

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Having a better life is mostly what drives immigrants to take their chances and migrate to a new place. However, in the process of gaining that better life, they sometimes have to let go some values of their culture, thus creating problems or conflicts both within themselves and with the people around them. This kind of problem that immigrants experience is also depicted in the novel that is going to be discussed in this thesis: *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok.

Jean Kwok is a Chinese-American author who often raises stories about immigrants' struggle in fulfilling their dreams of having a better life in the new place. According to her fellow author Julie Otsuka, the writer of *When the Emperor was Divine*, "Kwok is a natural story teller who eloquently captures the difficulty of living in two worlds" (Kwok, "Praise for *Girl in Translation*"). Kwok herself is an immigrant; she and her family moved to the United States when she was just five years old. Kwok later uses the memories of her struggle to master

English and the sacrifices that she and her family had to make as the inspiration for her first novel, *Girl in Translation*.

*Girl in Translation* itself tells a story of a Chinese immigrant named Kimberly Chang who moves from Hong Kong to the United States with her mother in pursuit of a better life. Moving to a new place with a totally different language and culture, Kimberly has to face some conflicts which arise because her efforts and ways to reach her goal of having a better life are against certain values of Chinese culture that are held by the people around her. However, despite all the difficulties she has to experience, Kimberly is eventually able to survive and succeed in the new environment.

As seen through the summary of the story, it is obvious that social conflict is the most significant element to analyze in this novel. Conflict, in general, is defined as “the opposition between two forces or two conflicting ideas” (Shaw 91) while social conflict specifically refers to “a struggle between men versus man” (92).

As the social conflicts that are going to be discussed in this study are rooted from the opposition between the protagonist’s efforts in pursuing the better life and certain values of Chinese culture, it is deemed necessary to use sociological approach in conducting the analysis. Sociological approach refers to “a literary approach that examines literature in the cultural, economics, and political context in which it is written or received. This type of criticism analyzes the social content of the literary work implicitly or explicitly” (“Type of Literary Criticism”).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems that I would like to analyze in this study are:

1. What kind of conflict happens in the novel?
2. What is the cause of the conflict?
3. What is the resolution of the conflict?

### **Purpose of the Study**

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

1. To show what kind of conflict happens in the novel;
2. To explain the cause of the conflict;
3. To show the resolution of the conflict.

### **Method of Research**

In conducting this study, I apply the library research. First, I read Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* as the data source of my analysis. Then, I read several references about the novel and the author, and explore some Internet sites to get some related information to support my analysis. Finally, I analyze the social conflicts that appear in the novel and conclude my analysis.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

I divide the thesis into three main chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two

contains the analysis of social conflicts in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* using sociological approach. Chapter Three is the conclusion of what has been discussed in the previous chapter. The thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of Synopsis of *Girl in Translation* and Biography of Jean Kwok.

