

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Culture is one of many important aspects in society. Culture is a concept that has been discussed extensively, giving rise to multiple approaches and uses of the term across fields of study (Sommier, 2014). According to a British Anthropologist, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (1870). Moreover, culture is a complex entity that includes other knowledge and habits acquired by humans as members of society (Hudaya, Najla & Anaztasya, 2023). Culture is a view or concepts that are inherited and allow humans to communicate, and develop knowledge and attitudes towards life (Andriani, 2021).

With a variety of cultures globally, it is possible to have cross-cultural challenges. As stated by Sabre & Mohandas (2023), Cross-cultural challenges always happen to people from different cultural backgrounds. These problems can be seen in today's media especially within the storyline of films. People's understanding about a culture may be varied due to many mediums that represent it. Those mediums such as literature and film. According to a study entitled "Cultural power dynamics and narrative transformation: a comparative analysis of Hollywood film remakes in contemporary Asian cinema", it analyzes how remake films are shaped as close as possible to the audience's culture. The study shows that

Asian films that are remakes from western countries are implementing complex strategies of cultural recalibration. The recalibration can go further than simple translation or localization (Sonni et al. 2025). However, films are one of the most crucial ways for America to have control, the impact of numerous American-made films already gave the benefits that America wants (Fithratullah, 2021).

One of the films that represented Cross culture is an awards winning film, *Past Lives* (2023). This film tells a story about a migrated Korean woman who found her love life in the USA who has an unfinished romance story in her past with her childhood crush. Even though they reunited before her marriage, they end up cutting ties with each other, leaving a longing feeling felt deeply in their hearts. The film features some cultural values from Korea due to the female main character's background. As stated by Sere, Muarifuiddin and Amalia, people get the chance to be acquainted with the culture of society through film due to it being a media of cultural representation. Film can be used as a reflection to see how culture lives or works in society (Sere, Muarifuiddin & Amalia; 2020). In the same study, it is stated that people are able to learn a significant amount of culture due to the fact that the director of the film represents the culture through the film (Sere, Muarifuiddin & Amalia; 2020).

Cross culture has been widely discussed by various authors in their studies. Adler & Aycan (2018) discussed the same topic in a journal entitled *Cross-Cultural Interaction: What We Know and What We Need to Know*. It discusses on how to manage cross-cultural interaction within the contexts of expatriation, negotiation,

and multicultural teams (MCTs) (Adler & Aycan, 2018). Meanwhile, studies have discussed cross cultural communication which is part of cross cultural values. According to Lombardo (2017), as cited by Sabre & Mohandas (2023) Cross-cultural communication is the understanding of different beliefs, customs, communication, and practices. It is the interaction between people from different cultures and backgrounds, which involves knowing how people from different cultures communicate, speak, and perceive the world around them. Cross-cultural communication can trigger many challenges. The common challenges between communicators from different cultural backgrounds are misunderstanding and wrong interpretation (Lombardo, 2017).

Furthermore, another study has discussed the cross culture in a live action film, *Mulan*. The study analyzes the deviation of the understanding of Chinese culture in the film communication content and symbol application of *Mulan*, so as to analyze the communication effect of the film *Mulan* (Tian, 2021). It is also analyzed how the Chinese symbols are not used properly in the film, such as in terms of clothing, architecture, and the character itself. Lastly, it is presenting criticism and reflection regarding the film. Tian (2021) stated that the whole story of the film reflects the strong values of individualism, feminism and heroism. Of course, such stories and values could fit into most American blockbusters but not suitable for the Chinese audience. However, *Mulan* is a film based on a Chinese story (Tian, 2021). This study shows that the cross-cultural value might be distorted or affected by the cultural background of the creator or the communicator of the film, in this case Walt Disney Company.

In addition, cross-cultural values are not only discussed using live action films. Another study has discussed the cultural value in an animated film entitled *Zootopia*. The culture that American animated films want to show is not simply entertainment. It is more a reflection of American political and cultural values. It is a reorganization and interpretation of the ideological and spiritual space of the whole American society. Through aesthetic deconstruction in different periods, the vivid images of liberalism, humanitarianism and individualism are constructed. (Yan, 2021).

Initially, previous study has discussed the cross cultural value. It is analyzing the short story “the Americans” by Viet Thanh Nguyen. It discusses the character who chooses to migrate to Claire Carver, who chooses to migrate from a more developed nation to a less developed nation to discover her true identity and assist the local Vietnamese. This portrayal challenges the conventional narrative of diaspora primarily being driven by economic scarcity and emphasizes the pursuit of personal and cultural exploration (Fitria, Llyoid & Kusumoriny, 2023). The authors analyze the short story using the culture identity and diaspora theory by Stuart hall.

Culture can be seen across literary works, such as novels and films. Novels are a type of literary work that is popular and favored by young people because of the interesting storyline and has their impression on readers (Yasin, 2022). In a study entitled “The Social Aspect of Culture Novels *Pulang* for Literary Studies”,



Yasin analyzed four out of seven cultural elements such as the language system, the social system, the livelihood system, and the religious system. The novel follows a story of a male character named Bujang who came from a bouncer of a big shadow economy family, Tong family. He was recruited due to his bravery and intelligence. However, he came from a religious family that has islamic influence throughout his life. This study resulted in the cultural aspects contained in the novel which were influenced by Malay as a communication tool. Another study also discusses another Indonesian novel entitled *The Representation of Culture in "Bumi Manusia"* Novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The research implemented the representation element of the Norman Fairclough model. The authors analyzed various forms of cultural representation such as daily behaviours, language, and clothes.

From the previous studies mentioned earlier, it can be concluded that films also have cultural aspects based on the origin of the makers, storyline and characters. As cited in Lynn (2023), Tryon (2013) and Corrigan (1991) argued that films have a complex and ever evolving influence on culture. To fully understand this phenomenon, the researchers must analyze it in depth. According to Supiarza, Ranti, and Gunawan (2020), films are not just artistic creations or sources of entertainment that showcase visual representations of artists. They also function as powerful tools for communicating ideologies and values. The millennial generation, in particular, tends to process and adopt messages more effectively through audiovisual media like films, integrating them into their daily lives.

With the presence of various culture, it is also resulted in many communication styles especially between high-context cultures and low-context cultures. Two cultures that have contrary communication styles are Korean and American culture. According to Merkin (2009) in the study entitled Cross-cultural communication patterns - Korean and American Communication, it is stated that Korean communication is highly influenced by the Confucian values that promotes harmony, face-saving and group cohesion. In contrast, American communication is mainly direct, emotionally expressive and individual centered. In contrast to the study above, Song (2014) have analyzed Korean learners who studied English as their second language. The study entitled politeness in Korea and America: A comparative analysis of request strategy in English communication. The result of the study stated that Korean learners often produce more direct requests than native English speakers. The increased directness in English could be attributed to pragmatic transfer limitations, unfamiliarity with conventionally indirect English forms, or structural differences between Korean and English.

Based on research by Benko (2023) which highlights that cross-cultural relationships helps increasing society with diversity and awareness, however it also resulted in significant emotional and cultural challenges for the couple involved in the relationship. The cultural differences will cause differences in values, family expectations, and religious beliefs. These problems might impact both partners and their children which can lead to divorce. However, these relationships also play a significant role in enhancing social integration and challenging discriminatory actions in multicultural societies.

Hall (1977) stated that Representation is one of the important practices that produce cultural identity. Moreover, there are various studies that have implemented representation theory in media such as novels and films. In a study entitled “The Representation of Gwangju Uprising in Human Acts Novel” by Aris Masruri Harahap & Sri Utami (2019), the authors implement representation theory by Stuart Hall to examine the historical references depicted in the novel. Human Act is a novel originated from Korea entitled *Sonyeon-i onda* or The boy is coming depicts the rebellion or Gwangju Uprising. Based on the study, the authors present the facts from real events and compare them side by side with the narrative from the novel. The study resulted in the true depiction of history by the novel.

The second study with historical approach implementing representative theory by Stuart Hall is entitled “Critical Discourse Analysis on Representation of Arab Spring in the film Alephia 2035” by Indah Rarasati & Moh. Zawawi. Alephia 2035 is an animated film that was uploaded on youtube with a duration of 59 minutes 32 seconds and a fictional story based on reality (Mhaya, 2021 & Awaliyah, 2021). This study is examining the form of representation of the Arab Spring and the social dimension in the film. Not only implementing the representative theory, they also implement Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis theory to examine the film. Based on the study, it can be concluded that the film, Alephia 2035, represents the Arab Spring events that occurred in 2011.

A study of gender equality in a film entitled *Marlina The Murderer In Four Acts* is also implementing the representation theory by Stuart Hall. The film follows the main woman character, Marlina, who is forced to act against gender stereotypes. The story of this film follows the discrimination caused by men and has to be faced by Marlina. The study by Zaki & Sumarlan has presented the scene analysis in order to examine the film. With attaching the screenshot of the scene and the dialogue, they also present the discussion using the representation theory. There are three results of the discussion which are meaning, language and culture. The meaning conveyed by this film is how the female character changes and challenges the conventional gender power dynamics. The authors stated that language used by the characters reflects the courage and strength of women while facing conflict. Furthermore, Zaki and Sumarlan also stated that gender norms in this film often hinder women's progress (Zaki & Sumarlan, 2024).

Lastly, another study of film has utilized the representation theory by Stuart Hall. This study analyzed the cultural identity that was represented in the *Black Panther* film. Many films have represented Africa as an arid plain full of animals which construct the audience's understanding as: Africa is an outdated country. However, this film was full of cultural elements and moral messages that are influenced by real African culture. As stated in the study all positive aspects of Africa are represented through *Black Panther* films. Furthermore Through the film *Panther*, Ryan Coogler as director of *Black Panther* film wants to build a better perspective of people about Africa (Sere, Muarifuddin, & Amalia 2020).



In this study, the author chose a film entitled *Past Lives* that talks about a Korean woman who moved to America, but she cannot forget about her childhood crush in Korea. Forced by circumstances, she has to move on with her life and forget the Korean boy. That is until she meets an American man and decides to get married with him. The two of them live in New York, away from her family. Later in the film, Arthur stated that he feels that he cannot fully understand Nora due to the cultural differences and language gap that leads to communicative misunderstandings. However, cross-cultural differences do not only create communicative misunderstandings, but also trigger deeper emotional consequences such as identity conflict and cultural dissonance, especially in immigrated characters. The family of the girl, who really valued Korean culture on American soil, was forced to accept the presence of an American man to be part of their family. Unexpectedly, her childhood crush decided to show up and remind her of the forgotten familiarity of Korean culture.

The representation of cross culture was already explored in the film and novels as stated above. Furthermore, one of the newest films that explored cross cultural is entitled *Past Lives*. *Past Lives* was produced by A24 production house which is famous for its bold storytelling. Directed by Celine Song, this film won various awards in 2024. This film also succeeded to gain teenager's attention due to its storyline. There are few differences between this paper and the previous papers that the author has mentioned above. This study will analyze the cross-cultural values contained in the film entitled *Past Lives* using the representation

theory by Stuart hall. Stuart Hall's theory will be relevant when we want to observe cross-cultural portrayal in the film Past Lives.

The gap between the previous studies and this study is that the author will analyze the cultural differences portrayed in the film along with the problems it has caused. Using representative theory, this study will examine how Korean culture is portrayed in the film. The author also will analyze the cross cultural related problems that are experienced by the main characters in order to understand deeper on the cross cultural values in this film.

### **1.2 Research Question**

1. How do cultural differences between Korean and American identities portrayed in Past Lives through the lens of representation theory?
2. What are the effects of cultural differences that are faced by the main characters in their social life?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Research**

1. Examine how the cultural differences are portrayed in Past Lives through the lens of representation theory.
2. Analyze the effect such as problems faced by the main characters in their social life.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study will be focusing on analyzing the representation of cultural differences in the film *Past Lives* using the representation theory by Stuart Hall. The research will analyze the Korean culture that is portrayed in the film and the identity shift of the main characters. The data of the study will be the scene and the narrative of the film which portrayed the cultural differences and cross-cultural problems that are experienced by the main characters. By using the qualitative method, this study will examine the key scenes, dialogues and visual elements in the film that highlights the cultural differences and cross-cultural problems in the film.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Research**

The writer hopes that the result of this study will contribute theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study has examined the challenges that faced by the main character of the film entitled *Past Lives*. By using the culture identity and diaspora by Stuart Hall, it deepens the understanding and knowledge regarding how cultural diversity can influence social interactions and relationships among the characters. Practically, this study has the capacity to foster tolerance and empathy among the diverse cultural community. By emphasizing the struggle and conflict between the diverse cultural community, it is able to create a cohesive and understanding community. Investigating the impact of cross-cultural values on the main character's social life provides valuable insights into how cultural differences shape interpersonal relationships, communication patterns, and social integration.