

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Diversity in the global world society manifests in various forms, such as skin color, culture, language, and social background. There are black, white, yellow, brown, and many other variations, all of which show the richness of humans as social beings. This diversity is understood in terms of the concept of race, which divides people into groups based on their physical and cultural characteristics. Race, as socially constructed, posits that humanity can be divided and classified into discrete hierarchical groups based on physical and cultural traits (Wicks, et al., 2024; Golash-Boza, 2016). However, while this diversity should be a force that enriches our everyday lives, the reality is that it is often a source of discrimination and injustice. Differences are usually used to justify unequal treatment of specific individuals or groups. These injustices are mainly seen in the form of racism and racial stereotyping, where certain groups are seen as inferior or mistreated based on their race. Because of this, literature plays an important role in illustrating how discrimination can affect people's lives, while also providing a space to question and fight against this injustice. Literature often serves as a medium to elevate experiences and voices that have been marginalized. One of the most obvious and enduring forms of discrimination is racism, which stems from racial stereotypes.

Racism and racial stereotyping are profound and persistent issues that continue to shape social structures and influence relationships between individuals in contemporary society. These issues are rooted in long-standing social constructions that define, categorize, and ultimately create unequal treatment of certain groups based on their race or ethnicity. According to Stewart and Kowaltzke, a stereotype is a negative image that is oversimplified and repeated so many times that it seems to have become a pattern (Duriana, 2021). Stereotypes serve as a means of "fixing" meaning and establishing rigid boundaries between the

"self" and the "other," thereby reinforcing cultural assumptions and legitimizing discrimination. In literary works, these dynamics are often explored to expose and critique the underlying structures of racial injustice that permeate society. One such literary work is *The Silence That Binds Us* by Joanna Ho, which vividly portrays the discrimination and stereotyping experienced by the Asian-American community. The novel illustrates how the 'model minority' stereotype, culture of silence, and racial expectations affect the lives of Asian-American families. By applying Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this study aims to critically examine how racial identities are constructed in the novel, how power operates through cultural narratives, and how the main character resists or navigates these representations. Hall's framework enables a deeper analysis of how meaning is produced and contested in cultural texts, highlighting the ways literature can challenge or reinforce social ideologies related to race.

In *The Silence That Binds Us*, Joanna Ho powerfully depicts the discrimination experienced by the Asian-American community, particularly focusing on the pressures imposed by the "model minority" stereotype and the social blame they often face during moments of crisis. This theme reflects a real and persistent phenomenon in society, where the social construction of race significantly shapes how individuals are perceived and treated. The novel presents these racialized experiences not merely as isolated events but as part of a broader system of meaning-making a process of representation through which dominant cultural narratives define and regulate racial identity. According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged through language, images, and symbols within a culture. It is through representation that stereotypes are created, circulated, and maintained, reducing individuals or communities to simplified and often negative characteristics that serve the interests of the dominant group. In elaborating on this idea, Hall (in Saragih & Prasetyo, 2023) not only discusses the reflective and intentional approaches to representation, but also emphasizes the constructionist perspective. From this view, meaning is not merely reflected or intended—it is actively constructed through language, which is

shaped by individuals or groups to serve particular purposes within cultural and social contexts. In this light, Ho's narrative does not just tell a story; it critiques and challenges the prevailing representations of Asian Americans by revealing how they are constructed through media, social expectations, and systemic bias. According to Sue (2010), racism is not only manifested in overtly discriminatory actions but also in microaggressions, subtle, often unconscious expressions of prejudice that perpetuate inequality. Ho's narrative captures these nuances with clarity and emotional depth, making her work a significant literary contribution to the understanding of racial stereotypes and the representational systems that support them.

The results of this study are expected to provide insight into how the novel not only depicts the impact of racial stereotypes but also conveys important messages about the need for greater awareness of injustice and the importance of embracing cultural diversity. Through its exploration of themes such as racial identity, silence, and social expectation, *The Silence That Binds Us* challenges readers to reflect critically on the consequences of racial labelling and systemic discrimination. Literature, in this sense, serves not only as a mirror of society but also as a space of resistance, where marginalized voices can challenge dominant representations. Therefore, this research focuses specifically on the representation of racial stereotypes and the resistance of the main character against those stereotypes. By analyzing the novel through the lens of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this study aims to reveal how meaning is constructed around Asian-American identity and how acts of resistance emerge through narrative strategies and character development.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Based on the background of the problem above, the problems in this study have been formulated as follows:

1. How are racial stereotypes constructed and represented toward the Asian-American community in the novel *The Silence That Binds Us*?

2. How does the main character respond to the stereotypes portrayed in the novel?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To analyze how racial stereotypes toward the Asian-American community are constructed and represented in the novel *The Silence That Binds Us*.
2. To explore how the main character responds to racial stereotypes portrayed in the novel.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

After reading this work, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by the Asian-American community, particularly in addressing racial stereotypes. This research reveals the various forms of racial stereotypes experienced by the protagonist in *The Silence That Binds Us*, as well as the ways she responds to and deals with them. In addition, readers will also understand the message that this novel conveys about the importance of awareness of racism and how racial stereotypes can impact individual lives, especially within the context of the Asian-American diaspora.

### **1.5 Methodology of the Study**

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to analyze the forms of racial stereotypes experienced by the main character in the novel *The Silence That Binds Us* by Joanna Ho. The qualitative method was chosen because this research aims to explore and understand the meaning, experience, and social phenomena that exist in the text in depth. Through a descriptive approach, this research will describe the various forms of racial stereotypes that appear in the narrative, dialogue, and character interactions and interpret the messages conveyed by the novel regarding racism and stereotypes. In addition to racial stereotypes, this

research will also describe the resistance made by the main character to fight the stereotypes constructed in the novel.

To address the two statements of the problem, the steps will include collecting data from the novel's text by identifying and citing phrases, sentences, or dialogue that show forms of racial stereotypes. The data will be analyzed to identify specific patterns or repetitions that lead to stereotypical representations of Asian-American characters in the novel.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This research focuses on analyzing the representation of racial stereotypes experienced by the Asian-American Diaspora and also the resistance given by the main character in Joanna Ho's *The Silence That Binds Us*. The approach used is Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Stuart Hall's theory of representation is used in this study to identify and analyze how racial stereotypes toward the Asian-American diaspora community are constructed and represented through the novel's narrative, dialogue, and character interactions. This study also examines selected dialogues by applying Hall's three approaches to representation (reflective, intentional, and constructionist) in order to understand how meaning is produced and how cultural identities are shaped through language and context. This analysis will explore how the main character, as part of the Asian-American diaspora, faces and responds to racism, as well as the message the writer conveys regarding racial stereotypes that occur in the novel.

This research is limited to analyzing the text within the novel and does not include interpretations or responses from other readers. This research only focuses on the representation of racial stereotypes and resistance of the main characters, without analyzing the perspectives or experiences of other supporting characters. The research will also not include an examination of the broader social and historical context of the Asian-American diaspora but only look at how these issues are represented in the novel. In addition, this research is limited to the interpretation of

the text in the novel and does not consider other interpretations that may arise from readers with different perspectives.

### **1.7 Status of the Study**

To support this research, the researcher received several previous studies that are relevant to the topic to be discussed, especially about racism and racial stereotypes towards Asian communities :

Sofyani, Rangkuti, and Lubis (2022) analyzed racism and racial stereotypes in *Eleanor and Park* using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Their study found implicit, explicit, and internalized racism, with stereotypes centered on Asian physical traits and fetishization of Asian women. They identified inequality, power imbalances, and the "Model Minority" myth as key factors reinforcing these prejudices. Meanwhile, Riadiska (2022) analyzed the film *Minari* using reception analysis based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory. The researcher interviewed three members of the Montase Community in Yogyakarta to explore how they interpreted the representation of the Asian race in America as portrayed in the film. The findings show that two participants were in the dominant position—they fully and positively accepted the film's message—while one participant was in the negotiated position—partially agreeing with the message but expressing doubts about certain aspects. *Minari* was seen as realistically portraying the experiences of Asian immigrants, particularly in terms of tradition, parenting styles, and the symbolic meaning of the minari plant, which represents resilience and adaptability.

Vanessa, Vania, Jan, and Toni (2024) analyzed cultural stereotypes in *Crazy Rich Asians* using Barthes' semiotic approach. Their study examined scenes, dialogues, and visuals, identifying stereotypes in fashion, life principles, social class, aesthetics, and cuisine. The research highlights how these stereotypes shape intercultural perceptions, contribute to communication conflicts, and assert Asian cultural dominance globally. Sunardi and Mustofa (2021) examined the portrayal of Chinese characters in *The Karate Kid* (2010) through Said's Orientalism theory.

Their study found that Hollywood reinforces oriental stereotypes through physical traits, behaviors, and the dominance of Western characters like Dre Parker. By analyzing storylines, characters, scenes, settings, and cinematography, they highlighted how Western media sustains an orientalist view that portrays Eastern culture as inferior.

Previous studies on this novel have not been found. However, research on racism and racial stereotypes in the Asian-American context has been conducted by several scholars. Sofyani, Rangkuti, and Lubis (2022) explored racism in *Eleanor and Park*, identifying implicit, explicit, and internalized racism, along with stereotypes of Asian physical traits and fetishization. Riadiska (2022) conducted a reception analysis of the film *Minari* using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, showing how Indonesian viewers interpret Asian representation in the film. Vanessa et al. (2024) examined cultural stereotypes in the *Crazy Rich Asians* film, revealing their impact on intercultural perceptions and conflicts. Sunardi and Mustofa (2021) investigated oriental stereotypes in *The Karate Kid* (2010), showing how Hollywood reinforces Western dominance over Eastern culture. These studies demonstrate how literature and film reflect and perpetuate racial stereotypes and power dynamics in the Asian-American experience.

### **1.8 Organization of the Study**

This research will be presented in several chapters, with the following notes:

Chapter I: Introduction. This chapter consists of the background of the study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Significance of the Study, Methodology of the Study, Scope and Limitation of the Study, Status of the Study, and Organization of the Study.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature. This chapter contains the theories or related research studies in the same field. Here is the theory used to analyze the data, namely Stuart Hall's theory of representation.

Chapter III: Findings and Discussions. In this chapter, the answers to the research questions are presented, including the research findings, the findings connected to the previously explained theory, and an explanation of the analyzed results.

Chapter IV: Conclusion and Suggestions. This chapter presents the conclusion and suggestions based on the findings from the previous chapter to answer the statement of the problem. It provides a summary of the research that has been conducted and offers several recommendations related to the study.

