



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

THESIS

Written By:

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ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF LETTERS

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2015





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*GIRL IN TRANSLATION***

THESIS

**A Thesis Presented to the English Department, Faculty of letters,
Jember University as One of the Requirements to Get
the Award of Sarjana Sastra Degree
in English Study**

**Written By:
Riski MuliaWati
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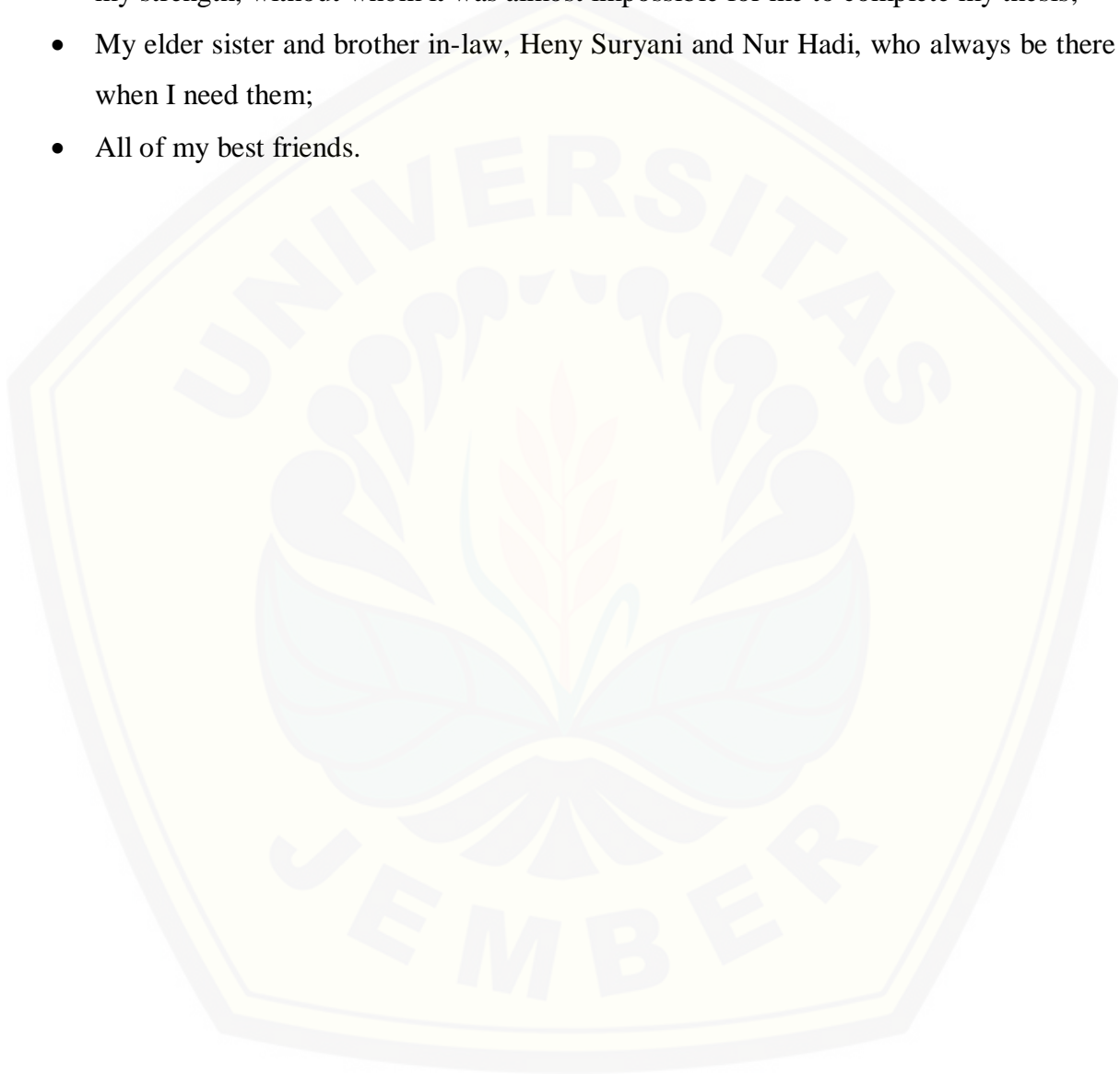
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2015

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to:

- My beloved parents, Pi'an and Susmiati, who have always been my inspiration and my strength, without whom it was almost impossible for me to complete my thesis;
- My elder sister and brother in-law, Heny Suryani and Nur Hadi, who always be there when I need them;
- All of my best friends.



MOTTO

The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.*)



* Socrates. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/socrates.html> (accessed on October 14th, 2015 at 08.20)

DECLARATION

I hereby state that the thesis entitled “Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation in Jean Kwok’s *Girl in Translation*” is an original piece of writing. I declare that the analysis and the result described in this thesis have never been submitted for any degree of any publications.

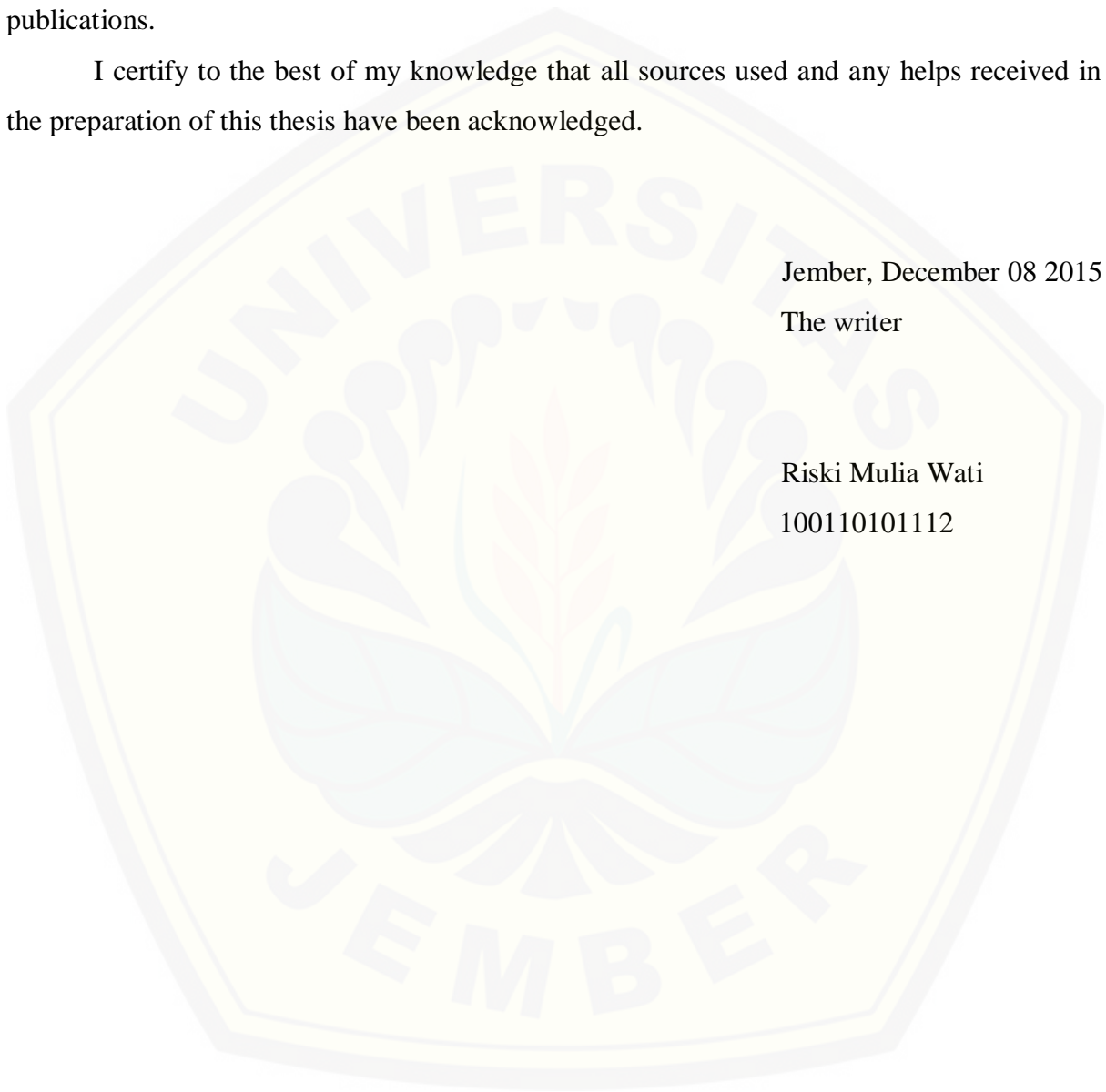
I certify to the best of my knowledge that all sources used and any helps received in the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

Jember, December 08 2015

The writer

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APPROVAL SHEET

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Jember, December 08 2015

Riski Mulia Wati

SUMMARY

Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*; Riski Mulia Wati; 100110101112; 2010; English Department, Faculty of Letters, Jember University.

This thesis analyzes the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*. This novel tells about a Chinese immigrant called Kimberly Chang, born in Hong Kong, who is later moved from Hong Kong to USA when she was child. In this novel, Kimberly experiences cultural identity and cultural dislocation. Using Stuart Hall's cultural identity, this research tries to examine the events related to the two issues. Therefore, the analysis is not only dealing with the intrinsic elements but also the extrinsic elements of the novels.

To find out a discourse of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in the novel, this research begins with observing the psychological and cultural complexities of Kimberly. Then, the analysis continues to examine the characteristic of cultural identity and cultural dislocation. Moreover, this research does not ignore the context of the novel. Therefore, I also observe the context beyond the novel which influences the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas through the character of Kimberly. Those events lead this research gains a conclusion that Jean Kwok sees the immigrant phenomena as a process of identity changes, especially Chinese immigrants. Immigrants are in the position of dealing with new environment whose its culture is very different. Hence, they gradually displace their past culture and learn the new culture in order to be accepted socially in their new land. For Kwok, the failure to accept new culture obstructs people to gain better life in their society, in this case is in USA.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Identity is a problematic topic, especially for immigrants who are culturally displaced. They live in the midst of two cultures which cause ambivalent identity. The past culture shadows their paths because it has developed since they were born while they have to accept the new culture as their efforts to do adaptation in their new environment. It becomes the reason why immigrants are considered living in two worlds. This cultural problem creates a negotiation between old and new cultural. Immigrant who cannot successfully do adaptation in his new land maintains his past culture finds himself as a new identity. This identity is the problem of diaspora in cultural study.

Stuart Hall, in his journal entitled *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, states;

“Cultural identity, in this second senses, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation (1990).”

Cultural identity is the fact of being that is related to the past as well as to the future. It experiences constant transformation since it walks across place, time, history and culture. Diaspora sees immigrant phenomena as the ‘recognition of diversity’ between the past culture and the new culture. It leads the production of new identity. Moreover it does not only happen in reality but also in literary work (Hall, 1990: 713).

Literary work is inseparable from culture. ‘Cultural critics argue, subordinate population produce forms of art that not only transform their own experience but affect the whole culture as well’ (Tyson, 2006: 296). Literature is born within the cultural context. That is why, the observation of cultural identity in this research cannot be separated from the cultural study.

There are writers who write diasporic novel such as *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri which tells about second generation Bengalis families living in the United States who find a new sense of belonging and cultural dislocation (Jhumpa Lahiri: 2006). *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz tells about Oscar as the main character in the novel who moves from Dominica to America. As immigrant he faces many problems of race and class (Junot Diaz : 1997). Those are the writer who successfully publish diasporic novel and lead them to be the world wide best seller book including Jean Kwok, *Girl in Translation*.

Girl in Translation is one of diasporic 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 was 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 to 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 after time she does not only translate her language but also herself.

In this novel, Kimberly as main character considers that she finds herself translating in anything other than language, such as personality or behavior and Life style. Through the character of Kimberly, Jean Kwok's novel depicts the formation and evolution of identity. Therefore, the formation and the evolution experienced by Kimberly are the problems which are needed to analyze in this research.

1.2 The Problem to Discuss

After I read and studied Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* I build up the following research problem by questions:

- a) How does Kimberly psychologically face the complexities of culture as a Chinese girl living in diaspora?
- b) What are cultural identity and cultural dislocation characteristics in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*?
- c) How does the context beyond the novel *Girl in Translation* influence the construction of cultural identity and cultural dislocation ideas through the character of Kimberly?

1.3 The Goal of Study

This thesis has several goals of study, in particular:

- a. To examine psychological and cultural complexities of Kimberly bear as a Chinese girl living in Diaspora.
- b. To contribute knowledge about the characteristic of cultural identity and cultural dislocation depict on this novel.
- c. To reveal 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 general 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 of diaspora. Furthermore, I hope my thesis could give worthwhile contribution to the knowledge of postcolonial field and it could encourage the students in conducting research about diaspora.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Previous Research

This research uses two previous researches to help conducting this research. The first is Abha Singh's article entitled *Cultural Dislocation and Changing Identities, in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel 'The Namesake'*. The second one is a thesis written by Mening Marganingsih entitled *Ashima Gangulis's Diasporic Life in Jumpa Lahiri's The Namesake*. The first previous research gives me an example how to apply Stuart Hall theory in analyzing a novel. Meanwhile, the second previous research provides information about diasporic life which has similarities with the object of this research.

The First previous research is an article written by Abha Singh, "*Cultural Dislocation and Changing Identities, in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel 'The Namesake'*", the article was written in 2003. Abha Singh discusses about cultural dislocation and identity that is experienced by the character in Jumpa Lahiri's novel entitled '*The Namesake*'. The cultural dilemmas are experienced by an Indian Bengali family from Culcutta to America. This article implements Stuart Hall's theory to explore how the character of Lahiri's novel managed the cultural dilemmas and dislocation as an immigrant. The cultural dilemmas and the dislocation happen because the opportunities offered in the new place are as much as the conflicts which have to be faced by the immigrant.

Even though the theory used in the article is same with this thesis, the objects of our analysis are different; Abha Singh observes the Indian character while this thesis focuses on an immigrant character that comes from Chinese family. It means that the result of this thesis is different from the result of Abha Singh's observation.

The second previous research is thesis written by Mening Marganingsih, "*Ashima Gangulis's Diasporic Life in Jumpa Lahiri's The Namesake*". Mening is student of English Department faculty of letters, Jember University. Her thesis uses cross-cultural psychological perspective by Berry, J.W and Annis, R.C to

analyze the Ashima Ganguli's diasporic life. Mening presents two major goals in her thesis. The first is to give a clear and understandable explanation about diaspora, diasporic life, and the attending issues. The second one is to provide an intense description and analysis of diasporic life as the depiction of Ashima Ganguli's life in *The Namesake*. I use this thesis as one of my previous researches because I find that we have the same topic to discuss, it is about diaspora. This research helps me study about diasporic literature and inspire me to conduct theoretical and methodology to analyze the data from different novel *Girl in Translation*.

2.2 Diasporic Literature

The term diaspora has been used since long time ago to describe Jewish experience. A word 'diaspora' is etymologically derived from the Greek term diasperien, a word comprised of *dia* (about, across) and *speirein* (to scatter). Yet, people think that the term of diaspora is appropriate for observing Jewish Experiences only. Semantically the term of diaspora now is extended to be more common to describe of the immigrants, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, ethnic community (Cohen, 2008: 1). Therefore, diaspora is spreading ethnic or population of a nation from one country to another country in which consciously or unconsciously they produce a new identity and new culture.

Jewish, African, Armenian, or Roman-Gipsy and even Chinese also do immigration. They move from China to another country carrying out their own culture. In process to do adaptation they are transforming and re-identifying as others. Chinese immigrants have many experiences in adaptation. Some of them write their experience in the literary work. As in the Poh Wah Lam in Hong Kong or Hwee Hwee Tan in Singapore and many others, they are known as Chinese writers who have been writing novels and novellas, stories and story-cycles which are inspired by their own experiences (A Robert Lee, 2008: 11).

Cohen briefly states that diaspora contains nine features: (1) being traumatically moved from one's homeland to more than two foreign regions; (2)

being uprooted from one's homeland for economic opportunities; (3) retaining a collective memory to the homeland; (4) idealizing the homeland; (5) wanting to return eventually to the homeland; (6) having an ethnic consciousness and feeling of solidarity; (7) feeling marginalized and alienated in the host society; (8) feeling a sense of community with fellow ethnics settled in other location; and (9) believing in the promise of a rich, imaginative, and inventive life in the host country (Cited in Bhatia, 2007: 90).

Literary work is intimately related to the society. The genre of the diasporic novel gives a chance and space for the writer to express what their imagines as diaporic imaginary. Although literature is clearly known dealing with representations of writer imaginary, it is not to show the goodness or weakness of something in society (Francoise Karl, 2009: 24). Therefore, diaspora has been expanding on literature to describe the process of travel, displacement and immigration.

Unconsciously imaginary literature shows a medium or room for the writer to raise issues about identity in realm of diasporic. It is because the author writes an immigrant experiences or diasporic experiences of the fictional character in their works (Francoise Karl, 2009: 23-25). Jean Kwok in *Girl in Translation* portrays about how Chinese immigrants are living in the United State. Kimberly voluntarily moves to America to follow her mother. Her different cultural backgrounds become obstacles to adapt in new environment.

1.3 Stuart Hall's theory of cultural Identity

In recent years, there has been discussion about identity in all of disciplines including the disciplines of philosophy or metaphysics. Deconstruction has performed in all disciplines to criticize the initial idea of identity. Therefore the process of deconstruction shows subjective questions such as the processes of developed identity formation which influenced by cultural criticism or other disciplines (Hall, 1996: 1).

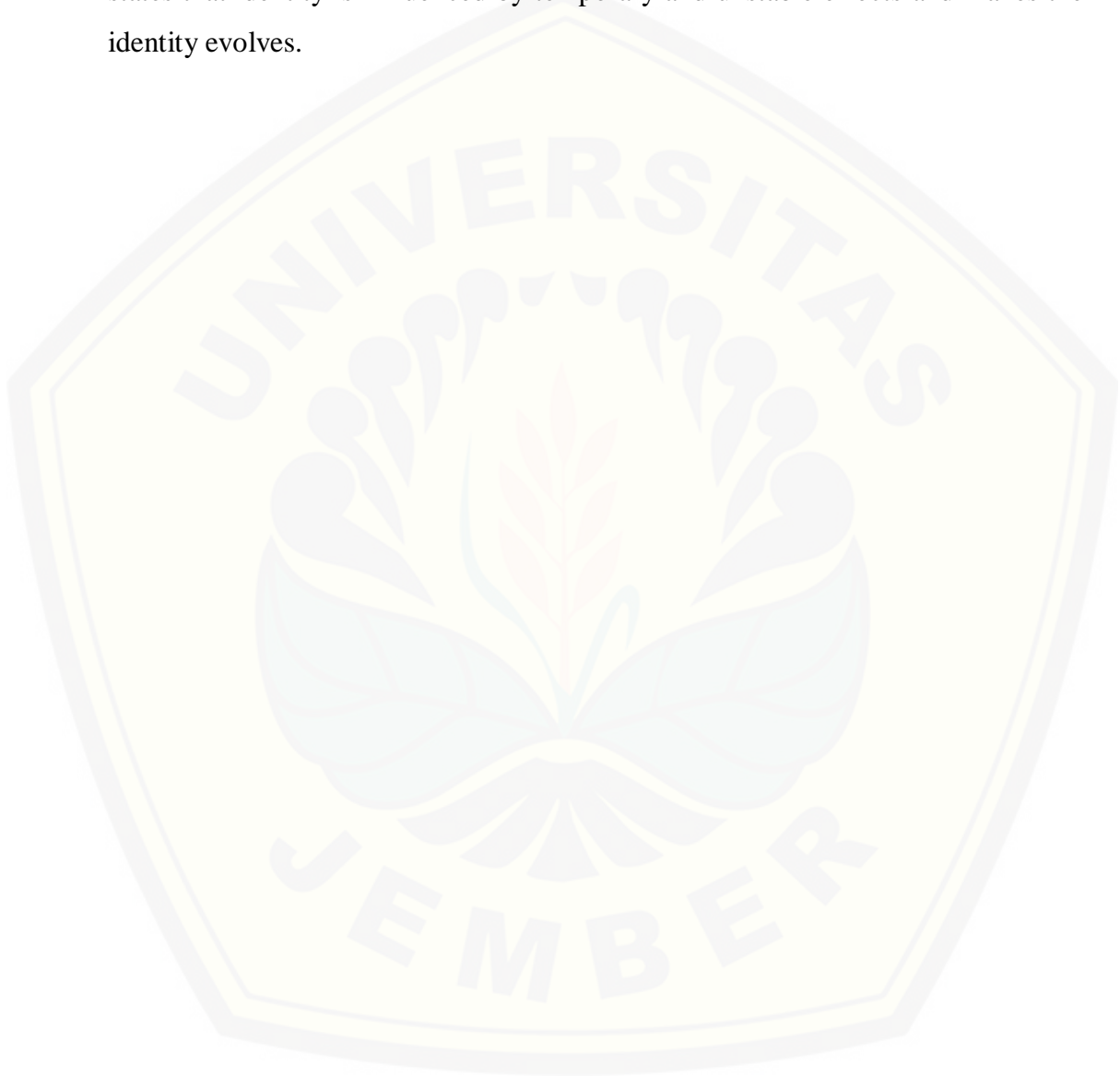
For debating about identity, there are two ways of answering to the question about identity. The first is by observing an important event deconstruct of the many concepts or critics which already exists. It is not to replace the old concept with the new one. Therefore identity is such a concept. Operating 'under erasure' the old concept replaced with the different concepts which continue changing. The second is the indicating problem within the concept of identity. An example is the influence of society and environment toward identity (Hall, 1996: 1-2).

Stuart Hall's idea of cultural identity emphasizes the concepts of 'being' and 'becoming'. Stuart Hall (1990: 222) states that identities are a transparent product which is never complete and always in process. Study about cultural identities is point of identification. The process of changing identities can be 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).

Cultural identity has relation to the previous culture and history. As Lois Tyson explains, being "un-homed" is not the same as being homeless. To be un-homed is not to feel at home even when you are in your own home because you are not at home in yourself, your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak (Mojtaba et al, 2013: 55).

In analyzing cultural identity we need to investigate the constitution and politics of identity. There are distinctions in two ways of analyzing identity (Hall: 1990). There are two forms of struggle and two models of the production of identities. The first model argues that there are some intrinsic and essential content of any identity which struggle against common origin or common structure of experiences with particular identity (Grossberg in Hall, 1996: 89). Struggling identity from common structure or experiences with particular identity is dislocated of deconstruction of negative to positive image. Therefore identity is trying to discover the 'authentic' and 'original' context of identity.

The second model explains the identity is always changing because there is no 'complete' authentic identity. Identity is always incomplete, relational and in process (Grossberg, in Hall 1996: 89). Human experiences events and problems in their life which influences their identity to always transform. As Hall (1991:21) states that identity is influenced by temporary and unstable effects and makes the identity evolves.



Hall's Perspective of cultural identity

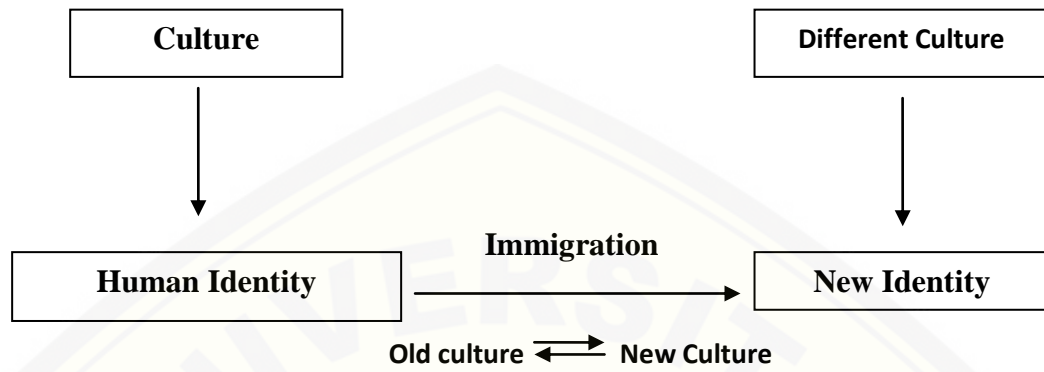


Diagram 1. Hall's cultural identity scheme in Hall's book *Question of Cultural Identity* (pages: 1-17).

The Analysis of Cultural Identity and Cultural Dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*

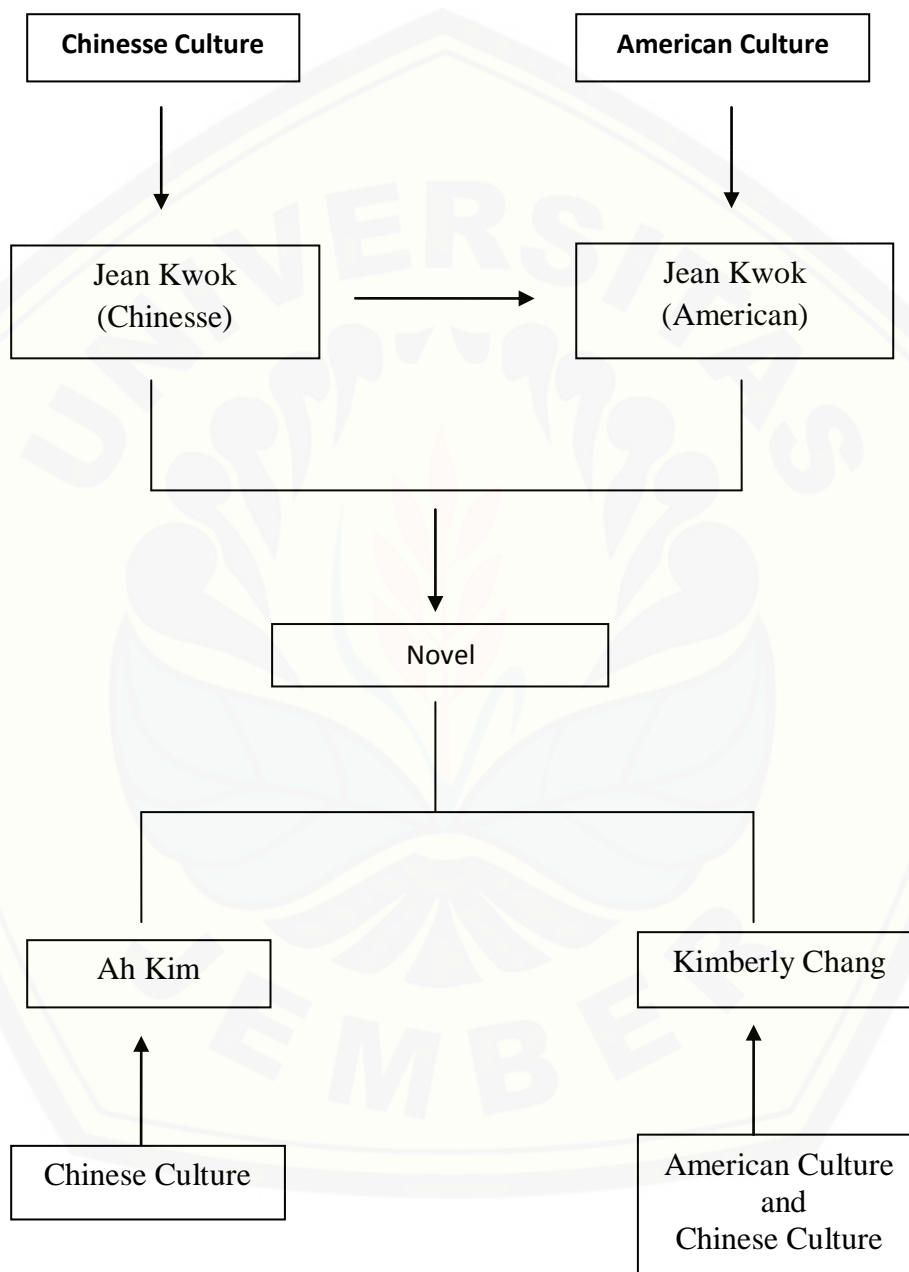


Diagram 2. The scheme of cultural identity and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*.

CHAPTER 3. THE METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.1 Type of Research

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 statements 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.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection in this thesis is divided in two kinds of data, the primary data and the secondary data. The primary data of this research are facts and information related to cultural identity and cultural dislocation taken from the novel entitled *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok. Besides, the secondary data as the supporting data I use in this research are facts and information related to diaspora, cultural identity and cultural dislocation gathered from diaspora's books, thesis, journals, and internet articles.

3.3 Data Processing and Data Analysis

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 a Chinese girl living in diaspora through close reading. Then, I begin describing every quotation and connecting one event to another event in those quotations by using Hall's theory, I describe some dialogues on description to know particular discourse about the cultural complexities experienced by Kimberly. At this step, the first question is answered.

Then, the analysis continues with examining how the dominant ideology in US and English affect Kimberly in making her life decisions. The quotations that show Kimberly's decisions when she faces problems of ideology and language of the new land are also described so that the characteristics of the cultural identities and cultural dislocation in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* are able to be revealed. Afterwards, this research leads to observe the real condition of Chinese immigrants in US and the personal experience of Jean Kwok. The discussion of the contextual background of the novel is needed to find out how far the social condition of Jean Kwok influences the production of her novel, *Girl in Translation* and proves that the immigrant issue brought by Jean Kwok through her novel in the real events that happen in US.