

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

B.1 Post-Colonial Feminism and Gender Dynamics

In examining post-colonial feminism, it is crucial to understand how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary gender dynamics. Post-colonial feminism investigates the enduring impact of colonial rule on gender relations, particularly how historical narratives influence present-day gender expectations and power structures (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988). This framework is essential for understanding the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary gender issues (Pierz & Dapi, 2021; Inoue, 2004).

In elite Singaporean-Chinese society, traditional norms persistently influence gender dynamics, highlighting an ongoing struggle for women's autonomy within family dynamics. Practices such as family restrictions and marriage traditions exemplify systemic gender-based constraints, emphasizing the lasting impact of colonial power structures on social norms (Inoue, 2004). The persistence of these colonial legacies can be seen in how traditional gender roles are reinforced, particularly within elite social circles. These roles are often codified through legal and social structures, perpetuating patriarchal norms that continue to influence gender dynamics long after the end of colonial rule.

Colonialism often entrenched patriarchal structures that were

codified into legal and social systems, impacting gender relations long after the end of colonial rule. These structures persist in many post-colonial societies, where traditional gender roles, reinforced through colonial governance, continue to affect gender dynamics today (Rhys, 1966; Roy, 1997). In particular, the legal and social systems imposed during colonial rule have had a lasting effect on gender relations, often reinforcing traditional gender roles that continue to be influential in contemporary society.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform strategies for promoting gender equity by highlighting the deep-seated nature of these historical influences. Understanding how colonial legacies shape contemporary gender dynamics is crucial for developing effective approaches to address gender inequalities. By exploring these intersections, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how historical legacies continue to influence gender roles and societal expectations, offering insights into potential pathways for addressing these challenges.

In summary, post-colonial feminism provides a vital framework for understanding the persistence of gender inequalities in contemporary societies. By examining the enduring impact of colonial rule on gender dynamics, this research highlights the ongoing relevance of colonial histories in shaping modern gender expectations and societal structures.

This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for advancing gender justice in post-colonial contexts.

B.2 Subaltern Theory and Marginalization

Within Subaltern theory, as articulated by Gayatri Spivak and further developed by scholars like Ranajit Guha, the focus is on the experiences of marginalized groups historically excluded from dominant narratives and power structures. Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) argues that subaltern voices are often silenced by dominant discourses, making it difficult for these marginalized groups to have their experiences and perspectives acknowledged. Guha (1983) extends this by highlighting how colonial histories have entrenched social hierarchies that continue to influence contemporary societal structures. This framework is crucial for understanding how power dynamics and social hierarchies operate to maintain the marginalization of certain groups, demonstrating the pervasive nature of systemic marginalization within social contexts.

B.2.1 Systemic Marginalization

Systemic marginalization refers to the ongoing exclusion and disadvantage imposed on certain groups by societal structures and institutions. This concept is central to subaltern theory, which seeks to uncover the ways in which marginalized voices are silenced and excluded from dominant narratives. According to Spivak (1988), subaltern individuals

are those who exist on the margins of society and whose voices are often ignored or suppressed.

Systemic marginalization manifests in various forms, including social exclusion, discriminatory attitudes, and efforts to undermine the position of marginalized groups within society. This marginalization is often driven by perceived outsider status, where individuals or groups are excluded based on their background, identity, or social class. For example, disapproval or opposition within certain social circles may be rooted in the belief that those from different backgrounds are unfit to belong or succeed. This is an example of how systemic marginalization operates to maintain social hierarchies and exclude those who do not conform to established norms.

Social acceptance in elite circles is often contingent on more than just personal merit; it involves conformity to specific cultural and social norms. This notion is supported by Spivak (1988), who argues that the subaltern's voice is often suppressed by dominant groups, making it difficult for them to gain recognition and acceptance.

Cultural identity can add layers of complexity to marginalization. Discrimination based on cultural background reflects how social hierarchies are maintained by excluding those perceived as inferior or incompatible with traditional values. This scenario reflects Guha's (1983) argument that

colonial histories have entrenched social hierarchies that continue to influence contemporary societal structures.

The journey of marginalized individuals often exemplifies how they assert their identity and resist oppression. Their resilience and agency in the face of systemic efforts to undermine them demonstrate how subalterns can navigate and resist oppressive structures. This is consistent with Spivak's (1988) argument that subalterns can find ways to voice their experiences and resist marginalization, even within restrictive social frameworks.

The intersection of gender and marginalization is crucial for understanding the broader implications of experiences of systemic exclusion. As women in patriarchal societies, individuals face additional layers of discrimination and exclusion. This intersectionality is central to their experience of marginalization and resistance. Gender plays a significant role in shaping these experiences and highlights the additional challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies.

The intersection of gender and marginalization underscores the added layer of discrimination faced by women in patriarchal and elitist societies. Their struggle for acceptance and autonomy highlights the need for systemic change to address gender inequalities and support marginalized individuals. This analysis provides insights into the complex

layers of oppression that women face, emphasizing the importance of addressing both gender and class in efforts to promote social justice.

In conclusion, subaltern theory provides a valuable framework for examining the experiences of marginalized individuals within post-colonial contexts. The systemic marginalization faced by those who do not fit traditional societal expectations highlights the importance of recognizing and supporting marginalized voices. This analysis offers insights into the broader implications for gender dynamics and social justice.

B.3 Power Intersectionality and Gender Oppression

Intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, examines how overlapping social categories such as race, class, and gender intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). This framework is essential for understanding the complex layers of oppression that individuals face within various social contexts.

Intersectionality reveals how different forms of social stratification intersect to produce multifaceted experiences of oppression. For instance, a person's identity as a racial minority and as a woman subjects them to discrimination that differs from the experiences of others due to the interplay of race and gender. This intersectionality is crucial in understanding how background and identity influence interactions within specific social hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1991).

Novels such as *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker illustrate how intersecting identities contribute to experiences of oppression. In **Beloved**, Sethe's struggles as a formerly enslaved woman are shaped by both her racial identity and her status as a mother, reflecting the compounded effects of intersectional oppression (Morrison, 1987). Similarly, in *The Color Purple*, Celie's experiences of gender and racial oppression intersect, shaping her journey towards self-discovery and empowerment (Walker, 1982).

The central issue addressed in this research is the impact of intersecting identities on experiences of oppression and privilege. By analyzing how various social categories intersect, the research provides insights into the complexities of gender oppression and the need for nuanced approaches to addressing social inequalities. For instance, a person's cultural background adds a layer of complexity to their gendered experiences, influencing how they are perceived and treated within specific social circles.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform strategies that account for multiple dimensions of identity and promote more inclusive social policies. Understanding intersectionality is crucial for developing effective strategies to address the multifaceted nature of oppression. By exploring how intersecting identities shape experiences of discrimination, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of

social inequalities and offers potential pathways for addressing these issues.

In summary, intersectionality provides a framework for examining how various forms of social stratification intersect to produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege. By analyzing these intersecting identities, this research highlights the complexities of gender oppression and underscores the need for nuanced approaches to addressing social inequalities. This analysis contributes to efforts aimed at advancing social

B.4 Works Patriarchy and Familial Structure

Patriarchy, a social system where men hold primary power, significantly influences familial structures and gender relations. This system enforces gender roles that prioritize male authority and marginalize women's roles and contributions within the family and society (Connell, 2005). In elite Singaporean Chinese society, these patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, impacting women's autonomy and agency. This is evident in the expectations placed on women to conform to traditional roles, which are often perpetuated by both men and women within the family.

B.5 Post-Feminism and Social Expectations

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Patriarchal familial structures are characterized by hierarchical relationships where male authority predominates. Men are often seen as primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women are expected to assume domestic responsibilities. These dynamics impact gender relations within families and extend to broader societal structures, reinforcing gender inequalities. Traditional gender roles and the continuation of family lineage are often prioritized over individual independence and professional achievements, which are undervalued in comparison.

The critical assessment of patriarchal structures reveals their pervasive nature and impact on various aspects of life, including economic systems, leadership roles, and access to education and healthcare. These structures are maintained through cultural, legal, and social mechanisms that reinforce male dominance and female subordination. The societal reinforcement of patriarchal norms often goes unchallenged, creating systemic barriers to achieving gender equality (Becker, 2018).

Authority within family structures, particularly among women who enforce traditional values, exemplifies the challenges posed by these gender norms. The role of women as gatekeepers of family legacy and enforcers of traditional values highlights how patriarchal norms are perpetuated, even by those they oppress. This illustrates the complexities of internalized patriarchy, where women themselves uphold and enforce gendered expectations (Kwan, 2013).

Understanding the intersections of patriarchy and familial structures is crucial for developing strategies to address gender inequalities. By examining how patriarchal norms influence familial relationships and societal expectations, this research provides insights into the systemic barriers that women face. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform efforts aimed at dismantling patriarchal structures and promoting gender equity.

In summary, patriarchal norms significantly influence familial structures and gender relations within elite Singaporean-Chinese society. By examining these dynamics, this research highlights the systemic barriers posed by patriarchy and underscores the importance of addressing these norms to promote gender equality. This analysis provides valuable insights into the complexities of gender oppression and the challenges of achieving true autonomy and agency for women.

B.6 Economic Power & Gender Disparities

Economic power plays a crucial role in perpetuating gender disparities, as explored by theorists like Bourdieu (1984). Economic capital influences personal relationships, social norms, and class distinctions, reinforcing broader social inequalities. In elite social contexts, wealth significantly impacts individuals' experiences, highlighting how economic power enforces conformity and marginalizes those who do not fit within predefined notions of acceptability.

Economic power is closely tied to social and cultural capital, shaping the dynamics of power within families and broader societal structures. Wealth affords a level of control and influence that extends beyond personal relationships, impacting broader social and cultural norms. Outsider status within these elite circles challenges this power, as the presence of individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds threatens to disrupt the carefully maintained social order. The tension between different class backgrounds and the elite status of wealthy families underscores the role of economic power in perpetuating social hierarchies (Kwan, 2013).

Understanding the intersections of economic power and gender disparities is crucial for developing effective strategies to address social inequalities. Economic disparities within elite social contexts illustrate the systemic barriers that women face. Economic capital influences gender

dynamics, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations, thereby perpetuating gender inequalities.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform strategies for addressing economic inequalities and promoting gender equity by highlighting the role of economic power in reinforcing social norms and class distinctions. By exploring how economic capital influences gender dynamics, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by women in elite social contexts. This analysis offers insights into potential pathways for addressing these challenges and promoting more inclusive social policies.

In summary, economic power significantly influences gender disparities and societal norms within elite social contexts. By examining these dynamics, this research highlights the role of economic capital in reinforcing gender inequalities and underscores the importance of addressing economic power to promote gender equity. This analysis contributes to efforts aimed at advancing social justice and inclusion.

B.7 Cultural Critique and Modern Literature

Modern literature serves as a critical lens for examining contemporary gender issues, as illustrated by the exploration of themes such as love, power, and identity. Through these themes, literature critiques the systemic barriers faced by women in post-colonial contexts

and highlights the ongoing relevance of traditional gender norms in shaping modern societal structures.

Literature often reflects and critiques societal norms, offering insights into the cultural and social dynamics that influence individual experiences. In contemporary novels, the narratives often provide a platform for exploring the complexities of identity, power, and resistance within elite societies. These stories highlight the enduring impact of colonial legacies on gender roles and societal expectations, illustrating how traditional norms continue to influence contemporary gender dynamics (Kwan, 2013).

The critical assessment of modern literature reveals its role in shaping and challenging societal norms. Literature provides a space for marginalized voices to be heard, offering alternative perspectives and highlighting the experiences of those who are often excluded from dominant narratives. By examining such portrayals, this research aims to uncover the ways in which literature can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and promote social change.

The experiences depicted in these narratives reflect broader societal issues related to gender, power, and identity. The struggle for acceptance within elite families underscores the ongoing conflict between traditional gender norms and modern aspirations for equality and autonomy. These narratives highlight the importance of examining cultural and social dynamics through literature to gain insights into the challenges faced by

women in contemporary societies. The portrayal of struggles with acceptance and resistance against patriarchal expectations serves as a microcosm for broader societal conflicts between traditional norms and modern feminist ideals.

In literature, the conflict between modern, independent identities and traditional expectations provides a rich context for exploring themes of identity and power. Novels often utilize these narratives to critique the societal structures that perpetuate gender inequalities and the cultural expectations that constrain women's autonomy. This critique is crucial for understanding how modern literature can reflect and challenge societal norms.

The relevance of this research lies in its ability to highlight the role of literature in critiquing and challenging societal norms. By examining these portrayals, this research underscores the importance of narrative in reflecting the complexities of gender dynamics and promoting social change. Literature not only provides a platform for marginalized voices but also offers critical insights into the mechanisms of oppression and resistance.

In summary, modern literature serves as a critical tool for examining and challenging contemporary gender issues. By analyzing these portrayals, this research highlights the ongoing relevance of traditional gender norms and underscores the importance of literature in promoting social change.

This analysis contributes to efforts aimed at advancing gender equity and promoting more inclusive and just societies.

B.8 Review of Related Research

Numerous studies have analyzed the themes of social class, power dynamics, and cultural conflict in Kevin Kwan's *'Crazy Rich Asians'*, offering valuable insights that align with Subaltern perspectives. UlfaNasution et al. (2021) examine the impact of social class on family life, focusing on the stark divide between the upper and middle classes, which is marked by wealth, privilege, and prestige. Their analysis underscores how these social distinctions create significant gaps that shape familial relationships, often leading to exclusionary practices by the upper class.

Agnes (2022) delves into the character of Eleanor Young, highlighting her superiority complex as a means to mask her underlying insecurities. This study illustrates how Eleanor's attitudes and behaviors, driven by her perceived superiority, strain her relationships with Nick and Rachel, reinforcing the novel's exploration of power and social hierarchy.

Similarly, Eva Monica, Ni Made Widisanti S., and Sari Rejeki (2020) explore the cultural conflicts experienced by the central characters, attributing these tensions to stereotypes, misunderstandings, and materialistic values. Their findings reveal how cultural differences, when unacknowledged or misunderstood, lead to persistent conflicts, reflecting broader societal issues.

The theme of postcolonial identity is further examined by Maharani (2019), who discusses the Westernization of Rachel and Nick, noting how their diasporic backgrounds and adoption of American values create a cultural dissonance with traditional Chinese expectations. This analysis highlights the ambivalence that arises from their dual identities and the challenges it poses in understanding and adhering to their cultural heritage.

Another perspective on Eleanor's character is offered by OneptinKurniaTandisau and Andi FebrianaTamrin (2021), who investigate the influence of wealth on social stratification, particularly how Eleanor's power exacerbates the social divide. Their research emphasizes the unequal status of women in society, demonstrating how material wealth can dictate social dynamics and perpetuate gender inequalities.

Collectively, these studies provide a rich foundation for analyzing Subaltern perspectives in *Crazy Rich Asians*, particularly in relation to themes of romance, power, and social stratification. They serve as important references for understanding how the novel critiques and reflects on the intersections of class, culture, and gender in a postcolonial context.