

## Stereotypical Image of Chinese People in Hollywood's The Karate Kid 2010 Movie

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**Abstract** - Hollywood is an important media for the United States in spreading Western ideology. The hundreds years, Hollywood has featured various characters from different cultures and countries. However, they have suffered from cultural racism along with other minority groups. In American movie, the East depicted as ignorant and backward with a considered inferior culture compared to the west. This situation is known as orientalism, has influenced and controlled the mass media (films) and Western society's perceptions. This study aims to determine how eastern culture is depicted in the American film, *The Karate Kid*. This study uses Edward Said's Orientalism theory, which explained how the westerner views the east. The analysis concludes that the Hollywood industry reflects the superiority of the west over China through the character of Dre Parker. Hence, the portrayal of Chinese characters is displayed with stereotypes such as yellow faces, skin color racism, slanted eyes, bullying, and alcoholic habit.

**Keywords:** Hollywood, Orientalism, Racism, Stereotype

**Abstrak** - Hollywood merupakan media penting bagi Amerika Serikat dalam menyebarkan ideologi Barat. Selama ratusan tahun, Hollywood telah menampilkan berbagai karakter dari budaya dan negara yang berbeda. Namun, mereka menderita rasisme budaya bersama dengan kelompok minoritas lainnya. Dalam perfilman Amerika, Timur digambarkan sebagai orang yang bodoh dan terbelakang dengan budaya yang dianggap inferior dibandingkan dengan barat. Situasi ini dikenal dengan orientalisme, telah mempengaruhi dan menguasai persepsi media massa (film) dan masyarakat Barat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana budaya timur digambarkan dalam film Amerika, *The Karate Kid*. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Orientalisme Edward Said, yang menjelaskan bagaimana orang barat memandang timur. Analisis menyimpulkan bahwa industri Hollywood mencerminkan keunggulan barat atas Cina melalui karakter Dre Parker. Oleh karena itu, penggambaran karakter Tionghoa ditampilkan dengan stereotip seperti wajah kuning, rasisme warna kulit, mata sipit, bullying, dan kebiasaan alkohol.

**Katakunci:** Hollywood, Orientalisme, Rasisme, Stereotip

### INTRODUCTION

Movie is a visual effect medium that delivers an emotional sense, giving a deep impression on the audience. It has the unique ability to render and capture visible phenomena seemingly objectively but consistently from the filmmaker's perspective (Catherine Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Moreover, the depiction of people's characteristics from different countries in films has always been controversial. As for Hollywood films, they are an essential medium for the United States to spread certain ideologies. Hollywood industry of film provides a kaleidoscope of American culture and ideas about accepting and excluding different ideologies. One of the unique cultures often mentioned is from China. Hollywood has a particular narrative method used to present stories about Chinese culture. However, many of these

films have been filled with racial prejudice and orientalist thinking (Fuller, 2010).

For example, in the earliest Hollywood films, the Chinese characters appeared as clowns and villains. In addition, the Chinese image in Hollywood films is constructed by a set of stereotypes that is constantly changing. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there is a wealth of literature on the stereotypical depiction of East Asians in Hollywood films. After Fu Manchu started appearing in 1929, Fu Manchu instantly became a distinctive public and stereotypical character. In Hollywood films, he portrayed a threat in every twitch of his finger and eyebrow and terror in every second of his slanted eye.

Moreover, there is another stereotype, Charlie Chan, and he is portrayed as a detective with a simple, law-abiding character, contrasting the portrayal of dangerous crimes in many films and TV

shows. However, he is also calculative, boring, distended, and effeminate. Therefore, it strengthens certain stereotypes in East Asia called the inability to speak English fluently, bound by tradition and obedience (Fuller, 2010).

The representation of Chinese and Chinese-American has appeared on screens since the inception of American fiction films. However, they have suffered from cultural racism with other minority groups in the long history, including Native Americans, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans. According to Edward Said, the Hollywood Narrative is actually "a Western-style for dominates, restructures, and the authority over the East." The different stereotypes of Chinese people in each era, forming galleries that reflect American cultural attitudes towards China. From the literature study above, it is legitimate that the stereotypes of orientalist thinking influence the construction of Chinese images in Hollywood films. This phenomenon is a brief description of Orientalism. Orientalism is the West's way of looking at the East in a cultural aspect. The stereotype that emerges is that the East is low, dirty, and has no advanced civilization, opposed to the West. Edward Said's statement regarding his criticism of Western injustice through "Orientalism" states that Orientalism is the West's way of controlling and reorganizing the East (Said, 1978).

The Karate Kid is a film by Harald Zwart, an adaptation of early Karate Kid's film released in 1984. The story itself still takes the same outline as the old version. Dre Parker had to separate from his friends in Detroit and move to Beijing, China, due to his mother's job demands. The process of adapting to a new environment is a difficult thing to do, especially for children of Dre's age. His acquaintance with a beautiful girl, Mei Ying, causes him to become despised by Cheng, the young man who has been in love with Mei Ying for a long time. Cheng and his gang members often use Dre as a "practical tool" for their Kung-Fu learning. Cheng's attitude made Dre even more uncomfortable living in China. Luckily, Dre meets Mr. Han, a mechanic who works in their apartment. After being able to help Dre from attacks by Cheng and his friends, Mr. Han is willing to teach Dre Kung-Fu techniques to help Dre protect himself.

This film is related to Orientalism, which according to Edward Said's statement about his criticism of Western injustice through his work "Orientalism." Said states that Orientalism could be discussed and analyzed as a legal entity against the East. It is relevant to making statements about the East, affirming the East's view, describing, positioning, and dominating it. In other words, Orientalism is the West's way of dominating and

restructuring the East (Said, 1978). The depiction of non-Western characters is an oriental stereotype embedded in the orientalist in the film. Orientalist stereotypes are a typical thing in the East. In this case, Gifford stated that writers such as novelists or poets have the power to spread certain ideologies through their fiction words that can control the content in the story and build a kind of hegemony that aligns the reader without realizing it. The author's construct of stereotypes serves as an 'invitation to missionary achievement and endeavor, i.e., practical outcomes and strategies of European colonization (Addison, 1993).

Orientalism is the depiction of the East by the West, in contrast to Occidentalism which talks about the depiction of the West by the East (Silalahi, 2018). America tries to portray the East according to their imagination. East is described as unique, ancient, and full of mystery. Therefore, Western stereotypes that shape the audience's perception of the East are only based on films without seeing the East directly (Scurry, 2010). This stereotype is described as one of Hollywood's insistence on removing Asians from their narratives. According to Hall, the stereotype signifies how something is given meaning (Hall, 1997). The primary function of stereotypes is to create meaning, making it easier for us to understand the world. In this sense, the stereotype is very close to the practice of grouping things into specific categories. People often consciously or unconsciously divide things or people into groups based on particular characteristics considered to have something in common. Type is a simple characterization featuring several properties and functions as the basis of our classification system.

Therefore, several previous studies on Orientalism have been carried out. West & Lyn conducted semiotic research to present Orientalism in the film *The Man Who Knows Infinity*. They use Barthes' semiotics to determine how the denotative, connotative, and mythical files in Orientalism in "The Men Who Knows Infinity." Fairuz gave an example that the representation of Orientalism shown is the power of the West against the East through the difference in status and social position of each culture (West & Lyn, 2017). The second orientalism study was conducted by Bramanstian on 2019 in which he examines the bias of colonialism or Orientalism towards the Arab in the film *The Dictator* by Larry Charles. The paper uses the perspective of Orientalism put forward by Edward Said, especially the Western world view of Arabia. He gave an example that the Western world view Arabs image as a society that is brutal, violent, and full of lust (Brammastian & Kusciati, 2018).

Although the new centuries have removed some of the bad pictures of the previous period, to some extent, they still misjudge the eastern nation—continuous Western film production with flawed Eastern characters in it. Based on previous studies, the author has not found any research on Orientalism that specifically represents the image of Chinese characters.

Through *The Karate Kid*, the author wants to reveal how Hollywood portrays Chinese people with various stereotypes in the film. Asians have been subjected to unfair and underrepresented treatment in the Hollywood film industry from the 20th century until today. The author wants to dissect how Hollywood portrays Asian people through text and film analysis and critical theory. In the film *The Karate Kid*, the writer wants to show that the portrayal of Chinese people is strongly influenced by orientalist thinking, which harms the perception of Asian people in the world. Therefore, this study will explain what stereotypes Hollywood instills in films and how films continue to portray them. This study not only covers the stereotype of China as a whole but also examines the existence of Orientalism which unconsciously inserts for the audience to enjoy the superiority of the western power over the east.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study implements the theory of Orientalism from Edward Said because this film contains Western view against the East. The data will explain how Hollywood portrays China in *The Karate Kid 2010*, which depends on the story, conversation, visuals, and other contexts. Orientalism is the West's attempt to dominate authority and express everything about the orientation that builds its image and qualities. Thus, Orientalism is a study as a European cultural discourse capable of managing and even making its political, sociological, military, ideological, scientific, and imaginative orientations. The western conception of the East helps define the West; in contrast, Said also subjugated the East and emphasized the domination and superiority of the West (P. Zhang, 2002).

The data source taken from *The Karate Kid 2010* a martial arts drama movie directed by Harald Zward. The evident use in this study to provide a legitimate proof is taken from *The Karate Kid* movie which then analyze in three steps. First the author doing close watching *The Karate Kid* movie to understand the whole story. The author focuses at the storyline and pays attention to the characters, scenes, setting of place and time cinematography and others. Second, the author take screenshot and group them according to each scene to finding the

meaning behind the signs. Afterwards, the author will then further examine the data using Orientalism theory to findings of the analysis. The author will look at every meaning contained in film, analyze it based on knowledge from the literature on orientalism, the meaning of the film and its techniques.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Depiction of Chinese Image Through Dre's Perceptions.

In *The Karate Kid*, the depiction of Chinese characters clearly contains Asian stereotypes. Dre is a boy with curly hair, black skin from Detroit, America. Dre is the main character in the film. Through Dre character, as American, *Karate Kid* portrays China from a western point of view.



Picture 1. Slanted eyes and yellow face

The picture above is the scene of Dre and his mother on the plane. A complete shot shooting technique shows Dre, who is sitting next to a man on the plane. Because his mother was transferred to Beijing, China, this forced Dre to leave Detroit, America. While on a trip to Beijing, Mrs. Parker taught Dre mandarin using a google translator. Seeing a man with a yellow face and slanted eyes, Mrs. Parker asked Dre to try it by chatting with the man. With the extended shot shooting technique, we can see the different characteristics between the character Dre and the man. Dre, with The curly-faced, has a western body. At the same time, the man has an oriental face, yellow skin, and slanted Chinese eyes.

This scene shows how westerners think about Chinese people. In addition to the Chinese depicted with slanted eyes, the physical characteristic that is identical to the Chinese ethnicity is an oriental face. The word oriental comes from the Latin "orient," which means east, referring to the peoples of the eastern hemisphere. Oriental is an adjective that means things that are eastern in a broad scope (Winatian et al., 2019). So, when referring to an oriental face, it can mean someone who has an Asian face, predominantly East Asian or East Asian descent.

In addition to physical identity in the form of faces and eyes, the physical identity of an ethnic Chinese also lies in the skin color that looks lighter, which tends to be yellower than the skin color of westerners. Although China belongs to the Mongoloid race, it occupies a different sub-race based on its physical characteristics. Hooton classifies countries in Southeast Asia into the Malay-Mongoloid race while Northeast Asia into the Classical Mongoloid race (Bulbeck et al., 2006).

In racism, it is called the western stereotype of the Chinese. Lippman defines a stereotype as an oversimplified picture of the world that fulfills the need to see the world as easier to understand and manage than it is. Physical appearance is very influential in everyday life. This stereotype has been very attached in the west. People often see physicality as the leading indicator in viewing ethnic and cultural ownership. The depiction of Chinese physical stereotypes that often occurs expresses anxiety about discrimination often inherent because of different physical characteristics, namely the ethnic Chinese who have slanted eyes. It is proved by Dre's character and his mother, who think that the man is Chinese just by looking at his physical characteristics. *"Dude, I'm from Detroit."* This dialogue refutes the physical stereotypes of Chinese people that often occur. Although the man has the same physical characteristics as the Chinese with a yellow face and slanted eyes, the man is not Chinese but comes from Detroit, America.

The stereotypes represented in the scene above talk about discrimination against ethnic Chinese, assuming that ethnic Chinese are a separate racial group, so they are distinguished from other racial groups (Irena & Rusadi, 2019). The distinctive and striking physical characteristic is the shape of the slanted eyes which becomes the material to corner them in their interactions with other majority races and causes the ethnic Chinese to often get verbal attacks as a form of confinement to their existence. These prejudices are proved by the increasing number of attacks and racial violence against Asian Americans in several areas in the United States (L. Zhang, 2015). Reporting from The Washington Post, cases of racism against Asia in America have been going on for several centuries. The latest case is the shooting and murder of an Asian-American woman by an American in a spa area in Atlanta in March (The Lancet, 2021). Stereotypes can bring about social injustice for those who are victims, and if this happens, it will raise questions about ethnicity. Stereotypes sometimes even go beyond questions of social justice.



Picture 2. Dre meet Mei Ying

Likewise, with the stereotype that Asians cannot speak English, Dre's character thinks Mei Ying cannot speak English. The scene shows where Dre meets Mei Ying in the park. This scene capture technique uses full shots and close-up techniques. The full shooting technique is used to show the setting where the location is taken. In this scene, Dre is seen in the park with Mei Ying. Dre meets Mei Ying for the first time. Dre, who does not speak Chinese, tries to get him acquainted with Mandarin, which he learned from his mother on the plane. On the dialog *"Hi, what's wrong? I forgot, can't speak English,"*. Dre said that he was an American, and Mei Ying was a non-American girl. Then in the continuation of the dialogue, Dre replied, *"You can speak English? Me too."* This dialogue shows how Dre is an American boy, which the dialogue shows American post colonialism in China. He assumes that Chinese people cannot speak English.

The shooting technique in the scene of Dre meeting Mei Ying also shows how the differences between the characters of Dre and Mei Ying. Dre, a boy with dark skin, curly eyes, and wearing blue clothes, talk to Mei Ying, a local Chinese girl with white skin, slanted eyes, and a pink dress, carrying a violin. Dre held a conversation with Mei Ying in a standing position directly opposite Mei Ying. Mei Ying was sitting on a park bench, watching Dre talking. Dre's position can also mean that his character is taller than Mei Ying. Because it indicates weakness, the East places its position as a racial area that is incompetent, not strong, and significant. Gender is male, Eastern is female, and Western is male. The situation of women can be said to be equal to that of men. In this case, the position of women is lower. Finally, the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' for East and West emerged (Said, 1978).

In this film, the author also looks at how English is constructed as a better language. On the other hand, Chinese as the primary language and the national language of China is not essential. It is also confirmed when Mrs. Po, the principal of his new school in Beijing. When welcoming Dre to her mother, Mrs. Po prefers to speak English. In the dialogue *"Ms. Parker. We have been waiting,"*, this shows that Mrs. Po, the principal of Dre's school, is fluent in English. It can be interpreted that Mandarin is a language that is no longer dominant and essential for communicating with Mrs. Parker and

Dre. From the scene, westerners perpetuated colonialism under the guise of English (Zhu, 2016).



Picture 3. The drink bottles and glasses

This image using a close-up camera technique, at which this stage is shown the drink bottles and glasses that have been half-filled with alcohol on the table of Mr. Han. This technique is to show intimacy is built to giving impression that Mr. Han is an alcoholic. Various alcoholic beverages have been used in China since prehistoric times (WeiZheng, 2016). Wine jars from Jiahu are the earliest evidence of alcohol in China as far back as 7000 BC. In China, alcohol is known as Jiu and is considered a spiritual food that plays an important role in their religious life. In its development, alcohol has never been separated from the world of cinema, especially Hollywood. Almost all film titles always feature alcohol, whether it's the main character or supporting actor in some scenes always bring up scenes that consuming alcohol.

Arak in China apart from having a long history and has also played an important role in Chinese culture and many drinking customs arose during China's long history. In ancient times people used wine when praying to the heavens and the earth, worshipping the mountains and the sea, when praying they poured wine on the ground. When praying to the sea, the wine is poured into the sea. On certain holidays, Chinese people always cannot part with wine, for example at the Chinese New Year celebrations, the Qīngmíng festival, the moon cake festival and so on. At the wedding there is a happy wine, there is also a cross that is drunk by the bride and groom symbolizing an eternal bond. There is full moon wine, for families celebrating a month old baby's birthday. There is a long life wine which is used as a gift for parents who have a birthday, because the word wine and the word long life are also used as a complement to the opening of a shop, moving house, etc (WeiZheng, 2016).

This alcoholic habit symbolizes Chinese culture, which is the setting of the Karate Kid film's location. According to the existing myth, China is a consumer/alcoholic. Although alcoholics come from different ethnicities, the image that appears when China consumes alcohol is always associated with negative things. This stereotype is inherent and continuously maintained by the mainstream media, especially in Hollywood. In its development, alcohol

has never been separated. Almost all film titles always feature alcohol, whether it's the main character or supporting actor in some scenes always bring up that are consuming alcohol.

## 2. The Dominance of The West Against The East.

The depiction of Chinese culture in The Karate Kid is apparent. Through this film, the Western production team wants to introduce Eastern culture to the audience. They present the beauty of Chinese cultures. Starting from Wudang Mountain, The Forbidden City The Great Wall of China, The Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and Kung Fu martial arts culture. Although this film is closed to the feel of Asia, which shows landscapes that are very closely related to Asia, the author found an element of western domination, which is very clearly visible in several scenes of The Karate Kid film.



Picture 4. Dre trying to get back up

Dre's character is depicted as a solid American and invincible. Hailing from the United States, Dre tries to adapt to his new environment. Of course, it's not easy because Dre's characteristics are different from those around him. This condition makes Dre the target of bullying from his colleague named Cheng and his friends. Cheng is a very skilled kung fu athlete. Cheng's character is described as a rude and arrogant Chinese person. It can be seen from how Cheng's treatment of bullying and violence against Dre was aimed at the West to conclude that Eastern people can also be racist from outsiders. Chinese people are considered to use martial arts to carry out discriminatory actions.

Dre's victory in a kung fu match shows the superiority of western nations over Asia. The shooting technique uses a complete shot technique to deliver how Dre's character can bounce back to continue the match. This technique also shows how euphoric the game was at that time. In this scene, Dre's character is seen trying to get up to get back on his feet to continue the tournament even though previously Dre's left leg was injured due to the unsportsmanlike actions of one of Cheng's gang. It can be attributed to the western ideology as a state that is superior and stronger than others. The heroic figures of heroes in novels, comics and movies have

similarities in physical and character, namely the hero must take bold and dangerous actions, for that the hero must be physically strong in order to protect the weak and can face the enemy to gain victory (Medrano, 2019). This stereotype is manifested through its supernatural powers or masculine body shapes, such as muscular and muscular, besides that the hero character also builds a relationship with a woman (heterosexual). In contrast, the hero usually has certain traits such as a loner and quiet; a hero only talks as needed and communicates everything with action.

Many successful dark skin athletes in sports have more or less led the paradigm that the dark-skin race is superior in terms of physical strength. From various sports, there are always big names of athletes who come from dark skin races. Several factors make dark skin superior in physical terms, especially in sports. According to Kanne in Dunning (2003) explains these factors based on physical characteristics:

- a. Longer proportions, narrower hip bones, broader and broader calf bones, longer arms than whites.
- b. Ratio Tension to the larger muscles in blacks provides the typical conditions for a more flexible and denser bone structure.
- c. The elongated base structure of the body allows them to balance body heat.

These physical characteristics gave rise to the myth that dark skin has a dependable and excellent physique. It shows how strong Dre is as a child of American descent. Dre, who had fallen, then got back up to fight Cheng. At the beginning of the history of the arrival of dark skin in America, Afro-Americans were deliberately imported from Africa because they had advantages and physical endurance. Their power is used for plantation needs and services; even in the military, dark skin races go to war without pay. An example is when African-American men dominated horse racing before the civil war in America (Miller, 2019). Through the medium of film, consciousness has helped maintain and confirm the myth that dark skin is superior in physical terms.



Picture 5. American television program

The West's dominance over the film *The Karate Kid* is also shown through a scene showing

American television programs in China. When Dre arrived at his new home, Dre saw a pitch-black TV. With Close up shooting techniques, American television programs are visible. This scene represents China's new image in terms of television programming. Chinese people like western television programs like the cartoon *Spongebob & Squarepants*. The spread of cultural values is not balanced. Local values are eroded by dominant foreign cultures that infiltrate other countries through media intermediaries (Williams, 2003). As a result, films that carry representations of local cultures lose their national identity. Massive United States invasion with its image, ideology, and way of life shared on a global scale through the United States mass media. This cartoon, produced by Nickelodeon Production House, is only a small part of the United States' means to achieve a dominant position that dominates the world. Meanwhile, Eastern society takes American products for granted. Although the subtitles for its television programs are in Chinese, Hollywood inserts American cartoon programs to show its dominance. It is proven by the words of Edward Said that the mass media tends to reinforce ideology to stick to its power through hegemony. The mass media also provide opportunities for the development of mass culture. Through the media, the dominant group is often used and continuously undermines, weakens, and eliminates the potential rivalry of the parties under its control. Mass media is a medium for sending messages, influencing cultural values, and creating stereotypes about gender, race, and ethnicity (Arie, 2020).



Picture 6. The violin trainer

Shooting with a complete shot technique shows a picture of a man in a black suit with a western appearance sitting in front of a grand piano. With this technique, it appears that Mei Ying's trainer is a Westerner. This scene shows that the west dominates the east from various aspects, including music. The choice of a western character as Mei Ying's trainer shows Westerners' inferior superiority compared to eastern. Westerners are always associated with superiority, and east with inferiority. In other words, the east felt itself inferior to the west in all aspects. belief that white people are superior to other races in many areas of life. White supremacy is an understanding of Western superiority which considers Europe as a nation that is superior and more advanced than other nations. While white supremacy arises because of the

assumption that white people feel that the white race is superior and other races so that they consider other races such as color to be considered inferior in social, cultural, and economic life (Winatian et al., 2019) Therefore, white Europeans believed that they should be dominant in various aspects of life in various countries. In addition, Europeans consider that the superiority of their nation can be used as a tool to control other nations by applying this understanding to other nations.

The selection of violin music also evidences this western superiority. The violin in its modern form originated in Northern Italy in the early 16th century, especially in the port cities of Venice and Genoa. Violin music is one of the most popular music in the world. Mei Ying's parents told her to practice the violin to enter the prestigious Beijing Academy of Music competition. Although the Chinese state organizes the event, the Mei Ying family chose to perform violin music performances instead of "original Chinese" music such as Guzheng (Sewpaul, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Orientalism is a study of the west, and orientalist is a term for people who study it. Orientalism is a view that the East was built by the West because of the influence of imperialism. the generalization and decentralization of western culture causes its values to dominate the colonized nations. hollywood constructs the east through their point of view with a negative image. in their films, They portrayed the east badly and gave a better quality to the west. by using inequality and stereotypes, the west positioned itself with its ideology and demonstrated its dominance to the east.

The Karate Kid film depicts and builds Eastern stereotypes through the characters and characterizations in the film. Timur is described as oriental in appearance, does not speak English, and is alcoholic. All negative images are depicted in Asian characters like Cheng and his friends. On the other hand, the west is described as full of goodness. Another result of this study is the binary opposition between East and West. Implicit in this film shows how the west is superior to the east. Dre, as a western character, shows his superiority by defeating all his rivals in the kung fu tournament, and all his opponents are eastern boys. And also some aspects of western ideology that make the east inferior. All these eastern inferiorities and western superiorities still occur today. All evidence shows that orientalism is depicted in karate children's films. West to East stereotypes and East to West inferiority are seen in this film. Although this film was made in 2010, the writer finds that orientalism still exists through karate children's films in this modern era.

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