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**Charlie Wong's Identity as Second Generation in Jean Kwok's Novel
*Mambo in Chinatown***

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ABSTRACT

As an ABC (America-born Chinese), Charlie Wong's life is not as exactly as American girl should be. Charlie is always around Chinese people since she lives in Chinatown with her father. However, as she has grown up, Charlie then challenges herself to be a professional dancer. Charlie is curious about the outside of her world since her father's belief as the Eastern people's mindset. This condition makes Charlie to hide her new life to her father and she has to choose between her native world or her new world. According to the related issue, the writer will use Homi K. Bhabha's theory diaspora. The writer will apply closed-reading methodology, and then the writer will specifically put the order of diaspora term, which is identity, memory, and home. Based on the diaspora term, the writer takes Charlie Wong's dialogue and action, which is, represented her as second generation. Next, the writer will analyze and interpret how the characteristic of Charlie Wong identity affects her psychologically and culturally. The result shows how Charlie Wong is in in-between position since her interaction between her family as first generation and her world, which is American. This condition puts Charlie in identity's conflict, which one is more dominant on her. This condition makes Charlie to suffer the dynamics identity.

KEYWORDS: diaspora, identity, post-colonial, Chinese, second generation

Identity always a feature to someone who wants to represent his/herself, who he/she is, who he/she comes from, what culture, ethnic, and nation that he/she represents, and many more. In this case, how about identifying someone's identity that lives in another's country with a cultural different background? According to post-colonial term, this person's condition can be called as diaspora. Diaspora is a term to describe the condition of person lives in new land. Diaspora people have feeling to be

separated from their native land and culture (Tyson, 2006: 421). Diaspora people always connected to three aspects, it is identity, home, and memory (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002: 218). Diaspora is one of the post-colonial issues that questioning the identity of diaspora itself. It is because the experience of being separated from their homeland will show how they survive in a new condition and environment. It means they will suffer the crisis identity and it happens in post-colonial issue always discuss the identity of native people.

As the person living in a new environment which is different culture from the homeland. Diaspora will be struggle and hard working to adapt in the new land. It means they will find any difficulties through the language, culture, habit, manner, and at all. According to the problems, diaspora's life encounters the differences of the culture. It means how they accept the culture in the new land and customize their native's culture. This condition above is the effect of the movement of diaspora from their homeland to the new land (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002: 68).

The condition of second generation's diaspora can be seen in several ways. One of them is seen through the literary works, novel. The writer chooses one specific novel to be discussed; it is from Chinese-American writer called Jean Kwok. Jean Kwok grew in China and she moved to America since 5 years old, then she spent her childhood in America until she graduated from Harvard University majoring English and America literature. After that, she took her master degree in Colombia University majoring fiction (About Jean). Jean Kwok itself is a Chinese Diaspora. For contributing in literary works, Jean publishes two novels and one short story. All of her masterpieces always tell about the struggle of Chinese girl who tries to adapt in new land after the migration.

The most famous masterpiece created by Jean Kwok is entitled *Girl in Translation* in 2010. The novel has already translated in several languages and achieved several awards (Jean Kwok Book). The novel is a story about Kimberly Chang's struggle to customize her language and culture in America.

After released *Girl in Translation*, it is followed by her very first short story entitled *Where the Gods Fly* in 2012. The Sunday Times EFG Private Bank Short Story Award (2012) published it (Jean Kwok's official blog). The story happened between the struggle of Pearl and her mama in a new land. The last masterpiece that Jean Kwok created is a novel entitled *Mambo in Chinatown* in 2014. This second novel tells about the hardworking of Chinese Diaspora who lives in America. However, there is difference in three stories of Jean Kwok's writing. *Girl in Translation* is a heart breaking story and struggle of first generation Chinese diaspora. It means, the main character followed the people who had moved to another country, in this case is the main character accompanied their parents to seek a better life in America. However, the second novel, *Mambo in Chinatown*, the main character is the second generation in which her parents had moved to a new land first and she was born in the new land. In this case, the main character in *Mambo in Chinatown* was born in America. Furthermore, the writer finds the interesting part in the novel that makes difference from other Jean Kwok's stories.

Mambo in Chinatown is a story happened of Charlie Wong's life; she has been in Chinatown for 22 years. Charlie is called as an ABC (slang words of American-born Chinese). She is the oldest daughter of a noodle maker and a ballet dancer from Beijing. Charlie almost spends her whole life in Chinatown and works as a dishwasher. Moreover, Charlie decides to challenge herself that she is able to find a job outside of Chinatown. She finally realizes that there is more world than she knows around

Chinatown. At first, she applied as a receptionist in a ballet center. Then, her friends fired her and accepted her as a professional dancer. It is because Charlie had a hidden talent that she did not realize. At first, she hesitated herself and she tried to be confident that she could do it. In a ballet room, Charlie was learned gradually and then she found her own dancing's style. According to herself experience of dancing in outside of Chinatown, Charlie seemed to think that it was a new world to her and everything was wonderful. However, she had to hide her new world from her father. It is because her father's belief as Eastern people. So, his mind and his thought were taken from Eastern's perspective. After her dancing's skill improved, Charlie was wondering about her sister's condition. This step made Charlie was in hesitation to decide or assimilate two different worlds, western world or eastern world, and new world or origin world (Goodreads.com).

In this study, the writer will reveal Charlie Wong's identity that is labeled as second generation. It is because she comes from a Chinese but she lives in American, it will be questioned whether she regarded herself as Chinese, American, non-Chinese and American, or both Chinese and American. Then, the writer will move to the next step to reveal her identity. Moreover, the writer will reveal how Charlie Wong's identity as second generation is portrayed in Jean Kwok's *Mambo in Chinatown*,

RESEARCH METHOD

The writer will apply a proper strategy to answer the research questions. Qualitative research will be used in this study. According to Catherine Marshal (1995), qualitative research is, "a way of analyzing a research which has purpose to obtain a better comprehension in complexity of human interaction." (quoted by Sarwono, 2006:193). In that case, the writer will find a better and a complex comprehension to understand the relation of: people to people, people to individual, individual to

individual (193). Furthermore, qualitative method also helps the writer's perspective to be creative and accurate to analyze the issue (194).

The Source of the Data

The object of the study is the novel entitled *Mambo in Chinatown*. It is written by Jean Kwok. It is published by Riverhead in 2014. The primary and secondary sources are facts and information that relate to Charlie Wong's identity, for example; personality, behavior, and statement or dialog. Moreover, the writer also provides the study with several articles and theory's books about post-colonial of Homi K. Bhabha's diaspora.

The Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The writer will use closed-reading method to analyze the issue. By closed-reading, the writer focuses on the main character's background as a Chinese. After that, the writer will conduct by the following steps. The first step is elaborating Charlie Wong's behavior and her dialogue which will represent her as a second generation of Chinese diaspora and analyze Charlie Wong's attachment toward Chinese and American. After that, the writer will conduct the finding to interpret Charlie Wong's identity. The last step, after analyzing and interpreting the writer will make the conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter intends to discuss Charlie Wong's identity as a second generation from Chinese Diaspora. First, the writer will analyze the condition that Charlie faced as second generation. It can be identify how Charlie Wong is called as second generation. According to the novel, Charlie is not mentioned for escaping together with her mother and her father. It means, after her mother ran off to get married her father, both of them escaped in American and her mother gave birth to Charlie. The

movement that had been done Charlie's parents is the effect of diaspora which moved from their homeland to the new land (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002: 68). In this case, Charlie's parents moved from China to America. It is proven by the dialogue, "...before she ran off marry my father...Hand in hand, they escaped to America to start their family." (Kwok, ch. 1). The sentence above represents Charlie's family do not have a child. It shows how the word "they escape to America to start their family", it means her father and her mother start their marriage life in America until her mother gives birth to Charlie.

The statement above is supported by a fact in Charlie's memory; she remembered when she was in Uncle Henry's house. Charlie told that uncle Henry would like to return to his home. It is written in the novel;

...He was traditionalist and refused to consume any sort of non-Chinese food. If he hadn't had rice, then he hadn't eaten. He and Aunt Monica had never been on a vacation away from their house. He didn't see the point of wasting money, he said, although he would like to return to his home, China, someday. I remembered that when I was a child...(Ch. 2).

The sentences above tell when Charlie was a child, she visited Uncle Henry's house, then she explained Uncle Henry's habit that he did not like consume non-Chinese food. The writer wonders if uncle's Henry lives in China, why he is bothered whether he eats rice or not, Chinese food or non-Chinese food. The writer is sure the way of Uncle's Henry's life does not represent that he lives in China. Moreover when Charlie visited him, Uncle Henry was in America. So, it means Charlie has stayed in America since she was child. In addition, Charlie also remembered how Uncle Henry's house was filled by his belief of Buddha and ancient figures (Ch. 2).

Charlie has lived in America for 22 years. She has been through living in New York's Chinatown and working as a dishwasher in her father's noodle restaurant. Charlie has been attached to be behaved like a Chinese girl. It is proven by the dialogue, "I was tanned like the rest of Pa's family, and for a Chinese girl, I was homely. I had learned early on not to attract any attention. Most of time, I succeeded" (Ch. 1)

The sentence that is said by Charlie means she follows the value as how Chinese should be. A Chinese girl is someone who does not appeal any attention to other people. The sentence of 'most of time' amplifies Charlie's difficulties of following Chinese tradition. It also shows how Kimberly is struggling to be placed herself as a proper Chinese. Moreover, Charlie is still attached to pray like a Chinese. It is proven how she still goes to the temple to pray that her job would be successful (Ch. 4). By going to the temple and asking a request to Kuan Yin, Goddess of compassion, it represents that Charlie still believes in Chinese culture.

The most interesting part tells how Charlie Wong's interaction toward Chinese people, especially with her father who still believes in Chinese culture. The language used to communicate with her father, Charlie always uses English. It is proven in the dialogue, "Although, I could understand Chinese, I couldn't speak it very well. Pa and I usually communicate in English. Sometimes he spoke Chinese and I answered him in English." (ch. 1). This sentence implies that Charlie understands little about Chinese language, but she cannot speak with Chinese language. It signifies how Charlie spends her time a lot to communicate with other people with English since she has lived in America. The statement above also convinces about Charlie's poor ability on reading Chinese newspaper, "Pa only brought Chinese newspaper, which neither Lisa nor I could read." (Ch. 1).

In addition, Charlie has to follow the superstition that her father's belief, for example, girls are not allowed to unbind her hair, he believes that if Chinese unbind their hair is a sign of a grief (Ch. 4). Moreover, the belief of red color will bring someone a good luck is also said by her father (Ch.4). Next, the belief of her father about not allowing girls to wash hair on birthdays or holidays, it is because if Chinese wash their hair on those days, they will get bad luck (Ch. 19). Moreover, Charlie lives around his father who respects the Chinese values. It is usual for Charlie to believe what her father says, because her root as Chinese is irreplaceable if Charlie is being around with her father. Therefore, Chinese values still sticks in Charlie's mind.

Charlie's new job brings her into enlightenment. She is able to try something expressively what she was curious before. For example, first Charlie is able to use thick make up with her friend to prepare herself in dancing competition. The dialogue proves it;

Pa would explode if he ever saw me like this.

"I don't look cheap?" I asked

Mateo looked shock then laughed, "You are gorgeous," he said ruffling my hair.

I examined my face in the mirror. I still looked like myself, but more so. My eyes I leapt out, my cheekbones seemed more pronounced. Instead of looking pale, the way I usually did, I appeared vibrant. I wasn't used to wearing such bright colors, but I had to say it was an improvement. (ch. 10).

Her father's reaction proves Charlie has never used thick make up in her life, so that is why her father will be angry if her father sees her with that thick make up. However, Charlie looks amazed with her makeup, which is marked by the words of 'I appeared vibrant', and 'it was an improvement'. These words brand about the excitement that

Charlie's feeling to her new world. The word of improvement seems to mark there is a progress that Charlie has been through since she has joined dance studio.

Charlie seems more to think after she knows the other world by wearing makeup, it happens when Charlie meets her old friend named Grace, who always wears makeup and whom she has been jealous. The dialogue, "I'd wondered, if I'd still had a mother and a grandma like her, would I have been as attractive", proves it? (Ch. 15). This dialogue proves Charlie's wishes to be as attractive as Grace. It marks to the writer, Charlie has a wish to be someone else who is American, and in this case, Grace is the symbol of her inferiority of not having American face like Grace.

Second, Charlie also does something that in her father's eyes breakdown the tradition of Chinese woman. It happens when her father finds out about Charlie's new job. It is proven in the dialogue;

"Are you dancing with men? And what is this, then? Is this for lessons?" He waved the competition form in his hand.

I decided to pretend I hadn't heard the men question, "No. I'm doing a show."

"You are a show girl! How can this be, my own daughter?" (Ch. 22).

This dialogue marks to the relation to Chinese girl's tradition which is based on her father's belief that Chinese girl is not allowed to show off or attract any attention to other people (Ch. 1). One of them is represented that girl is not allowed to dance with man. It means what Charlie does, it does not figure Chinese girl in its culture.

However, being a dishwasher makes Charlie bored and she wants to challenge herself to have a job in the outside of Chinatown. Then, she applies a job and finally she gets it in dance studio. After that, by working in there, Charlie slowly feels that she is living in a different world with her father. She feels her father still assumes that

he lives in China, but she and her sister are in America (Ch. 5). This kind of feeling is always repeated several times.

First, she feels like foreigner as she hangs out with her friend in Chinese restaurant (Ch. 18). It is proven in the dialogue below;

The waitress came to our table with menus. She was Chinese, with her hair pulled back neatly from a plain face. I felt like a foreigner, sitting there with a white guy, wearing my ballroom clothing. The menu was long and complicated. I was tired, and as always, it cost me so much effort to read at all.

The words blurred into a soup of letters. (Ch. 18)

The feeling as foreigner rises in Chinese place to Charlie, it must be question. This feeling may be caused when she spends her time longer with her new American friend in Dance studio. In addition, the symbol of wearing my ballroom clothing regards Charlie's new identity as being American. According to her action, Charlie marks a different behavior toward Chinese people when she hangs out with American. It means Charlie is started to attach as American.

Second, It happens when Charlie on rooftop with her dancing partner, Ryan. It is proven in the dialogue;

What a different world I had lived in. It wasn't only that I used to have a different job, I'd been another person, and now, dancing had freed me. It felt a hallucination- the music, the night air, Ryan by my side. (Ch. 20).

This sentence strengthens about Charlie's feeling as foreigner. It also remarks with the statement of 'different world I had lived', it means Charlie seems to point out the different world is America that she has never been there before. The symbol of words 'dancing had freed me' refers to the different world she has lived. It refers to American freedom which makes anyone is free to choose whatever it is. It seems like what

Charlie feels after being burdened with Chinese culture and she has to obey and follow, then Charlie is being free after knowing America in dance studio.

Third, it happens when Charlie has argued with her father about Lisa whether brings her to western doctor or alternative medicine practitioner. Charlie seems worried about her sister's condition which is not signed to get better soon. Charlie always advises her father to bring Lisa to a western doctor, but her father always denies her idea because her father believes that western doctor is not trustable. It is proven in the dialogue;

Pa's face was bitter. "They lie. When your ma was in a hospital. The doctors told me not to worry too. They did not tell me what the bills would be like. Those big companies tell you one thing, but when you owe the money. It's a whole other story."

I struggled to stay calm. "Pa, this is different from China. There are laws. They can't say you are insured for something and then suddenly, you are not." (Ch. 21).

The argumentation between her and her father remarks of Charlie's influence with America. Charlie asks her father to bring her sister to western doctor who is more modern in technology and knowledge. Then, Charlie's words about 'this is different from China' represents that she is completely not Chinese anymore, she believes she has to trust American. This action marks how Charlie is attached more to American.

The last one, it happens as the problem climbs to at peak between Charlie and her father. Her father wants Lisa is back to China with Uncle Henry. However, Charlie refuses the idea. The debate between them is unavoidable anymore. It is proven in the dialogue:

“I still can believe you are going to send her to a country she’s never been to.”

“I’m just letting her go home.”

“No, this is our home. America. Lisa and I were born here and this is where we belong. You too, only you don’t realize it yet. If you went back to China, you’d see how much you have changed as well.” (Ch. 22).

The last dialogue proves how Charlie affirms herself that America is her new home. She feels China is no longer her home anymore. It is because she has been living in America since she was born. The writer is sure that is the influence of hanging around in dance studio that all of her new friends are American. By hanging around with American, Charlie seems to show that America is better than China in which she claims her territory as America that is publicity known as superior.

Those repetitions mark about several signs to Charlie how the attraction in America pull her to be American since she finds a new her after joining the dance studio. America pulls her identity by signing that America is everything, for example, more freedom, more superior, and more knowledgeable. It is because the representation of how American as dominant figure reflects in Charlie’s mind. It is supported by this statement how, ““Whiteness seems to have a coherence, stability, and finality that justify its authority, in contrast to the incoherence and instability that explain why non-whiteness will always be inferior.” (quoted by Huddrat, 2006: 33).

The statement above proves how American is superior in Charlie’s point of view. She understands the concept of inferiority and superiority. In this case, she sees herself as inferior human being, she realizes that she does not come from the dominant group which consists of white race, and the Americans is one of superior classes. However, Charlie still follows how Chinese’s praying and Chinese’s superstition in

her mind. These conditions pull her in in-between position. In where she cannot choose her self-place to be a Chinese or an American since both of them are attracted to her.

Charlie has already immerse in Chinese culture with those values that come from her father, but Charlie has also influenced in America as her new culture that she faced. In this case, there is an attachment that faced by Charlie between her native culture and new culture. According to Bhabha, this term is called as self and other in diaspora (1994: 8). Self is the representation of Charlie's self as a Chinese. Moreover, the other is the representation of experiencing for living in American. After she was imprisoned for interacting only with Chinese, Charlie then challenges herself to try into a new culture, which has different perspective, value, and point of view with Chinese.

CONCLUSION

The identity of Charlie Wong in the novel, it represents that Charlie faces in-between-ness situation. There is a social attraction that faced by Charlie Wong between her first generation as a Chinese and American as her new world. Her attachment to Chinese culture and her excitement to American make Charlie in a conflict of identity. It means her identity dominates in-between Chinese and America.

The problem of identity that Charlie Wong faced, it shows how the complexity of Charlie's life in psychological and cultural, it makes her to experience the dynamics of identity. Living as second-generation places her to be in-between position, however she has tried to manage and assimilate herself; Charlie Wong is successfully merging herself. This condition continues to support her dancing career in the United States. It means her relationship with native and America is lasted together.

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