



เรียนรู้เพื่อรับใช้สังคม

การวิเคราะห์ตัวละครสำคัญในนวนิยายไตรภาคเรื่อง THE HOUSE OF  
EARTH TRILOGY จากมุมมองสตรีนิยมเชิงสังคมนิยม  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSE OF EARTH TRILOGY'S MAIN CHARACTERS  
FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIALIST FEMINISM

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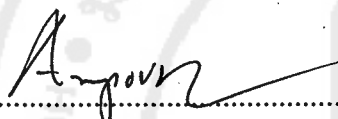
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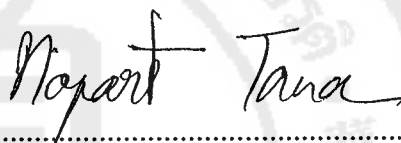
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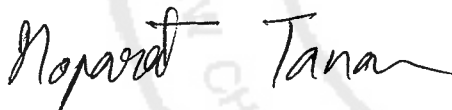
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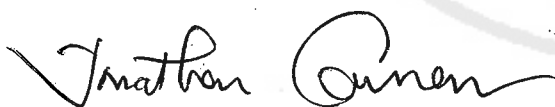
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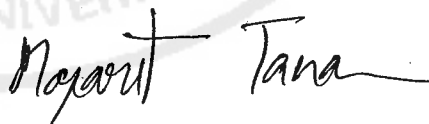
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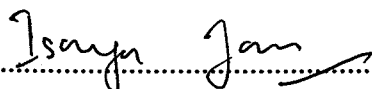
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**การวิเคราะห์ตัวละครสำคัญในนวนิยายไตรภาคเรื่อง THE HOUSE OF EARTH TRILOGY  
จากมุมมองสตรีนิยมเชิงสังคมนิยม**

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**บทคัดย่อ**

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษา 1) อุปสรรคที่มีต่อปัญหาความเสมอภาคทางเพศตามที่ปรากฏในนวนิยายไตรภาคเรื่อง THE HOUSE OF EARTH TRILOGY และ 2) แนวทางที่เหมาะสมในการเสริมสร้างพลังอำนาจของสตรี ผลการวิจัยมีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อให้มุมมองใหม่ ๆ สำหรับวิธีการที่สตรีจีนถูกกดขี่และฟื้นฟูในอดีต ข้อมูลถูกเก็บรวบรวมจากงานเขียนนวนิยายไตรภาคผ่านการกระทำ คำพูด และสติของตัวละครหลักหกตัว จากนั้นข้อมูลถูกแบ่งออกเป็นสองประเด็นคือสถานะทางสังคมของผู้หญิงและความรู้สึกสตรีนิยมของสตรี และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากกรอบแนวคิดของสตรีนิยมสังคมนิยมของ Stanley and Wise (1993) แนวคิดสตรีนิยมสามประเด็นของ Mitchell (1966) และการแยกแยะระหว่างเพศของ Srisembhok (2003)

ผลการวิจัยสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์และชี้ให้เห็นว่า ผู้แตงนวนิยาย Buck พิจารณาความไม่เท่าเทียมทางเพศสืบเนื่องมาจากการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของชนชั้นทางสังคมที่ไม่เท่าเทียมกันและระบบการปกครองแบบปิตาธิปไตย สตรีจีนมีความต่ำต้อยกว่าบุรุษชาวจีน และมีเสรีภาพและอำนาจน้อยกว่าเนื่องจากวัฒนธรรมจีนมีจารีตการรัดเท้าของสตรีให้คับแน่นเพื่อให้เรียวเท้าเล็ก มีการแต่งงานด้วยวิธีคลุมถุงชน และมีวิถีชีวิตเหมือนเป็นวัตถุทางเพศและเครื่องมือการสืบพันธุ์ Buck ยังได้แสดงออกถึงแนวทางในการเสริมสร้างพลังอำนาจของสตรีด้วยการศึกษาที่เหมาะสม การรับมรดกการแต่งงาน เสรีภาพ การประกอบวิชาชีพ และความเคารพของผู้ชาย โดยอาศัยการเปลี่ยนแปลงรูปแบบครอบครัวของตัวละครหลักและการเปลี่ยนแปลงของตัวละครหลักเองเพื่อหันมาพึ่งพาตนเองด้วยการทำงาน Buck ยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าการศึกษาที่เหมาะสมทำให้สตรีแสวงหาความเท่าเทียมทางสถานะทางสังคมกับผู้ชายและเสรีภาพได้อย่างมีสติ

**คำสำคัญ:** นวนิยายไตรภาคเรื่อง THE HOUSE OF EARTH TRILOGY สตรีนิยมเชิงสังคมนิยม  
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MASTER OF ARTS (ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION)

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**ABSTRACT**

This research examined to discover 1) barriers to gender inequality issues as reflected in *The House of Earth Trilogy*; and 2) solutions appropriate to empower women. The research findings aim to provide a new angle to disclose the way in which Chinese women were historically oppressed and restored. Data were collected from the texts of the Trilogy through six main characters' action, speech, and consciousness. The data were then categorized into two themes: women's social status and women's feminist consciousness and analyzed from a socialist feminism perspective based on conceptual framework of Stanley's and Wise's (1993) three themes on feminism, Mitchell's (1966) four structures on women's oppressed situation, and Srisermbhok's (2003) dichotomy between genders.

The outcomes aligned with the objectives and suggested that the author Buck considered gender inequality as the interaction of the unequal social class and the patriarchy. Chinese women were inferior to men and they had less freedom and power because culturally speaking they were obliged to bind their feet, marry through arrangement and become sexual objects and reproduction tools. Buck also expressed her solutions to empower women by means of right education, inheritance, independent marriage, professions and men's respect through the main female characters' changes of their family patterns and of themselves so that they could work, earn incomes and live an independent life. As both changing family patterns and becoming workforce derived from the power of right education, Buck indicated that right education could empower women to seek the equality of social status with men and freedom consciously.

**Keywords:** The House of Earth Trilogy, Socialist feminism, Social status, Feminist consciousness, Freedom

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Gender Inequality

Historically, gender inequality emerged when a society was established mainly because men were physically made stronger than women. Partly, it was because women were naturally made a companion to men (Bustelo. 2016). In the hunting-gathering society and agriculture society, men hunt, do farmer work and contribute the main production to the family. Such contribution leads men to the head role in the family. Women's farming and hunting production belongs to men or the family, leading them to a subordinating or inferior position in the society.

Due to its long existence, gender inequality becomes behaviors, custom, and culture. Chinese central culture, Confucianism, teaches people that "women should not be educated" (Jia & Zhang. 2015). In fact, it is because men do not want to give women education or they will lose control over women. Despite the fact that the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century successfully changed gender roles, which offered women an opportunity to work in factories with steam-powered machine, gender inequality has never disappeared. In contrast, it has been passed down from generation to generation.

Basically, gender inequality is shown in socialization of children. For example, boys are taught with masculinity while girls are taught with femininity. Being masculine means being physically and emotionally strong. Only girls can cry because they are thought to be born with physical and emotional weakness. Women's ability is consequently devalued and their independence is degraded. Both men and women have taken this gender inequality for granted in China.

When feminists are aware of such gender inequality, revolution in cultural tends to be involved. Feminist studies have provided the strongest foundations and theoretical innovations for gender studies. Feminism holds the view that women are oppressed and its aims is to liberate and empower women. As a result, today's women have achieved many equal rights with men including inheritance, vote and education, just as Kenschaft, Clark and Ciambrone (2016 : 1) claim that gender gap is smaller than it was a century ago.



However, gender inequality still exists widely in Chinese society. On the one hand, women are consciously or unconsciously inferior to men. A number of women are willing to spend money on plastic surgery so that they will look more beautiful according to the society's standards which make them confident, attractive, and advantageous in work and marriage. Unfortunately, many of them have suffered and died of diet or plastic surgery (Kenschaft, Clark & Ciambrone. 2016 : 174). Sex-selective abortion which is female infanticide remains practical in China (Bharadwaj & Lakdawala. 2013).

On the other hand, people's cognition of sexism or gender stereotypes on women still exists. Nigam (2014) reports that color of skin has become ingrained mindset throughout India and the world. This is true in China that color of skin is seen as a signal of social status. Most apparently, white skin is thought to be upper class while black skin is associated with lower class. Women with dark skin color are associated with eyesore, poverty, and ignorance. Many women are also threatened by gender violence (Tegbar, Yibrie & Kebede. 2017).

Gender inequality is especially concerned in working women's family. Skarpenes and Nilsen (2015) explores from the culture dimension in a city in the southern region of Norway where women and men culturally have the least equality, which in turn socially influence women's employment. It is found that the informants are aware of gender inequality at work and at home, and they have to compromise the gender gap. Similarly, Fetterolf and Rudman (2014) find that income influences men's and women's perception and amount of domestic work. Higher income brings higher entitlement and less housework. Gender role, which means men should be the breadwinners and women should be caretakers, still influences women to be caretakers. Due to the fact that men earn higher income for doing the same work as women, women still need to do much more housework than men.

Lessening gender inequality by means of treating women as human beings is needed in the current era of civilization. One of the ways is to give choices to women. When they have equal choices in economical productivity and cultural treatment with men, women can do much more contribution to the whole society (Dover. 2014). Another way is to train them with knowledge and skills for agriculture production in the poverty areas to avoid labor mobility (Singh, Meena, Kumar & Singh. 2013 ;

Thin, Lapar & Galie. 2017). To say the least, women in any part of the world, especially in China, need to have equal choices of right education, so that they can have equal rights with men in employment, politics and family.

## **1.2 Reflection of Gender Inequality in Literature**

As literature reflects social reality, gender inequality is commonly shown in literature. Women in male writing are portrayed either as angels who do everything to follow men's will or as monsters who do things against men, yet all men are heroes (Rogers. 2016). In contrast, feminist literature reveals a voice that women need to be empowered so as to overcome their struggle for rights.

Literature can be defined in many ways. In fact, all the writing materials can be called literature (Barnet, Berman, Burto & Cain. 1997 : 3). However, this definition is too broad. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary (2009 : 1181), literature is defined as "pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspapers, magazines, etc.)". It means that literature is the writing materials with artistic values, but it does not mention the content of literature.

Albrecht (1954) points out that literature is interpreted as reflecting norms and values, as revealing the ethos of culture, the processes of class struggle, and certain types of social 'facts'. Similarly, according to Kharbe (2009 : 135), literature is a body of written works of culture, language, and people in period of time. Both Albrecht and Kharbe hold the view that the content of literature reflects the social reality including values, culture, and people in some historical periods.

Furthermore, Hoeper and Pickering (1994 : 31) explains how literature reflects on the social reality. They refer literature to "structured imitation of life and is not to be confused with a literal transcription of life itself, which offers a world of the possible of the probable, rather than the actual." It implicates that literature includes not only the social reality but also the author's artistic refining of the reality, which leads to the artistic values. Therefore, literature here refers to writing materials which are based on the writer's refinement and reflect the social reality with artistic values.

Uncountable literature is written, but not all of them can be considered great. Averill (2001) argues that great literature has universal appeal—cross time and

culture and it refines, stretches, and transforms emotion. It means that great literature musters readers' emotions regardless of the time transfer and culture difference. According to De Quincey (Agnew. 2012 : 61), who remains recognized today, although he was a famous critique over two centuries ago, literature is classified into two broad fields: 'literature of knowledge' and 'literature of power'. The function of the first is to teach, while the function of the second is to move. It means that 'literature of knowledge', which is the mere discursive understanding, can teach people and 'literature of power', which refers to the higher understanding that influences people with affections of pleasure, sorrow and sympathy. Therefore, 'literature of power' is the great literature. Literature is considered great when it is able to withstand the time and culture, and still release the emotional joy, inspiration and enlightenment on life, society, the truth and the nature of human beings.

Great literature contains some functions. Although great literature has higher artistic values than common literature, it cannot separate its basis, which is the social reality. The functions of the great literature are not only to reflect the society but also to serve as a corrective mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and find need for positive change (Dubey. 2013 ; Duhan. 2015). It is because literature releases the author's feelings and emotions on the society. The good things containing the author's best wish become the virtues and good values and the bad things or the mistakes of the society become the evils in the literature.

As a result, the imitative society created in the literature not only reflects the good values and the ills of the real society, but also explains the values and explores the way to the ills of the society, so that the society realizes its mistakes and amends them. In this way, literature can be used to correct societal ills and teach positive values. However, great literature is not simply preaching; it provides the insights into the ways of emotions that are produced in human social life (Hogan. 2014 : i). That is to say, another function of great literature is to move readers' feelings by transforming the emotions of sympathy, anger, sorrow, admiration and confusion. Readers can make a summary on the content of literature with simple words, sentences and paragraphs, but the great literature additionally gives them inner feelings.

Take the works of Virginia Woolf (1882—1941), the leading feminist author, as an example. They are considered great literature. As Woolf focuses on women's

writing and makes great contribution to it, she is rightly considered as ‘the founder of modern feminist literary criticism’ (Goldman. 2007 : 66). Although Woolf herself is very critical about the term ‘feminist’, her arguments for the equality of education, literary writings and marriage for women are found widely in her works and this had made her famous in the last two centuries.

In her novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf in 1927 believed that women should have their own writing style, which was different from men’s. She created the unique writing pattern, which called ‘stream of consciousness’. She also argued that human beings’ writing should be ‘androgyny’, which was harmonious between male’s and female’s consciousness (Stahl. 2016).

In her essay entitled *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf in 1929 released the situation that women’s writing was not accepted by literary tradition and one of the reason was that women were deprived of education, which was the basic literary training (Kathmann. 2012). Furthermore, Woolf (1929) stated that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”. In other words, education, economy and privacy were important requirements for women’s writing which led women to own freedom.

In her speech about *Professions for Women*, Woolf in 1942 pointed out that women could not write either because they were eager to be ‘Angel in the House’, which was the Victorian image of the ideal wife who stayed in the house and did everything to follow husband’s requirement and values and at last lost their own self. They were passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all—pure (Sánchez Cuervo. 2017). She also spoke of her partly successful attempts to kill off the ‘Angel in the House’, as it was because “killing the ‘Angel in the House’ was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (Woolf. 1942).

Apparently, women’s submissiveness leads to their oppressed position in literary criticism. That is why literary study is based entirely on male literary experience and the figure of the mad woman is important for feminist rebellion (Showalter. 2011, as cited in Rogers. 2016). In terms of women’s images portrayed in novels, Srisermbhok (2003 : 22-27) adds that the category between female and male can be explained in dichotomy because gender inequality is present. Men embody the

positive element of 'self' and they are assumed to superior, dominant, strong, brave, intelligent, protective, heroic, devoted and active, whereas women are defined through the negative description of 'other' and they are thought to be inferior, controlled, weak, submissive, passive, less intelligent and dependent.

It can be said that women can have mental freedom if they have education, financial support and privacy to start or continue writing. When they meet these requirements, they can produce great literature, which crosses time and culture, reflects gender inequality and transforms emotions of sympathy, anger, and sorrow (Averill. 2001 ; Agnew. 2012). The great literature empowers women and enlightens the society.

### 1.3 The House of Earth Trilogy

When Woolf was active in English literature, almost at the same time, an American female writer, Pearl S. Buck (1892—1973), also killed 'Angel in the House' and authored the great literature, *The House of Earth Trilogy*, from 1931 to 1935. Buck was rewarded the Nobel Prize for a body of her works including *The Good Earth* in 1938. Yukang (1938) said Buck deserved the prized as her works reflected Chinese women's social status, which was a serious and melancholy problem. She illustrated it in the way for human sympathy without radical boundaries. Besides, the famous writer and feminist Morrison (1994 as cited in Conn. 1996 : xiii) also gave similar evaluation on Buck's works: "she misled me...and made me feel that all writers wrote sympathetically, empathetically, honesty and forthrightly about other culture."

*The Good Earth* particularly brought enlightenment to feminist literature because the novel reflected the society of China at the ending of monarchical rule. In this novel, Buck created O-lan, the main female character, and used her to reflect the oppression of Chinese women further conveying that men could not actually survive without women.

In *Sons*, the story was mainly set in the background of the warlord period (1916—1928). Being influenced by the development of feminism, women had more rights to education and inheritance. The main female character in this novel did not have a name; Buck called her 'the lady'. The lady represented the upper-class

educated women whose experience was influential over women's liberation. Buck portrayed women's oppression, resistance and liberation through this lady as she was independent from men and used her entire life to fight for women's liberation.

In *A House Divided* which was published in 1935, the story was mainly set after the warlord period in the coastal city which was the most open and modern in China. The main characters faced the conflicts derived from feudalism, colonialism and imperialism in this open and modern city. At the same time, the traditional culture bondage to women was to be destroyed gradually with the influence of the Western modern culture. Buck focused on women's inner voice and their self-discovery through the main female character, Mei-ling. Mei-ling who had the Eastern and Western virtues found her self-ego. She and Wang Yuan's happy ending indicated Buck's best wish for women and men that they would be equal and harmonious.

Buck wrote about the oppression of Chinese women through the lens of O-lan and solutions to the oppression through the lenses of other characters in the Trilogy over a century ago. The changes from the three-generation women revealed that Chinese women benefited from the social changes as women had more choices to attend social life they wished. They were set free from the foot-binding and the pure. They could enter the school and work outside home to be independent mentally and economically. Their individuals' experiences and feminist consciousness were also influenced by these changes of social status and became more positive and independent. O-lan's strength to struggle with harsh life, the lady's courage to resist sexism on women and Mei-ling's ideal to achieve her career could inspire today's women and concurrently allow today's men to empathize with those women's experiences.

A large number of studies relating to Buck's works have been carried out. It appears that many types of feminism have been applied to analyze *The House of Earth Trilogy* including ecofeminism (e.g. Mao. 2010 ; Zhu. 2011 ; Cheng & Tu. 2013), the third world feminism (Liu. 2013), and post-colonial feminism (Xiang. 2011). However, there is no evidence of investigation into *The House of Earth Trilogy* and socialist feminism.

Socialist feminism exhibits an understanding on women's historical social status and treatment, which are the interaction between the unequal social class and

the patriarchy. Socialist feminism is a combined theory of Marxism and feminism. Marxism philosophy is the social and political theory, which analyzes the society through the economy and social construct. As the Trilogy not only reflects women's liberation but also releases the interaction between the social change and women's social status and their consciousness, it indicates the link between the Trilogy and socialist feminism.

The connection mentioned above interests the researcher, who is a Chinese female and opts for the analysis from a perspective of socialist feminism. Stanley's and Wise's (1993) three themes on feminism, Mitchell's (1966) four structures on women's oppressed situation, and Srisermbhok's (2003) dichotomy between genders are applied for data analysis.

#### **1.4 Objectives**

The main objectives of this research are to 1) identify barriers to gender inequality issues as reflected in *The House of Earth Trilogy*; and 2) find solutions appropriate to empower women.

#### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

*The House of Earth Trilogy* comprises three novels: *The Good Earth*, *Sons* and *A House Divided*. All three are the central of this research. To fulfill the objectives, the main characters will be mainly analyzed from a perspective of socialist feminism.

#### **1.6 Definitions of Terms**

##### **1.6.1 The House of Earth Trilogy**

The House of Earth Trilogy refers to three epic novels authored by Pearl S. Buck: *The Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932) and *A House Divided* (1935). They illustrate the Chinese social changes including Chinese women's liberation in the period from the late Qing to 1935. They also portray three different periods of social changes for Chinese women: traditional women, anti-traditional and anti-modern women, and modern women (Zhu. 2003). The first period was parts of *The Good Earth*, from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth

century. The second was set in the warlord period in *Sons*. The third period was set after the warlord and before 1935 in *A Divided House*.

### 1.6.2 Main Characters

Main characters refer to not only females but also males as men are always associated with data analysis on women's oppression (Stanley & Wise. 1993 : 42). In this study, females and males (taken from the sex perspective) women and men (taken from the gender perspective) are used interchangeably. Buck portrays about sixty characters in those three novels. In total, there are six main characters organized by their personal experience which revealed a variety of women's issues surrounding feminism, gender, social prejudices, self-identity and freedom. They include three male characters (below labelled M) and three female characters (below labelled F). These six main characters are as follows:

From *The Good Earth*,

1. Wang Lung, a peasant (M).
2. O-lan, Wang Lung's wife, a peasant woman (F).

From *Sons*,

3. Wang the Tiger, a warlord (M).
4. The lady, Wang the Tiger's wife (a doctor's daughter), an educated woman (F).

From *A House Divided*,

5. Wang Yuan, Wang the Tiger's son, from a confused man to be agricultural doctor (M).
6. Mei-ling, one of the adopted girls of the lady, a medical student (F).

Among these main characters, some characters only appear in one novel while some others appear in two novels, for example, the lady appears in both *Sons* and *A House Divided*. Wang Lung's third son is called 'Wang the Third' and 'Wang the Tiger' in the novels. In this study, in order to make clear expression, he is called 'Wang the Tiger' only.

### 1.6.3 Socialist Feminism Perspective

Feminism and feminist theory are interconnected. According to Chodorow (1989), feminist theory is the extension of feminism into the theoretical discourse. Stanley and Wise (1993 : 64) also define feminism "as not only a set of



beliefs but a set of theoretical constructions about the nature of women's oppression". Therefore, feminism and feminist theory are synonymous and can be used interchangeably. Feminism has become an established canon in Western literature since 1970s (Srisermbhok. 2003 : 3). There is different typical feminism—liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism—and each differs based on its long standing different political tradition (Mackinnon. 1983 ; Briskin. 1989 ; Freeman. 1990 ; Yusuff. 2014). However, each type has something in common in that they are against the inequalities between men and women but support women's education, social equality, respect and rights. The purpose of this support is to help women to be free from sexism, stereotype and oppression (Jaggar. 1983 : 5-6 ; Freeman. 1990 ; Stacey. 1993 : 50 ; Goodman. 1996 : x).

Among those types of feminist theory, the socialist feminism plays the most important role in this study. The reason is that socialist feminists believe that women's oppression exists in the interaction of the capital system based on inequalities of social class and patriarchal structures (Mitchell. 1966 ; Flora. 1984 ; Freeman. 1990 ; Holvino. 2010). This idea provides the thinking that the unequal social classes and the patriarchy (father or the eldest male is the heading of the family) lead to women's oppression.

Similarly, Stanley and Wise (1993 : 61-65) argue that, there are three basic themes in feminism within social sciences. First, "women are oppressed", a factual statement for feminists. Second, "the personal is the political", which emphasizes the importance of women's experiences especially in the family. Third, "there is feminist consciousness", which means women's new understanding they gain through consciousness-raising activities. These three themes indicate direct connections between social structure (the family) and women's oppression.

Mitchell (1966) argues that the key structures of woman's situation can be listed as: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. The liberation of women can be achieved only when all the four structures are integrated or transformed in the family. In other words, women need to have rights in production and freedom in the family. The family is not an eternal social institution and so-called women's duty in the family is the cultural creation not the natural duty. Mitchell's (1966) four structures provide an aspect how of women are oppressed.

Drawing the second theme from Stanley's and Wise's (1993 : 62-64) "the personal is the political" and Mitchell's (1966) four structures, socialist feminism perspective in this study refers to perspective of feminist theory or feminism, which are women's personal experiences in their social reality including their production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Both terms are used interchangeably. In order to clarify related terms of women's personal experiences, production regards work with pay. Reproduction refers to bearing children. Sexuality concerns the sex desire in legally sexual relationship of a husband and a wife. The husband had more cultural privilege than the wife. The socialization of children refers to women playing a role as socializers of children.

#### **1.6.4 Feminist Consciousness**

Feminist consciousness is also drawn from Stanley's and Wise's (1993 : 64-65) the third theme of feminism, 'feminist consciousness'. It means women are aware of their own values and they understand their social status. The awareness and understanding derive from their argument that "feminist consciousness provides what it is to be a woman, what the social world looks like to women, how it is constructed and negotiated by women" (Stanley and Wise. 1993 : 120). In other words, women consciously know about the characteristics that are made up of a woman in society. They know how men perceive them and how to present themselves to others and deal with the real world.

#### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Many researchers investigate Buck's works from different approaches including feminism. Ecofeminism, the third world feminism, post-colonial feminism and general feminism have been in particular applied to both *The Good Earth* and *The House of Earth Trilogy*. However, socialist feminism has not yet been applied. This means that how the social class and the patriarchy impact on women's oppression is still blank. Therefore, the research findings can disclose to women's oppression in Chinese society and influence men to repose women's socialist status and in turn respect them more. As a feminist researcher, this study is for the purpose of women's benefit as Kleiber and Light (1978 as cited in Stanley & Wise. 1993 : 32) posited that

“woman study should be done by women and focus on women, and that its products should be used for women’s activities and benefits”.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Buck's Personal Experience and Her Works

Feminist literature was another kind of writer's autobiography. Buck was considered as an American writer who was good at Chinese content writings. Her personal experience can be traced carefully in *The House of Earth Trilogy*. She was born in America in 1892 and brought to China by her missionary parents when she was only three months old. At home, she was taught American English and literature by her mother. At the same time, she was also taught by her Chinese teacher. In the community, as her parents lived in the suburb area, the people Buck knew of and understood where they came from were poor peasants who were main characters in *The Good Earth*. During 1900—1902, her family had to go back to America due to the turmoil caused by Boxer Uprising. This was shown in *A House Divided* that foreigners were excluded in China.

In 1910, Buck started her college education in America, and during her four-year study there she felt culturally disoriented (Conn : 48-49). This learning experience was repeated when the main character, Wang Yuan, went on learning abroad in *A House Divided*. Buck came back to China after that and taught English in the Jinling University (now is Nanjing University) in Nanjing where the capital city at that time was. There she kept in touch with some Chinese famous scholars including Yutang Lin and Zhimo Xu. Buck married an American agriculturalist in 1917. This may influence her to create Wang Yuan to learn about agriculture in America and this fitted the reality that the major of Chinese were peasants. Later, she had a disable daughter and this was shown through the main character, Wang Lung, in *The Good Earth* to express her pity and love to her disable daughter. Buck lived in China nearly for forty years. With China torn by civil war, Japanese invasion and anti-foreign violence, she moved back to America in 1934 and lived there for the rest of her life. In America, Buck built 'Welcome Home' to raise adopted children in 1949. It was the same as the main character, the lady, in *Sons*, who raised unwanted female children.

Buck had deep understanding and emotion with China. Buck's experience of learning and living in China and America made her culturally competent in both

American English and Chinese literature. Buck had published 116 works including novel, essay, story, drama, biography and translation and most of them were about China. Although her works were all written in English and published in America, most of her works had been translated into Chinese. In 1929, her first novel, *East Wind: West Wind*, reflected the combination of Chinese traditional culture and Western culture in China. From 1931 onward, Buck continued to write her works: *The Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932) and *A House Divided* (1935) and these three novels were called *The House of Earth Trilogy*. From 1928, Buck spent four years translating Chinese classical prose epic *Shui Hu Chuan* into *All Men Are Brothers*. She introduced Chinese novels to the world with her acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize.

Buck's special experience led to her success in writing, but it also brought her controversial. According to Wang (2011), as most female characters in Buck's works accepted instead of resisting the patriarchal thoughts, Buck and her works were ignored by Western feminist critic and unaccepted by Western literature. Although *The Good Earth* became the best seller during 1931 and 1932 in America, it was not convinced by American literature. Indeed, research study on *The House of Earth Trilogy* was not found outside China in the Western literature. In China, although *The Good Earth* was translated in many versions in the 1930s, it was suspected if it reflected the social reality objectively. However, the findings of this present study reveal that *The Good Earth* actually reflects the social reality objectively.

## **2.2 The Development of Feminism in China**

The social phenomenon, that men were majority and women were minority in Chinese traditional society, was criticized strongly by Chinese intellectuals. Chinese feminism became active in the early 1890s when Chinese feminists started to emphasize the necessity of giving freedom and equality to women as parts of developing China (Zarrow. 1988). They believed that women had the same duty and ability as men to save the nation. The anarchists He and Li (n.d. as cited in Zarrow. 1988) supported these beliefs. Therefore, Chinese traditional culture, especially the issues on women treated as slaves, was strongly attacked during the New Culture Movement. The father of contemporary Chinese literature, Lu Xun (1980) argued that

Chinese women were trapped without a good reason by tradition. They were sacrificed without a purpose and every Chinese had duty to destroy the old order and rescue women from stupidity and tyranny.

Based on Huang (2012 : 21), later on during 1903 and 1904, numerous representative feminist journals emerged and they influenced Chinese scholars to express their voices about women's liberation. A journal called 女钟界 (nv jie zhong) or Women's Bell emphasized the equality between men and women and announced these six women rights: education, making friends, business rights, managing property (including inheritance), going out freely and free choice of marriage. Another journal was 女子世界 (nv zi shi jie) or Women's World that was against the cultural idea of 'jen' or the pure in that women must remain virgin before marriage and stay married even they became widows. This idea prisoned the mind of women as it forced a woman to belong to a man as an object.

Besides the reforming of culture and the struggling of feminists, government promulgated a series of policies including forbidding the foot-binding and stipulating the monogamy. These measures had made great changes on women's life. According to Huang (2012 : 27-33), there were three major changes. First, women could receive common education. At first, only some of the upper-class women could be educated in the increasing school while most of women were still taught how to be a good housewife at home. Later, the girls' schools let women have choices to receive education. Second, women began to be economically independent. They could work outside the house after the foot-binding was abolished, so that they did not have to be subordinate to men economically. Women who received education could live by themselves as doctors or teachers. Third, women had equal rights as men in marriage. Government reformed the law that stipulated monogamy so that women had equal rights with men in the family. In summary, women gained some rights and freedom in education, economy and marriage, which indicated great progress in women's liberation.

### **2.3 Related Studies on The House of Earth Trilogy**

Based on Buck's personal experiences and the social reality mentioned previously, Buck authored *The House of Earth Trilogy*. It appeared that there have

been a large number of studies on Buck's works in China (e.g. Zhao. 2009 ; Mao. 2010 ; Zhu. 2011). From the 1930s to the 1940s, many Chinese intellectuals expressed their criticisms on the content of *The Good Earth*. Jiang (1933 as cited in Cevasco. 1967) criticized that its content was not real as Chinese characteristic and the shortcoming was obsessed with the low status in *The Good Earth*. For this, Buck had ever argued that what she portrayed was the mass of common people who are 'the proletariat' she sympathized with (Conn. 1996 : 127). Mao (1935 : 62-64) also argued that "the character of Chinese peasants was distorted. The modern peasants who changed the Chinese history were not shown in *The Good Earth* at all". Furthermore, Hu (n.d. as cited in Guo. 1999) pointed out that "Colonialism and imperialism which the Chinese peasants suffered from were ignored in *The Good Earth*. This was the shortcomings of the novel". But at the same time, he admitted that the phenomenon that Chinese peasants were poor and ignorant was true, but as Buck did not find the cause of the phenomenon, the motivation was easy to be misunderstood or distorted. It can be concluded that these intellectuals pointed out that there was no resistance to the colonialism and imperialism but the ignorant and poor phenomenon shown in *The Good Earth*.

However, Chinese intellectuals began to look at Buck's works in new ways from the 1980s onward. Zhang (2014) made a summary based on the studies on *The Good Earth* from Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) in 2014. It was found that there were three categories of the studies. The first was on Buck's identity, relationship with China, and multicultural identity. The second was on the themes of *The Good Earth* that included epic significance, local complex, feminism perspective, Confucianism perspective, cross-culture perspective, political culture perspective, biological perspective and literary anthropology perspective. The last was on characters including characterization of the characters, individual character, group characters, and characteristics of the characters in *The Good Earth*. Zhang (2014) also pointed out that most of the researches were conducted in connection with the second category. It appeared that the content and theme of *The Good Earth* were still central in the studies, and that Chinese scholars had applied Western theories for their studies. Such trends indicated close communication between Chinese and Western cultures.

Although the male characters were portrayed mainly in the novels, female characters who represented women's oppression and liberation were also impressive parts. Among the studies on the theme, many researchers applied feminism to their study into *The House of Earth Trilogy* which includes ecofeminism, the third world feminism, post-colonial feminism and general feminism. Ecofeminism was the combination of ecology and feminism and it revealed the similarity between women and nature (the earth). Namely, women's biology and the ecological cycle of the nature were similar and they were both submissive to the patriarchy and male domination. Just as its name implied, the content of *The House of Earth Trilogy* was relevant to the earth. A number of studies (e.g. Zhao. 2009 ; Mao. 2010 ; Zhu. 2011 ; Cheng & Tu. 2013 ; Lv. 2014 ; Ma. 2014 ; Wang. 2014 ; Dong. 2016) from this perspective confirmed that O-lan and the earth had similar density. O-lan was victimized by the patriarchy but she chose to resist it by doing things to approve her social status.

The third world feminism was different from the Western feminism which the middle class, the white and their colonialism and imperialism were central, and it should be suitable for different ethics and national reality. *The House of Earth Trilogy* reflected the timeframe when China was colonialized. Liu (2013) analyzed *The Good Earth* from the third world feminism perspective, and it was found that in Chinese contexts, O-lan was powerless but she resisted the powerful patriarchy through her silent hard work. In some ways, she was the positive subject instead of the oppressed object when facing the life troubles. It indicated that O-lan's way to resist the patriarchy was different from white women. Wang (2011) supported this outcome as Buck portrayed how women commonly accepted the patriarchal thoughts instead of radically criticizing its oppression on women.

Post-colonial feminism also differed from the feminism in the West which was based on the criticism on sexism. In fact, it refers to a state of aphasia, loss of voice and loss of subjectivity of Eastern women and they were under the pressure from the West and the patriarchy. Xiang (2011) applied post-colonial feminism which was similar to Liu's (2013) third world feminism to *The House of Earth Trilogy*. By comparing the three typical female images in the novels, Xiang (2011) found that Chinese women were vulnerable and marginal. Even though Buck had her limitation



in understanding and interpreting of Eastern women, she was concerned about Chinese women's social status and fates. Perhaps, Buck's limitation in understanding Eastern women was one of the reasons why "colonialism and imperialism which the Chinese peasants suffered from were ignored in *The Good Earth*" mentioned by Hu (n.d. as cited in Guo. 1999).

For general feminism perspectives, He (2001) particularly compared two different novels from the East and the West, Buck's *The Good Earth* and Xiao Hong's *The Field of Life and Death*, to explore the similarity in the image of female characters. Feminism was based on *The Second Sex* written by Simone de Beauvoir and *Sexual Politics* written by Kate Millett. She compared the authors' aesthetic consciousness, which aimed to examine the feasibility of culture exchanges between China and America. The findings indicated that both Buck and Xiao Hong had portrayed women's weakness and firmness in the darkness period. Women were 'the other' in society and they struggled to achieve their value in life.

A number of past studies (Hu. 2006 ; Wang. 2006 ; Wu. 2007 ; Zhuang & Chen. 2008 ; Wang. 2011 ; Xiong. 2012 ; Yang. 2012 ; Liu & Lin. 2013 ; Su. 2014 ; Xu. 2015) also used general feminism to analyze the main character, O-lan, in *The Good Earth*. They were based on the general feminism which referred to the resistance to the patriarchy. The results confirmed two kinds of criticism on this character whether she had resistance to the patriarchy or not. The first kind was that O-lan was a traditional woman with many virtues. She was victimized by patriarchy and resisted it. In contrast, the second kind was that O-lan was only a victim but not a rebel. Xiong (2012) argued that O-lan did not have self-ego consciousness or feminist consciousness, which meant she was inferior to men socially by being submissive to all men although she had the ability to depend on herself economically and emotionally. As a result, men were the essential, while women were the inessential; Wang Lung was the subject, while O-lan was 'the other' to Xiong (2012). The concept 'the other' derived from Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) argument that men were essential and women were inessential.

In addition to general feminism application, Zhu (2003) and Wang (2011) found in their studies that Buck portrayed traditional women, anti-traditional and anti-modern women and modern women one by one in the three novels. Although the

traditional women were diligent, abundant of survival skills and had strong will power, they were submissive to men. Therefore, Buck appreciated the modern women who were independent (Zhu. 2003). In fact, Buck projected her feminist consciousness on O-lan and expressed her resistance to the patriarchy through O-lan in *The Good Earth* (Wang. 2005). Similarly, it was found by Sun and Yuan (2015) that Buck also expressed her own characteristics including feminist consciousness through the main female character, the lady, in the *Sons*.

It can be concluded that researchers (e.g. Zhao. 2009 ; Mao. 2010 ; Zhu. 2011 ; Xiang. 2011 ; Liu. 2013) who conducted their studies into *The House of Earth Trilogy* from feminism perspective had found that the patriarchy was the resource of Chinese women's oppression. Among them, Xiang (2011) from a perspective of post-colonial feminism and Liu (2013) from the third world feminism angle found that Chinese women were also oppressed by the Western colonialism and imperialism. In addition, from the ecofeminism perspective, it was found that women and the earth had similar fate which was oppressed by men (Mao. 2010 ; Zhu. 2011 ; Cheng & Tu. 2013). However, it appeared that there was not attempt to study *The House of Earth Trilogy* from socialist feminism perspective. Therefore, this research applied socialist feminism to explore Buck's *The House of Earth Trilogy*.

#### **2.4 Socialist feminism**

Socialist feminism is the combination of Marxism and feminism: "attempts to death with the 'unhappy marriage' between Marxism and feminism led to the birth of socialist feminism" (Ng, Mohamad & Hui. 2006 : 5). One of the most obvious characteristics of socialist feminism is Marxism, which is a social structure theory. Marxism philosophy is the social and political theory, which analyzes the society through the economy and social construct, so socialist feminism perceives women's oppression through economic and social construct. Marx and Engels pointed out in 1844 that women's supposed inferiority in the society is something that can change as society changes, but more is in need that women will have to work themselves to change their situation (Brown. 2014). Engels (1884 as cited in Mitchell. 1966 : 14-15) explained later that "the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry . . . this . . . demands that

the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished.” It means that the achievement of women’s liberation needs the social change which turns women into a part of the productive workers.

The representative socialist feminist Mitchell (1966) who learns from Marxism to socialist feminism argues that women’s marginal position in the society can be illustrated from four dimensions: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. For production, throughout history women’s weakness in physiology and psychobiological metabolism appear to render them to be less useful member of work-force. For reproduction, women’s reproduction including bearing children, bringing them up, and maintaining the home makes women absent from the critical sector of production historically. For sexuality, throughout history women have been appropriated as sex objects, as much as progenitors or producers. For socialization of children, when women play role as socializers of children, they become makers and victims of the gender inequality.

Mitchell (1966) further argues that the four structures are interconnected and all of them must be integrated or transformed in order to liberate women. It is because that among the four structures, production is the economic element meanwhile reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children are women’s roles in the family. When women become the social labor force, they face the pressure from both work and the family, so women’s liberation can only be achieved when women are economically independent and they have appropriate treatment in the family.

However, Griffin (2015) argues that traditional Marxist theory, which is held by white socialist feminists, neither addresses the oppression outside of production nor provides the tools to confront American racism, so Mitchell’s (1966) four structures never fully integrate women’s special needs in Chicago where working women have become a strong social class.

Stanley’s and Wise’s (1993 : 61-65) three themes provide a basic recognition on women’s experience from the social science perspective. First, “women are oppressed”, which all of the feminists agree with. Second, “the personal is the political”, which emphasizes the importance of women’s personal experiences especially in the family. Third, “there is feminist consciousness” which provides what

it is to be a woman, what the social world looks like to women, and how it is constructed and negotiated by women.

Socialist feminism is mostly applied with social movements, groups, and organizations, just as Benschop and Verloo (2015) argue that the objective of many present socialist feminism-inspired researches is surrounding the blue-collar workers who are the main productive power. However, socialist feminism also has been applied in literature criticism as a great try. Peng (2015) explores socialist feminism reflected in English Angela Carter's work *The Magical Toyshop*. It is found that women are oppressed by the double oppression from the patriarchy and capitalism. In order to achieve liberation, women need to overthrow patriarchy and capitalism with the resisted alliance of women themselves and all men. However, Carter's compromise to the patriarchal capitalist society is shown through at the end of the novel, the protagonist is still submissive to men. The findings prove that socialist feminism can also be applied to feminist literary criticism.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

Since Stanley's and Wise's (1993 : 61-65) socialist feminism gives an insightful discussion on women's oppression and liberation, their three themes of the socialist feminism will be applied in the research. The first theme, "women are oppressed", links to several questions. For example, why are women oppressed? How are women oppressed? Who are the oppressors? How do women react to the oppression? In order to answer these questions, the researcher focuses on women's experiences. Just as the second theme "the personal is the political" shows, personal experiences are important power to change women's oppressed situation. Women spend much time in the family. Hence, main female characters' experiences in the family are central in this research. In the family, women play a socialization role on children in that they are transformed into 'feminine' or 'masculinity' social beings with norms, values, and behaviors (Stanley & Wise. 1993 : 93-94). Feminist consciousness, which is the third theme, is associated with how women are aware of their social status and how they react to the status. Based on these three themes, data are analyzed and categorized into these two themes: women's social status and women's feminist consciousness.

Mitchell (1966) illustrates women's oppressed situation from four structures: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Women are inferior in the production. The stereotype that women are weaker than men in biology leads to women's lack in the social production. However, the Industrial Revolution, which has made men free from human being labor, does not allow women to attend the production. They are still a small part of the social production. Women are considered as reproduction tools. Women's biological structure makes them bear children. When women bear children, they have to pause or stop their role in the production. By this chance, they are considered as natural-born homebodies and need to spend much time taking care of family. This stereotype has been misunderstood as a social role.

Sexuality refers to human being's sexual experience and desire. Under the influence of the cultural concept 'the pure', on the one hand, women who do not marry or who are widows are not allowed to have sex as they wish. On the other hand, women who are married are seen as sex objects and reproduction tools. Socialization of children refers to the proceeding of children who are taught with values, norms, and behaviors within the family. Mothers play a particular role in children's socialization as it is women that are involved in the early unconscious stage of socialization. Mothers treat children with different behaviors based on children's sex differences consciously or unconsciously. Besides, the patterns of the relationship between parents also influence children's values, norms, and behaviors. Women's oppressed roles will influence children's attitudes toward the gender. Mitchell's (1966) four structures are used to report the findings of the theme of women's social status.

Srisermbhok (2003 : 22-27) believes that applying the dichotomy to the relationship between women and men has given a clear explanation on the cultural inequality between them. Dichotomy is an absolute division between women and men, that illustrates gender which is the historical and cultural unbalanced attitudes between them through the relative or opponent words. It appears that as the sex differences, women are embodied with passive role while men with positive one. Srisermbhok's (2003) dichotomy between genders is applied to those two themes: women's social status and women's feminist consciousness.

Besides those theories mentioned previously from Stanley and Wise (1993), Mitchell (1966), and Srisermbhok (2003), this study includes the researcher's

personal experiences as it is a relationship between theory, experience and research throughout the feminist research (Stanley & Wise. 1993 : 156). Undoubtedly, the study itself always includes the researcher's own understanding and interpretation. In this study, the author's feminist beliefs and consciousness are also taken into consideration.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Tools

Pearl S. Buck's three novels: *The Good Earth*, *Sons*, and *A House Divided* were selected as research tools. The texts were from the original version which was written in English.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Six characters from these three novels were organized as main characters. The main female characters were characterized by women's issues including gender and feminism. O-lan was the most oppressive traditional woman in *The Good Earth*. The lady was the most powerful woman in resistance to the patriarchy in *Sons*. Mei-ling was the most positive woman in inner freedom in *A House Divided*. The main male characters were characterized by their evaluation of women which illustrated women's social status. Wang Lung was the man who was most related to O-lan's oppression. Wang the Tiger was the man who was related to the lady's oppression mostly. Wang Yuan represented men who treated women equally.

According to Di Yanni (1990 : 38), there were six aspects of revealing character in the novel: narrative summary, narrative description, surface details of dress and physical appearance, character's action, character's speech, and character's consciousness. To meet the objectives of the study, the researcher chose the fourth, fifth and sixth aspects because they were direct and visible to reflect character's attitudes, evaluation, consciousness to personality and society in details.

Action, speech and consciousness had respective definition and function in this study. Action refers to the main characters' body languages while speech refers to the dialogs among the main characters and others. Lakoff (1975 as cited in Abbas. 2010) argues that many differences exist between women's and men's use of language. For example, women's speech is politer than men's; trivial, unimportant topics are considered to be women's domain. Women's manner of speaking, which is different to men, reflects their subordinate status in society. Therefore, speech reflects not only the main characters' personal thoughts but also the relationships between the

main characters. Consciousness refers to the main characters' emotional and psychological inner ideas, feelings, and beliefs, which are stimulated by the environment, occupation, social and leisure activities. Consciousness reflects the main characters' inner thoughts and attitudes.

Therefore, data were collected from main characters' action, speech and consciousness. Some linguistic markers and relevant words in the texts help the researcher with data collection. For example, it is easy to collect the characters' speech as it is normally portrayed in quotation marks. Verbs 'sit' and 'gap' are the actions whereas 'ponder', 'think', 'wonder', 'think of', 'say to himself' and 'reproach' indicate that the content following was consciousness. Adjectives and adverbs 'be ashamed of', 'ashamed' and 'only' indicate the attitudes. Nouns 'woman' or 'women', 'girl' or 'son', 'man' or 'men' indicate the content connects to women issues.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

To meet the objectives of the study, the collected data were analyzed from the perspective of socialist feminism, which the researcher constructs in the conceptual framework.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE GOOD EARTH

#### 4.1 Findings

*The Good Earth*, Buck's first novel in *The House of Earth Trilogy*, was published in 1931. It was riveting Chinese family saga and story of female sacrifice. Buck made a rational approach to the subject of women's oppression by illustrating the main female character O-lan as detailed throughout the novel with her social status, her struggle with the harsh life and her obedience to the patriarchy. O-lan's personal experience is related to the feminism subject.

The event began with the imbalance of development in China and Europe in modern time. After the Industrial Revolution in the 1760s, Europe had great progress in productivity. With the help of rapid-fire guns and steam power, military strategy in Europe became powerful and aggressive to start colonies. China was defeated in the Opium War (1839—1842) by Britain and then became a Semi-Colonial and Semi-Feudal country and invaded by more countries later. Later in 1912, the new government, the Republic of China, was built. It signed that Chinese 2000-year tradition of monarchical rule had been destroyed. It was this period, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, *The Good Earth* was set.

The social class structure at that time could be compared with a pyramid which was conceptualized by Lasswell (1950 as cited in Tananuraksakul, 2009) that "the influential are those who get the most of what there is to get. Those who get the most are elite; the rest are mass" (p.42). This pyramid released the inequality of the social class: the elite with small amount positioned on the top of the society had all the power over the poor with large amount positioned at the bottom. In the case of *The Good Earth*, the elite referred to the empire of Qing dynasty that had the most property and power while the mass were the peasants who had the least. Peasants were the mainstream in the society and their life was harsh.

In the background mentioned above, Buck began the story with Wang Lung's wedding day. This poor peasant was going to pick up his wife, O-lan, who was a slave in a rich family. She was sold by her parents at ten. O-lan was enslaved by the persons

who had higher status than hers including the master and one of other slaves, Cuckoo. After getting married, O-lan was a good wife who was diligent, saving, considerate and filial. She also fulfilled a woman's duty for bearing sons to her husband. Due to famine, the family had to go to the south and there they still lived harsh lives. But by good luck, Wang Lung got some golds and O-lan picked up a mass of jewels in a disturbance, so the family became rich. However, when O-lan was old, Wang Lung abandoned her to have a young girl, Lotus, as a concubine. O-lan realized that she was invaluable to her husband. At last, O-lan died on her eldest son's wedding day.

O-lan's personal experience reflected the life of Chinese peasant women who were in the bottom of the society at the end of the nineteenth century. This chapter discusses her experience based on two themes: women's social status and women's feminist consciousness.

#### **4.1.1 Theme 1: Women's Social Status**

Through O-lan's life, women's social status was perceived low in the society and in comparison to men's, it was lower, which could be seen in certain ways. The obvious evidence revealed gender inequality that caused physical and mental oppression.

Being submissive was culturally destined for poor women in Chinese traditional society, so men and rich women were superior to them. The two phases of O-lan's life showed how submissive her life was.

Peasants were in the bottom of the society and had poor living conditions. In O-lan's alienated childhood, she was a daughter of poor peasants and a beggar on the streets. O-lan's poor childhood was shown through her begging words: "a heart, good sir—a heart, good lady! Have a kind heart—a good deed for your life in Heaven! The small cash—the copper coin you throw away—feed a starving child!" (pp.94-95) O-lan had to beg the rich people on the streets without dignity.

During O-lan's childhood, she was sold to a rich family, the Great House of Hwang, to be a slave. She still stayed in the bottom of the society and had to serve the upper social class. She was a kitchen girl and was treated badly by another slave, Cuckoo as she recalled:

"I bore her haughty looks all during my youth in the great house and her running into the kitchen a score of

times a day and crying out ‘now tea for the lord’—  
 ‘now food for the lord’—and it was always this is too  
 hot and that is too cold, and that is badly cooked, and I  
 was too ugly and too slow and too this and too that....”  
 (p.192)

As texts above showed, O-lan was forced to do heavy physical work and abused with nonsensical reasons. Her life was full of complain and criticism. In O-lan’s own words, she was ‘slave of slaves’ (p.193).

Later, marriage changed her life. She was sold by her mistress to marry a poor peasant, Wang Lung who she never met before. O-lan was looked down by Wang Lung due to her natural big feet. O-lan lived in a distorted society that women had to bind their feet due to a stereotype which was foot-binding considered as beauty and sex object. When Wang Lung met O-lan first time on the wedding day, he paid attention not only to her voice, coat and hair, but also to her feet:

The woman answered slowly as an echo, “Ready.”  
 Wang Lung, hearing her voice for the first time, looked at her back as she stood before him. It was a good enough voice, not loud, not soft, plain, and not ill-tempered. The woman’s hair was neat and smooth and her coat clean. He saw with an instant’s disappointment that her feet were not bound. But this he could not dwell upon, for the old lady was saying to the gateman. (p.16)

Wang Lung was disappointed to find that O-lan’s feet were not bound. In fact, O-lan was a slave who had to do heavy work and needed natural feet. Foot-binding was a symbol for women with higher social class who did not need to work and who were treated as ‘birds in the cage’ for men. Foot-binding was a way by which men physically and mentally colonized women, just as Dworkin (1993 : 61) argued that “foot-binding was a political institution which reflected and perpetuated the sociological and psychological inferiority of women; foot-binding cemented women to a certain sphere, with a certain function—women were sex objects and breeders.” It was because the bound feet directly or indirectly limited women’s social activities and working ability, so consequently, women had to depend on men

economically or mentally. In this case, women were brutally crippled and mutilated in the name of erotica and beauty, meanwhile men reveled in love-making devoted to the worship of the bound feet.

After getting married, O-lan gave birth to children and another stereotype was shown. Under the Confucian culture system, children were assigned a gender which was based on the appearance of their genital. Sons were honorable beings meanwhile daughters were humble creatures. When O-lan was going to give birth to the first son, Wang Lung's reaction releases his great love for sons:

“Is it a man?” he cried importunately, forgetting the woman. Then thin cry burst out again, wiry, insistent.

“Is it a man?” he cried again, “tell me at least this—is it a man.... We shall have to buy a good basketful of eggs and dye them all red for the village. Thus will everyone know I have a son.” (pp.35-37)

Wang Lung was pretty glad and proud that the child was a son. He would declare the news and celebrate his son's coming by giving neighbors red eggs as the custom.

However, daughter's value was rejected by both men and women. When O-lan gave birth to a girl, Wang Lung was shocked: “Wang Lung stood still. A sense of evil struck him. A girl! A girl was causing all this trouble in his uncle's house. Now a girl had been born into his house well” (p.60). Wang Lung was embarrassed and panic to have a daughter as it was troublesome to protect a girl's chastity. Even O-lan also thought that “it is only a slave this time—not worth mentioning” (p.60). In O-lan's view, girl was born with low status and submissive characteristic. Liking sons and disliking girls had been extensively terrible. When Wang Lung and O-lan brought their first son to the Great House of Hwang, Wang Lung was afraid that any evil spirit would take his baby boy away, so they even made the ‘worst wishes’ with the son: “what a pity our child is a female whom no one could want and covered with smallpox as well! Let us pray it may die” (p.48).

O-lan was dominated in sexuality and reproduction. She was used to be a reproduction tool. Due to the limited contraception, O-lan had to give birth to children until she became old and ill. She gave birth to seven children. The

reproduction worsened O-lan's health as she said: "since those two last ones were born together I have not been well. There is a fire in my vitals" (p.160). During the time, Wang Lung and O-lan picked up some golds and a mass of jewels in a disturbance, Wang Lung bought lands from the fading Great House of Hwang and became richer and richer. O-lan's sacrifice on reproduction did not reward Wang Lung's admiration or appreciation, but he overlooked her kind heart and diligence. Wang Lung disowned her verbally: "I have labored and have grown rich and I would have my wife look less like a hind. And those feet of yours—" (p.169). Wang Lung's words released Wang Lung's real attitude to O-lan. Due to poverty, Wang Lung could not complain about O-lan's big feet before, but when he was rich, he spoke it out. Money released Wang Lung's human being weakness that he wanted to choose women. Wang Lung criticized O-lan's physical appearances from head to toe several times and eventually abandoned her for a young girl, Lotus:

I mean, cannot you buy a little oil for your hair as other women do and make yourself a new coat of black cloth? And those shoes you wear are not fit for a land proprietor's wife, such as you now are.... Why should that one wear pearls with her skin as black as earth? Pearls are for fair women.... Every day he went to the tea shop; every evening he waited until she (Lotus) would receive him, and every night he went to her. (pp.161-181)

Even when O-lan was a peasant woman instead of a slave, she was submissive in the family as a slave. She was portrayed to be "a faithful, speechless serving maid, who was only a serving maid and nothing more" (p.27). O-lan was submissive in the economy. O-lan was heavily involved in the economic production that she had to do many things to produce a money income as well as the housework. Although O-lan worked hard both on the farm and at home, she did not get paid for her labor. She had to depend on Wang Lung. O-lan's economic dependence led to her powerlessness in the family affairs. She could not stop Wang Lung from buying a concubine. Although Wang Lung was a little sorry and afraid of being accused of buying a concubine, he thought that he had done his duty by paying O-lan money in

exchange for his lust: “I have given her silver when she asked for it” (p.237). In fact, Wang Lung took advantage of O-lan’s unpaid labor.

In addition, O-lan could not stop Cuckoo moving in the house as Lotus’s slave. When she combated Cuckoo’s coming, Wang Lung thought inside that: “well, and it is my house and whoever I say may come in, she shall come in, and who you are to ask?” (p.191) In Wang Lung’s consciousness, he was the householder who controlled most domestic affairs. O-lan was not expected to defer him.

It can be concluded that Buck portrayed Chinese women’s lives through the lens of O-lan’s childhood and adulthood based on her personal experience and to reflect women’s exploitation in China at the end of the nineteenth century. Women were manipulated and exploited due to poverty, which triggered social and gender inequality. Men, whether they were poor or rich, were culturally inherited to become oppressors over women while rich women were more socially privileged than poor women. Economically and culturally, poor women were deprived of a good life except begging and becoming slaves.

#### **4.1.2 Theme 2: Women’s Feminist Consciousness**

Feminist consciousness is women’s awareness of their inferior social status as well as recognition of their own values from the family treatment and the stereotyped community norms. As theme 1 showed, O-lan was treated unequally in the family and community. O-lan’s awareness of her social status including obedience and resistance to class oppressors and the patriarchy will be discussed in this theme.

From O-lan’s childhood, she had been enslaved by the upper-class oppressors and this experience had destroyed her spirit. Buck illustrated O-lan as a mindless person: “the stolid face, the unexpressed, half-fearful look of her eyes, made nothing of her” (p.27). In this way, O-lan was isolated her and did not want to communicate with anyone and this made her lose her self-esteem. Even when she was going to die, in narcosis, she reviewed the most painful time in her life:

Although even now only through such brief words as these: “I will bring the meats to the door only—and well I know I am ugly and cannot appear before the great lord.” And again she said, panting, “Do not beat me—I will never eat of the dish again” And she said over and

over, “my father—my mother—my father—my mother” again and again, “Well I know I am ugly and cannot be loved.” (pp.243-244)

The texts above showed that at first, O-lan recalled her life in the Great House of Hwang, then she asked her parents for help, at last, she was disappointed to find that even her husband did not love her. She realized that she was unaccepted by the people around her. She was abused mentally and physically. O-lan’s self-denial was also seen when she believed she was ugly and could not be loved, so she was not only rejected by the oppressors, but also rejected by herself. Feminist Morrison (1970) reflected her opinion on gender inequality issues in *The Bluest Eyes* as follows:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without questions. (*The Bluest Eyes*, p.39)

O-lan obeyed the oppressors’ distorted evolution on her, but at the same time, she also resisted them in her weak way. When O-lan was going to give birth to her first child, Wang Lung suggested asking for help from the Great House of Hwang where she had been a slave for ten years. However, O-lan became angry and refused his suggestion resolutely: “‘none in that house!’ She cried out at him” (p.31). O-lan was always submissive to Wang Lung, but this time she was against him. Her reaction showed her hatred toward the Great House of Hwang family who had enslaved her.

O-lan wanted to be respected and admired in the Great House of Hwang, so she imagined one day she would come back gloriously with her son:

“When I return to that house it will be with my son in my arms. I shall have a red coat on him and red-flowered trousers and on his head a hat with a small gilded Buddha sewn on the front and on his feet tiger-faced shoes. And I will wear new shoes and a new coat

of black sateen and I will go into the kitchen where I spent my days and I will go into the great hall where the Old One sits with her opium, and I will show myself and my son to all of them.” (p.32)

From O-lan’s imagination above, readers would know that O-lan was intended to show her resistance to the oppressed ones by showing off her son to them. She was the lowest one in the Great House of Hwang. Once she came back with her son, her status would be higher. The son would make her proud and become powerful in the community.

Later, her imagination came true. It seemed that she won the battle: “and again the slow smile spread over her face, the smile that never lightened the dullness of her narrow black eyes, and after a long time she said: ‘last year this time I was slave in that house’” (p.50). O-lan was satisfied that she was not a slave any more.

For Cuckoo, the slave who treated her badly in the Great House of Hwang, O-lan had built a scene of hatred toward her. When Cuckoo moved in Wang Lung’s house, O-lan grew angry “with deep and sullen anger” (p.191). O-lan hated Cuckoo so much that she could not bear to live together. Later the conflict between O-lan and Cuckoo became explosive when Wang Lung asked O-lan to prepare boiling water for Lotus and Cuckoo. The dialog below between O-lan and Wang Lung released O-lan’s strong argument:

“I am not slave of slave in this house at least.” Then he was angry beyond bearing and he sized O-lan’s shoulder and he shook her soundly and he said, “do not be yet more of a fool. It is not for the servant but for the mistress.” And she bore his violence and she looked at him and she said simply, “and to that one you gave me my two pearls!” (p.193)

As the texts showed, O-lan argued for her power. She had realized that she was not the mistress as the pearls had been taken away by Wang Lung, but O-lan refused to be Cuckoo’s slave again. With her strong argument, Wang Lung had to separate them to live in different courts. This time she neither won nor failed.



O-lan's fight against Cuckoo continued. When she was dying, she talked to Cuckoo that "well, and you may have lived in the courts of the Old Lord, and you were accounted beautiful, but I have been a man's wife and I have borne him sons, and you are still a slave" (p.244). According to Chinese traditional mindsets, women would always fulfil the route that they got married and then bore children. They were needed by men and family. O-lan had done her duties, but Cuckoo had not. Therefore, O-lan thought that she was a winner although she was ugly and Cuckoo was a loser although she was beautiful.

And then O-lan said to Wang Lung that "after I am dead that one nor her mistress neither is to come into my room or touch my things, and if they do, I will send my spirit back for a curse" (p.244). Until O-lan died, she could not relieve her hatred toward Cuckoo and Lotus. It was traditional women's tragedy. All three of them were victims of the unequal social classes and the patriarchy. O-lan did not realize this, so she hated these two women.

O-lan's resistance to the Great House of Hwang and Cuckoo was obvious but her resistance to Wang Lung who stood for the patriarchy and Lotus who was the accessories of the patriarchy was weak and hidden. O-lan was fearful and submissive to Wang Lung even he betrayed her to have another woman:

But she had been afraid of him from that day on which he had seen clearly that she had no beauty of hair or person, and when he had seen her feet were large, and she was afraid to ask him anything because of his anger that was always ready for her now. (p.176)

As the texts above showed, O-lan was afraid of Wang Lung as she did not have beautiful hair or the bound feet to satisfy him. She thought that these shortages made her voiceless, so her only argument to Wang Lung's abandonment was "I have borne you sons—I have borne you sons—" (p.185). For O-lan, reproduction was a kind of production and the child was an object created by her, so bearing sons should have made her powerful.

In fact, O-lan's sacrifice did not bring her power. She was still powerless in the family. When Wang Lung did not agree her to drive Cuckoo away from the house, O-lan was helpless:

Then O-lan waited and when he did not speak, the hot, scanty tears welled slowly into her eyes, and she winked them to hold back the tears, and at last she took the corner of her blue apron and wiped her eyes and she said at last, "It is a bitter thing in my house, and I have no mother's house to go back to anywhere." (p.192)

O-lan cried for her voiceless status in the family. In Chinese traditional custom, women could not go home unless she was divorced by her husband. O-lan preferred to divorce with Wang Lung not to live with Cuckoo, but she could not do anything more because there was no parents' support. This time she failed. It was not O-lan's limitation than the traditional women's that they lacked independent consciousness. At that time, there were husband's and father's houses, but women never had their own houses.

O-lan's resistance to Lotus was hidden. When Wang Lung had Lotus as concubine, it seemed that O-lan did not hate Lotus and she just ignored her: "would not speak to her or notice that she was in the house at all" (p.190). She did not express openly like to Cuckoo, but her last words in her life were about Lotus. When she was going to die, she murmured unconsciously:

"Well, and if I am ugly, still I have borne a son; although I am but a slave there is a son in my house."

And again she said, suddenly, "How can that one feed him and care for him as I so? Beauty will not bear man sons!" (p.251)

In O-lan's thoughts, she compared herself with Lotus: although she was ugly with the low social status, she had borne sons. In contrast, Lotus was beautiful, but she did not have sons. Therefore, she should be more valuable than Lotus. It can be said that in the male-dominant society, O-lan was strongly affected by the prejudiced morality that men were superior and bearing sons was considered proud. Besides, she was miserable with the physical beauty which was another way to please men. She once said: "well I know I am ugly and cannot be loved" (p.244) which indicated that she was desired to be beautiful, but this time, she said: "beauty will not bear man sons!" (p.251) It meant that she became to hate physical beauty.

However, O-lan did not resist the patriarchal beauty on feet—the bound feet. Instead, she obeyed it. When Wang Lung abused her “not fit for a land proprietor’s wife” (p.161), O-lan felt embarrassed that she had big feet: “but she answered nothing, only looked at him humbly and without knowing what she did, and she hid her feet one over the other under the bench on which she sat” (p.161). The bound feet were O-lan’s conformation to physical beauty. Like many women at that time, O-lan followed this main traditional standard of beauty and value. She felt ashamed as she did not bind her feet. It was too hard for O-lan to realize that foot-binding was men’s way to control women’s body and spirit as she had been suffering from the unbound feet. As a mother, she would not let her daughter repeat her painful experience, so she argued that: “my mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young. But the girl’s feet I will bind—the younger girl’s feet I will bind” (p.161). These words showed O-lan’s socialization of her daughter: the mother brutally crippled and mutilated her daughter for the sake of a secure marriage.

In any patriarchal society, women were apparent servants to the family. O-lan lost her self-ego in taking care of the family. Before the last moment to give birth to the first child, she did not forget to prepare food for the men and this supervised Wang Lung: “she had stopped in the labor to prepare them food! He said to himself that she was a woman such as is not commonly found” (p.34). When she was going to give birth to the second child in the harvest time, Wang Lung was not pleased because she would not be able to work. O-lan answered stoutly: “this time it is nothing. It is only the first that is hard” (p.53). After giving birth to the child in the morning, she went to do the famer work right away.

In order to serve the family, O-lan even did some evil things which also reflected her sexism on women. To reduce the heavy burdens for the family, O-lan even killed her new born girl in the starvation time before they set off to the southern city. She killed her child with her own hands: “upon the neck he (Wang Lung) saw two dark, bruised spots” (p.78). Later, in the southern city she planned to sell another girl so that Wang Lung had money to return home:

“There is nothing to sell except the girl,” she answered slowly.... “If it were only I, she would be killed before she was sold... the slave of slaves was I! But a dead girl

brings nothing. I would sell this girl for you—to take you back to the land.” (pp.110-111)

It was complicated for O-lan to sell the girl. She had been sold by her parents to live a terrible life in the lowest society, but in order to show her loyalty to Wang Lung, she was willing to sell her own daughter.

For the family, O-lan even sacrificed her life but did not forget her duty. She preferred saving money than saving her life. She would not pay the doctor five hundred pieces of silver: “no, and my life is not worth so much. A good piece of land can be bought for so much” (p.239). O-lan did her duty to continue blood-line before her death. She arranged her son’s marriage:

Now I want my son to come home, because I must die, and I want him to wed this maid first, so that I may die easily, knowing your grandson is stirred into life and a great grandson for the old one. (p.246)

The texts above showed that O-lan did the duty not only for the family but also for the old one. It can be said that O-lan was trying to be ‘Angel in the House’. She followed husband’s requirement and the duty the society imposed on women to serve the family. Although she was hard-working, saving and did anything she could to save the family, at the same time, she was cool and cruel.

It can be concluded that Buck projected that Chinese women liberated themselves through the lens of O-lan’s life. Buck expressed her complex emotions with O-lan and other thousands of traditional women. Buck portrayed O-lan as one of Chinese traditional women who never thought about herself but their husbands and the family. Their ability, virtues and sacrifice should make them deserve respect and a better life, but in the male-dominant society, they were made inferior and submissive. What was worse, they also took men’s privilege, and women’s characteristics, social status and duty which were imposed by the society as granted. This made them totally become slaves in the family and community. Buck sympathized with them but most obviously she felt pity that they were unconscious with their situation and their own self.

## CHAPTER 5

### SONS

#### 5.1 Findings

The *Sons* was published in 1932. The story was mainly set in the background of the warlord period (1916—1928). Being influenced by the development of feminism, women had more rights to education and inheritance. The main female character in this novel did not have a name; Buck called her ‘the lady’. The lady represented the upper-class educated women whose experience was influential on women’s liberation. Buck portrayed women’s oppression, resistance, and liberation through this lady as she was independent from men and used her entire life to fight for women’s liberation.

As the government of the Republic of China which was established in 1912 lacked strong army, the country was less order in military. The twelve years from 1916 until the establishment of the Nationalist Government in 1928 were usually referred to as China’s warlord period. The twelve-year warlord had dramatic damage in the capitalist industry economy and the peasant economy. Besides the destruction of war, higher taxes were levied from peasants and business men for the warlord adventures (Gittings. 1973 : 99). The warlord, landlord, and merchant had collusion for their personal interest. This warlord was illustrated in *Sons*.

The story began with Wang Lung’s death and his three sons divided the large inheritance. The third son, Wang the Tiger who worked in the army used the inheritance to develop his own army to be a warlord. The lady, a doctor’s daughter married him. As Wang the Tiger held the distorted views on women and he only cared for his son, Wang Yuan who was born by another wife, the lady brought her daughter, Ai-lan, to live in another city. The lady sent Ai-lan to the school and raised many adopted female children including Mei-ling, but she failed in cultivating Ai-lan to be a great female because Ai-lan became a social butterfly. At last, Ai-lan’s son and Mei-ling gave her warmth in her old age. As the lady appeared in *Sons* and *A House Divided*, data in this chapter were collected from these two novels.

### 5.1.1 Theme 1: Women's Social Status

In this novel, women's social status was less inferior to men as they had more opportunity in education, more freedom not to bind their feet and more rights to own property, but women were still oppressed by sexism, arranged marriage and pressure derived from the new rights and opportunities.

Wang the Tiger perceived women with sexism and considered women evil creatures. But in order to have sons to transmit his warlord position, he put women on the unfair status in the marriage only to use women to bear him sons. This could be found below:

“Cannot any woman have sons, and do I not desire a son more than any mere woman? I will have a son. I will take a woman or two or three until I have a son. I have been a fool that I do always cling so to one woman—first to a woman I never even knew beyond a few scattered words such as a man may speak to a slave in his father's house and I went sore for that woman nearly ten years, and then there was the one I had to kill.... I shall be as other men are and I will see if I cannot make myself free as other men do and take a woman and leave her again when I please.” (p.286)

The texts above included Wang the Tiger's depressing experience, painful emotion, and cool decision. Wang the Tiger was an outwardly strong but inwardly weak man. He went sore for a woman nearly ten years and then killed another woman he loved once he realized that she betrayed him. The failed love experiences had destroyed Wang the Tiger's belief on love and he escaped from women and perceived them distortedly. Women were materialized by Wang the Tiger. In his views, he could have two or even more wives and their function was to bear him sons. He decided to revenge women in the way of treating them as inferior as other men did.

In order to have sons, Wang the Tiger asked his two elder brothers to choose wives for him. The two brothers chose each wife for him:

Thus Wang the Tiger brought his bride to his own regions, and in a month or two and a little more the second woman came under her father's care, and her he received also, since one or two were the same to him.  
(p.302)

The texts showed that Wang the Tiger had two women as wives. Men could have more than one wife as long as they had money or power. In this case, women were materialized by men. The reason why men could view women as commodities was because not only money but also the culture allowed men to do so.

The lady was one of the wives. As she had unbound feet, she was not accepted by the community and her marriage was delayed. The lady at last was wedded in an arranged marriage. The arranged marriage was a traditional way that parents chose the family whose property and honor met with theirs to wed their sons or daughters. The sons and daughters did not have choice to choose their life partner. As a thousand-year traditional custom, the arranged marriage was powerful to influence strongly people's actions. Even educated women could not escape from the influence of the arranged marriage at that time. The lady and Wang the Tiger's marriage seemed to be a good marriage. A daughter of the doctor married a warlord, the son of a landlord. But one expected to be loved and have a happy marriage while the other one expected only sons. The lady undoubtedly would be a victim of the arranged marriage.

The lady's marriage could not be happy. She had to bear Wang the Tiger's cool attitude: "he never looked at me.... I do not know why he hates women so" (*A House Divided*, p.63). Then she gave birth to a girl and another wife gave birth to a boy. As Wang the Tiger had had his son, he was free himself from women:

No longer did he use those two women to free his own heart and flesh. His heart was freed at the first sight of his son.... So he went regularly to his two wives and not more to one than the other.... It troubled him no more that he did not love a woman, now that he had his son."  
(pp.336-337)

As the texts above showed, at first, the lady and the other wife were used to free Wang the Tiger's heart and flesh and later they were displaced by the son.

The lady was not loved and she felt lonely. With education that her father had taught her, she left Wang the Tiger's court with the excuse to educate her daughter in a great city. There the lady also raised a number of unwanted female children. Mill (1869 as cited in Pan, 2004) pointed out that women's social status was lower than men's as men lived in both public and private areas meanwhile women's life was limited in the privacy area. However, the lady was different from the traditional women who were not allowed to socialize in public. The lady could do so because she was independent as an educated woman.

The lady had two incomes. One was money from Wang the Tiger, the other one was her father's inheritance. She told Wang Yuan that:

I am glad I have used my own silver for Mei-ling. Yes, I have a sort of pride to do that, and my father left me enough, since he had no son, before he died, and he put his moneys in a good sound foreign bank where they have lain safely all these years. He loved me very well, and sold many of his inherited lands even, and turned them into silver for me. (*A House Divided*, p.295)

She used the inheritance to bring up the adopted girl, Mei-ling, to be independent, free and with integrity. It can be said that the lady's educated father had great influences on her. Her father treated her without sexism so that the lady could treat herself properly and confidently to leave Wang the Tiger. In addition, her father's inheritance helped her be anti-independent economically to fulfil her meaningful life.

It can be concluded that Buck portrayed Chinese women through the lens of the lady's marriage and womanhood and it reflected the mainstream values preached in the society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Poor women remained the mass in the society while educated women who did not bind their feet were rare with difficulty to be accepted by the traditional society. The power of tradition also forced the educated women to get married through the arranged marriage and they were seen as materialized and functionalized women. However, the



inheritance rights socially gave them choices to start a new life if their marriage failed.

### 5.1.2 Theme 2: Women's Feminist Consciousness

As an educated woman, the lady understood hers and other women's social status well and she struggled for the women's equality with men in the terms of education, marriage and other opportunities.

Educated women were not as submissive as the traditional women. Buck portrayed the lady as a good looking, wise and confident woman: "she had a wise good face and a manner which made her seem composed and able to do what she liked" (p.358). As a wife, this lady was not submissive to her husband as the traditional woman did: from the verbal performance, the lady called Wang the Tiger 'my husband' instead of 'my lord' as another wife would; from the actions, "when he looked at her, she did not fear him and she looked back at him without giggling or drawing her mouth down as the other wife might have done" (p.358). It can be said that the lady performed herself to be as equal as her husband.

As a mother, she also treated her daughter and son equally. The lady did not have any bias in gender and she loved her daughter. In her views, the girl was never inferior to the son, so she persuaded Wang the Tiger to treat his daughter fairly:

"No, my husband, at least look at her, for she is no usual child. She walked three months before the boy did and talks now as though she were four instead of two and under, I have come to ask a favor to me that you will give her learning also and share your goods with her as you do with your son." (p.357)

The lady held the view that there was no any weakness that caused the girl to be abused and she should share her father's goods and love as the son did. In addition, the lady asked for more rights for her daughter: "I shall not bind her feet, and let us send her to a school and make such a woman out of her as there are here and there these days" (p.358). This was the lady's socialization of children.

However, although the lady expected to be treated equally, Wang the Tiger still kept his cool attitude to the lady and her daughter. The lady suffered from

the failed marriage and she decided to walk out of the family. Many years later, she recalled this experience:

“But I used to know how he longed for a son, and all the months he was away I used to tell myself that if I bore his son—I am not foolish, Yuan, as most women are—my father taught me all his learning. I always thought that if your father would only look at what I really am, see what my heart is, he might have taken comfort in me for the little wisdom I have had. By now, to him I was ever no more than a woman who might bear a son for him—and I bore no son, only Ai-lan.... At last in my own loneliness, Yuan, I told myself I would leave his courts—not openly, but with the excuse of schooling for my daughter, and I was sure that I would let Ai-lan have everything a son would have, and do my best against this bondage of a woman’s birth.” (*A House Divided*, pp.63-64)

As the texts above showed, at first, the lady tried to please Wang the Tiger by bearing son and showing him her wisdom she had, but she failed. She felt lonely and frustrated. She did not feel belongs and realized that Wang the Tiger would never fulfill her need for her self-fulfillment, so at last, she decided to set free herself from Wang the Tiger’s indifference.

The lady also realized that Wang the Tiger’s prejudice for women led to the unhappy marriage and family, so she let her daughter have everything a son would have. It was her way to resist Wang the Tiger and the whole patriarchal system. Compared with O-lan, the lady neither lived with husband hopelessly, nor went back to her mother’s house as O-lan wished, but she built her own house. She walked out of the family in order to search her identity.

After leaving, the lady took good care of her daughter, Ai-lan. She sent her to the sort of school. The lady did as she said “against this bondage of a woman’s birth” not only through her daughter, but also through other unwanted female children. She tried to make life meaningful through her social work career:

Her real pleasure was in a certain good work she did for children, those female children, newly born, who are cast away unwanted by the poor. There she when she found them she gathered into a home she kept and she hired two women to be mothers to them, and she herself went there daily, too, and taught them and watched to see those who were ill or wasted, and she had nearly twenty of these little foundlings. (*A House Divided*, pp.92-93)

As the texts showed, the lady was intended to raise the poor female children to be working and independent women. She took good care of them and taught them herself. Although her marriage had failed, she hoped that the next generation would have an equal marriage as she said: “they are to be the wives of working men” (*A House Divided*, p.93).

When Wang Yuan met her again after nearly twenty years, she had become “a quiet grove-faced lady.... Her face was kind, a full pale face, not wrinkled much, but never beautiful, since the mouth was too large and the nose large and flat between the eyes. Still the eyes were kind and comprehending” (*A House Divided*, p.42). The lady’s pale face seemed to indicate that she did not have a good life.

The lady regretted her marriage. Many years later, she expressed her helplessness about her own marriage to Wang Yuan when Ai-lan was going to marry a married man:

And it was true she was an old-fashioned woman, Yuan, one his parent had chosen for him and wed to him when he was sixteen.... I seem to feel in me the sorrows of them both. I was wed like that, too, and not loved, and so I felt myself her. (*A House Divided*, p.241)

The lady realized the limitation of the arranged marriage. The lady sympathized with the old-fashioned woman as they had a similar fate. They were wedded to the men who did not love them. They were both victims of the arranged marriage.

The arranged marriage was a social institution and when it did not suit the society, it was changed. As a victim of the arranged marriage, the lady opposed the traditional arranged marriage but supported the modern freedom of marriage. She performed as a good mother to Wang Yuan. When Wang Yuan was forced to wed by Wang the Tiger, he decided not to follow his father's will. She comforted Wang Yuan that:

“If so be you can say this, Yuan, I will stand by you. I will not put strength into you, to force your decision, for it is your own life and he is your father. If you feel your old duty to him stronger than the duty to yourself, then return to him. I will not blame you. But if you will not go back, then stay on, and I will help you somehow at every step. I am not afraid.” (*A House Divided*, p.110)

The lady believed that Wang Yuan should have freedom in his marriage. Wang Yuan was free to decide to perform the duty to the personality or to the filial piety. Compared to Wang the Tiger's autocracy, conservatism, the lady was democrat and tolerant. She respected and supported Wang Yuan's freedom in the marriage.

It can be said that the lady was good mother, but she had some troubles in educating her daughter. The lady felt pity with Ai-lan. Ai-lan did not become a great woman as she expected. She told Wang Yuan her disappointment about Ai-lan:

“I used to think she must one day be great, perhaps, a great painter or poet, or best of all a doctor as my father as, for there are women doctors nowadays, or at least some leaders in this new day for women in our land.... But I have come to understand now that she will never be very great.... My dreams are gone.” (*A House Divided*, pp.64-65)

The lady's dream was to make her daughter to be a great woman who was different from traditional women. She wanted women to work and have freedom, but at last she painfully came to understand the differences between reality and dream and had to accept that her plan for Ai-lan had failed.

The lady felt ashamed that Ai-lan got pregnant before getting married. She abused herself that: “it is a sorry end to all my care for Ai-lan, to train and school my daughter in such freedom as this!” (p.259) Her words released her complex emotions to the modern freedom.

The lady thought that Ai-lan’s failure also was due to Ai-lan’s physical beauty. On Ai-lan’s wedding day, Wang Yuan praised Ai-lan is ‘the loveliest woman’ (*A House Divided*, p.258), however, the lady did not think so. She spoke with strange bitterness:

“Yeah, and I wish it had not been so. It has been the curse of my own life and of my poor child’s that she has been so beautiful. She has needed to do nothing. She has not needed to use her mind or hands or anything—only to let people look at her, and praise flowed in upon her and desire and all that others work to gain. Such beauty only a very great spirit can withstand, and Ai-lan is not great enough to bear it!” (*A House Divided*, p.258)

In the lady’s views, the external beauty needed the support of the inner beauty. Ai-lan focused on external appearance which devastated growth and development of the individual female character and she became empty in spirit. Later the lady said: “against this beauty have I fought my whole life, but I have lost” (p.258). It can be said that the lady’s kindness to her daughter, the unwanted female children and the old-fashion woman released her feminist sisterhood.

At last, due to the failed marriage and failed education in daughter, the lady did not find her identity or inner freedom. It can be reflected through how Wang Yuan perceived her. When Wang Yuan learned in America, his old teacher invited him to his home. The old teacher’s wife reminded him of his lady mother in China. He found that there was a difference in the two:

For about this lady there was an air of contentment and simple satisfaction of the soul which his lady mother had not. It was as if this one had her heart’s desire in her lifetime, but the other had not. By two roads the two

had come to a good tranquil age, but the one had come by a happy road and with companionship, while the other had come by a darker way and she walked alone.

(*A House Divided*, p.187)

As the texts illustrated, both two women had different spiritual outlooks due to their different experiences. The American woman had a happy marriage because her husband respected and loved her. However, the lady's life was full of disappointment, frustration and depression from the failed marriage and her social butterfly daughter. The lady's insistence on maintaining the standard of great women, rebellion to her physical beauty made her lonely.

It can be concluded that Buck portrayed how Chinese women liberated themselves through the lens of the lady. Although poor women remained unworthy in the society, educated women could manage to liberate themselves from sexism exploitation on women. The educated women were aware of their own gender inequality and they were against it through their insistence of the arranged marriage, and supporting an independent marriage, raising unwanted baby girls and teaching them to be working women. Nevertheless, they were unable to free themselves mentally from their failed marriage.

## CHAPTER 6

### A HOUSE DIVIDED

#### 6.1 Findings

*A House Divided* was published in 1935. The story was mainly set after the warlord period in the coastal city which was the most open and modern place in China. Dominance by its Westernization was one of the main characteristics of this city. The main characters faced the conflicts derived from feudalism, colonialism and imperialism in this open city. At the same time, traditional culture bondage to women was to be destroyed gradually due to the influence of the Western modern culture. Buck focused on women's inner voice and their self-discovery through the main female character, Mei-ling, who represented the educated and working women from the upper class. Mei-ling who had the Eastern and Western virtues found her self-ego. She and Wang Yuan's happy ending indicated Buck's best wish for women and men to be equal and harmonious.

The influence of the New Culture Movement was portrayed continually in *A House Divided*. This cultural movement bred a political movement called May fourth Movement. The May fourth Movement in 1919 provided the ideological and the masses conditions for Chinese communists. The Communist Party of China was then built in 1921. In 1927, Mao Zedong's attempted 'the Autumn Harvest Uprising' was quickly suppressed and until 1930 the communist organizers were recruited all over the country (Bai, 2005 : 474-488). *A House Divided* was set in this period.

The novel began with Wang Yuan's return home from the school of war. He resisted against the marriage managed by Wang the Tiger by escaping to live with the lady. There he saw the Westernized modern city and met the foundling girl Mei-ling. Later, Wang Yuan went to study abroad. After six years, he graduated with an agricultural doctored degree. When he came back to China, Mei-ling had become an independent modern woman. He fell in love with her.

#### 6.1.1 Theme 1: Women's Social Status

With the influence of the Western culture and modernization of the country, women were relatively equal to men. The gender equality in education and marriage helped women have more choices to attend the social work.

The countless wars between warlords who fought for territory and power had worsened the country. In order to save the country, the new generations of the warlords who were educated in school became revolutionists against the warlords. They even resisted the warlords in a radical way: “both men and women even killed their parents to show their loyalty” (p.36), so women had become an indispensable part of the revolutionists to confront the warlords. Their activities had not been limited at home, but politics as well.

Wang Yuan was trained to oppose the warlords by his tutor at home and in the army school. As he did not think he could kill his father, he left the school of war and went back home. When his father forced him to wed, he escaped from his father to live with the lady in the coastal city which was open to the West as a trade port in the early time. In this city, people’s behaviors had changed to become more Westernized as the result of colonization. In the new era, the arranged marriage was totally displaced by the way of the Western marriage. Wang Yuan realized that people’s attitudes on the relationship and marriage had changed:

Hands touched, and it was not counted evil as it used to be, and a youth himself might ask a maid to be betrothed to him, and her father did not sue his father at a court of law as once he might and still would in an inland city where the evil ways of foreigners were unknown. And when the two were openly betrothed, the came and went as freely as though they were savages, and if sometimes, as it must happen, blood ran too hot and high and flesh met flesh too soon, then the two were not killed for honor’s sake, as would have happened in their parents’ youth. No, only the marriage day was hastened forward, and so the child was born in wedlock.... But still this was the new day and none could turn it back. (pp.95-96)

The texts above showed that the era had seen the change of the custom from being conservative to modernized. With the collapsed old tradition, people were



more open-minded and tolerant to the gender relationship and women would decide their marriage without their parents' permission.

The freedom of marriage had been accepted by young people in the coastal city. However, for Wang Yuan, as he was raised in the traditional and conservative inland city, he had a conflict between the public filial piety and personal freedom, even though he had escaped from Wang the Tiger. At last, Wang Yuan struggled for his freedom of marriage:

He was glad, and among all these modern men and women walking to and fro upon the streets he felt yet stronger and surer. It was true that in these times what his father had required of him was an absurdity. These people on these streets, if he told them, would only laugh at such old dead ways, and cry him for a fool to feel any fear.... This was his world—this new world—this world of men and women free and free to live in each his own way. (p.112)

As the texts above showed, both modern men and women were free from these patriarchal values. They did not need to follow their fathers' requirement to get married. Especially women needed not be compelled to marriage as before. Wang Yuan got courage from this.

With the new living environment, Wang Yuan went on his research for life. He found that besides attitudes, education was also influenced by the Western education system which required the educational equality between men and women. When he went to learn in the school, he saw some women in the school:

Now Yuan stared indeed. For there were maidens among the students in his school, this being the custom in this new and forward coastal city, that in many school for men the law allowed young women to come also, and though there were not many maids yet who dared to be learned, or whose fathers let them be, yet there was a score or two in this one school. (p.79)

As the texts above showed, women had education right to enter the public school and this became a new custom. Because it was new, only a small number of women dared or were allowed to come to learn in the school.

When the country was open, Chinese young generations including women also had choices to go out of the country and study abroad. The lady provided readers this situation:

Nowadays the young men and women are all zealous to go abroad, and I say it is a good thing for them to go. Yes, though your uncle cries out it is a waste and that they all come back too full of their own skill and abilities so that there is no living with them. I say still it is well for them to go and learn what they can and come back and give it to their own country. (p.49)

The texts above portrayed the radical change in society: women could go abroad and then they also became members to develop the country as men did. Women's activities were not limited in the house. This change showed that women were valued and supported by their family and the society. However, in the conventional ideas, women mostly were seen as servants in the family meanwhile men were considered as the main power to manage the country.

Mei-ling was one of these educated women and the lady put great hopes on her:

I have taught her all he taught me, and now she goes to a foreign school of medicine. She has two more years to learn, and then she must work in their hospital for more years. I say to her do not forget that for internal humors it is we who know best our own frames. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that for cutting and sewing up again the foreign physicians are best. Mei-ling will know both. (p.240)

In the lady's views, learning the professional skill would make Mei-ling be independent working woman. It is true as Mill (1869 as cited in Pan, 2004) argued that women were refused to enter to the public areas including the professional

and politics. Ninety percent of men had the professional work; however, ninety percent of women had the normal work. As Mei-ling had professional work, she was independent economically and entered the public areas as a productive woman. Besides, it seemed a voice from Buck that Chinese should not throw their own culture when they learned Western technology and knowledge as a part of moderation. As Mei-ling had not married, her experience in reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children were not found in the novel.

It can be concluded that Buck portrayed Chinese women through the lens of Mei-ling's living environment and it reflected the modern society in the Chinese coastal city during the 1920s and the 1930s. Poor women continued to be exploited while educated women appeared to be influential and powerful in the society. In general, women had the equal education and freedom of marriage rights with men and they were valued and respected by the community. Through the education, women had ability to work and live independently. They could decide on what they wanted to be and who they wanted to marry.

### **6.1.2 Theme 2: Women's Feminist Consciousness**

In the era of Mei-ling, many women in the modern city had equal rights in education and marriage with men. For them, the external oppression of women had been weakened. Therefore, Buck portrayed Mei-ling to reflect women's inner freedom through Mei-ling's research in her self-identity and personality

Mei-ling would be a great woman as the lady expected. The lady found that Mei-ling was a special girl in their first meeting and Mei-ling's growth: "(she) has some spirit in her.... She is so quick at letters, so true to every teaching, so to be depended on" (pp.93-94). When Mei-ling was a maid, she had healthy body and spirit as her plain appearance showed:

Very fresh and clean to see in her robe of a dark blue sild she wore to school, and her short straight black hair brushed behind her ears and no jewels in her ears or on her hands.... Her look was quiet, the eyes cool and steady, and her mouth curved and not very red in hue as Ai-lan's always was, and her cheeks pale and smooth.... Although Mei-ling was never ruddy, she had always a

clear gold skin which was full of health; it was so fine and smooth. (p.297)

As the texts showed, Ai-lan had the external beauty: Jewels in the ears or hands, red mouth, and ruddy cloth. However, Mei-ling was plain, but she still impressed readers with her inner beauty.

This maid also impressed readers with her positive attitude on the past and the future. Although she was an adopted girl, she survived her unfortunate babyhood with dignity: “there was no shame at all in the girl’s eyes, such shame as she might have had to say she was as founding, of what parents she did not know” (p.254). She did not feel ashamed with being abandoned by parents. Nobody could make Mei-ling inferior as Roosevelt (n.d. as cited in Eragula. 2015) said, “no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” She appreciated the lady who brought her up and sent her to school. Therefore, Mei-ling wanted to be a doctor as the lady expected. She talked to Wang Yuan about her ideal:

“My foster-mother made me think of it at first,” she said and threw her quiet beaming look upon the lady. “and now I like it very well. Only it has meant a long time to study, and a great cost, and this my foster-mother has done for me, and I shall always care for her in return; where I am she shall be, too. I want a hospital of my own one day in some city, a place for children and for women, and I want a garden in the center, a round it buildings full of beds and places for the sick—not too large, not more than I could do, but all very clean and pretty.” (p.261)

It was no doubt that Mei-ling was an inspired woman. She had traditional women’s virtues. She was filial and she would care the lady in return. In addition, she had modern women’s independence. She had her target to be a doctor and build a hospital to service people.

Indeed, Mei-ling had a good heart and the basic virtue what a doctor required. She was friendly to people even they were poor. She did not have any social

class prejudice. This made Wang Yuan not ashamed to introduce his poor mother to Mei-ling:

But he could say to Mei-ling, "This is my mother," and she, knowing that thousand men like him had sprung from such mother, should not think it strange, for nothing was so.... Even to Ai-lan he might feel shamed, but not to Mei-ling. He could uncover all his heart to her and never be ashamed. (pp.290-291)

Mei-ling opposed the inequality not only in social classes but also in gender. When a newborn abandoned girl died, Mei-ling was sad and angry: "to this the maid sat listening, and she could not eat. Her narrow hands were clenched upon the table and she cried angrily, 'I know what it is. It need not be!'" (pp.293-294) Mei-ling became angry because she respected the life no matter it was a boy or a girl.

Mei-ling supported the freedom of marriage as she said: "if I were not too old I would myself do something in that hospital. It is a better day than mine was. It is a very good day when women are not forced to wed!" (p.262) Mei-ling was glad because the freedom of marriage was advantageous for working women like her. Women could set free from the family and save energy to go on their career. They were free to decide when and who they would marry.

Mei-ling was mature. In most people's semi-traditional and semi-modern consciousness, it is shameful to get pregnant without marriage. When Ai-lan got pregnant before marriage, Wang Yuan was confused and ashamed. Although Mei-ling was the youngest one among three of them, she calmly comforted and guided the lady how to do. The lady told Wang Yuan:

"You need not mind, for Mei-ling knows everything. I could not have borne my life if I had not had her. She it was who helped me to plan and know what I must do. I had no one, Yuan. And she stayed a sister to my poor pretty foolish child, and that one leaned upon her, too. She even would not let me send for you, Yuan.... But Mei-ling would not let me spoil your years abroad." (p.259)

Mei-ling was considerate and thoughtful to deal with Ai-lan's affair. She had become the person who was worth trusting and relying on.

Mei-ling was brave enough to criticize both the 'modern women' and the 'modern men'. When Ai-lan gave birth to a son, she did not breast to feed him. Mei-ling criticized Ai-lan for not doing her duty as a mother: "you are not fit to have this good sweet son! Here he is born strong and lusty and starving, and your two breasts running full and you will not feed him! Shame, shame, Ai-lan." (p.344) When Wang Yuan happened to get drunk, Mei-ling was very angry with him:

"You are like all the others, Yuan—like all the other foolish idle Wangs! I have made myself a fool. I thought, 'Yuan is different—he is not a half-foreign fop, drinking and dancing all his good years away!' but you are—you are! Look at you! Look at your silly foreign clothes—you reek of wine—you are drunk, too!" (pp.350-351)

Mei-ling looked down on the worship men who spent their time in meaningless things with the empty spirit. Mei-ling was an assertive girl. What she was looking for as a husband was a man who had inner virtues.

In Wang Yuan's eyes, Mei-ling "is between, too, not wholly new, and yet different from the old" (p.342). They were similar. Wang Yuan did not have a happy life as he was confused with the obedience and resistance to the tradition, love and hatred toward his father, and rejection and acceptance to the revolution. Mei-ling who had great spirit gave him courage to face everything: "she only could set him free from himself—only Mei-ling could set him free and tell him what he ought to do. She, who ordered everything she toughed, could tell him what to do!" (p.286) The way men perceived women reflected the cultural sources of women's oppression. Wang Yuan's respecting Mei-ling indicated that the culture perception on women had changed.

Mei-ling owned Wang Yuan's identity and love as Buck illustrated at the end of the novel:

He puts his lips on hers.... She hung her head down and looked at the ground, and now she was as shy as any

old-fashioned maid could ever be.... She held herself bravely and she straightened her shoulders square and sure, and she lifted up her head and looked back to him steadfastly, smiling, waiting and Yuan saw her so.... “We two,” he said— “we two—we need not be afraid of anything.” (pp.374-375)

Buck’s desire for men and women to be equal and harmonious eventually became true because Wang Yuan, a teacher in the school, and Mei-ling, a medicine student, depended on themselves. Both were new generations without much money, land or other properties, but they had the spirit to have a content life together.

It can be concluded that Buck projected that Chinese women liberated themselves through the lens of Mei-ling. Poor women continued to be abused and educated women continued to be influential and powerful in the society. It appeared that educated women were able to liberate themselves. Subjectively, women had independent spirit and kind heart. They were educated and became independent. Objectively, men treated women with respect, for they deserved love from men.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISSICUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Discussion

This study has two aims: identify barriers to gender inequality issues as reflected in *The House of Earth Trilogy* and find solutions appropriate to empower women. Data were mainly collected from six main characters' action, speech and consciousness in Pearl S. Buck's *The House of Earth Trilogy* which included *The Good Earth* (1931), *Sons* (1932), and *A House Divided* (1935). They were then analyzed from the socialist feminism perspective. From the socialist feminism point, the development levels of a society depended on the ways in which the economy was developed and the way in which the society was constructed. Similarly, women's survival and development also depended on how the economy they could manage in the society and how their lives were constructed with social institutions and their personal consciousness. As the findings showed, 1) Chinese women's low social status was mainly due to unequal social class and the patriarchy; 2) right education and professional work as production tools that enabled women to consciously seek freedom and the equality with men.

Literature, on the one hand, was the best way to educate women by sharing how they perceived the world, their position in the society and their own self. On the other hand, literature was able to educate people and influence them with affections of the emotions like pleasure, sorrow and sympathy. Through reading feminist literature works, readers were encouraged to think about their own situations rather than accepting views only and this would make them become fulfilled human beings. There are some messages from Buck on women's social status and the solutions to empower women that were shown in each novel. That is, she wrote about the oppression of Chinese women through the lens of O-lan and solutions to the oppression through the lenses of the lady and Mei-ling in the Trilogy.

In *The Good Earth*, Buck indicated that women's situation was bad and women's acceptance of the patriarchy made the situation worse. O-lan represented the peasant women who were socially placed at the bottom of the pyramid. Undoubtedly, she was powerful by nature because she was diligent and smartly made some



important decisions to fight against the harsh life especially when Wang Lung had did not know what to do. However, O-lan was made submissive in the society. She was posited in an inferior position in the family and community due to the patriarchal cognitions including foot-binding, sexism on women, husband's privilege on marriage and economy. O-lan's life was terribly harsh and oppressed, but what made it worse was that she accepted those patriarchal cognitions totally by following men's requirements to be a 'good' daughter-in-law, wife and mother. She made herself 'Angle in the House' and at last she lost her own self. Roosevelt (n.d. as cited in Eragula. 2015) said "no one can make you feel inferior without your consent", so naturally, it was O-lan that made herself inferior. That was why Buck felt lamentable with O-lan. Readers would sympathize with O-lan's oppressed situation, but at the same time, they would also feel angry with her submissiveness to the patriarchy.

In *Sons*, Buck revealed a message that changing family patterns could empower women. Family was considered as a central place for women's oppression because they played their roles of reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children in the family, so the family must be changed in order to liberate women. In the novel, firstly, the lady's father changed the family. He built a new family for the lady by educating the lady himself and giving her all of his inheritance. Secondly, the lady also built a new family for herself and other female children. She walked out of the family by leaving her sexism husband and devoted to the career contributed to women's equality with men. Woolf (1942) said "killing the 'Angel in the House' was part of the occupation of a woman writer". In fact, not only for woman writers but also for every woman who struggled with freedom needed to reject women's submissiveness in the family, so the lady killed the 'Angel in the House'. Consequently, the era had seen the change of the pattern of family shifted from the arranged marriage to the independent marriage, from men's privilege of having multiple wives to monogamy.

In *A House Divided*, Buck released a message that women themselves had to change. Women had to work by themselves to find their own self. Mei-ling was intended to build a hospital for children and women. She became a productive worker and this made her mature, independent and professional. When women were competent in surviving, they would not need to ask for help from men. Having a

career confirmed women's confidence. When women were confident in themselves, they would not expect to be dependent on men. Women became integrated and content in the family and community and they were worth for men's respect. Simone de Beauvoir (n.d. as cited in Barkman & Papadopoulos. 2014) identified herself that, "I am too intelligent, too demanding, and too resourceful for anyone to be able to take charge of me entirely. No one knows me or loves me completely. I have only myself". This showed how a fulfilled woman should be.

It can be said that Buck illustrated Chinese women's oppression and liberation through creating the great literature which had been empowering women and enlightening the society. Feminist literature was a powerful weapon to fight against the stereotypes on women and to enlighten women who have mindset like O-lan.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

This study analyzed Pearl S. Buck's *The House of Earth Trilogy* from a socialist feminism perspective to identify barriers reflected in the Trilogy and find out solutions appropriate to empower women. Six main characters' action, speech and consciousness were selected as data. The data were then categorized into two themes: women's social status and women's feminism consciousness and analyzed based on conceptual framework of Stanly's and Wise's (1993) three themes on feminism, Mitchell's (1966) four structures on women's oppressed situation and Srisermbhok's (2003) dichotomy between genders.

The outcomes aligned with the objectives and suggested that Buck considered gender inequality as the interaction of the unequal social class and the patriarchy. Socially, women in the social bottom who did not have or had less power in production were oppressed by the upper-class. Culturally, women were treated unequally with men. Chinese women were inferior to men and they had less freedom and power because culturally speaking they were obliged to bind their feet, marry through arrangement and become sex objects and reproduction tools.

Gender inequality was a historical, social and cultural problem and it could be resolved broadly in two ways. In objective dimension, the development of production would help to resolve the problem. For the whole society, it would take a long time. For the individual, attending production helped to improve personal social status. In

subjective dimension, right education was a proactive and basic way that human beings consciously constructed social institutions and their consciousness humanly. Based on these two ways, Buck also expressed her solutions to empower women by means of right education, inheritance, independent marriage, professions and men's respect through the main female characters' changes of their family patterns and of themselves so that they could work, earn incomes and live an independent life.

As both changing the family patterns and earning incomes derived from the power of right education, Buck indicated that right education could empower women. In addition, Buck never ignored the influence of right education on men and their effects on reducing gender gap. In the male-dominant society, men were majority in decision making. It was the interaction between right education and great progress of civilization that men released or shared their freedom and power with women. When men changed their roles from women's oppressors to be women's companions, the established pattern of dichotomy between genders could be changed eventually.

### **7.3 Limitations and Recommendations**

There are two limitations. On the one hand, as the story was set over one century ago, women's social life in the Trilogy was different from today's women. Correspondingly, the gender inequality they faced was different. On the other hand, some theories used in conceptual framework for data analysis may limit this study because they are relatively outdated. These two limitations likely make the analysis less comprehensive and practical for the present society. As a result, it is recommended to explore Chinese women's situations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in feminist literature with contemporary socialist feminist theories.

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