

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Economic inequality is a contemporary problem that covers most countries in the world. There are some groups of people who are the pillars of the economy so that their position becomes very important. By using the power of this position, the group can exploit groups that are considered economically weaker and dominate in the socio-economic class. This is the ideology of capitalism. As a result of economic inequality, the community is divided into groups of 'miners' and 'mine owners'. Although the social class division was removed due to industrial developments, this created a different class ladder. Several countries began to identify their society into two major groups, namely the bourgeoisie (upper class) and the proletariat (working class) as a result of the development of the contemporary economic system. The division of groups in the capitalist system really shows inequality and injustice, especially for the working class group. The bourgeoisie refers to as the elite who own commodities, while the proletariats are only workers who work under the influence of the elite and their products are not entirely theirs. As a result, exploitation occurs because there is imbalance power between the proletariat and the elite. The elite group has more power than the working class group and they use their privilege to exploit the working class.

Capitalism can be called as "the liberal plan" which every individual or business privately can have their own sources and benefits from their own works even if they

have employed laborers under their control in the process to get it. In other words, capitalism has the motive to have a control on their sources or goods freely and compete with others in order to develop the works as long as they follow the laws. Private companies become the group that benefits the most in the capitalist system because of their control over commodities. Simply, private companies are the source of the state's economy which is quite influential in the development of industry and for that reason, on the other hand, society may get the benefit of it, however they also have to face unbeneficial effects of their business process. This increases competition among working class groups who have to survive between domination and competition.

Talking about capitalism, several countries in Asia have adopted a capitalist economic system, including China, South Korea, and Japan. Prof. Hanns W. Maull stated on his online article, these countries had previously experienced an economic crisis in 1997-1998. As a result of the resolution of the crisis, the East Asian countries changed their economic system to capitalism that imitated the Anglo-Saxon capitalism system. Then, these East Asian countries developed into countries with the largest economic activity in the world.

According to Anthony Brewer in his book entitled *A Guide to Marx's Capital*, he wrote Marx's theory of history and political program related to the analysis of capitalism which showed that economic development added to the crisis and sharpened the polarization of social classes in the name of a way to deal with revolution (2). This means that capitalism does temporarily stabilize the economy, but its negative effects are far more detrimental than eliminating the system and bringing down the economic

system for a while. East Asian countries seem to have depended on this economic system where the economic progress is quite rapid and has made them superpower countries.

South Korea is a country that is quite outspoken about capitalism. Production in the economic sector sourced from the world of entertainment and industry is the most obvious supplier of profits. Consumption of local music, films and dramas from South Korea continues to spread internationally. This is nothing more than the role of elite groups politicizing the entertainment industry to attract foreign economic resources to provide commodities (money, land, raw materials, etc.) in South Korea. However, the working group in South Korea has to experience oppression and exploitation because of their position which is only responsible for the course of production and does not get commensurate results. The number of deaths and cases of crime due to injustice for working groups in South Korea continues to increase. Working groups in South Korea are increasing competition and refusing to fall behind in order to survive under the domination of an upper class group with easy access to anything.

Criticism of the capitalist system in South Korea has been shown indirectly through literary works and films or dramas. Speaking of Capitalism in South Korea, the South Korean government has been working with wealthy businessmen called “*chaebol*” (meaning “conglomerates” in Korean) to build and develop the country's economy since facing a crisis in 1997-1998. This was the beginning of capitalism where *chaebols* controlled the country's economy as well as the social conditions of its

people later on. *Chaebol* has its own role in the Korean economy. This *chaebol* system developed during the leadership of Park Jung-Hee (1961-1979) (Murillo & Sung 5). They are given the privilege to receive exclusive projects in several government sectors such as industry and the military, they even get reduced tax costs and export subsidies or loans without the need to be billed or ask for guarantees (Murillo & Sung 5). *Chaebols* became the bourgeoisie group in the Korean capitalist system and the perpetrators of the working class exploitation.

Discussing the capitalist system cannot be separated from the Marxist theory put forward by Karl Marx. Raymond Williams considers that the main discussion of Marxist theory is the formation of new social classes, the awareness of which is followed by elements of new cultural formation (124). Marx critiqued the capitalist system which was considered detrimental and exploited the working class group through literary works. Therefore, in the Marxist literary concept, literary works are the author's product produced and sold by the author to the reader as a commodity or a driving force for literary production to keep repeating itself. In other words, literary works can become a forum for criticism of social problems, including the bad effects of capitalism, which are more detrimental to the working class.

The problems experienced by working class people are one of the topics raised in three selected short stories written by Bora Chung and it was compiled in a book entitled *Cursed Bunny*. Bora Chung is known as a social activist and lecturer in Russian language and literature at Yonsei University. She has produced three novels and three short story collection books, including *Cursed Bunny* and *Your Utopia* which was

published in January 2024. Her book, *Cursed Bunny* is one of the winners of the International Booker Prize Award 2022 and became the first Korean translated book that won the award in that year. Through those books, she is more engaged with genre magical realism, horror and thriller in order to show her critics toward South Korean contemporary society.

Cursed Bunny is the first published work of Bora Chung. *Cursed Bunny* was written in Korean and published in South Korea by Arzak in 2017, then it was translated into English by Anton Hur and published by Hanford Star, a British publisher in 2021. The book consists of 10 short stories with different story lines, setting, and characters. The 10 short stories are written in the period of 20 years where the oldest short story is written in 1998 and the newest short story is written in 2013. The researcher decides to use three short stories from the book, such as “The Embodiment”, “Cursed Bunny”, and “Home Sweet Home” to examine the exploitations that happened in South Korea society. Talking about *Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung, there may not any research happen to examine this book, however the reviews of the book are written on several online magazines. Violet Kupersmith published a review of *Cursed Bunny* on New York Times entitled “With Bora Chung as Our Guide, We Walk Ourselves Into the Trap” (2022) which is saying Bora Chung serves more than one genres on her short stories, such as classic ghost stories, fairy tales, mythic fantasy, science fiction, dark fables, the surreal and unclassifiable horror-adjacent. The genres keyword "horror" and "fantasy" are not only assumed by Kupersmith, Fernanda Coutinho Teixeira on Stranger Horizons, Noah Berlatsky of Los Angeles Times, Mahvesh Murad of Reactor

Mag, Fi Churchman of Art Reviews and Ian Macallen of Chicago Reviews of Book shared the same ideas.

In some Korean literary works, the topic of social problems that affect South Korean society both personally and publicly is raised and even becomes a target to convey personal experiences or criticism of these problems. This invites the interest of researchers to find out more about social problems in South Korean society, one of which is problems in the working class environment, especially the exploitations experienced by them. To understand more about this problem, the writer chose the *Cursed Bunny* book written by Bora Chung as the object of my research. The translated version can be considered as a good one because it was shortlisted in Book Prize Award 2022 and reviewed by several famous online magazines. This book attracted the researcher to be used as the research object because the book is originally written by a Korean woman and it shows her point of view and critic as a Korean who is experiencing capitalism in South Korean society.

1.2. Identification of the Problem

All short stories that Bora Chung compiled in *Cursed Bunny* shows the characters are struggling and filled with helplessness because of their diverse issues and backgrounds. However, these three of short stories entitled “The Embodiment”, “Cursed Bunny”, and “Home Sweet Home” show similar issues where the main characters are getting exploited because of their socio-economic class background as a working class and living in South Korean capitalist society. Each of the stories show

depicts different reactions which negatively felt by the characters socially, psychologically, and materially.

1.3. Review of the Related Study

In order to evaluate this research, the researcher found several related sources for this study. The sources will mainly relate to the short stories' theme, topic, and theory from previous researches. It can be in a form of article, journal or thesis.

Talking about theme, there are some online magazines reviewed the theme of "The Embodiment", "Cursed Bunny", and "Home Sweet Home" in *Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung. Violet Kupersmith writes her review on New York Times article magazine entitled "With Bora Chung as Our Guide, We Walk Ourselves into the Trap". She agrees that "The Embodiment" tells how women are the object of Confucians gender doctrine pressures in patriarchal society. She also mentions her ideology about the theme of "Cursed Bunny" which shows capitalist greed and the hunger of power can lead to an unbeneficial revenge. In addition, Ian Macallen of Chicago Reviews of Book article magazine entitled "Greed and Other Monsters in *Cursed Bunny*" says the short story "Home Sweet Home" tells us that being greedy only leads to sufferings or shortly shows the human materialist. Moreover, all of the reviewers also agree that Bora Chung mainly uplifts the themes of capitalism and patriarchy in the whole of *Cursed Bunny*. Those themes are relevant with the findings of the kinds of exploitation where they are becoming the motives of doing the exploitations toward working class.

Previously, there were studies that raised the topic of exploitation of the working class in a capitalist system. The form of exploitation can be modernized

following the development of society. Therefore, contemporary exploitation is more likely nearest to working class living under the circumstances of industrialization and globalization. The researcher finds there are some related sources to the predetermined research topic. In a journal article entitled “Economic Realities, Classicism and Exploitation: A Marxist Study of Thomas Hardy’s Novel *Tess of D’Urbervilles*”, Shadab Fatima shows one of her ideas where she stated that marriage meaning is to gain economic stability. Similar idea is also stated by Ida Purnama Sari and Ely Rusliawati on their journal article “Eksplorasi Perempuan Sebagai Komoditas dalam Novel *Jatisaba Karya Ramayda Akmal*”. This is one of the forms of exploitation where women are forced to give the control of themselves in a change of instant wealth. Another journal article titled “Dampak Eksploitasi Terhadap Anak di Indonesia” by Uswatun Hasanah mentions that the causes of exploitation can come from internal and external areas and the impact must involve physical and mental. Exploitation not only has a physical and mental impact, but also creates resistance from the working class as the exploited and most disadvantaged party. This is shown in Dhika Bagaskara Januar’s thesis, *Representasi Perlawanan Kelas Melalui Tokoh Pada Film Mary Poppins Return Dengan Pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis*. He shows the form of resistance of the proletariat can be unlawful act or violence.

As for studies that use a Marxist approach in analyzing exploitation against the working class, the closest related sources are Sany Eka Putri’s thesis entitled *Perjuangan Kelas Proletar dalam Novel Kani Kousen Karya Kobayashi Takiji melalui Pendekatan Teori Marxisme* and Dzakkia Ulul 'Azmi’s *Penindasan Kaum Proletar*

oleh Kaum Borjuis dalam Novel Kani Kosen Karya Kobayashi Takiji Kajian : *Marxisme*. Both of them uses the main ideas of Karl Marx to explain the class struggle and exploitation or oppression of working class.

1.4. Research Question

This research is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the kinds of exploitation depicted by the characters in selected short stories in Bora Chung's *Cursed Bunny*?
2. What are the impacts of the exploitations depicted by the characters in selected short stories in *Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung?

1.5. Scope of the Research

This research focuses on analyzing the characters from the three selected short stories which depicts the experience of exploitations as lower or working class people in South Korea society where it has influenced by strong capitalism and the impacts of exploitation.

1.6. Objective of the Research

This study aims to discover the kind of exploitations that occurred in South Korean Society depicted by the characters in three selected short stories of *Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung. The researcher also analyzes the negative impacts of exploitation experienced by the characters in the three selected short stories of *Cursed Bunny*.