CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The United States of America is a great melting pot. Millions of people from different races, religions, and nationalities came there for the so-called New World appeared to be very promising to start a new better life. Those immigrants came to the United States due to several reasons, ranging from density of population, shrunk economic chance, starvation, dryness, war, religion torture, to politic oppression prevailing in their previous residence (Luedtke: 115). The United States became the first country in modern history to decide accepting immigrants as their government policy. Based on the 1802 act, immigrants are able to be the United States' citizens by passing five years residence requirement which is considered enough for the new comers to be familiar with American life. The new comers had to demonstrate good moral character and swear to support the constitution as well (Luedtke: 71). At that very time, the United States was a wide country with small population, thus immigration appeared to be a hope for the country to be denser in population, richer, and solid as the immigrants filled the vacant lands and expanded its resources.

However, immigrants coming to the United States were not always welcomed with open arms by the native-born Americans, also known as white Americans. People tend to suppose that those who are different to them must be

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stranger (Parrillo: 4). Further, Parrillo also explained that interaction between two parties might result in several kinds of relationship, ranging from close cooperation to open conflict (14). As a minority group in the United States, the new comers were often treated unequally. Minority groups were often responded with over acts of discrimination ranging from avoidance to violence (Parrillo: 4). Due to its numerical representation, minority group is considered as powerless race in society. According to Schermerhorn, the size of a minority group must be less than one-half of the population (Parrillo: 17). Further, Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris identified five characteristics of a minority group: they receive unequal treatment compared to others, they are easily identifiable because of distinguishing physical or cultural characteristics which are held in low esteem, they feel a strong sense of brotherhood among themselves, member of a minority group is born into it, and they were isolated in society (Parrillo: 17).

According to Luther S. Luedtke, the United States' ancestry is classified into several groups in hierarchy based on their ethnic origin: West and North European, South and East European, Eastern (Asian), and Black American (121). Most of the United States' citizens came from Western and Northern European countries. The fact is supported by the report of Lewis Sitzer, who stated that a great number of the United States' immigrants mostly came from Ireland and Germany during colonial era. In 1860, more than half New York's citizens consisted of immigrants and their American-born children. After the civil war, the United States required more and more workers to support its industrial sector. The vacancies were filled by immigrants, most of which came from Southern and Eastern European countries such as Italy, Poland, and Russia ("American

Immigration"). From the previous sentences, it can be concluded that United States' citizen mostly are European immigrants. Great number of European immigrants in the United States constructed their race to be a dominant group upon others.

The result of Luedtke's research corresponds to Donald Young's observation which was held in 1932, that Americans create distinctions among people according to race and national origin (8). Sitzer clarified that racial distinction in United States brought a host of problems which could not be resolved easily. Hostilities emerged as the result of cultural differences and language barriers among ethnically distinct groups ("American Immigration").

One of the examples of such socio-cultural hostilities can be found in the relationship between the Americans the Japanese Americans in 1940s. In 1940, there were about 127.000 Japanese among the immigrants in the United States. 94.000 of them were in California, 63% were American born and 15% were of voting age (Parrillo: 254). As a minority group in the United States, Japanese Americans were the object of Americans' prejudice. Prejudice or negative attitude toward a person or group is basically caused by a stereotype or assumptions toward people in which we categorize and make sense of them quickly (Von Bakanic: 6). Bakanic also stated that prejudiced people are often also the object of discrimination. Prejudiced people whom are usually member of minority group are treated unequally compared to those who are member of dominant group (8).

Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower* which was published by Simon and Schuster in 2006 is one of the historical fiction novels portraying the prejudice

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and discrimination of white Americans towards Japanese Americans during World War II. *Weedflower* can be classified into a historical fiction novel because it suits to X.J. Kennedy's statement that a historical fiction novel presents factual information in portraying scenes, events, and character although the factual information itself is placed at the secondary importance (3). Historical fiction novel is an enjoyable way to learn history because the actual events are presented through a story. Most people might be bored while reading a history book. However, when history is presented through a fiction, people will curious and keep reading until finish. The internment of Japanese Americans which is told in the novel really happened in the past, but the characters and events which are portrayed in the novel are created by the author. An online source reported that *Weedflower* was written based on Kadohata's father experiences during World War II. It also informs that Cynthia Kadohata herself is a Japanese American. Her paternal grandparents immigrated to the United States in 1920s. In this New World, her grandfather earned his family living by working as a farmer in California. Unfortunately, he died in a tractor accident when Kadohata's father was still a little boy. After his father's death, Kadohata's father worked in a farm as a celery picker after school. On the other side, Kadohata's mother was born in California but then moved to Hawaii in 1930s. She supported her family living by working as a waitress in Hawaii before moving to Chicago. Kadohata's family is hard worker ("Biography").

Born in Chicago in 1956, Cynthia Kadohata had no early desire to be a writer. Being used to be one of few Japanese families in a small town, she became introvert and extremely shy girl. She dropped out of school and took a job as a

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clerk in a department store and a hamburger flipper in a fast food restaurant. At the age of eighteen, she attended Los Angeles City College but then transferred to University of Southern California, where she achieved a bachelor of art degree in journalism ("Biography").

Kadohata started writing when she was twenty five years old. During her recovery after a car accident, she read a lot of books. It seemed for her that it was easier to say things through fiction than any other way. Kadohata was an active writer. She wrote over forty stories in four years and sent them to magazines. None of which were published until the New Yorker accepted a short story entitled *Charlie O*. Her first novel *The Floating World* was published in 1989 ('Biography").

Kadohata started writing children novel since 2004. Her first children novel entitled *Kira-Kira* won the 2005 Newbery Award. *Kira-Kira* tells an inspirational story of a Japanese American girl named Lynn Takeshima who has an ability to cheer everyone by her way of looking at things in a glittery way even when her family is forced to move from Japanese community in Iowa to Georgia ("Biography").

In 2005, Kadohata wrote *Weedflower,* which also narrated Japanese American life during World War II. In writing *Weedflower*, she was inspired by her own family history. Post Pearl Harbor bombing, her father was interned in Colorado River Indian reservation and joined United States Military Intelligence Service. There he met his third brother, particularly when he was stationed in Japan after the war. Kadohata hopes others will know about such things and share

the care by retelling the story from a twelve years old girl's point of view ("Biography").

Weedflower narrates a Japanese American family, Matsuda family, living in California during pre and post Pearl Harbor Bombing. The main character of *Weedflower* is Sumiko, a Japanese descendant girl, who was born and raised in California. She lived in a flower farm with her brother, Tak-tak, her grandfather "Jiichan", her uncle and auntie, also Ichiro and Bull, her cousins. Jiichan had moved to United States because of a promise that there will be a brighter future of his own and his offspring.

However, as minorities in United States, Matsuda family can not avoid white Americans' prejudice and discrimination. They experienced various types of prejudice and discrimination, including unequal treatment in social life, job opportunities, and so on. Sumiko who was just a little girl also experienced prejudice and discrimination. Being the only Japanese girl in her class, Sumiko used to be lonely because it was uncommon for white American children to make friends with Japanese children at that era. Nobody in her school cared about her existence: she was never asked to hang out with others and she definitely was never invited to a white children's party.

Prejudice and discrimination toward Japanese Americans worsened when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Post Pearl Harbor Bombing, white Americans started to suspect that all Japanese were spies to the emperor, even to those who were born in United States which meant that they were American. As suspicions grew, white Americans started to treat Japanese even

worse. They raided for Japanese belongings and made some restrictions. Japanese leaders were arrested. Others were evacuated to several internment camps in California, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, and Arkansas under the camp administration control. So did the Matsuda family. They were interned in Poston, Arizona, which is told in the novel to be the biggest relocation centre during World War II. They were alienated from the outer world just because they were Japanese.

The prejudice and discrimination happened to Sumiko and the Matsuda family is an interesting topic to be elaborated in this thesis. It may portray and reveal the prejudice and discrimination towards the Japanese Americans in 1940s pre and post Pearl Harbor Bombing. By elaborating such problem, the aftermaths of Pearl Harbor Bombing towards the Japanese Americans can be clearly described and understood. The writer is interested to elaborate the subject based on *Weedflower* because it was written based on a true story of Kadohata's father. *Weedflower* is written truthfully.

B. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

In studying the racial conflicts between white Americans and Japanese Americans, the writer formulates two research questions to be elaborated. The first question examines white Americans' prejudice and discrimination toward Japanese Americans which are found in the novel. While through the second question, Japanese Americans' reaction toward white Americans' prejudice and discrimination will be portrayed clearly. Those questions are:

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1. How are white Americans' prejudice and discrimination toward Japanese Americans portrayed in *Weedflower*?

2. How do Japanese Americans in *Weedflower* react toward white Americans' prejudice and discrimination?

C. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to obtain answers for questions mentioned at the statement of the problems. Related to the statement of the problems, the objectives of this study are:

2. To describe white Americans' prejudice and discrimination toward Japanese Americans, as portrayed in *Weedflower*.

3. To portray Japanese American's reaction toward white American's prejudice and discrimination as seen in *Weedflower*.

D. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study examines unequal treatment toward Japanese Americans in 1940's pre and post Pearl Harbor bombing based on *Weedflower*, a novel written by Cynthia Kadohata, a Japanese American writer. As minorities in United States, Japanese immigrants had been the object of prejudice and discrimination even before World War II between the United States and Japan erupted. The war between both countries was marked by the bombardment of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Pearl Harbor bombing caused great misery to white Americans

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and it surely had several impacts towards Japanese Americans. Pearl Harbor bombing worsened white Americans' prejudice and discrimination.

Weedflower presents the fact about what did really happen in the United States during World War II. By reading the novel, readers are expected to become more aware with people around them because people are not supposed to be judged based on their skin colors. The real quality of a person must be considered through his intelligence and personality. Through this study, our knowledge about racial conflicts in a multicultural country, particularly in United States will be improved. The writer of the study also wishes that this study will give a significant contribution amongsts all the study about *Weedflower* and Cynthia Kadohata.

E. SCOPE AND LIMITATION

There are several issues in Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower*. However, the analysis will be focused on one topic, which is the white Americans' treatment toward Japanese Americans as minorities in the United States in 1940s, especially during pre and post Pearl Harbor Bombing. It will also analyze Japanese Americans' reaction toward white Americans' prejudice and discrimination. Prejudiced people naturally react differently toward unequal treatment toward them. Their various reactions will be portrayed through this study.

Scope and limitation will also be applied in the theoretical framework. Although *Weedflower* is a historical fiction novel, historical approach will not be applied in analyzing the novel. It is because the main concern of this study is an

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intrinsic element of the novel which is its plot structure. This study will examine racial conflicts between Japanese Americans and white Americans which is portrayed in the novel. Therefore, new criticism approach will be applied.

F. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literary text which is examined in this study is a historical fiction novel entitled *Weedflower* which is written by a Japanese American writer, Cynthia Kadohata. The analysis will be focused on white Americans' treatment toward Japanese Americans in 1940s pre and post Pearl Harbor bombing. It will also examine Japanese Americans' reaction toward white Americans' unequal treatment. In examining the text, new criticism approach will be applied as a tool.

New criticism approach interprets literary text based solely on the context created and the language provided by the text. That is why it is also called intrinsic criticism (Lois Tyson: 132). Further, Tyson explained that intrinsic criticism examines literary text scrupulously on its complex relationship between formal elements and theme (124). Formal elements are elements which form or shape literary text, such as images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization, and plot (Tyson: 119).

One of the elements which is going to be analyzed is the plot structure which is related to conflict. It is because the text's main concern is racial conflict between two distinct racial groups which are white Americans as the dominant group and Japanese Americans as the minority. Plot is important because it informs the arrangement of the story and also provides a clue in which the story

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meaning can be found (Robert DiYanni: 45). In supporting his idea, DiYanni illustrated a plot diagram in which chronological events are shaped. In a plot diagram, structure of events is organized in chronological order because everything happens as the result of previous event. The definition of plot diagram will be explained further in chapter II.

G. METHOD OF THE STUDY

In a new criticism research, the main source of the analysis is the text itself. Mostly, the writer collects data inside the literary text. Data collection is conducted by having a close reading to the literary text and selecting some materials which are fit to the statement of the problems. Data which are selected must be related to the racial conflicts between white Americans and Japanese Americans during World War II as the main topic of this study. The data will be composed to make a structured analysis.

Besides, the writer also conducts library research to collect background information about the text and the theory. Background of the study is needed to improve our understanding about the main issue within the literary text. Theoretical background is also important to the study because it will be the main tool to examine the literary text. Online sources also give contribution to the study. Both are applied sufficiently to give additional information which is required to make an academic analysis.

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H. DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERM

Discrimination : Giving different treatments to certain group of people. In this study, discrimination is experienced by Japanese Americans as minority in United States. The discrimination is acted by white Americans as dominant group in United States.

Japanese Americans : Those who are Japanese descendant both whom born in Japan then move to United States and their American born children.

Minority : Small group, such as racial or religious group in a community or nation.

Prejudice : Negative attitudes or bias towards a particular group which is usually based on ethnic origin.

Weed flower : Wild flower growing on a place where it is not wanted. Weed flower is considered to be peculiar, innocent, and beautiful. Weed flower also symbolizes Sumiko as a peculiar, innocent, and beautiful girl.

White Americans : United States' citizen who are European descendant, also known as Caucasian race. It refers to both European born citizen who was born in Europe then move to United States and their American born children.

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