

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The field of English Literature has undergone considerable development in recent decades. Its scope is no longer limited to printed literary works such as novels, drama, and poetry. At present, visual narratives such as films and animated features are also widely studied as literary texts. This expansion reflects the growing recognition that meaning can be constructed not only through written language but also through images, sounds, and narrative structure.

Animated films in particular have become important objects of literary analysis. They are able to present moral values, emotional conflicts, and social messages through a combination of dialogue, visuals, and symbolic elements. In this sense, animated films are not merely entertainment products, but also complex cultural texts. Hutcheon (2013) explains that cinematic narratives operate in ways similar to literary texts because they generate meaning and guide audience interpretation.

In recent academic discussions, character intelligence has also gained increasing attention. Intelligence in fictional characters is now understood in a broader sense, not only as logical ability, but also as adaptability, emotional awareness, and strategic thinking. Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences

highlights that intelligence can appear in different forms, including interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities (Gardner, 2011). This broader concept allows scholars to examine how intelligence is represented through character behavior and narrative function.

Within this broader understanding of intelligence, Zhen in *Kung Fu Panda 4* becomes a relevant subject for literary study. Zhen is portrayed as a character who demonstrates mental agility, flexibility, and ethical awareness throughout the story. Her actions often show problem-solving skills, strategic reasoning, and sensitivity toward others. These traits make her character suitable for examining how cleverness is constructed in an animated narrative.

The representation of intelligence in literary characters is closely related to narrative agency. Abrams and Harpham (2015) state that character traits often influence plot development and contribute to the thematic direction of a text. Intelligent characters frequently shape the story through wit, observation, and careful decision-making rather than physical strength alone. This idea supports an analysis of Zhen as a character whose cleverness has a meaningful role in the storyline.

Emotional intelligence is another important concept for analyzing Zhen's character. Goleman (2015) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, manage, and respond appropriately to one's own emotions and the emotions of others. Zhen's interactions in the film show empathy, social awareness,

and emotional control. These aspects indicate that her intelligence is not limited to rational thought, but also includes emotional maturity.

However, despite the growing number of studies on intelligence in film characters, research on supporting characters is still limited. Most previous discussions tend to focus on major protagonists, while secondary characters are often overlooked. This creates a clear research gap that deserves further attention. As a supporting character, Zhen offers an opportunity to explore intelligence from a less commonly examined perspective.

In relation to this topic, several previous studies have discussed Kung Fu Panda 4, although they focused on different aspects of the film. Sudiantari and Satwika (2025) examined politeness maxims in the movie by using a pragmatic approach. They paid attention to how politeness is expressed in the characters' utterances rather than looking at the narrative structure. Their analysis focused heavily on the social dynamics between characters through their verbal exchanges. Consequently, their study did not address how the characters are built or developed in the narrative.

Furthermore, Wardana and Putra (2024) studied expressive illocutionary acts in Kung Fu Panda 4. They described the specific types and functions of the speech acts used by the characters. Through this method, they categorized various emotional expressions such as thanking, apologizing, and praising within the dialogues. Therefore, their study was primarily concerned with language use in communication rather than characterization or literary traits.

Meanwhile, Falhi, Widhiyanto, and Haryanti (2025) analyzed subtitling strategies and translation quality in the Indonesian fan subtitles of the film. Their research focused on how the dialogue is translated from the source language to the target language. They evaluated how accurate, acceptable, and readable the subtitles are for Indonesian audiences. Because of this technical linguistic focus, their investigation did not explore the deeper thematic or literary layers of the narrative.

Taken together, these studies show that previous research on Kung Fu Panda 4 has mostly discussed linguistic and translation issues. None of them has specifically explored Zhen's cleverness through Abrams and Harpham's characterization theory. This leaves a significant empirical gap regarding the literary and psychological analysis of the film's characters. Therefore, the present study is designed to fill this gap by focusing on the textual and narrative development of the character.

This research is important because it introduces a more focused analysis of Zhen's cleverness. By examining her character, the study contributes a new perspective to the discussion of animated films in English Literature. It also broadens the academic attention given to supporting characters, which are often underestimated in literary research. In this way, the study strengthens the idea that animated films deserve serious scholarly treatment.

From an educational perspective, this research also offers useful insight for students and scholars. It provides an analytical framework for understanding character intelligence through literary and psychological theories. In addition, it

encourages critical thinking and interdisciplinary interpretation in literary studies. This is consistent with the academic goals of English Literature programs in Indonesian higher education.

In conclusion, this study addresses an important gap in literary and film analysis by focusing on Zhen's cleverness in *Kung Fu Panda 4*. Through the integration of relevant theoretical perspectives, the research seeks to present a deeper understanding of character intelligence in animated films. The study is expected to contribute to the development of English Literature scholarship. It also affirms that animated films are meaningful literary texts that deserve closer academic attention.

1.2 Problem Statement

Based on the background of the study, this research is conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is Zhen's character in *Kung Fu Panda 4*?
2. How is cleverness reflected in Zhen's character in *Kung Fu Panda 4*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study is designed to achieve two main objectives that are directly related to the research questions. The first objective is to describe Zhen's character in *Kung Fu Panda 4* by observing how her personality is shown through her actions, dialogues, and relationships with other characters across the film. Through this objective, the research aims to present a clearer picture of who Zhen is and how she functions as a character in the story.

The second objective is to examine how cleverness is reflected in Zhen's character in *Kung Fu Panda 4*. In this case, the study focuses on scenes and dialogues that highlight Zhen's ability to think quickly, solve problems, and respond to difficult situations in a strategic way. By analyzing these moments, the research seeks to explain how Zhen's cleverness shapes her characterization and influences the development of the film's narrative.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on the character of Zhen in the animated film *Kung Fu Panda 4*. The analysis is limited to the way Zhen is portrayed throughout the story, especially through her actions, dialogues, and interactions with other characters. Within this scope, the research pays particular attention to Zhen's overall character and to the cleverness she displays in different situations in the film.

The study does not discuss all aspects of the film in detail. Elements such as animation techniques, cinematography, sound design, or the characterization of other characters are only mentioned when they are needed to support the analysis of Zhen. The research is also limited to a qualitative descriptive approach, which means it focuses on interpreting scenes and dialogues rather than using numerical data or statistical analysis. With these boundaries, the study aims to provide a clear and manageable discussion that remains consistent with the research questions and objectives.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to offer both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to the development of character analysis in English literature and film studies, particularly in relation to animated films. By focusing on Zhen as a supporting character in *Kung Fu Panda 4* and examining how her cleverness is reflected in the narrative, this study expands the discussion on characterization beyond the main protagonist and shows that secondary characters can also carry important thematic and structural roles in a story. The use of Abrams and Harpham's characterization theory in this context also illustrates how the concepts of "showing" and "telling" can be applied to analyze cleverness as a specific character trait in visual narratives.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this research may serve as a useful reference for students, lecturers, and researchers who are interested in conducting literary analysis of films, especially studies that focus on character and characterization. The study can provide examples of how to select, organize, and interpret scenes and dialogues when examining a particular character trait, such as cleverness, in an animated film. In addition, the research encourages readers to pay more attention to supporting characters and to consider how their traits and actions contribute to the overall meaning of a narrative. In this way, the study is expected to support teaching and learning activities in English literature programs and to inspire further research on character analysis in various types of film.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

A. Cleverness refers to an individual's capacity to think strategically, adapt to various situations, and resolve problems effectively, including elements of emotional and social intelligence (Gardner, 2011; Goleman, 2015).

B. Reflection denotes the way an abstract concept is represented through a character's actions, dialogue, and behavioral patterns within a narrative context (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).

C. Character is defined as a fictional figure in a literary work who possesses psychological, moral, and social attributes that influence and support the development of the narrative (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).