

HYBRIDITY POTRAYED BY MAJOR CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL “CRAZY RICH ASIAN” BY KEVIN KWAN

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Abstract

This research was conducted to figure out kinds of hybridity that major characters did in the novel “Crazy Rich Asian” by Kevin Kwan. This study was analyzed by using postcolonial approach with theory of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha. According to Bhabha, hybridity is the mixing of two or more different culture and create a new culture that has both culture characteristic. It can be said that hybridity is the result of cross culture that appears in society due to cross cultural interaction that happened for a long time. Descriptive qualitative method was used in this research to analyse social problems happened in the novel. Based on the analysis that had been conducted, there were two kinds of hybridity found out in the novel “Crazy Rich Asian”. They are ethic hybridity and lifestyle hybridity. The ethic hybridity was found in Rachel and Eddie’s mindset. Their mindset were more like American than other characters. Lifestyle hybridity was found in Astrid lifestyle which more like westerner than her husband.

Key words: Cultural Identity Crisis, Postcolonial, Hybridity

1. INTRODUCTION

Colonization era that ended hundreds years ago not only left sorrow and dark past to the colonized, but they also leave behind their culture and custom. These customs then adapted by the locals and blended with local customs and create a new culture and tradition which resulted of mixing two different culture (Cornali & Tirocchi, 2012).

Blending two or more different culture is not always a good thing for a person’s cultural identity. This phenomenon can make the traditional culture disappear and replaced by new culture. Even if the original tradition not gone, it can be contaminated with new culture and create a new culture that is the result of combining traditional and

foreign culture. This new culture will evoke a confusion for the people who lived with this kind of culture. They confused which culture they must followed and must be maintained (Nirmalasari, 2012). Daulay (2020) explaining the concept of Said Ideas related about orientalist in poscolonialism. He stated that orientalist discourse manifests itself as an influential system of ideas or as a network of various intellectual interests and meanings that are implied in various contextual, social, political, and constitutional of colonial hegemony.

According to Erikson (1968), identity crisis is condition when a person or group of people feel confused about their identity. It is also a time

when they start to find and build their own identity. Meanwhile, a cultural identity crisis is condition when a person or group of people feel confused about their racial identity, whether they are Asian, American or African. This confusion makes them feel that they are not in a particular ethnic group, race, or religion so that they feel isolated (Khan, 2017).

The fear of not belonging to a particular group made people experiencing a cultural crisis adopt the culture around them and claimed it as a part of their own culture. This phenomenon happened because people who grown up with two different culture cannot determined which culture belong to them and ended up adopting these two cultures as theirs. Crisis of cultural

Identity is closely related to the colonial era, where colonizers that mostly dominated by western colonize Asian and African countries. They not only bring misery but also bring their own culture and implement the culture into their colonized. The result, the colonized people have grown customized to the new culture that invades their country, and the new culture, both large and small, will affect life in the country and make the culture of a country related to or similar to its colonial state (Susanto, 2016). Bhabha in Waworuntu (2019) add that Hybridity is a cross between two different cultures in a tangent interaction. In this case, hybridity is not only seen as a fusion of culture but also cultural products placed in social and historical space under postcolonialism which are part of the imposition of colonial power relations.

This condition will affect in people's attitude towards their own traditional culture. People might forget their own traditional culture and do not

want to develop their cultures this also can affect world's cultural Identity. If their own people do not want to cultivate, the world will become dull and uninteresting because it only has one culture. The other effect is people might confused whether their culture that they conserved is their own culture or not. The result is culture that our ancestor held will perished and no more pure and traditional culture in this world.

The phenomenon of crisis identity because of the cross-culture actually happened since the end of colonization era. In that era, beside bringing pain and distress to the colonized, colonizer also bring their own culture and give influence to the colonized culture. For example when Netherlands invade Indonesia, they bring their culture like language and ideology and give influence to Indonesian culture until now.

One of the effects of crisis cultural identity is cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity happened when two cultures mix together and create a new culture that is a hybrid between old and new cultures. Cultural hybridity already blends with people in colonized countries. The new westernization trend that grown in society is the example of hybridity, from music choices that prefer western song and politics, especially in Indonesia that adapts Dutch political concept and law as the basic concept of Indonesian constitution (Praseno, 2011).

Other than hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence are some impacts of crisis identity. The way colonizers and colonized recognize one another is called Ambivalence (Bhabha, 2004). The feeling that happened between colonized and colonizers can be the negative feeling or positive feels that affect both parties psychologically or

socially. The ambivalence that happened for a long time can affect people and led them to do mimicry action. Mimicry refers to the act of impersonating other people's act or behavior, including language style, pattern, accent even to house design or interior (Bhabha, 2004). The act of mimicry happened because people grown attach to some culture and wanted to become like them, so they started to mimic the culture in order to make people the culture they adored, willing to accept them.

One of the story that shown the phenomenon of hybridity is the novel "Crazy Rich Asian" by Kevin Kwan. This novel told about the lives of Rachel Chu, Nick Young, Eleanor Young and Astrid Leong as Asian people who are familiar with western culture. the reason why Rachel was familiar with western culture even though she was Asian because Rachel was raised in America. She spent most of her life in America so she was more familiar with American culture. While Nick, Astrid and Eleanor were the member of one of the richest family in Singapore. As the part of Singapore high society, both Nick, Eleanor and Astrid familiar with western culture especially British culture. This phenomenon because Singapore is part of British colony and as the colonized in colonialism era, they thought that western people are the highest caste in Singapore. Because they were descendant from richest family, they need to behave like westerner to indicate they were from high social status.

Postcolonial analysis not only relates with colonizer and colonized interaction in the colonialism era. But it can also to analyze a character's behavior and mindset towards foreign cultures that lived alongside them for a

long time. This phenomenon will made the character adopt foreign culture and made it as a part of their own culture. The result of this action is cultural hybridity that suffered by the character. Cultural hybridity phenomena clearly found in the novel "Crazy Rich Asian" by Kevin Kwan. With postcolonial approach, the researcher aimed to find out kinds of hybridity that been implemented by the major characters of the novel "Crazy Rich Asian".

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonialism is a term used for a state or behavior of people towards others after colonialism era (Iverson, 2015). Postcolonial study usually related to the state or condition of what colonized people felt after the colonization ended. So it usually assumed as a study that concerned with the relation between colonizer and their colonized people, but the fact is, postcolonialism study is not only talks about colonizer behavior toward others, but it also tells about human experience. This study related to the condition that colonized people suffer after colonialism ended.

Postcolonialism is not simply about the effect of colonialism towards colonized countries and their people. But the study also talks deeper about human experience that has a relation with race, origin, culture, and also skin color as well as about minority in the world (Young, 2003). One of the theories about post colonialism is a theory of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence initiated by Homi K. Bhabha.

2.1. Hybridity

Hybridity is a common phenomenon that happened in our society today. Hybridity is a well-known term in biology. But in

literature, hybridity has a close relation with postcolonial study because it is related to cross-culture identity happened to a person after colonialism era ended. One of the well-known leading researchers in post-colonial study is Homi K. Bhabha with his theory about hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. As stated by Bhabha in Pourviseh & Pirnajmuddin (2014), hybridity can be described as the views about cultural identity and aims at the creation of a kind of community where different groups with different cultures while accepting their differences, form a union of “coalition”. The creation of this coalition can be led up to identity crisis for both groups. The new culture that comes from the combining process becomes a hybrid culture that caused multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is the result of hybridity. Bhabha (2004) argued that hybridity and multicultural could not be avoided because every cultural identity that exists will be constructed in a space called Third Space. According to Bhabha (2004), cultural identity always haunted by ambivalency and this controversial space, so a culture originality cannot be sustained.

Hybridity can happen in many forms, including, the way of thinking, fashion and style, language, and even politics (Praseno, 2011). Hybridity in music can be seen from the mix of music that had been created in the past few years. For example is the latest music created by Indonesian music group entitled “Lathi”. The melody is a mix between western and Indonesian music. It is a mix between western EDM and Indonesian gamelan (Prasetya, 2020). It is a clear example of hybridity in music.

Hybridity can also found in fashion world. The standard fashion style like suit, dress, and jeans that people wear

today are the example of hybridity. Suit, jeans, and dress are the British fashion characteristic in the past. After the industrial revolution, colonialist spread their influence and make people adapt this culture into their lives and started to wear them as formal standard clothes nowadays (Praseno, 2011).

Language also a kind of hybridity. Most language in this world are not pure anymore. Languages that exist in this world already mixed with other language and become a hybrid. One of the example of hybrid language is Japanese-English language or mostly known as “Japanglish” is the clear example of hybridity in language. They adapt English and combine it with Japanese to make the English pronunciation become easier to pronounce by Japanese people. For instance the word “Petto” is the japanglish word for “pet”. Hybridity in language cannot be avoided, because there are some words that cannot be translated and need to adapt from other sources (Life In Kansai, 2016).

2.2.Literature Review

There are some researchers that conduct an analysis about hybridity phenomenon towards a person culture. The first research was conducted by Pourviseh & Pirnajmuddin (2014). The title of this study is *Hybridity in Graham Greene’s The Quiet American and The Comedians*. These novels were written by using postcolonial theme. The aim of the researchers was to identify the imperialism and colonialism part that Greene’s point out in his novel. The reason why the researchers interested to research this novel is to found and answer their curiosity that whether the characters in the novels can be described as hybridity.

The second research was conducted by Istari (2018) with a journal article entitled *'The Impact of Hybridity and Mimicry on the Indian Immigrants' Identity: A Postcolonial Analysis in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland'*. The researcher did this research to point out hybridity and mimicry act done by Indian immigrant characters in the novel. Furthermore, the researcher also wanted to analyze the effect of these two phenomenon towards the Indian immigrant's character. Based on the research, the researcher found that Indian people in the novel suffered linguistic hybridity and did lifestyle mimicry.

The third research was conducted by Waworuntu & Arianto (2019). The title of the research is *'Hybridity of the Characters in My Son the Fanatic Short Story by Hanief Kureshi'*. The aim of this research is to show readers about what kind of hybridity that happened in the story which portrayed by Parvez and Ali. The researchers were using Homi K Bhabha theory to research this paper with Post colonialism approach. Qualitative descriptive method is used by the researchers to help them analyze the data. At the end of the research, the researchers found two kinds of hybridity that happened in the story, mimicry and ambivalence.

The fourth research was conducted by Zohdi (2017). The title of this study is *Lost-identity; A Result of "Hybridity" and "Ambivalence" in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*. The purpose of this research was to learn more about Season of Migration to the North novel by using Bhabha's Hybridity and Ambivalence theory. The novel itself was written by Tayeb Salih in 1969. The novel talk about Mustava Saeed, a colonized who went to London for study. The main purpose of his migration was to do a

revenge on the imperialist but apparently, he lost his own culture identity in the process. So based on the problem faced by the main character, the researcher believe that Ambivalence and Hybridity are things that make culture mixed together or even lost their identity in postcolonial literature.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative descriptive method is the method that used by the researcher to analyze the data in this research. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative method is a method that used to analyze social problems that happened in human's life. While descriptive method means that the data that had been analyzed will be shown descriptively by using words and paragraphs. The researcher divided the analyzing process into two steps. The first step is data collecting and the second is analyzing.

A process of gathering information that can be used as data to analyze is called data collection (Kabir, 2016). In this step, the researcher will collected the data related to the topic of analysis by reading the primary source which is the novel "Crazy Rich Asian" by Kevin Kwan. After reading the main data source, the researcher will figure out some data related to the research problem and made analysis based on the postcolonial theory. After collecting the data, the researcher will move to the next stage which called analyzing. In this step, the researcher analyzed the novel by applying extrinsic elements which is postcolonial theory about hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha to the major characters of "Crazy Rich Asian" novel. After analyzing the data, the researcher will present the research result descriptively by using words and sentence in the form of paragraphs.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis that had been conducted, the researcher found out two kinds of hybridity occurred in the novel “Crazy Rich Asian” by Kevin Kwan.

4.1. Hybridity in ethic

Hybridity in ethic related to the way people behavior towards others, including their mindset about something.

Hybridity in Ethic showed by Rachel’s interaction with her mother. Rachel was a Chinese as well as Nick. But Nick interaction towards her mother was different to Rachel’s.

“But shouldn’t your personal life be the same as your family life?”

“Not in my case. Rachel, you know how overbearing Chinese parents can be.”

“Well, yeah, but it still wouldn’t keep me from telling my mom about something as important as my boyfriend. I mean, my mom knew about you five minutes after our first date, and you were sitting down to dinner with her—enjoying her winter melon soup—like, two months later.”

“Well, you have a very special thing with your mum, you know that. It’s not that easy for most other people. And with my parents, it’s just ...” Nick paused, struggling for the right words. “We’re just different. We’re much more formal with each other, and we don’t really discuss our emotional lives at all (Kwan, 2013, p.64).”

The quotation above clearly stated that Rachel’s culture already a hybrid between American and Chinese culture. In the quotation above, Rachel said that personal life should be the same with

family life. However, the truth is, Asian people usually not that close with their family. There are some distance between children-parents relationship. It is really hard to talk about personal matters especially taking their lovers to meet their parents. Just like Nick said, his relation with his mother was really formal and they usually not discussed emotional things with his parents. Asian children prefer to discuss personal matters with their friends because that make them more comfortable.

However, the situation is different in western country like America. Westerner relationships are not that formal. Children and parents can casually talk about their problems like friends and the children sometimes more trust their parents to talk about their problems than with friends. Just like Rachel’s and her mother relationship. Rachel’s mindset already followed western culture so she did not have any problem to talk about personal matters with her mother. That is why the quotation above clearly stated that Rachel attitude was more American than Nick.

Hybridity in ethic also showed by Eddie Cheng, Nick’s cousin who lived in Hong Kong and worked as a banker. Eddie was a famous banker and also a descendant of wealthiest family in Singapore, so he always think about his images by showing a rich person image. The hybridity in Ethic that showed by Eddie was his mindset that as a successful businessman, he must showed his wealthiest by having luxurious things and riding a private jet to travel around, like what British royal family did.

Alexandra considered the implications of his declaration quietly, but decided to pick her battles one at a time. “Fiona is

right. We can't possibly borrow the Ming family plane two days in a row! In fact, I think it would look very inappropriate for us to fly in a private plane at all. I mean, who do we think we are?"

"Daddy's one of the most famous heart surgeons in the world! You are Singaporean royalty! What's wrong with flying on a private plane?" Eddie shouted in frustration (Kwan, 2013, p. 53).

Eddie's mindset inclined more to westerner mentality where a wealthy person must showed and boast around their wealth. He over proud of his own achievement and think that everyone must know about it. This way of thinking contradict with her mother, who thought that as a Chinese, we cannot show-off and must down to earth. Because they do not have anything to boast around, thus she thought that their family need to stay humble and low profile. However, Eddie disagree with this opinion because he knew that actually his family was wealthy enough to even buy a private jet. Eddie's way of thinking that like to boast around was more like westerner than Asian.

4.2. Hybridity in Lifestyle

The first data related to hybridity in lifestyle was shown by Astrid and her family. The hybridity shown by a scene where Astrid and Michael attend a family dinner to celebrate Astrid's father birthday. Her family chose Italian restaurant to celebrate her father's birthday. Even though they were Chinese, they did not follow Chinese custom to celebrate a birthday.

"Gordon and I sold our Pulau Club memberships because I realized I was only going there to

eat their ice kacang,"‡ Michael overheard Mavis telling his mother-in-law. What he wouldn't give to be back out on the field with his friends right now. They could play soccer until the sun went down, and then head to the nearest kopi tiam§ for cold beers and some nasi goreng|| or char bee hoon.a It would be so much better than sitting here in this tie that choked him half to death, eating unpronounceable food that was insanely overpriced (Kwan, 2013, p. 97).

The quotation above clearly indicate that Astrid's lifestyle was a hybrid between western and Asian culture. She enjoys going to western restaurant. Even for her father birthday, she and her family chose Italian restaurant to celebrate his birthday. They did not celebrate it by using Chinese custom but using western tradition, which is a simple dinner at a fancy restaurant. This small dinner at a fancy restaurant made Michael uncomfortable. He prefer something more like Singaporean. He did not enjoy fancy dinner that spent a lot of time, he liked small and warm dinner like what he usually did with his friend. Based on the explanation, it clearly showed that Astrid's lifestyle was more western than Michael's.

The second data related to Hybridity in lifestyle showed by Eleanor Young. At that time, Eleanor and her friends were traveling to Hong Kong and the hybridity showed while they were having breakfast at a prestigious Hong Kong hotel.

As Eleanor tried to imagine the countertops in a neutral Silestone, a maid placed a bowl of steaming fish porridge in front of her. "No,

no porridge for me. Can I have some toast with marmalade?” The maid did not appear to understand Eleanor’s attempt at Mandarin. Lorena finished her call, flipped off her phone, and said, “Aiyah, Eleanor, you’re in China. At least try some of this delicious porridge.” “Sorry, I can’t eat fish first thing in the morning—I’m used to my morning toast,” Eleanor insisted. “Look at you! You complain your son is too westernized, and yet you can’t even enjoy a typical Chinese breakfast (p.219. Kwan, 2013).”

Based on the quotation above, Eleanor clearly showed hybridity in lifestyle. She was a Chinese, but due to her marriage to the Young family who lived with hybrid culture, she followed their lifestyle and later it became a habit for her. Compare to her other friends who are still familiar with Chinese culture, Eleanor lifestyle was more western. The example is the choice of breakfast she chose. Although she was Chinese, she preferred to eat western breakfast than Chinese breakfast. As seen in the quotation, while her friends were eating Chinese congee, Eleanor chose toast for her breakfast.

Eleanor’s choice of breakfast indicate that her lifestyle already a hybrid between Chinese and western culture. She is a Chinese and follows Chinese culture since she was a child, but after she married to the Young family, she mimic western culture that followed by Young family and for the time being, she used to it and her lifestyle became a hybrid between Chinese and Western.

5. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of hybridity clearly happened in the novel “Crazy

Rich Asian” by Kevin Kwan. The phenomenon of hybridity in the novel was analyzed by using Homi K. Bhabha postcolonial theory of hybridity. The analysis found two kinds of hybridity that the major characters did in the novel. The first one is hybridity in ethic that Rachel and Eddie’s did. The second hybridity is hybridity in lifestyle that Astrid did. The hybridity that happened in Rachel and Eddie’s mindset happened because they were living in western country for too long, and it influenced their mindset. While Astrid hybridity happened because her family tried to mimic westerner life to show others that they were from high class family. The mimicry that occur for a long period of time made astrid lifestyle became hybrid. Based on the research, the researcher found that hybridity not only happened between two different race but one race can also suffers hybridity, this happened due to living in other country for too long and they adapt foreign cultures and made it as their own. Beside of it, the high class people way of life also the cause of hybridity.

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