

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DISLOCATION IN JEAN KWOK'S GIRL IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Girl in Translation is a novel written by Jean Kwok in 2010. In her novel, Jean Kwok wants to show about the process of cultural identity and cultural dislocation. Kimberly Chang is the main character has the role to experience Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation. Kimberly Chang is immigrant who moves from Hong Kong to USA when she was young. Kimberly begins to learn English language and American culture in order to be accepted as American citizenship. She faces many difficulties and obstacles which make her losing her root culture, she changes her cultural identity and she experiences of cultural dislocation. The discussion aims to analyze the Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation on the main character, Kimberly Chang, by using Stuart Hall's theory Cultural Identity. It is used to analyze the process of Kimberly as the main character in the novel changes her cultural identity and experiences of cultural dislocation. Furthermore, the deductive method is applied to analyze the general truth from the specific to the general. The library research is used to collect data and information which are relevant to the topic discussion. It concerns with facts and information related to cultural identity and cultural dislocation and Kwok's novel is also gathered in order to support this research.

Keywords: *Cultural identity, Cultural Dislocation*

Abstrak

Girl in Translation adalah sebuah novel yang ditulis oleh Jean Kwok pada tahun 2010. Dalam novelnya, Jean Kwok ingin menunjukkan tentang proses identitas budaya dan perpindahan budaya. Kimberly Chang adalah karakter utama berperan mengalami Identitas Budaya dan Perpindahan Budaya. Kimberly Chang adalah imigran yang berpindah dari Hong Kong ke Amerika Serikat ketika ia masih kecil. Kimberly mulai belajar bahasa Inggris dan budaya Amerika untuk dapat diterima sebagai warga negara Amerika. Dia menghadapi banyak kesulitan dan hambatan yang membuat dia kehilangan budaya asal, dia mengubah identitas budaya dan dia mengalami Perpindahan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa Identitas Budaya dan Perpindahan Budaya pada karakter utama, Kimberly Chang, dengan menggunakan teori Stuart Hall Identitas Budaya. Hal ini digunakan untuk menganalisa proses Kimberly sebagai tokoh utama dalam novel mengalami perubahan identitas budaya dan mengalami perpindahan budaya. Selanjutnya, metode deduktif digunakan untuk menganalisa kebenaran umum dari khusus ke umum. Penelitian perpustakaan digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dan informasi yang relevan dengan topik penelitian. Hal ini termasuk fakta-fakta dan informasi yang terkait dengan identitas budaya dan dislokasi budaya dan segala hal yang berhubungan dengan Kwok novel.

Kata kunci: *Identitas Budaya, Perpindahan Budaya*

Introduction

Girl in Translation is one of diaspora literature. It presents the problem of cultural displaced which is experienced by the main character in this novel as a Chinese immigrant living in United States. It was written by Jean Kwok who was born in Hong Kong but spent her childhood life in Brooklyn. It is Kwok's first novel which becomes one of the best seller novels in New York Times version. Since it is published in 2010, this novel gets many achievements such as John Harvard Scholarship for Academic Achievement of the Highest Distinction and

Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Scholarship for Achievement of the Highest Distinction (<http://www.Jeankwok.com/book.sth#girl>). Her work has been translated into 50 languages.

The novel tells about a girl called Kimberly Chang who was born in Hong Kong and decide move to America with her mother. She has complex experiences as immigrant such as Language and culture. Kimberly begins a secret double life; she lives as schoolgirl during a day and becomes Chinatown sweatshop worker in the evening. Poverty and family burden force her to hide her personal

life. Kimberly learns about language and time to time she does not only translate her language but also herself.

In this novel, Kimberly as main character in the novel considers that she finds herself translating in anything other than language, such as personality or behavior and Life style. Kimberly traps in two cultures which is caused ambivalent identity. The past culture (Chinese culture) shadows her paths because it has developed since she was born while she is insisted to accept the new culture (American culture) as her effort to do adaptation in her new environment. This cultural problem creates a negotiation between old culture and new culture. Therefore, it leads Kimberly experiences cultural dislocation and changes her cultural identity.

To know how the process of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok *Girl in Translation* is, first, I formulate some point such as the psychological and cultural complexities of Kimberly. The second is the characteristics of cultural identity and cultural dislocation. The last is to find the context beyond the novel *Girl in Translation* which influences the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas through the character of Kimberly.

This research has several goals. The first goal is to examine psychological and cultural complexities of Kimberly bear as a Chinese girl living in diaspora. The second is to contribute knowledge about the characteristic of cultural identity and cultural dislocation depict on this novel. The last is to find the context beyond the novel *Girl in Translation* which influences the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas through the character of Kimberly. In addition, I do hope that my research could help other students who are interested in analyzing Jean Kwok's novel and doing research in the field diaspora. Furthermore, I do hope my thesis could give worthwhile contribution to the knowledge of postcolonial field and it could encourage the students in conducting research about diaspora.

Research Methodology

The role methodology to formulate a good research is important. This thesis uses qualitative research. Blaxter et al. (2006:64) states qualitative research does exploration and explication toward text as detailed as possible. The data used in this research is non numerical data which are in the forms of words, sentences, phrases and statement about cultural identity and cultural dislocation. This research method is employed in this thesis to analyze the data from *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok. I used the novel *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok as the source of primary data. The primary data are in the form of dialogues and narrations that represent the facts and information about cultural identity and cultural dislocation. This primary data are supported by the secondary data which are facts and informations related to the diaspora, cultural identity and cultural dislocation gathered from diaspora's books, papers, journals, and articles.

This thesis applies inductive method as method of analysis in this research. It determines a general truth from the specific to the general. Firstly, I categorize particular events, features, and statement happened in the novel which relate to Kimberly's complexities of culture as Chinese girl living in diaspora through close reading. Then, I begin describing every quotation and connecting one event to another event in those quotations to construct a discourse showing the cultural complexities experienced by Kimberly. At this state, the first question is answered. Then, the analysis continues to answer the question of the characteristics of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* and what are beyond the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas through the character of Kimberly in *Girl in Translation*. Furthermore, Hall's perspective about concept being and becoming is implemented in this analysis. Finally the description of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* are disclosed.

Result

Jean Kowk's novel, *Girl in Translation* expose the process of changing identity and experiences cultural dislocation by immigratns. From the process adaptation by immigrants depicted from the interaction between the past culture and the new culture as the problem of doing adaptation, this research concludes that Jean Kwok tries to describe immigrants experience cultural identity and cultural dislocation as the impact of doing immigration.

Discussion

The psychological and cultural complexities of Kimberly

In modern times, identity is fractured and never singular always changing and transforming. In this case, immigrants also experience this process. The process of immigrant's adaptation tends to keep a part of origin culture in the new land. Meanwhile, their identity change through the time. The changing identity can be analyzed through the representation of language and culture. Literature is a product of language and culture. Therefore, the representation of cultural identity and cultural dislocation can be analyzed through Kimberly's character that represents her psychological and cultural complexities which she experiences after moving from Hong Kong to U.S.A.

The American society is ideal society where people have a chance to get their better live. Since many settlers and immigrants come from around the world to the U.S. they want to be accepted by the majority group. The majority group is the largest group in America such as European settlers. The opportunity to gets better life is given to some of the people from the majority group. The minority group can get the same opportunities if they are accepted by the majority. They will not win the social acceptance until they learn American language and culture (Fox, 1967: 83-90). Kimberly as immigrant does not notice

with who she uses to be in the U.S., because she is innocent. However, her mother is aware of situation. She expects Kimberly to change her life and get the better life because it is too late for her mother to get her success. This is ideal expectation of Ma toward Kimberly. Ma realizes that the U.S. is different from Hong Kong. In the other hand, Ma wants Kimberly to be a part of American society but she is afraid of losing her child as a Chinese.

The process of changing identities is seen and identified through observing the behavior transformation. Hall believes that different environments bring different history, culture and experience which emerge different impact toward the identity development, therefore identity is unstable products which made and change within the history, culture and experiences (Hall,1990:225). Therefore, immigrants think of new land as a "foreign country" far away for home, both physically and psychologically. Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* brought up the psychological problem represented in main character in the novel.

Kimberly experiences disillusion when she comes to America. She thinks that even she tries to do adaptation she wants to go back to Hong Kong. Anytime she faces difficulties to do adaptation she imagines if she were living in Hong Kong and was her father were not dead. She will not experience such afraid of something difficulty when she does adaptation in U.S. who Pa helps her to warm her loneliness (Kwok,2010:14).

Immigrants disillusion feeling is different from non-immigrant because immigrants face many different experiences from the previous land and they expect the better life by going to the new place permanently. Immigrants who move from the home land to the new land feel disillusion for the first time they arrive. The new land does not as good as their expectation because their lack of knowledge such as language and culture. They also have to struggle in order to survive in the new land. The experience of migration creates psychological problem for them. They feel rejection from the new society which affect self-esteem and lead them to alienation, confusion in term of role expectation, values, and identity.

In this case, Kimberly's feeling of regret and disillusion are natural feeling to have difficulty adjusting to a new culture. People move from one place to another place and live permanently or temporarily will face the language barrier and cultural problem. In order to successfully assimilate with the new place, they have to get along with the native in order to learn the culture and the language. For another choice, they hang out with people who come from the same country.

The psychological and the cultural complexities of Kimberly appear as the effect of her new environment. The differences between previous culture and new culture make her confuse to adjust the new culture in the new place for the first time. She experiences unfamiliar weather, clothes, food, people, school and values. She has to struggle to do adaptation in her new place because it is not easy to go

back home. According to Grossberg, identity is often predicated on distinction between two forms of struggle over; two model of and the production of identities (Grossberg in Hall: 1996:89). Therefore, cultural dislocation causes a person separated from home land, community, language, and cultural practice that contribute to identity (Rubenstein in Mening 2010:14). As immigrant, Kimberly is influenced by American culture. Slowly, she is more aware of the strange culture and language by learning American language and culture in school which it cause her identity change as well.

Characteristics of Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation

Kimberly moved to U.S. when she was eleven years old. She goes from communist country with her mother, to New York. She lives in a world she does not understand at all. Even her mother does not have any of knowledge about language and American culture. As immigrant Kimberly wants to be accepted by the people and the government in U.S. She comes from communist country which has distinct features with liberalism as ideology of America.

As we know that ideology of American is liberalism, liberalism emphasizes in individualism. It is a political ideology that an individual has their right to do anything; everyone is free to build their business without interferences and restrictions from the government. Meanwhile, communism does not give any right to individual freedom. It is political ideology that an individual does not have any kind of individualism freedom as liberalism. In communism, the power is equally shared by everyone (<http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/differencebetweencommunism-and-liberalism/>).

American people believe in limited government, free market, and individual freedom. Therefore, American gives opportunities for the immigrant to take their right to be part of American. Kimberly and her mother live in U.S. in three years. She cannot take the naturalization exam by herself so that her mother does it for her. Naturalization is the process of giving American citizenship for immigrant, foreign citizen, and national after they fulfill the requirement that is determined by congress in the immigration and nationality act (<http://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization>).

One of the benefits of naturalization is the financial aid. Many financial aid grants, including college scholarship and funds given by the government for specific purpose, the chances are only for the United State of America citizens. Therefore, Kimberly's mother takes the naturalization test for particular purpose. By passing the naturalization test Kimberly and her mother is qualified to get the financial aid programs at colleges. Kimberly teaches her mother to answer the naturalization test by saying "no" when the official asks whether she is communist or not. If she said 'yes' for the question, they will have trouble with their U.S. citizenship. They will be deported by the U.S because she is immigrant who comes from communist

country. To become U.S citizen she must take the oath of allegiance. The oath has several points of promises such as giving up all prior allegiance to any other nation or sovereignty, swearing allegiance for the United State, supporting and defending the constitution and the laws of the United State, and serving the country when required (<http://www.immihelp.com/citizenship/naturalizationbenefitsresponsibilities.ht>).

In this case, Kimberly consciously changes her ideology. Since she knows about her communist country, Kimberly accepts the American ideology to be part of the U.S. Her mother does not realize about what she answers for because she does not speak English fluently, and Kimberly does not explain about the question of naturalization test. She explains the benefit of it that she qualifies to receive financial aid programs at college. It means her mother does not worry about the financial for school tuition. This is Kimberly's strategy to be accepted by the U.S. government. She has to make a deal with what is good and bad for her sake for living in the U.S. By accepting to be a part of the U.S., Kimberly tries hard to be a good student at school. Since she can speak English fluently; she quickly adjusts the entire subject in school (Kwok, 2010: 180-181).

By attending school she changes her ideology. The higher her grade that she reaches, the bigger expectation she has, the more possibility for identity to change. In some particular reasons, Kimberly never tries to get closer with other friends in school because she realizes that she cannot be part of them. Even she does not have responsibility by working in the factory; her mother will not give her an excuse to get along with them, because it is not what a Chinese girl does such as going to the party and everything that Kimberly's native friends do.

Kimberly has a dream to be a successful women since she moves from Hong Kong to America having nothing; she is poor and without any knowledge who she wants to be. Her expectation for the future is that she wants to live happily with her mother without suffering and takes her mother away from the poverty as she lived in the past few years. That is why she struggles to make it happened by being a good student at school. By graduating as a good student, she wishes to get a prestigious college.

Kimberly changes her ideology to be more open minded. Kimberly's ideology changes since she came to U.S. By going to school and learn English, she does not only changer her identity but also ideology. She tries to escape from communist ideology as Chinese ideology and she receives liberalism as her ideology. The way she acts and solves her problems in USA shows that she changes who she was. She does what her friends do; she goes to party and has free sex without getting married. It does not represent how Chinese girl used to do. She is trapped by being pregnant but she refuses to give up on her dreams. Therefore, she decides to break up with her boyfriend. She thinks that if she marries, she cannot make all her dreams come true. She cannot give up for the Columbia's scholarship that she already gets. She finally decides to be a single mother without even thinking about married. Few

years later Kimberly becomes a pediatric cardiac surgeon and leaves Chinatown to find her baby's father. Kimberly realizes that being pregnant can screw up her dreams. But, her mother advices her to keep her baby as Chinese regards child as God's gift. In this case, Kimberly experience negotiation process between American ideas and Chinese ideas.

Jean Kwok describes how Kimberly finally speaks English fluently. She is taught English by Annette and Kerry. Kerry is an advisor who teaches her to learn English at school. Kimberly also keeps in touch with her friend Annette to improve her language. She attends to Harrison Prep School which the school gives her a chance to learn English with Kerry as her tutor until gets better English well. Although, Kimberly does not need tutor when she was in eighth grade, she has a duty as the assistant of librarian. She writes some article and helps librarian after school (Kwok, 2010: 151). Jean Kwok shows that immigrants carve their own culture in the course time and it is not necessary to come back to their origin country. Jean describes how Kimberly grows up in the new place with cultural problem during she lives in America, changing her cultural identity for the sake of her future.

The contextual Background of the Novel

Jean Kwok is female Asian writer. She was born in Hong Kong but spent her childhood life in Brooklyn. Jean emigrated from Hong Kong to Brooklyn when she was five years old and worked in Chinatown factory for the rest of her childhood. She is a mother of two sons and lives with them while her husband in Holland. She received her bachelor's degree from Harvard and completed a MFA in fiction at Columbia. Jean Kwok starts to write her first novel *Girl in Translation*, inspired by her experiences as immigrant.

The genre of *Girl in Translation* is diaspora literature; the novel simply describes the issues concerning cultural identity and cultural dislocation such as homesickness and nostalgia, acculturative stress, cultural clash and negotiation. However, in this subchapter I would like to focus on Jean Kwok's experiences which have a close relation to the issue of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas constructed to the character of Kimberly in the *Girl in Translation*. Those experiences include; homesickness and nostalgia, acculturative stress, cultural clash and negotiation. These experiences and the relation of the cultural identity and the cultural dislocation ideas constructed through the character of Kimberly.

Conclusion

Girl in Translation is a novel which tells about the process of cultural identity and cultural dislocation toward immigrants experiences. Immigrants experiences the cultural identity and cultural dislocation in order to do adaptation. Immigrants who move from one country to another country face many obstacles and problem. They have to learn language and culture in order to be accepted by the government.

Girl in Translation is a novel which portrays a life of Kimberly Chang, a Chinese girl who struggles to learn and find her true identity in a new society. As immigrant who moves from Hong Kong to US, she faces many difficulties and obstacles to make her dreams come true. She expects to be a successful woman in the new land, since she has nothing when she came to US. The differences of Chinese culture and American culture make Kimberly has to learn the language and culture in order to be accepted by American government. She does not only translate her language but also she change her ideology and the way of she think. In the end Kimberly loses her identity and culture. The cultural identity and the cultural dislocation depicted from Kimberly's experiences in the novel *Girl in Translation* finally leads this research to conclude that migration to United States is considered as the condition when someone is willing to accept new culture and release as much as his culture baggage from homeland. Moreover, the novel also shows that Jean Kwok intends to show the reader that migration is not merely a condition when someone certain country moves to another country but there is a complex process in which culture, language, religion, ideology and other aspects of life in between the homeland's country and the new land's negotiate and leads a person finding himself/herself with new identity.

Therefore, Kimberly's character shows that she is, as an immigrant, finally aware that she is no longer a fully Chinese girl as she is no longer devoted to Chinese culture, language, and ideology. Meanwhile she is also not fully regarded as American because her physical notions such as her slanting eyes and her skin undeniably remain her as part of Chinese race. Since she is trapped in 'being and becoming' situation as other immigrant experience the same things, Jean Kwok sees herself and immigrants as the product of cultural dislocation through the character of Kimberly in her *Girl in Translation*.

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