

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study. The background of the study section explains the topic being discussed and the reasons why the writer choose the topic. The research questions serve to direct the focus of the study by being represented by the questions, while the objectives of the study section explain the purposes of the study. The significance of this study explains the necessity and value of conducting this research and its contribution to the field. Additionally, the scope and limitation section explains the specific research area being studied and recognizes the limitations of the study, allowing for a more focused and in-depth analysis.

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the world's issues that continues to be in the spotlight is racism. According to Grosfoguel (2011), racism is a global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority that has been generated and perpetuated for millennia by the institutions of the "capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric, modern/colonial world system" through political, cultural, and economic means. It can be said that racism is a sort of discrimination that not only perpetuates social injustice but also political, economic, and cultural inequality. Racism creates patterns of power relations that oppress minority communities, from colonization to segregation and more subtle forms of discrimination in the modern era.

However, as time goes by, in the modern era like today, racism still exists but in a different form when compared to the past. Racism in the modern era or what can be called modern racism has changed into a more covert form and is not as extreme as what people did in the past. Modern racism often manifests itself through actions such as indirectly demeaning a particular group, questioning a person's ability based solely on his or her race, or regarding the success of someone from a particular group as an "exception." As McConahay (1986) argues, modern racism is characterized by antagonism towards demands for racial equality, as well as resentment towards perceived special treatment given to certain groups.

However, when talking about racism, it will not escape oppression. This is because the two are interrelated. According to Memmi (2000), racism always leads to oppression because it involves a hierarchical system that establishes the superiority of one group over another, thus creating unequal and sustainable power relations. Like racism, oppression itself until now still often occurs both verbally or non-verbally and in real life or cyberspace. According to Djohar et al. (2023), Oppression is characterized as an injustice whereby some groups of people are unfairly and systematically burdened, constrained, or diminished due to one or more factors. People who dehumanize others are engaging in oppression (Young & Allen, 2022). Oppression as a form of racism can take numerous forms, including racial, social, economic, and political marginalization, which is often maintained by institutions, ideologies, and cultural practices that reinforce injustice.

Injustice, which is a form of oppression, means restricting certain parties or not giving freedom to certain parties. It means cruel treatment of them as well as restrictions on their ability to speak, learn, and engage in other activities that could make them less fully human than they already are (Simanjutak et al., 2021). As stated by Jose (2021) the system of oppression consists of controls, barriers, and forces. This is typically carried out by those in positions of power against those who are powerless. Furthermore, oppression can also take the form of overt oppression, such as persecution, mockery, or other forms of harsh actions. The irony is that these actions still occur today.

Oppression which is part of racism is also depicted in literature because it is a medium that represents actual events in the real world. One of the literary works that discusses the issue of racism is the novel *Yellowface* by R. F. Kuang. This novel tells the story of a soldier of Chinese descent, inspired by June's best friend, a Chinese-American woman named Athena Liu. After witnessing Athena's sudden death, June Hayward steals Athena's unpublished manuscript and, with slight edits and added thoughts of her own, publishes it under the title *The Last Front*. Hoping for a fresh start after the failure of her debut novel, June adopts the ethnically ambiguous pen name Juniper Song. The book quickly becomes a massive success, catapulting June into literary fame and even landing her on bestseller lists. However, this glory is short-lived. Like a sudden tsunami, a wave of criticism

emerges as people uncover the truth and accuse her of cultural appropriation, theft, and racism. June faces intense backlash, especially on social media platforms, where she becomes the target of blasphemy and online bullying, primarily from members of the Asian community who condemn her for profiting off a culture that is not hers.

The oppression experienced by June, the protagonist in *Yellowface*, stems from her position as a white author writing about Chinese culture and history. Many believe that June, as a white person, is not entitled to tell such stories, leading to widespread condemnation. This novel illustrates how oppression persists in modern times, even though in different forms than in the past. It explores the complexities of cultural belonging and highlights how those in positions of power within a community can also become the oppressors, just as social media users, empowered by collective outrage, harshly judge and attack June. The story experienced by June Hayward is a depiction of the issue of racism, which remains a global problem.

The study of racism has been extensively conducted by numerous researchers, as this topic remains highly relevant in both the social and literary world. First, research from Mas Muhammad Idris in 2017 entitled *An Analysis of The Racial Discrimination Suffered by Edgar Allan in John Neufeld's Edgar Allan*. This research uses De Benoist (1999) theory of structural racism. Second, Guruh Bimantara's 2020 research entitled *Racial Discrimination Reflected in Series Drama Tennou No Ryouriban (The Emperor's Cook)* uses Wellek and Warren's (1995) literal sociology approach and theory of discrimination by Dovidio (2001). Third, the research from Tarukallo Wilson et al in 2022 entitled *Racial Discrimination Towards African-American in Langston Hughes's Selected Poems* using Romero's (2014) theory about racial discrimination. Those are a number of studies have previously been conducted on the topic of racism. Among the numerous literary works, particularly novels that address issues of racism, there has yet to be a study focused on *Yellowface* by R.F. Kuang. This absence is understandable, given that the novel was first published in 2023, categorizing it as a very recent addition to the literary canon. Consequently, this creates a significant gap and opportunity to explore *Yellowface* as a valuable source of research data.

To address this gap, the writer applies racism theory to the *Yellowface* novel by analyzing the types of racism as defined by Carmichael and Hamilton (1992). This framework highlights the various forms of oppression and discrimination encountered by members of minority groups. By employing this approach, the writer is able to research the circumstances and character of the protagonist in *Yellowface*, identifying several types of racism that are present in the story. Furthermore, this study will explore the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans to the protagonist as a white writer, in addition to highlighting how Asians and Asian-Americans perceive protagonists who are not part of them narrating novels about their culture. To examine this perception, the writer uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Delgado and Stefancic (2017), which provides valuable insights into the how Asians and Asian-Americans perceive white people as people who write works related to Chinese.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the writer aims to answer the research questions as follows:

1. What are the types of racism encountered by the protagonist in the *Yellowface* novel?
2. How do Asians and Asian-Americans perceive the protagonist as a white author in the *Yellowface* novel?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Referring to the statement in the research questions, this study has two main objectives, namely:

1. This study aims to explain the types of racism encountered by the protagonist in the *Yellowface* novel
2. This study aims to identify the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans to the protagonist as a white author in the *Yellowface* novel

1.4 Significance of the Study

From the objectives of the study, the following is the significance of the study which is divided into two, namely:

1. Theoretical Significance

The writer expects this study will become new insight relate to the modern racism in the form of oppression and contribute to the advancement of science related to modern racism in the form of oppression, considering that racism issue still occurs today. Based on Carmichael and Hamilton's (1992) theory of types of racism and Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) theory related to how Asians and Asian-Americans perceive white person it is anticipated that this study will offer valuable new insights.

2. Practical Significance

The writer hopes that this study will contribute to efforts to reduce and more understand of modern racism, particularly in its oppressive forms within society, by raising public awareness of the persistent issue of modern racism. Furthermore, the writer also aspires that this study will serve as a valuable resource for future researchers who wish to explore similar topics or apply the same source of the data.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on the examination of racism through the application of Carmichael and Hamilton's (1992) theory to identify the types of racism. Additionally, Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) theory will be employed to analyze the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans toward the protagonist.

The limitation of this study is focuses on the narratives and dialogues between the characters related to racism, specifically the types of racism encountered by the protagonist, and the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans towards the protagonist in the *Yellowface* novel by R. F. Kuang as the source of data. Then, reveals the types of racism encountered by the protagonist and the perception of Asians and Asian-Americans towards the protagonist are analyze use the related theory, which gives the answers to the research questions of the study.