy, as cited in Stacey (1993:56), saw patriarchal exploitation as "the common, specific and main oppression of women". She highlighted the ability of women to reproduce and their economic productivity within the household as the main form of oppression.

Walby (1986, 1990:24) suggested that six structures of patriarchal society, "employment, household production, the state, sexuality, violence and culture", had undergone changes from their forms in the nineteenth century based on the "traditional home-makers" to that of a more public figure as "wage-earners" who provide significantly to the economy of their homes. However, the induction of women as agents of patriarchy is not conclusively stated by Walby. Her writings highlight the notion that women may seem more independent of the structured patriarchal system, but in actual fact new and more dynamic forces keep them in place within the "patriarchy".

The novel idea of using the psychoanalytical theory to unravel the "deep-rootedness of patriarchy" have been mooted by a number of writers like Mitchell (1974, 1982), Rose (1982, 1986), Sayers (1986, 1988),

Chodorow (1978), Dinnerstein (1977). Feminists' work on the psychic dimensions of patriarchy has explored ways in which the broader structures of society operate within the kinship relations in the formation of individual identities. Mitchell, in Stacey (1993:53) argues that the individual psyche reproduces the "broader patterns of patriarchal exchange of women within the male dominant society". The pre-eminence of male over the female is simply not a conscious belief but something that we have internalized, in an unconscious manner through the norms of socializing and the identification of sexes which had taken place consciously and unconsciously.

Unfortunately, the pre-eminence of the male is professed actively by women themselves, and this in turn makes them the agents of patriarchy. A vicious circle is created when their actions put in place this kind of values to oppress other women. Stacey (1993:57), generalizes that different ways and for very different ends, psychoanalysis offers explanations as to how patriarchy is organized and how power relations operates within patriarchy.

## **RADICAL FEMINISM**

According to Lenggemann and Niebrugge (1996:326), "radical feminism is based on two emotionally charged central beliefs: one, that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be universal devaluing of women, and two, that women everywhere are oppressed – oppressed violently – by the system of patriarchy". According to Radical feminists, patriarchy is the least noticed and yet the most significant structure of social inequality, which leads women (subordinates) to be oppressed by men (dominant). They further assert that men's ability to muster the most basic power resources, by physical force, to establish control makes patriarchy exist as a "near-universal social form" (327). This is put in place through the guidance of other resources like economy, ideology, legal and emotions. Physical violence, however, "remains as its line of defence", and in "both interpersonal and intergroup relations, violence is repeatedly used to protect patriarchy from women's individual and collective resistance". The comparison of women to men and their abilities has been consistent throughout the centuries and this is seen as a problem in itself by Kreps (2003:45) because the woman is not defined "in terms of herself but in relation to him". By being compliant, and the traditional view of her as "secondary and inferior", the woman has simply let herself to be subjugated by man. Where men deem that freedom for women is a profound threat, biological differences is used with great enthusiasm to downplay the role of women in social setting.

Kreps states in her article "*Radical Feminism I*" that it is an obvious truth that one is not born, or rather becomes, a woman or a man" (45). A developmental view is put into place by Kreps on hereditary and environmentally determined characteristics and potentials. According Kourany et. al (1999:9), a female automatically becomes subjugated even as a child when they follow predetermined roles according to definite guidelines in a cultural setting. This practice is obviously accepted as a social norm and sometimes religiously followed. Unfortunately, Kourany et. al noted that these practices are put in place and enforced by women themselves because the practice had been ingrained into them since childhood, being born into a society that upholds such practices.

A woman's immediate social environment puts enormous pressure on her to submit to male dominance. "Catching" a man is a clear reflection of a woman's "desirability" whilst her inability to do so would signify "a social and moral disgrace". Simone De Beauvoir in McKann and Kim (2003:33), summarizes the perception of women in a patriarchal setting as "...man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man" and that "...she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential".

Besides, marriage is considered by some feminists as a typical arena for oppression. It provides the platform, as a social contract, for men to subjugate women with the blessings of the society in general. Women are made to believe that marriage offers them a better alternative to working for pay. A sense of security is provided in marriage with food and shelter guaranteed. The notion of family, building families of their own, with responsibilities given to them to make them feel important within the family unit and extended family and social circles beyond, attract women towards marriage. Motherhood is "conceived as a

woman's entire destiny and the fulfilment of her nature" (Kreps, 2003:46). While they are to men's advantage, a woman experiences loss of respect, loss of personal growth, of full-humanness, when she submits to the demands of the patriarchal society. There is, of course, a further risk in the loss of identity, becoming a "thing" or part of the possessions of man.

Using Su-Chen Christine Lim's four novels as a platform and resource, this study will explore the extent to which radical feminism is employed to salvage the loss experienced by the characters. It is the unique nature of oppression being practised by patriarchy, using women as agents of oppression, which will be of interest in this study.

## **WOMEN AND CHINESE PATRIARCHY**

Croll (1978:12) observed in her writings that the status of women in traditional China was inferior, as "proverbial" Confucian tenets set the rules of conduct in patriarchal practices among the Chinese, appropriate to each type of social relationship, which at the same time subordinates female as the "Yin". The "Yin" is to display "dark, weak and passive attributes in contrast to the "yang" which is characterized by all that was bright, strong and active – the male.

Women were taught from young "The Three Obedients" and "The Four Virtues", which without any mistake idolizes the male. The Confucian '*Classics*' and '*The Book of Rites*' too state clearly that a woman should not be knowledgeable. To disobey the male in the family would be to disrespect the traditional teachings and the patriarchal system which is in place (Croll, 1978:13).

Owing to these patriarchal practices, Chinese women suffered loss of identity within their family as well as within the community. They were referred to as the mother of her son, or the wife of a man. "They live the life of an outsider", or a virtual slave "and this essentially is due to cultural and religious beliefs (Warren, 1993:29).

The same teachings became the basis for the Chinese in other parts of the world outside China, especially in Singapore and Malaysia, even to this day. Most of the Chinese women migrants came to Singapore and Malaya (Malaysia) because of the extreme conditions of poverty they experienced in China. Practically most of the women were sold as *Ah-Ku*, subservient house-maids or in many cases as prostitutes by their peasant families, since they were of no value to the family. Having a daughter will only add to the number of mouths to be fed. So, the easy way out of this problem is to sell off the daughters who do not contribute to the family economy (Warren, 1993:31).

As times have changed, armed with education and exposure to other cultures – especially to Western values and norms, women have learnt to manipulate the oppression by men unto them. They have learnt to either live with the oppression, to overcome or to separate themselves from patriarchal oppression. Su-Chen Christine Lim's novels have settings that depict colonial and post-colonial turmoil in Chinese households and families. Hence, how women overcome oppression is very much influenced by taking bold steps to break away from norms and possibly subscribing towards the more liberated Western values.

## **METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED FOR RESEARCHING**

This study is expected to resolve present inconsistencies in the understanding of patriarchy and the notion that only men create ill for the women within a patriarchal setting. This research essentially explores three main themes, namely "sisterhood", "pointless devotion" and "patriarchy" itself. To closely look at the occurrences of oppression of women by women, the tenets of Radical Feminism were adopted. The tenets were not used as they were because they were more concerned about oppression of women by men. These tenets are also deployed to explore the strategies of resistance towards oppression. Therefore, the tenets are only used as guidelines in a loose manner to answer questions as to "when", "how" and "why" opportunities for oppression of women by women happen from the viewpoint of a female writer.

“Sisterhood” encompasses and reflects on the principles, struggles and all that stands for “feminism”, encapsulating the feminists’ ideals and movement. The irony, however, is that “sisterhood” which is supposed to provide the final bastion for women themselves, was found to be the platform for perpetrators of oppression. Therefore, the term “sisterhood” does not emulate the actual concept that it might have conjured. The solidarity of women who challenge patriarchy creates a superficial impression that feminists have already overcome the distortions in female relationships. This study highlights the decadent state of affairs within the sisterhood circle.

The act of “pointless devotion” concentrates on filial piety by children towards their parents; in this study, especially of daughters towards their mothers. Chinese tradition demands filial piety (Hsiao) of a son, complete obedience to parents and providing a child to carry on the family line (surname). If a marriage turns out to be barren, then it was the son’s duty to take on another wife to perpetuate the family name. The daughter-in-law, becoming part of the husband’s family is expected to perform her duties by serving the in-laws and providing an heir (son), who will carry on the family line. If the mother and daughter-in-law did not get along, filial piety demanded that the man get rid of his wife and get another one, since he would only have one mother (Croll, 1978: 24-28). Oppression of women by women was a natural course of action with concepts of filial piety being the guiding life principles of most Chinese men even today.

The notion of “patriarchy” is a much detested concept by feminists because it embodies all the ill that men can bestow upon women. This area, however, provides the forte from which patriarchy has recruited women to be agents in oppressing other women in manners that can be none other than be dubbed as subtle, and making sure that the tenets of patriarchy are not compromised in any manner. Radical feminists too believe that oppression need not always take the “form of overt physical cruelty. Oppression, which subjugates women, may be hidden in many forms of exploitation and control” (Lenggermann & Niebrugge, 1996:326).

Therefore Radical feminist key concepts like “confrontation”, “escapism” and separatism” are applied in this research to investigate the above issue. Besides these, the strategy of being “silent” will also shed some light as to how women handle oppression, for as Laurence in Hedges & Fishkin (1994:158) aptly puts it: “Silent, yet knowing, women listen, observe, think and dream”. Another tool employed to resist oppression will be the adoption of “alienation”, whereby one distances oneself from the oppressor or the act of oppression. Other than these, exploring the texts using literary devices such as irony, language and style, and metaphors will enlighten us on how Su-Chen Christine Lim has brought forward the idea of oppression and how the female characters have addressed and actively resisted oppression.

This study endeavours to answer three research questions. They are:

- a). When, why and how do women oppress other women characters in the novels?
- b). What are the psychological effects faced by the oppressed characters in Su-Chen Christine Lim’s novels?
- c). What are the strategies of resistance employed by the oppressed women in Su-Chen Christine Lim’s novel?

## THE NOVELS

Su-Chen Christine Lim has written 4 novels and has basically put forth different ideas of looking at female characters as victimized characters. She presents them as survivors, even when they were being oppressed.

**A bit of Earth (2000)** – this novel subverts colonial stereotypes and shows the friendship between a Malay chief and a Chinese refugee. The setting is Malaya and the novel focuses on three families, the Wongs, the Wees and the Mahmuds. The female characters are portrayed as victims of the Chinese patriarchy system with Choon Neo, Taukeh Wong’s second wife, oppressing the first wife, Wong Soh, due to her higher status in society. Choon Neo’s mother, Ee Neo is also a victim of oppression by Baba Wee’s first wife. Oppression here takes place as part and parcel of the patriarchal system.

**Fistful of Colours (1993)** – A Singapore Literature Prize winner, this novel is woven around Suwen, an English educated Chinese being oppressed by her mother. Encouraged by her other English educated

friends, Nica and Jan, she tries to redefine herself and her association with them momentarily helps her escape oppression to find her own sense of “self”. This novel also depicts Jan, Suwen’s best friend being oppressed by her tradition-bound, China born father with his patriarchal ways. “Separation” was the option open to Jan to overcome oppression in this novel.

**Gift from the Gods (1990)** - Using Yenti as the voice, the stories of oppression of Yenti and Yoke-Lin unravels in the form of journals. Yenti is seen here as being actively oppressed by her mother Yoke-Lin and Yoke-Lin herself being the victim of oppression at the hands of her step-mother due to her lower status in the society. Oppression can be seen as the main theme of this novel, highlighting Yenti as the voice for the oppressed generations of Singapore women and thus fastens the bond between female identity and writing.

**Ricebowl (1984)** – This novel questions the regulated and pragmatic politics of Singapore. In this novel Ser Mei is seen as a victim of the materialistic society Singapore was growing into. She was oppressed by her own mother to be a prostitute, all in the name of gaining material gains. Lim Siew Yea (1996), has remarked that the “Ricebowl” has criticized the highly regularized democracy, which produces docile citizens who are unable to think for themselves and being drawn into the production of a materialistic society.

It will be noteworthy to say that these novels written by a Chinese writer depicts in some honesty as to how women are manipulated within the Chinese society and loosely using the tenets of Radical feminism was deemed appropriate to analyze the selected novels. Contrary to research practices, this qualitative study is novel in idea as it looks at an area of discussion that has long been avoided, probably because it delves into the ills of feminism itself. Even at this point, it needs to be made clear that this study looks at women as part of the patriarchal system and depicted as a victim. The oppression done by women upon women is forced upon them by circumstances, upbringing and beliefs with the main culprit being patriarchy itself.

## FINDINGS

This study has set out to examine how concepts adapted by Radical feminists are used to analyze Su-Chen Christine Lim’s novels through the use of concepts like “subjugation”, “confrontation”, “escapism”, “separatism”, “silencing”, “alienation” and “selfhood”. This study also examines the extent to which Su-Chen Christine Lim reinforces or challenges stereotypical representations of the Chinese female characters under the patriarchal system as practised in the Chinese society. The stereotypical representation of women as the weaker gender has been challenged and given a new perspective by Su-Chen Christine Lim as strong and capable women in her novels.

Results of this study reveal that Radical feminist’s key concepts are best used to depict oppression by other women. The female oppressed characters in Su-Chen Christine Lim’s novels are oppressed by other women who hold a dominant position, such as being a mother, mistress of the family’s patriarch or the first wife. Basically, the characters are oppressed when dominant women characters are displeased with them, for any possible reason ranging from jealousy (misunderstanding between mothers and daughters as portrayed by Suwen and her mother in *A Fistful of Colours*) or for power and authority (oppression by first wives unto other wives, mistresses, concubines or maids).

Practically all of Su-Chen Christine Lim’s novels are rich with examples of oppression due to power and authority. Ah Chun, the maid in *A Fistful of Colours* was abused totally all throughout her life by her mistress. Silence was Ah Chun’s tool for resisting her mistress’s oppression. Wong Soh (the peasant first wife of Tai-Kor Wong in *A Bit of Earth*) was oppressed by the second wife, who was seen as dominant because of her financial status as well as her ability to provide a male heir for future patriarchal lineage. Traditional Confucian beliefs, that total obedience of women to their husbands, father, mother-in-law and finally their son, is another aspect that allows oppression to take place unchecked within the patriarchal system.

Filial piety, another key element of the patriarchy system too, plays a major role for mothers oppressing their children, and this was evident in *A fistful of Colours*, *Rice Bowl* and *A gift of God*. On the whole, the findings of this study indicate that Su-Chen Christine Lim has presented her ideas against patriarchal

practices through examples that address the “when”, “how” and “why” her characters are oppressed in her novels. She has presented, contrary to beliefs that Chinese women are “obedient, unassuming, yielding, timid, respectful, reticent and unselfish” in character (Croll, 1978:13), examples of oppression when they find themselves in opportunistic situations whereby they can oppress for self-preservation.

The second research question was answered when the study revealed that oppressed characters underwent depression; loneliness; being resigned to their predicament; disassociation from the outside world; “belittled” by society; humiliated; inability to show their emotions; extraordinary show of tolerance and patience in the face of oppression. Depressed characters are shown in *A Gift of God* (Yoke Lin), *Rice Bowl* (Ser Mei) and *A fistful of Colours* (Suwen). Su-Chen Christine Lim’s choice of words clearly depicts their moments of frustration and the anguish the victims of oppression undergo. Most of the characters chose to “alienate” themselves. Yoke Lin (*A Gift of God*) practically locked herself up in her room for hours; Ser Mei (*Rice Bowl*) and Suwen (*A fistful of Colours*) shied away from the outside world by staying in their self-created “cocoon”.

Humiliation is another effect felt by all the oppressed characters. Yoke Lin (*A Gift of God*), Ser Mei (*Rice Bowl*), Wong Soh and Ee Neo (*A Bit of Earth*), felt humiliated every time they were oppressed. Humiliation lingered and developed into hatred towards the oppressor. This can be deduced as bad for the oppressed but it developed the level of tolerance and patience. In adverse psychological effects Su-Chen Christine Lim has developed the characters, projecting them as high-spirited and resistant to the stereotypical portrayal of the female gender as weak. She has put these psychological effects in good light, for these ill-effects became the foundation for her oppressed characters to make a stand in the face of oppression.

Answering the third research question, it was noticed that Su-Chen Christine Lim uses tools applied by Radical feminists to empower her characters. Escapism, confrontation, separatism, silencing, subjugation, alienation and the move to form a bond of sisterhood are found to be tools that helped the oppressed characters to stay strong and not succumb to the pressures of the oppressor. “Sisterhood” seems to be the mainstay of resistance against oppression, when consolation is sought by sharing their sorrow with a close friend, as can be seen in *A fistful of Colours*. “Escapism” and “separatism” are also means by which the characters seek solace from oppression. Suwen (*A Fistful of Colours*) and Yoke-Lin (*A Gift of God*) are oppressed women who resort to escaping, distancing and separating themselves from the oppressors. These characters, in fact, severed all ties with their oppressors to start life afresh, discarding their past.

The findings too indicate that “the ability to confront the oppressor”, plays a major role in developing the characters’ growth as an individual. Yoke-Lin (*A gift of God*) stopped her oppressor from further abuse by “confronting” her. The same tactic was used by Suwen (*A fistful of Colours*) when she confronted her oppressing mother. The characters, it was found, gained self-dignity and left them happier after the confrontations. “Distancing”, “disassociating” and “alienating” oneself are tools used by Su-Chen Christine Lim to portray strategies of self-preservation and resistance. Suwen (*A Fistful of Colours*) opted to distance herself from her mother, the oppressor, in order to have a life of her own. Wong Soh (*A Bit of Earth*), finds comfort by being away from her oppressor. Ah Chun (*A fistful of Colours*) and Ee Neo (*A Bit of Earth*) chose to repress their desires to be part of a closely knitted family, which in the end helped them gain a better life.

## CONCLUSION

On the whole, Su-Chen Christine Lim has resisted portraying her characters as weak, submissive females in her novels. She has cleverly developed her characters as very strong, capable and daring individuals. By doing so, she has made readers reflect on the current social and cultural norms, and to challenge, renew and redefine practices which have become part and parcel of our lives. Patriarchal practices, that has long “shackled” women and subjugated them, have been brought to scrutiny by these novels. Su-Chen Christine Lim links the Radical feminists’ idea of “freedom” into perspective and highlights the socially construed and constructed gender roles, and the biases that come with them in contrast to the contemporary women who seek independence.



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