

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of five points of the essential parts of this study. Those are the background of the study, research question, objective of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

In a society, ideology exists alongside various perspectives regarding many subjects, such as economic situations, social aspects, political systems, etc. As the influence of existing ideologies increases, the people who are being influenced by the ideologies also develop in numbers. Ideology, then, becomes something of an idea that people believe in their lives as a way of seeing the life they live (Eagleton, 1976, p. 15). The term ideology itself can be found in many subjects, especially in many Marxist works including but not limited to classism, class struggle, class conflict, etc. Marxism describes ideology as a belief system that is influenced by cultural conditioning (Tyson, 2015, p. 54). It refers to the cultures that exist and have many influences on society. Marxists believe that the idea or belief system that affects how society perceives a particular subject is affected by the cultural conditioning that exists in that society. Thus, it makes culture an essential means of merits in supporting the existing state in society (Barry, 2017, p. 139).

One particular ideology of Marxism that can be found in society to this day is the concept of social class. Social class or classism is an ideology that promotes people based on their status in society (Tyson, 2015, p. 56). This ideology believes that people from the higher class in society are the superior ones; more intelligent, more trustworthy, more responsible, and so on compared to the lower class people. On the other hand, lower-class people are seen as irresponsible, shiftless, lazy, and untrustworthy. Therefore, based on those views, it is only natural that the upper class is in the position of power and it is only them that can be trusted to perform properly. This ideology promotes the belief of social, economic, and political discrimination against the poor. Moreover, Manstead (2018, p. 4) finds in his

research that the people's placement in the socioeconomic status holds a powerful identity of how the society perceives and regards them as important as other identities such as race, and gender. This statement implies that socioeconomic status can influence someone's behavior toward other individuals or groups based on that value.

The subject of social class, at present, can be found in many forms of art, including literature. Literature is the closest image of the reality of life because it imitates a social reality people live in (Wellek and Warren, 1956, p. 89). Many Marxist critics analyze many different forms of literary works on many different topics, including social class. One of the literary works that reflects this issue is a novel by Kevin Kwan entitled *China Rich Girlfriend*.

China Rich Girlfriend is a work by Kevin Kwan that portrays the beliefs of the society of rich people and their world. This novel was published in 2016 by Anchor Books. This book is the second trilogy of *Crazy Rich Asians*. The story is the continuation of the previous novel where the story left off. However, this story contains multiple points of view from various characters. This book depicts the life of Rachel Chu; a middle-class young woman, who is going to marry Nick Young; a young man from a famous upper-class family. However, along the way, she discovers that she is a descendant of a rich politician in China. The journey of the newlyweds, Rachel and Nick, in uncovering the mystery of her father is depicted in the story, including how she knows that her father is still alive and well.

China Rich Girlfriend novel is chosen as the source of data in this research because the novel is an International Best Seller novel from a well-known Trilogy; *Crazy Rich Asians*. Besides, the author of the novel, Kevin Kwan, is a famous writer since his work, *Crazy Rich Asians*, became popular and has been adapted into another work of art. In addition, the writer is intrigued by how the society of rich people is portrayed in the novel. The using of multiple points of view from the characters also makes this novel have several stories wrapped in one which makes the reader's understanding of the characters a lot deeper and more complex.

The story pictures the life of rich people and their problems, including many issues that come up because of social class and status. In addition, Kevin Kwan covers three cultural differences in viewing the social status of the higher class and the lower class in this novel. They are Singapore, China, and Hong Kong. The exploration of how rich people behave according to the cultural beliefs in those countries is highlighted, especially the problems that appear because of the sudden change of social status and class that is also explored in the novel. This is mirroring what is still existing in society today. It is necessary to study as this kind of treatment and privilege still exists nowadays. This study is conducted in order to understand the topic of social class and its impacts on people.

The previous research on the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* is various in topics. Firdaus (2023) researched this novel entitled *Representation of the Hedonism of the Main Character in the Chinese Novel Rich Girlfriend by Kevin Kwan*. Mawuntu (2022) explored this novel in her research entitled *An Analysis of Metaphor and Simile Translation Strategies in China Rich Girlfriend into Kekasih Kaya Raya by Kevin Kwan*. Azzahra (2021) examined the novel and proposed research entitled *Idiomatic Expression in Kevin Kwan's China Rich Girlfriend Novel*. Budi et al. (2021) explored the novel in the study under the title *Code Switching and Code Mixing on China Rich Girlfriend Novel by Kevin Kwan*. Sembiring (2021) conducted research on this novel entitled *Social Stratification Portrayed in Kevin Kwan's China Rich Girlfriend and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: A Comparative Literature*. Prastika (2020) proposed research under the title *Social Class Reflected in Characterization in Kevin Kwan's China Rich Girlfriend*.

Based on the aforementioned previous studies, it can be concluded that this research is different from the others. Albeit using the same source of data which is the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan and a similar issue to Prastika (2020) which is social class, the topics that are discussed in this research are different. It is because the topics of this study are how social class is perceived by various cultures; Singapore, Hong Kong, and China, analyzed using the theory of

culture and social hierarchy and its influence on the characters of the novel analyzed using the psychological theory of social class. The theories related to the issues of this paper are chosen because there is no paper on relevant topics that used the theories. They are the Marxist theory of ideology by Eagleton (1984), the theory of culture and social hierarchy by Miyamoto et al. (2018), and the theory of psychological social class by Manstead (2018). Therefore, this study proposes a research paper entitled “A Study of Social Class and Its Influences in *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan”.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of the study, there are two research questions formulated that will be discussed later:

1. How are social classes from various cultures reflected by the main characters in the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan?
2. How do social classes influence the main characters in the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Referring to the research questions above, the objectives of this study are to discover the social class of various cultures reflected by the main characters in the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan and how it influences the main characters in the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan.

1.4 Significance of the Study

There are two types of significance of this study, theoretical and practical.

1. Theoretically, this study is supposed to support the theories of the related topics discussed, especially the Marxist theory of ideology, the culture and social hierarchy theory, and the psychology of social class theory.
2. Practically, this study is intended to provide better knowledge and comprehension regarding the topics of culture and social class and the

psychology of social class in literary works for the next researcher. This study is also expected to be instrumental to other students who utilize the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan as their source of data.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this research is the exploration of the novel *China Rich Girlfriend* by Kevin Kwan. This study focuses on social class and its influences on the main characters found in the novel using the theory of culture and social hierarchy by Miyamoto et al. (2018) assisted by the theory of Marxist theory of ideology by Terry Eagleton (1984) and the psychology of social class by Manstead (2018).

The limitation of this research is not all components are considered. Moreover, it is also noted that not all of the characters are going to be examined in this study. The data that are used in this study are in the form of characters' utterances and the narrator's words correlated with the research questions aforementioned.