

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

It is generally accepted that being immigrants means living in two worlds. Immigrants will always be in between their home culture and the new culture predominant in the place where they live. Trapped between two – or more – cultures, immigrants are forced to adapt and shape their own identity. Immigrants could shape their cultures through these mechanism: some choose to stick to their home culture whenever possible, some decide to freely embrace the new culture and some eventually meld both cultures in their life (Rapoport et al.). Whatever their choice is, the process of shaping their identity, however, is not one that can always go smoothly without conflicts. This typical immigrant struggle is also depicted in the novel that is going to be discussed in this thesis: *American Panda* by Gloria Chao.

Gloria Chao is a Taiwanese-American author who often writes about the struggle of Chinese people in finding their identity in relation with their culture (Futterman). Chao herself was born into a Taiwanese immigrant family, and she spent her childhood life on the outskirts of Boston. Chao later uses her own experiences in

figuring out how to meld her Chinese and American cultural backgrounds as an inspiration to write *American Panda*.

American Panda is Chao's debut novel that was published in 2018. Although it was just recently published, the novel has got many praises from critics and readers alike. Chao has already got many achievements through her works, some of which are *Seventeen Magazine* Best Young Adult Novels of 2018, Chicago Public Library Best Young Adult Book of 2018, *Paste Magazine* Best Young Adult Book of 2018, Junior Library Guild Selection, and YMCA's Summer Reading List for Teens ("American Panda").

American Panda tells a story of a Taiwanese girl named Mei Lu, who is born into an immigrant family in America. Living with parents who still hold on to the Chinese culture tightly, Mei feels that she is trapped between her parents' Chinese values and her own American values. As a second generation Chinese immigrant, Mei feels that she is not fully Chinese because she has been living in America since she was born. Mei also has some personal goals that are difficult to achieve because her values are not in line with her parents' Chinese values. The differences between Mei's and her parents' cultural values later cause Mei to experience some conflicts, although she is eventually able to live a life and become a person that she wants in the end.

As seen through the summary of the story, it is obvious that the most significant element to analyse in this novel is the conflict. Conflict in general is defined as "a literary element that involves a struggle between two opposing forces" ("Conflict"). It can be divided into three types: man vs nature (physical conflict), man vs man (social conflict), and man vs self (inner conflict). However, there are only two types of conflict found in the novel – social and inner conflicts. Social conflict is "a situation in which

two characters have opposing desires or interests” while inner conflict happens when “a character experiences two opposite emotions or desires – usually virtue and vice, or good and evil – inside him” (“Conflict”).

As the conflicts that are going to be discussed are rooted in the opposition between the protagonist’s and her parents’ cultural values, it is considered necessary to analyse this novel using sociological approach. Sociological approach refers to a literary criticism that “examines literature in cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received. This type of criticism may analyse the social content of a literary work – the cultural, economic, or political values a particular text implicitly or explicitly expresses” (“Types of Literary Criticism”).

Statement of the Problem

The problems I am going to discuss in this study are:

1. What kinds of conflicts does the protagonist experience in the novel?
2. What are the causes of the conflicts?
3. What are the resolutions of the conflicts?

Purpose of the Study

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

1. to show what kinds of conflicts the protagonist experiences in the novel;
2. to explain the causes of the conflicts;
3. to show the resolutions of the conflicts.

Method of Research

This thesis is conducted using the library research method. I begin by reading the research object, which is a novel entitled *American Panda* by Gloria Chao. After understanding the novel, I analyze the conflicts that appear in the novel while searching for some references that can be used to support my analysis. In the end, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three 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 conflicts found in Gloria Chao's *American Panda* using sociological approach. Chapter Three presents the conclusion of what has been discussed in the previous chapters. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, which consist of Synopsis of *American Panda* and Biography of Gloria Chao