

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Literature is a reflection of society. Through literature, the authors uncover the problems of life. The word 'literature' comes from the word *littera* in Latin which means letters. Literature as a form of writing distinguishes its form from other art products, and its aesthetic or artistic values make it different from other writings. "The definitions, therefore, usually include additional adjectives such as "aesthetic" or "artistic" to distinguish literary works from texts of everyday use such as magazines, newspaper, legal documents, books, and scholarly writings" (Murwantono 1).

In general, literary works are works formed from the author's imagination. It is also an expression of images and events of daily activities directly or indirectly. Literary works have a function to entertain or teach something to the reader. The function of this literature can be found in all types of literary works.

Henry E. Jacobs and Edgar V. Roberts (1995) divide prose into two, fiction and nonfiction. Fiction begins to mean something that is made or formed, is a prose story based on the concept and imagination of the author. These include novels, parables, short stories, and romances. On the other hand, nonfiction is a literary work that describes or interprets facts, presents judgments, and opinions. It consists of essays, news reports, encyclopedias, magazines, newspapers, broadcast media, and many other forms of communication.

A novel today is a long narrative in literary prose. "A novel is a piece of prose fiction of a reasonable length" (Eagleton 1). A novel is a narrative text that informs

long-form prose containing several fictional characters and events. In the novel, there are intrinsic elements such as plot, setting, characterization, point of view, and theme. Because of the general description above, this study is interested in analyzing a novel entitled *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok.

One of the issues raised in the novel's literary work is about Chinese immigrants. Besides being known as a great nation, China is also known as the nation with the largest population distribution in the world. In 1930, more than 8 million people were leaving China and spreading all over the world including America. The Chinese usually arrive very poor and have jobs as traders or farmers. The Chinese themselves first came to America around 1848, when there was a gold rush in California. As Portes and Rumbaut stated:

“Although some sources indicate that the first Chinese arrived in United States as early as the eighteenth century, the beginnings of a significant Chinese presence in the U.S. date back to the mid-nineteenth century. The influx of the Chinese resulted from a growing demand for mining labourers, which followed the discovery of large deposits of gold in California in the late 1840s (the so-called California Gold Rush)” (qtd. in Misiuna 154).

Most of the Chinese immigrants were known to be hard workers, especially in agriculture and railroad manufacturing. “The construction of railroads in the 1860s was an even larger attraction than the California Gold Rush. Thousands of men signed prepaid labor contracts that included free transoceanic passage to the West Coast of the United States” (Holland 150). They are also known as cheap labor, able to save from

this very low income and live very simply. The first wave of Chinese arrivals ended when the Chinese Exclusion Act 1882 was implemented. Its contents suspended immigrants and prohibited Chinese workers from entering the United States.

In the second period (1882-1965), there was a shift in the professional background or expertise of Chinese immigrants to the United States from previously manual labor. Those who came were diplomats, traders, and students. During the second period, the Chinese-Americans wandered confined to special villages or what is known as Chinatown. “After passage of the 1882 Exclusion Act, there were many incidents of deadly violence perpetrated against Chinese to force their removal from some counties, and Chinese were segregated into quarters, known as “chinatowns” in cities” (Campi 2). There are two types of Chinese immigrants entered the United States since the 1970s. The people who first came to America were only certain Chinese and highly educated people. Second, it consists of thousands of Chinese immigrants who came to America to avoid political instability or oppression in Asia.

Meanwhile, a peaceful, and prosperous life is the dream of all mankind in this world. That statement does sound like a mere fantasy, but it does not hurt every human being to crave a minimal life from all its shortcomings and complexities. Not many people can experience a life full of pleasure following their dreams. In reality, the dream of being able to achieve a prosperous life is sometimes hampered by others or caused by the individual himself. “Nevertheless, despite more than 60 years of systematic disenfranchisement, Chinese continued to migrate to the United States because it remained a country where they could find employment and fulfill many of their dreams” (Campi 1). Just as Chinese immigrants continue to come to the United States even

though they are faced with various rejections and even racism, they still come to the United States to achieve their dreams.

Chinese-American Dream experiences are often used by literary authors to build their stories or as major themes in their stories. Some novel authors also often use this term in their works. The author who reveals the Chinese-American Dream experience in one of her works is Jean Kwok. *Girl in Translation* is the debut novel that she wrote. *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok is a novel with a fiction genre. The novel was first published in May 2010 by Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin with 307 pages.

This novel also got some literary awards and became a New York Times and international bestseller. It has been published in 20 countries and translated into 16 languages. This novel tells about the new life of Kimberly Chang, an eleven years old girl, and her mother Mrs. Chang who immigrated from Hong Kong to the United States. Mrs. Chang was worried about her daughter's future if they remained in Hong Kong. Therefore they decided to immigrate to the United States in the hope that her daughter could gain success there and start a better life.

The main character of the novel is named Kimberly Chang who wants to achieve the American Dream and to be able to achieve it, she must be faced with difficulties that hinder her dreams. The history of the American Dream can be seen in the United States Declaration of Independence "its promise that citizens of the new nation were already endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life and liberty, and that these same people were entitled to engage in many varied pursuits of happiness" (qtd. in White and Hanson 1-2). The basic principle of the American Dream is the right

to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Everyone has the same view, which is free in achieving their happiness.

America has long been known as the land of opportunity, which brings immigrants to come to America. In order to get the benefits mentioned in the above statement, immigrants are faced with the struggles they have to pay. According to Maryanne K. Datesman et al (2014), there are six values that must be paid to be able to the American Dream, such as individual freedom—self-reliance, equality of opportunity—competition, and material wealth—hard work.

The importance of the family to Chinese society is clearly illustrated by the concept of *Wu Lun* (five relationships) taught by Confucianism to maintain harmony in the family. “The Chinese American family, both past and present, has its foundation in the traditional family structure of China that was greatly influenced by Confucianism” (Wong 117). Based on Chang & Holt’s (1991) work, “... there are five basic relationships for humans in Confucianism: father-son, emperor-subject, husband-wife, elder-younger, friend-friend. Three out of five bases of these relations occur in the family” (qtd. in Huang and Gove 11). This shows that the family is an important institution to maintain harmony. Chinese culture is not only a physical form but manifests psychically in the form of “Moral Ethics” or “Morality”. Traditional cultural values that affect Chinese souls are harmony, balance, virtue, piety, politeness, wisdom, honesty, hard work, and loyalty.

There are two reasons why this study is interested in choosing this novel for analyze. First, the story of this novel is based on Jean Kwok’s experience when she immigrated to America from Hong Kong. The last reason is a simple story and is not

difficult to be understood. This study wants to know how to understand the immigrant people in America when realizing their dreams. As well as knowing why the American Dream can make someone do various ways to get it. Based on the above background, this study proposes to conduct research entitled *Chinese Immigrant's American Dreams as Reflected in the Main Character of the Novel Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation*.

B. Problem Formulation

The main problems that want to put in this study are:

1. What are the American Dream Values of Kimberly Chang as the main character in the novel *Girl in Translation*?
2. How are the struggles of Kimberly Chang as the main character in pursuing the American Dream reflected in the novel *Girl in Translation*?

C. Limitation of the Study

The study limitation concerns the effort of the main character of the novel, Kimberly Chang based on the American Dream values and the pursuit of the American Dream as reflected in the novel *Girl in Translation*. This study only focuses on the description of Kimberly's American Dream in the novel. It also covers the analyze of the pursuit of the American Dream in the main character of the novel *Girl in Translation*.

D. Objectives of the Study

There are two objectives of the study, as follows:

1. To describe American Dream Values in Kimberly Chang as the main character in the novel *Girl in Translation*.
2. To analyze the pursuit of Kimberly Chang's American Dream as reflected in the novel *Girl in Translation*.

E. Significance of the Study

In this writing process of undergraduate thesis, there are some following expectations from this study:

1. The writer hopes that this writing about this issue reflected in *Girl in Translation* novel would be beneficial for the students of English Literature in the Faculty of Languages and Communication Science who would like to learn more about all things correlated by the American Dream.
2. This study aims to give deep knowledge to the readers or other researchers to find out beneficial for them in conducting a new study related to the issue of the American Dream.

F. Organization of the Study

To simplify the reader, this study consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which consists of the background of the study, problem formulation, limitation of the study, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, and organization of the study. The second chapter is the review of related literature. It

consists of some theories related to the study: The American Dream. The third chapter presents the research method. It includes types of data, data organizing, and analyzing the data. The fourth chapter contains findings and discussion of the point of the American Dream as reflected in *Girl in Translation* novel and analyzes the struggles of the main character in pursuing the American Dream as reflected in *Girl in Translation* novel. The last chapter provides a conclusion and suggestions.

