

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Singapore is a very unique country, since it is embellished by a mixed and various ethnic origins, such as Chinese, Tamil, Malay, and Indian. This country is known not only for having its multi-racial society but also multilingual society. There are forms of languages in Singapore, the local ethnic languages (Chinese, Tamil, Malay, and other Indian languages), and also English. Inspired by the colorful and different cultures, backgrounds, and languages, Singapore produces her own unique literature.

Her separation from Malaysia in 1965 marked the beginning of modern literature in the country (Darma, 2000, p. 3). At first, the writers of Singapore produced their writings for ethnic purposes. While ethnic writers continue to establish their works using their local ethnic languages, there are writers who also produce their works in English. Since then Singapore has its national literature written in Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and English (Darma, 2000, p. 3). However, at that time the development of ethnic writings was not as good as the English writings (Nair, 1977, pp. 1-4).

The function of English language is very important for those who work in the fields of literature. English is a way for other non-Singaporean people to be able to read the works of Singaporean literature. There are many ethnic writers who have translated their works from their own languages to English language. "It will not only make Singapore literature known outside its native country, it will also provide Singaporean poets, fictionist, and dramatists, with the encouragement of a deservedly wider audience (Leong, 2000, p. 135). In other words by translating their works to English, ethnic writers not only become more recognized but they are also able to gather more audience as well.

Modern Singapore Literature in English begins at school institutions (Leong, 2000, p. 126). Creative writing in English is traced to the establishment in Singapore of an institution of higher education in the arts and sciences of Raffles College, which

subsequently became the University of Malaya (Nair, 1977, p. 2). "There were small groups of undergraduates at the University in Singapore who came together to discuss writing and to write creatively" (Leong, 2000, p. 126). At the beginning, their writings were collected or published together in anthologies and journals (p. 126). Day by day, the Singaporean talented writers have produced magnificent and interesting works of literature. Lately, Catherine Lim is considered as the most outstanding woman writer, who shows her capability in creating her literary works and shortly afterwards, her name is well known by her readers in Singapore and people in other countries (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 13).

The reason why I choose Catherine Lim is because first of all, I have always been interested in Asian writers. In my opinion, the works of Asian writers are as qualified as the works of Western or European writers. They actually deserve a wider acceptance from the readers from all over the country. Some of them have accomplished that, and one of them is Catherine Lim. The second reason is because Lim definitely knows what she writes. This is related to the theme of the novel that I choose. She is a very conscious postcolonial writer who definitely has an advanced knowledge about it (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 131). Therefore, what she writes in the novel are significant facts and unquestioned reality. I would say that she is very brave in giving other people facts about a community that she is living with. In writing, Lim is also trying hard to simply tell the truth about the problem in Singapore without covering anything

Kate Mayberry once has stated that Catherine Lim is a Singapore-Chinese enormous writer in the 20th century ("Catherine Lim : The Lighting God Delivers", 1998, 2nd p.). The public of Singapore really love Lim's works and they are very anxious to read her books. Statistic at the National Library showed that during 1990 up to 1992 Lim's books were the most wanted and the most popular among other local books (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 12). Her excellent works have also been sold for over 10,000 copies and have undergone many reprints (p. 12).

Catherine Lim says that in writing, she never hides the reality or facts that happen in the society. Being able to write as genuine and as natural as possible is one

of Lim's greatest goals in writing. In her interview with Lim Yi-En, Lim says that she is a person with a mission, her wish is to let people know the reality or facts that happen in the life of people. That is why, in 1992, she decided to quit from her job as a lecturer and devoted herself in writing (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 16).

Catherine Lim's works are not only loved by the people in Singapore, but also people from other countries. She never expects her works would reach audiences wider than she has anticipated, including the readers from other countries. Some of her readers have translated a few of her stories from the various collections into Mandarin for publications in Shanxi, China (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 13). There are also some of her books translated into different European languages, Greek, and Icelandic (p. 16). In 1992, Catherine Lim was considered as "Singapore's most prolific short story writer" by the author's own publishing company, since she produced magnificent works which were known in the US, Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and also other countries ("Dr Catherine Lim Acclaimed Speaker and Best-Selling", 1998, 1st p.). Some schools and universities inside and outside Singapore have also used Lim's works as source of material for linguistic and literary study among academics and students at the National University of Singapore and elsewhere (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 141).

Considering her dedications and marvelous achievements in literary field, Lim has received several awards as well as appreciation from inside and outside Singapore. In 1998, she received the Arts Literary Award by the Montblanc - NUS Center for the best writer in English language (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 16). In 1999, Lim was the best of Southeast Asian Writer in Bangkok ("Catherine Lim : The Lightning God Delivers", 1998, 2nd p.). According to the Art Editorial Committee, Lim was the recipient of "The Fullbright Award, which included an attachment to Colombia University" (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 13).

What makes Catherine Lim very unique is her capability in adapting the significant themes either from her position as a feminist writer or as a conscious post-colonialist. She has a very strong social concern, as well as sympathy for the poor and antipathy towards the wealthy snobs (Yeo, 1982, p. 39). She also tells about the

disappearing responsibility of Singaporean people in preserving their traditional values, and how they are likely to become such a materialistic society. Lim's short stories are based mainly on the experiences and observations of members of the Chinese community, including the relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, relatives, friends, master and servants, and even between strangers (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 17). "Lim's greatest strength seems to be her unusual ability to stand apart as an observer of (local) Chinese behavior patterns"(Asiaweek, 1981, p. 42).

" Her characters are real people" (Asiaweek, 1981, p. 42) For that I am always amazed by her style of showing her characters. In writing Lim is likely to 'show' her characters rather than describe them and she lets her readers to have their own imaginations flow. When she writes, she rarely goes out and does research. She prefers to depend on the details based on the memories that she keeps in her mind. "If what I have found needs to be copied onto paper, it probably is not powerful enough but if I remember it, it must have the strength, that color" ("Dr Catherine Lim Acclaimed Speaker and Best-Selling," 1998, 7th p.). The tone of some of her short stories is gossipy, especially those that reveal the skeletons and frictions in the family (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 14), perhaps that makes her characters seem to become alive and interesting.

During her career as a writer, Lim has produced such interesting and brilliant works of literature. In 1978, she released her first debut Little Ironies. This collection of short stories which reveal the human condition particularly among Chinese community had sold for 38,000 copies and had undergone eleven reprints in 1989 (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 12). "It is probably the best collection of short stories by a single author published in a republic...."(Asiaweek , 1981, p. 42). Her resounding success was followed hard on its heels by Or Else, The Lightning God and Other Stories, (1980), which sold for 25,000 copies as a prescribed text in 1989 and 1990 (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 12). Lim's other interesting works includes The Woman's Book of Superlatives (1993), The Bondmaid (1995), and her first novel which marks the development of her writing from short stories to one sustained length, The Serpent's Tooth (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 31).

The Serpent's Tooth is an interesting work of literature by Catherine Lim. This novel has been used as a literature text both in the University of Southern Queensland and at Darling Down College in Australia (Lim, Y., 1999, p. 16). The reason why I choose Lim's The Serpent's Tooth is because first of all, I have always been interested in the subject of social problem. It is both interesting and challenging to discover the obstacles which might be faced by Chinese people as the major ethnic community in Singapore. "Catherine Lim's The Serpent's Tooth is almost ethnographic in fidelity to ethnic surface and social interactions" (Lim, S., 1991, p. 89).

The Serpent's Tooth proves her capability in telling a real dynamic story other than in form of short stories. In the novel, she tries to develop the characters one by one instead of explaining them like when she usually writes, particularly in her short stories, and this new style of writing definitely interests me. Finally, I am interested in what Catherine Lim wants to say by writing this novel. "She (Lim) may be implying that the age of imperialism is far from over"(Lim, Y., 1999,p. 138). This other form of 'conquest ' disguises in attractive packages so the Singaporeans are helpless without it, without being aware of the actual process (p. 138). The issue that Catherine Lim defines in The Serpent's Tooth itself is very crucial too because it really portrays the real condition of a community in a postcolonial country.

Released in 1982, The Serpent's Tooth centers on the conflict between Angela, a modern Singaporean woman, and her traditional mother- in- law, Old Mother. The title is taken from one of Shakespeare's work entitled King Lear (Lim, C., 1982, pp. 69-70). The theme behind the play tells about a parent's deepest grieve in having thankless child (Bates, 1906,pp. 39-44). In The Serpent's Tooth, Old Mother faces an eternal despair since she lives in the household of a dying patriarch. Moreover, her greatest sadness emerges due to the fact that she is nurtured by her modern (Western) daughter-in-law. The characters fall neatly into the two partitions of Chinese (old) culture and Westernized (modern) society.

The first generation of Chinese immigrants who were mostly born before the fifties initially identifies themselves as overseas Chinese and they have a strong

sentimental attachment to their homeland in China (Kong, 1997, p. 219). These people view themselves culturally and psychologically as Chinese, though they live in Singapore (Kong, 1997, p. 212). The strong perspective makes them heavily embrace the traditional values which are inherited by their ancestor (“Diallo : Traditional Values vs. Modern Concepts”, 1991, 1st p.). The picture of a traditional Chinese immigrant is clearly seen on the characterization of Old Mother in The Serpent’s Tooth.

On the other hand, the new generations of Chinese immigrants consider themselves as truly Singaporeans, who adapt a modern Singaporean life-style which is influenced by the Western culture. They no longer consider themselves strongly as Chinese like the previous generation since they were born in Singapore and they grew up in the country as well. “ Most of this generation have their education in English school or the current bilingual schools, and live in close nearness with other ethnic groups, who know no other country and hence are unable to identify themselves with China” (Kong, 1997, p. 219). The representation of a modern Singaporean Chinese people can be found in the characterization of Angela.

The characters of Old Mother and Angela are the representation of life between Chinese Singaporean years ago and today. In the beginning, both of the characters live separately. However, their different perspective in life has emerged in the middle of their relationship and it is enough in making them to dislike each other. Their differences become an open conflict since Old Mother has to stay in Angela’s house.

The issue of the differences and conflicts between the traditional (old) values versus the modern (new) concepts is controversial in Singapore as well as in the world. The problem still cannot be solved although there have been several efforts to deal with the issue. Being challenged by Lim’s first different style of writing and aware of the issue, I decide to analyze Catherine Lim's first novel The Serpent's Tooth, particularly on the differences between the traditional values versus the modern values and the conflicts which exist between them.

1.2. Statement of the problem

I want to find out how the issues of children's education, traditional religious activity, traditional and modern habit, master-servant relationship have become the sources of the conflicts between Old Mother, who represents the traditional values and Angela, who represents the modern values of Chinese Singaporeans.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

I want to prove that the issues of the children's education, traditional religious activity, traditional and modern habit, and master servant relationship are able to trigger the conflicts between traditional and modern values.

1.4. Significance of the Study

I would firstly like the students of English Department to understand more about Catherine Lim's novel The Serpent's Tooth, particularly on the topic which I choose to be analyzed. The first generation of Chinese immigrants from China may be visualized as overseas Chinese, but this concept would be inappropriate to describe the ethnic identity of their children and grandchildren who were born and brought up in Singapore. "As a result, a dual identity as Chinese Singaporean thus emerges" (Kong, 1997, p. 225). This condition has created its own dispute.

Second, I want the students of English Department to be aware that the differences between traditional (old) and modern values still appear in the world today. It will continue to create conflicts as long as there are no better acceptance and understanding between the two parties. Moreover, I would also like to define how the continuous conflicts between the traditional and modern values finally endanger their own relationship and people around them.

Eventually, by reading this thesis, I hope that the readers, especially the students of the English Department will interest to know more about Singaporean English literature, particularly Catherine Lim, for she is not only a great short story writer but also a talented novelist. Throughout this thesis, I hope more students will encourage themselves in analyzing Lim's other works.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

First, I limit the discussion on the topic of the differences between traditional and modern values and the conflicts that reveal between them. Second, I would also like to limit the analysis on the four issues which become the sources of the conflicts between the characters.

Although there are many characters in The Serpent's Tooth, I am focusing the investigation on the characters of Old Mother and Angela, particularly on their way in perceiving the similar issues differently. The issues are related to the children's education, traditional religious activity, traditional and modern habit, and master-servant relationship.

1.6. Methodology

In collecting the important data for the discussion of the thesis, I use library research. I gather and use all of the sources related to the topic, which are provided by the library, such as the collection of books, articles from magazines, and internet resources. I also collect some information and criticisms concerning the author and Catherine Lim's novel The Serpent's Tooth.

In order to conduct the analysis, I use literary approach, namely conflict and characterization as the literary tools. My analysis is also helped by sociological concept of social change as seen in the Chinese Singaporean culture and social background. This concept will be used as my device in understanding the early Chinese immigrants' persistence in upholding their traditional values. Moreover, the Sociological concept of social change will also help me in analyzing today's Chinese Singaporeans' acceptance of the modern (Western) values.

1.7. Organization of the study

This thesis is organized in four chapters. The introductory chapter explains the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, methodology, and the organization of the study. The second chapter entitled Review of Related Literature consists of the

Literary theories which include the theories of conflict and characterization, and Sociological concept of social change. The following chapter is the discussion of the conflict between the traditional values and modern values which reveal on the characters of Old Mother and Angela as seen in Catherine Lim's The Serpent's Tooth. Before analyzing the reasons and the outcomes of the conflict between traditional and modern values, I have first clarified the four issues which become the main discussion of the investigation. Eventually, I end with giving the conclusion as the result and the findings of my analysis. It will be followed by bibliography and appendix, which consists of synopsis and biography.