

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.2 Background of the Study

The topic of immigration has recently received a lot of attention. According to National Geographic Society on *United States Immigration*, immigration is known as the process of moving to a new country or region with the intention of staying and living there. The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as anyone who is or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his or her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) the reasons for the movement; or (4) the length of stay. Dewi (2012b) argued that people choose to leave their home countries and relocate to other areas for a variety of reasons. To provide for their health, safety, education, and welfare, many people decide to relocate to a new area. Immigrating to a new country appears to be a viable option for those seeking a better life.

The most affected region is the United States of America, which is the most popular destination for immigrants. Raquel Batalova (2023) in an article titled *Chinese Immigrants in the United States* published by Migration Policy Institute (MPI) stated that by mid-2020, the United States is expected to have absorbed roughly 28 percent of the 8.6 million Chinese people who live outside of China, Hong Kong, or Macau, making it the top country for immigrants overall and the top country for Chinese immigrants in particular. One of the largest immigrant groups in the US is composed of people from China. After Mexicans and Indians, Chinese immigrants make up the third-largest foreign-born population in the US. The first wave of Chinese migration to the United States occurred during the mid-1800s, again in the late 1970s, and continues to the present day. With a 2016 population estimate of 2.3 million, that represents about 5% of the world's 44 million immigrants.

Immigrants frequently encounter challenges when endeavoring to improve their living conditions. Identity is one of the issues at hand. According to Giles and Middleton (1999), an individual's identity pertains to their understanding of "what" or "who" they are. The concept of identity is multifaceted and comprises various components, including social aspects such as gender, sex, and ethnicity; physical attributes such as hair color, skin color, and body shape; and cultural elements such as political affiliation or lifestyle choices. The concept of identity holds significant value for individuals as it serves as a means of self-expression, social interaction, and contextualization of their surroundings.

Identity also helps people connect with each other and with the world around them. Different parts of an immigrant's identity can come up in their lives, which can lead to identity conflicts and crises. People who move to other countries often have trouble getting used to the language, customs, and ways of life there. According to Dewi (2012a), identity is a hard topic to talk about, especially for immigrants who are in a new culture. They live between two cultures, which gives them a mixed sense of who they are. The past culture follows them around because it has changed since they were born, but they have to accept the new culture as part of their efforts to adapt to their new environment. It makes people think that immigrants live in two different worlds. This cultural problem creates a transition between old and new cultures. People's cultural identities are being tested as they move between different societies. Some people are accepting their new hybrid identities, while others are strongly defending their traditional ones and resisting any changes.

According to Stuart Hall, identity is not a fixed or static entity; rather, it is a continuous process of becoming. He argues that identity is not merely something that "exists," but something that constantly "becomes" through historical and cultural processes (Hall, 1990). This perspective suggests that identity is shaped through ongoing negotiation, transformation, and interaction with social contexts. In the case of immigrants, identity formation often involves processes such as resistance, adaptation, and assimilation. Individuals who are strongly rooted in their home culture may initially struggle to integrate into the host society due to cultural

differences and unfamiliar social norms. Over time, however, as they adapt to new cultural environments, they may gradually incorporate elements of the host culture into their sense of self, leading to a redefined or hybrid identity.

Girl in Translation is a popular piece of literature. It addresses the issue of cultural transition, which the main character in this novel face as a Chinese immigrant living in the U.S. Jean Kwok wrote the novel in 2009, and it was published in 2010. Much of Jean Kwok's childhood is similar to Kim's in *Girl in Translation*. Jean Kwok moved from Hong Kong to Brooklyn, New York, with her family when she was five years old. Their apartment was roach- and rodent-infested, with no central heating, and when she wasn't in school, she worked in a clothing factory in Chinatown. After elementary school, she was accepted to the prestigious Hunter College High School, which prepared her for later admission to Harvard.

Kwok started out as a science major in college before shifting to English and literature. She held down a number of different jobs while attending college. She worked as a professional ballroom dancer for a studio in the time between earning her bachelor's and master's degrees at Columbia University. Her visit to the Chinatown neighborhood served as inspiration for her second book, *Mambo in Chinatown*.

The novel *Girl in Translation* tells a story of Kimberly Chang, a young woman who was born in Hong Kong and moved to the US with her mother. The Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, which transferred the former British colony of Hong Kong to Chinese control, made it abundantly clear that residents of Hong Kong would not be granted British citizenship. Ma and Kim left Hong Kong as part of a large wave of people who left the city as a result of this declaration. As a direct consequence of this, a large number of people left Hong Kong. Many relocated to New York City, where there were numerous employment opportunities in the garment factories located in Chinatown. Throughout the novel, issues of class, race, and language are explored, highlighting the challenges immigrants face when trying to assimilate to a new culture. The language used in the novel serves to reinforce these themes and illustrate the struggles and triumphs of the characters.

The novel is told from Kim's perspective. Each chapter roughly corresponds to a year in Kim's life, starting in early elementary school and ending shortly before she

begins college. As an immigrant, Kim faced complex experiences such as language and culture. The novel described how Kim begins a secret double life as an immigrant; she lives as a schoolgirl during a day and becomes Chinatown sweatshop worker in the evening. As she gets older, she becomes more and more conscious of the burden of her family's reliance on her to give them a better life. She is forced to make a choice between her responsibilities to her family and the things she wants for herself.

Kim and her mother move to New York City with the help of Ma's sister, Aunt Paula, and Aunt Paula's husband, Uncle Bob. This is where the book starts. They move into a run-down apartment in a Brooklyn neighborhood that is mostly empty and where many buildings are about to be torn down. Kim starts elementary school, and Ma goes to work at Aunt Paula and Uncle Bob's clothing factory in Chinatown. Kim goes to work with her there after school. Both of them work six days a week and make very little money. During their first ten years in the country, they have to deal with bugs, dirt, bad weather, and being very poor.

Kim's transition into the American school system is marked by significant challenges. Although she demonstrates strong ability in mathematics and science, she struggles to keep up with her peers in subjects that require advanced English proficiency. Her limited command of English affects not only her academic performance but also her social interactions. As an immigrant living in extreme poverty, Kim experiences bullying and social isolation, which further intensify her sense of marginalization. In addition to her academic responsibilities, she must divide her time between school and working at Ma's factory, making her educational journey even more demanding.

More importantly, Kim's process of adaptation goes beyond linguistic translation. She is required to adjust her personality, behavior, and lifestyle in order to align with American social expectations. Over time, learning English becomes more than a practical necessity; it becomes a transformative process through which

she reconstructs her identity. In this sense, Kim does not merely translate words from one language to another but gradually reshapes her sense of self in order to survive and succeed within a new cultural environment.

The writer's interest in examining the process of the main character's identity formation led to the selection of identity transition as the central focus of this study. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how the main character copes with the challenges of living as an immigrant in the United States and how these challenges influence the development of her identity. After carefully reading the novel and exploring the issue of identity transition in greater depth, the writer seeks to examine the forms of identity conflict experienced by the main character, the stages of her identity transition, and the messages conveyed through her experiences. Based on this focus, the title of this study is *The Portrayal of Identity Transition in Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation (2010) Novel*.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on background of the study above, the writer has formulated three problems of the study as follows.

1. What are the intercultural and identity conflicts faced by Kimberly Chang in the novel *Girl in Translation*?
2. How is the main character's identity transition portrayed in the novel *Girl in Translation*?
3. What messages does the novel *Girl in Translation* convey through the main character's experiences?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the problems of the study mentioned above, this study aims to reach the study's objectives as follows.

1. To identify and analyze the intercultural and identity conflicts faced by Kimberly Chang in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*.
2. To examine how the main character's identity transition is portrayed in the novel *Girl in Translation*.

3. To analyze the messages conveyed by the novel *Girl in Translation* through the main character's experiences.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to contribute to the field of literary studies, particularly in the discussion of identity conflict and identity transition in literary works. By analyzing the main character's experience in *Girl in Translation*, this research provides insight into how identity transformation is portrayed through migration, cultural adaptation, and personal struggle.

The findings of this study are also expected to help readers gain a deeper understanding of the psychological and cultural dimensions embedded in the novel. Through the examination of identity conflict and transition, readers may develop a more critical perspective toward the messages and meanings conveyed in *Girl in Translation*.

Furthermore, this research may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring similar themes, especially those related to identity, cross-cultural experience, and character development in literary works.

1.5 Methodology of the Study

In analyzing Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*, the writer applies a descriptive-qualitative method in the form of a close textual reading of the novel. The data used in this research are taken from related studies, textbooks, reports, articles, journals, theses, or other sources that support the topic. The object of this study is the novel *Girl in Translation*, written by Jean Kwok and published in 2010.

The present writer took four steps to analyze the identity transition faced by the main character in *Girl in Translation* novel. The first step is to gather information by rereading the novel several times. Following that, the writer became interested in analyzing the identity transition and the struggles faced by the main character in the novel. Further, the writer decided on the topic, title of the research, and the problem formulation.

The second step is to identify the study's related theory. The writer uses theory of conflict, theory of identity transition. The present writer uses William Bridges' transition theory to analyze identity transition in the main character Kim. This step helps the present writer analyze the problem formulation.

The third step is for the writer to begin analyzing the identity conflicts the main character encounters, how the character portrays an identity transition, and what messages the novel is trying to convey. The last step is that the writer created the whole conclusion of this study.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This *skripsi* focuses on the main character Kim in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* Novel. The limitation of this study is that it focuses only on form of identity conflicts faced by Kim, how identity transition portrayed in the novel and the messages the novel attempts to convey.

1.7 Status of Study

This chapter describes the writer's research, which occurred concurrently with other similar studies. This research uses two previous studies to help conduct this research. The first previous study is conducted by Claudarista (2021) titled *Chinese Immigrant's American Dreams as Reflected in the Main Character of the Novel Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation*. This study has two objectives: to describe the American Dream values of the main character of the novel and to analyze the main character's difficulties in pursuing the American Dream. This study's findings highlight two points. First, three American Dream values are reflected in the main character, Kimberly, as a Chinese immigrant pursuing her dreams. Individual liberty, equality of opportunity, and material wealth are the three values. Second, there are some costs associated with achieving the American Dream. Kimberly must overcome many difficulties and obstacles in order to realize her dreams, such as self-reliance (she is no longer dependent on her mother and must be able to do various things alone), competing with friends at school to be the best student, and working hard to obtain a scholarship and pay rent for the apartment.

The second previous study is conducted by Meity Adelina titled *Class and race discrimination against the Chinese immigrants in the USA in the 20th century in Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation*. The study aims to examine the instances of class- and race-based discrimination depicted in the narrative. The primary objective is to ascertain the physical appearance of the protagonist. The secondary objective is to analyze the depiction of the environment. The third objective is to identify the primary protagonist and the settings that exemplify the battle against social stratification and racial bias within the narrative. The author utilizes a sociocultural-historical methodology to investigate the social backgrounds of Chinese immigrants in the United States. The findings of the analysis indicate the presence of class- and race-based discrimination within the narrative. Individuals belonging to the lower echelons of the Chinese immigrant community encounter prejudice and bias from their counterparts in the upper strata, while Chinese immigrants as a whole are subjected to discriminatory attitudes from American society.

The third previous study was conducted by Yulika Prima Dewi and titled *Kimberly's Goal Setting Processes towards an Ideal State in Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation*. The author used psychology in literature, such as Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory and the discrepancy theory, to analyze the book. Based on what this study found, Kimberly has three short-term goals that will help her get to her ideal state, which is to be upper middle class. The three short-term goals are to finish elementary school at P.S. 44, high school at Harrison Prep, and medical school. As a result of the goals, it is discovered that Kimberly improves her performance on goal-related activities, allowing her to achieve her ideal state later.

Even though some of the journals listed above have theoretical similarities or employ methods like those used in this study, this study is distinct from those journals. In this analysis, the researcher focused on three issues: First, the main character's identity conflicts. Second, the portrayal of the main character's identity transformation. Third, the messages that the novel try to convey.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study consists of four chapters, as follows:

The first chapter of this study presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study and status of the study.

The second chapter of this study presents a review of selected literature in which the writer demonstrates theories to support this paper and lists the studies that have been discovered on the subject of the paper.

The findings and discussions are presented in the third chapter of this study. This chapter provides answers to the research problem as well as elaborates on the findings as much as possible in a consistent manner.

The fourth chapter of this study presents the paper's conclusion as well as suggestions for future research on Jean Kwok's novel *Girl in Translation* or identity transition in general.

