WESTERN DOMINATION IMPLIED OVER CHINESE TRADITION
IN PEARL S BUCK’S EAST WIND: WEST WIND
(AN ORIENTALISM READING)

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Abstract

This thesis describes about the domination of Western knowledge toward Chinese tradition by illustrating the superiority or prominence of Western knowledge in the novel East Wind: West Wind written by Pearl S. Buck. The analysis focuses on two goals, there are (1) to portray how are the Eastern and the Western represented in the novel, and (2) to analyze how the influence of western knowledge dominated Chinese tradition. To analyze this novel, the writer applied post-colonial criticism the writer focused on Orientalism as an approach by Edward Said. In analyze aspech the way Western discourse dominates the main character, Kwei-lan, as represented of Chinese people by issuing the discourse of superiority. In addition, the writer applied content analysis method to analyze documents in order to give a deep understanding toward the novel by using close reading technique, which requires to read the whole of the novel for several times. From the analysis, the writer found that Western discourse did construct the domination over the Orient (Chinese culture) by representing the differences in term family relationships (simple vs complex), mind (open minded vs narrow minded) and beliave (superstitious vs rational), the discourse succeed to dominate and create the truth or reality as the assumption about the West as supperior and the East as inferior.

Key word: orientalism

Background

The term discourse is the range of social practices, customs, and institutions that cover any given subject matter. According to Michel Foucault, “...discourse is strongly bounded area of social knowledge; a system of statements within the world can be known” (1967:70). Through language, discourse gives the role of us in our society. It constructs our knowledge and understanding about who we are and what the world we live are. Because of discourse covers every social matters, it can be used in any perspective.

Therefore, the influence of Western discourse to the world made people tend to consider West is more superior than East. The Western discourse of domination is one of the effects of Industrial revolution that born the idea of imperialism that implement in the form of colonialism.

In journal of university of pretoria by Lazere S. Rukundwa and Andries G. Van Ardel The Formation of Postcolonial Theory
Research Associate (2007:421), through Orientalism, Said presented the discourse that have been constructed to society about the perception of Eurocentric or Western where naturally they represented as the rational, mature, progressive, honest, normal, masculine, good, upright, democratic, and superior instead of Eastern which represent irrational, abnormal, backward, passive, undisciplined, primitiveness, and inferior. The simplest example regarded to this is people are assumed as smart or intelligent whenever we use English to non-native. It widely influenced people, society, lifestyles, and human life. Such discourse was able to construct the human standard as seem as they are. This system, discourse, has taught people, certainly us, the world of what they want us to be.

Thus, literary works is one of the ways western domination affect our mind. However, it is also a good implementation in understanding aspects of post-colonialism issues which concern the life; cultural, and interactions of cultural aspects. The interactions of difference cultures have much inspire author to make various literary works to explore those issues. Pearl S. Buck’s novel East Wind: West Wind (1930) is one of popular works considered has postcolonial implication.

The novel East Wind: West Wind tells about Kwei-Lan, a girl who was born as traditional noble Chinese family. She has no experience with modern western style before. As a Chinese royal woman, she has taught everything to become a good daughter of the family and to be good wife for her husband. Her husband is a noble Chinese royal man that had twelve years abroad, America, studying medicine. Kwei-lan has been betrothed to her husband since she was born. Her husband has adapted and adopted western lifestyle. He feels western life is better and rational than his Chinese culture that strange and irrelevant. Different perspective about being woman makes Kwei-Lan cannot win her husband’s heart as she thinks and has taught before. Kwei-Lan as a Chinese traditional woman and her husband’s lifestyle emerge distinguishes understanding about family between the West and the Chinese tradition.

The novel describes how Kwei-Lan’s cultural traditional background opposed with her husband’s Western lifestyle. In the part II of the novel, Kwei-Lan has to accept that her brother goes to study in America. Later the conflict comes up when her brother has already married with a foreign woman. Even though he has betrothed to one of daughters of Li family since he was child. Their mother is shocked to know such news. The family has to accept that son has been betrayed the family. Her brother chooses to disobey the Chinese tradition of married and his duty as a
son of Royal Family to keep the heir. It is seen as the impact of western culture influence toward her brother.

Based on explanation above, the writer is interested and challenged to discuss this novel. Pearl S. Buck is able to tell the story with her elegant way. *East Wind: West Wind* shows the elegant internal conflict of traditional Chinese woman who tries to oppose her ideology of being good woman and wife toward the western discourse that influences her life.

In this novel, Pearl S. Buck portrays how the Western culture meets the Eastern old tradition and tended to degrade the East. It seems she shows West lifestyle is better and rational than East. Through the main character Kwei-Lan, Buck explains in detail Chinese woman’s role in life and compares to the knowledge of Western within her husband. The author also shows the reader how Kwai-Lan’s brother finally betrays his old tradition, the Chinese Family tradition, by secretly marriage a foreign woman. Until the end of this novel, Buck confirms the superiority and rationality of Western discourse toward Chinese tradition as East.

By using post-colonialism, especially *Orientalism* of Edward Said, the writer will analyze how these texts construct the Orient through imaginative representations of the main character, Kwei-Lan, in the novel. The writer wants to analyze the differences of two cultures and perceptions based on the the *orientalism* that found in the novel. It is able to create the assumption about the West as superior and the East is inferior. Orientalism argues those discourses made by Western as a political tool to conquer the reader’s minds showing inferiority of the East.

Further, Post-colonial criticisms also appropriate as a “knife” to discuss, analyze, and examine a work with its relations and effect of colonialism and the interaction of two different cultures. Therefore, this research is entitled “Western Domination Implied over Chinese Tradition in Pearl S. Buck’s *East Wind: West Wind* (An Orientalism Reading)”. 

**Metodology**

In this chapter, the writer focuses on the steps that must take to finish this research, that proposed by Sudaryanto (1993). Some steps make this research success. This step relates each other and cannot release form the other steps. There are three steps, first, collecting the data, second, analyzing the data, and third presenting the data.

1. Collecting the data

In collecting data, the writer conducts a library research. Through the library research, the writer collects the data needed,
which can be categorized as primary and secondary data. The primary data itself is; “East Wind; West Wind” by Pearl S Buck, the more specific is sentences and quotations that have relationship with the topic and that have relations with the theory. The secondary data function as tools in analyzing the primary data. It consists of books and other sources from journals and internet sites.

The writer conducts the library research about post-colonial criticism. In this step writer finds the definitions and concept of post colonialism, especially the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said. It is helpful to broaden the perspective of writer about the term.

2. Analyzing the Data

In analyzing the data writer examines the primary data by the way of close reading and in analyzing specific sentences and quotations that have relationship with the topic and the theory. Based on Edgar Robert, “to analyze the problems in the literary work, it can be found by digging up through characters in the ways of speech, dialogue and action between one character and other characters” (56).

Besides, the writer explores some data related about the Post-Colonial criticism, especially Orientalism approach by Edward Said. Writer will identify the sentence related to the topic and the theory supporting to completing the research.

3. Presenting the Result

The last step is presenting the analysis. The writer thus uses descriptive method to present the data. Based on Bogdan and Biklen, qualitative research is descriptive, the data are collected in the form of words, rather than number, and result of analysis is written descriptively (1982:27) as the rule to conducts this research. The data is presented descriptively in this analysis by quoting the sentences of dialogue from the novel that relevant to the analysis.

Result and Discussion

In this chapter, the writer wants to analyze about the data. In analyzing data the writer uses the theory orientalism by Edward said. The writer analyzes about the The analysis focuses on two goals, there are (1) to portray the different perspective between Western knowledge and Chinese tradition, and (2) to analyze the implication of Western knowledge as domination over Chinese tradition.

Orientalism is a branch of Postcolonial theory that developed by Edward Said According to said this theory is about how The West see the world by binary oposition where It seems to explore the overplus of Western and expose the lacking
of Eastern and make it as if those are natural by using discourse. And the discourse is formed and it will effect to human mind who read it. Besides based on discourse the reader consciousness or unconsciousness will judge what that they read it is god or it is bad. Said does not question about the truth or the wrong. He tries to give us deeply understanding of how colonizer or Western discourse constructs the domination of the world toward colonized or Eastern in every way and how it continues until now.

The Different Perspective of the Eastern and the Western in the Novel

In this chapter, the writer would discuss the portrait of contradictive perspective between western Knowledge or Occident and Chinese old tradition or orient. Pearl S Back does not frankly describe what the western culture in the novel *East Wind: West Wind* is. She implicitly explains how Western culture by contrasted it with Chinese culture experienced by the character Kwei-lan

This chapter, the writer concludes that there are several contradictions of different perspective of the western knowledge and the chinese tradition. The writer divided two subchapter, the Eastern and the Western. It consist the complex family relationships and simple family relationships, narrow minded and open minded, superstitious and rational.

Family in the eastern in this case family in Chinese is narrated differently with family in western. It is described that Chinese family is a big extended family, complex and has not much freedom because bound of tradition. Different with western family, that consists of nuclear family, father, mother and children and has more freedom because not bound with the old tradition, it is because they explained are more logic and more simple besides they has right and free will to choose and do whatever they want to do.

In the novel describe although the Chinese man has been married, they are allowed or naturally believed to take some concubines as they like. It can be seen by following quotation in the novel:

“The desire for sons in a household like ours, where my father had three concubines whose sole interest was in the conceiving and bearing of children was too ordinary to contain any mystery.” [11-12]

Kwei-Lan’s father, as stated above, has three concubines in order to pour his desire in woman and to conduct a birth son for his clan. In the Chinese family, it is normal for the husband to marry other woman. Man in Chinese tradition has a duty to give great male offspring to maintain their clan. Further, Buck states:

“They had caught my father fancy at first though a
prettiness which faded like flowers plucking in spring, and my father’s favor ceased when their brief beauty was gone.”[19]

The husband can marry any woman if his wife cannot give birth and give him a son. Chinese man can whenever he wants to marry woman and leave them when their beauties are gone.

In contrast, the portrayal of Western woman is described as dichotomy to Chinese tradition where the family relationship is simpler. Besides the family in the western is nuclear family and the decision is make by own self. They do not need many procedure to do something. In the novel, it is narrated by Kwei-lan brother to marry his girlfriend, the kwei-lan brother and hiss wife do not need many procedure to get merit. In this case Buck tries ti show that thee western people are better than Eastern people because western people has more freedom.

In addition, the wife or woman in the western culture tends to not accepting become subordinate position in family. It clarifies in the novel:

“The trouble in all this may be that the foreigner is not willing to accept a subordinate position. It is not customary in their country to have secondary wives.” [160]

Western women believe that they have right and capable to follow their own will. There are no such certain rules either as woman or as wife of their family that have to be obeyed.

Kwei-Lan’s brother who has been taught the wisdom of the Great Master, has to fulfill the first duty as a man to pay careful heed to every desire of his parents. In spite of obeying the custom, he married a foreign woman when he studied in America. Kwei-lan who shocked to hear is alarmed by her husband. It can be seen in the novel that, he said:

“You must be prepared…it is better to face the truth. He will probably not obey you mother… Old foundations are breaking – have broken… there must be stronger reasons than in this days” [150]

As the one who adapts the Western culture, Kwei-Lan’s husband precisely knows that her brother will consistently disobey the old and primitive tradition. Kwei-lan’s brother breaks the old custom and chooses to live in progressive and democratic ways as his will. Related to this, Hans Bertens states that

“The inferiority that Orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West’s superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East construct the West as rational, democratic, progressive, and so on” [Bertens, 2006: 205]

The writer examines that the novel describes the primitiveness and despotism of Chinese
old tradition. Western discourse seems to take place and dominates the character Kwei-Lan’s brother, even our perspective, to disobey such custom.

Secondly, it is also happened to different perspective can also be seen in the mindset or lifestyle contradiction in the novel. in the family, that is to produces son to maintain the clan and descendent. In Chinese custom, Kwei-lan and her husband should remain stay within the ancestral home. For his father, a noble Chinese man should not waste their dignified leisure time and stay still in home. The family has plenty of food and space. It can be seen when Kwei-lan’s father in law spoke to her husband;

“here is plenty of food and space. You need never waste your body in physical labor. Spend your days in dignified leisure and in study that suits your pleasure. Allow your daughter in law of your honored mother to produce son. Three generations of sons less than one roof is sight pleasing to heaven” [43]

In Chinese custom, a noble family should only worry to give born the great son in order to maintain the clan and the descendant of family. It is reflected in the important of a son existence. A husband should not be worried about food and money. This is what has been taught by the ancestor for hundred years. In the other side, Kwei-lan’s husband, who has been studied in West, has his own perception. It can be seen in the quotation below:

I wish to work father, I am trained in scientific professions – the noblest in the western world. As for sons, they are not my desire. I wish to produce the fruit of my brain for my country’s good. A mare dog may fill the earth with the fruit of his body” [43]

The father of Kwei-Lan’s husband wants to keep them in the house without worrying about food and money. He wants them to pay attention to deliver his grandson. Rather than focus on producing son, Kwei-lan’s husband wants to work and earn money by himself to his family. His custom cannot change the decision he has taken.

Thirdly difference is seen based on the story is superstition and custom and Chinese culture which is described so irrational to be believed. In the novel, Kwei-lan’s husband is a doctor. One day someone called him to come to the house where a lady tried to kill herself by hanging her neck. She is still alive but unconscious. In order to heal the woman’s soul, the priest came and made a ceremony by plugging a piece of cloth to her nose and mouth.

“He sent for the priests to beat the gongs to call the woman’s soul back, and her
relatives gathered about and placed the poor unconscious girl…into a kneeling position on the floor; then they deliberately filled her nose and mouth with cotton and cloth and bound clothing around her face” [76]

Kwei-lan firstly agreed to the old tradition, taking back the soul, which has been done for hundred years. In the contrary, Kwei-lan’s husband totally disagreed with such custom that has lost so much spirit of human life.

“Would you die if I did this long enough? And he seized my hands in one of his and placed his handkerchief roughly over my mouth and nose. I twisted free and tore it away” [76-77]

The quotation convinces the irrationality of Chinese old custom, and on the contrary also convinces the rationality of Western discourse. The way of Kwei-lan’s husband tries to show to Kwei-Lan seems like confirm the opposite of perspective between Kwei-lan, reprented Chinese tradition, over Western discourse of her husband.

The writer concluded that those contradictions are the portrayal of different perspective of the Eastern in this case traditional Chinese and the western knowledge.

The Western Knowledge as Domination Implied over Chinese Tradition in The Novel

The writer found the orientalism issues which Western is assumed to has much more realistic to be true. This is a discourse, western discourse, which dominates the assumption about Chinese tradition in the novel. The changing perception of the character, even the readers, seem t confirms this discourse.

Kwei-Lan’s husband seems to confirm Western discourse based on the way he treat Kwei-lan Kwei-Lan also surprises to hear ‘the new ways’ her husband meant to her. Her husband has been certainly influenced by Western culture. For twelve years he studied in foreign country. Then, he now tries to convince Kwei-lan as it is best way for their life. Kwei-lan then responds to think that, it can be seen in the following quotation:

“I equal to him? But why? Was I not his wife? …was he not my master by law? …what else could I do if I did not marry? And how could I marry except as my parents arranged it? … it was all according to my custom” [36-37].

In order to construct the superiority of Western culture, the text shall describe the inferiority of others. In this novel, Pearl S Buck draws the domination or superiority of
Western culture by contrasting to Chinese custom. Therefore, Pearl S Buck’s novel has been influenced by Western discourse in the perspective of Orientalism. The writer found that the novel conducts unintentionally domination of Western over Chinese tradition.

“… I wish to follow the new ways. I wish to regard you in all things as my equal. I shall never force you anything. You are not my possession—my chattel” [36]

Changing perception about Western people also described in which the character Kwei-lan asked to her husband about what they think about Chinese tradition. In the novel, Kwei-lan’s husband told that;

“They think our clothes are funny and our faces and our food and all what we do. It does not occur to them that people can look as we do and behave as we do, and be wholly as human as they are… In fact, I believe they come over here thinking to teach us civilization” [88-89]

Assuming the clothes, faces, food and all what Chinese people do are funny imply the issue of imperialism of Western domination to Chinese people. The text seems to approve and convince that Western culture is more rational and represented universal civilization. Again, our perception about Eastern culture is conducted to change by contrasting the superiority of Western culture.

Further, the writers also found the changing perception of characters in the way Kwei-lan become happy to adopt the modern way of life.

“But now, selfish woman that I am, I do not care that the tradition is broken, I think only of my son… I thank the gods that I am married to a modern man… he gives me my son for my own…all my life is not enough to repay my gratitude” [114]

The climax of disobedient of Chinese tradition as the impact of Western discourse is when Kwei-lan’s brother in the end chooses to live freely like what he has been experienced in Western country. It can be seen in the end of novel:

“…from this day I have no father. I have no clan – I repudiate the name of Yang! Remove my name from the books! I and my wife, we will go forth. In this day we shall be free as the young if other countries are free” [264]

In Orientalism perspective, the character Kwei-lan’s brother clearly emphasize the domination over Eastern Culture, or Chinese tradition. The final disobedient of character against the old custom confirms the primitiveness and
irrational way of life. Kwei-Lan’s brother asserts that that Western culture represented the universal civilization. Accepting the domination of Western culture could benefit him from the ‘backward’ or ‘superstitious’ conditions in which he lived.

In the end, the writer concluded that the main character Kwei-Lan is influenced by Western discourse.

“We must let all that go, my love, my love! We do not want our son fettered by old, useless things!” And thinking of these two, my son and his cousin brother I know that my husband is right – always right! [277]

The effect of such discourse is a change of Kwei-Lan’s perspective about the modernism of Western culture and the backward of her Chinese tradition. Through the hand of her husband, Kwei-Lan admitted that Western discourse dominate her whole life assuming as the best way of civilization rather than Chinese ancestors. Influence and changing perception also gives impact to disobey the law of old Chinese tradition that for hundred years believed by the ancestors.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion, the novel *East Wind: West Wind* written by Pearl S. Buck tells about Kwei-Lan, a noble Chinese woman who had no experience with modern western style before. She has been taught to become a good daughter of the family and to be good wife for her husband. Kwei-lan has been betrothed since she was born to a noble Chinese royal man whom had twelve years abroad studying medical science. Her husband has adapted and adopted western lifestyle. Kwei-Lan as represented Chinese woman and her husband’s lifestyle emerge distinguishes understanding about family between the West and the Chinese tradition. Kwei-Lan’s cultural traditional background opposed her husband’s Western lifestyle. The conflicts come up from the different perception of life between Western Knowledge and Eastern culture (Chinese Tradition). It is seen in binary opposition such as complex family relationships and simple family relationships, open minded and narrow minded, and superstition and rationality.

By using Orientalism approach presented by Edward Said, the writer found that the novel *East Wind: West Wind* constructs the imaginative representations of the Orient (Chinese culture) through the main character Kwei-Lan. The writer found the indication of Western discourse which dominates the Orient, in this case Chinese culture, through negative perception by describing cultural conflicts of the main character. Kwei-lan is influenced by her
husband who taught her about the Western knowledge. She gradually changed her perception about the West. Kwei-lan who applied her ancestors’ custom, started to doubt and questioning the truth about Chinese tradition. Orientalism examined the West constructs such discourse through contrasting the right and rational way of life and the backward and irrational custom of Chinese.

In the end, through the analysis the writer emphasize that the novel East Wind: West Wind written by Pearl S. Buck implied the Western Domination over Chinese Tradition. Western discourse succeeds to dominate the assumption and about the West as superior and the East is inferior. Orientalism argues those are constructed by Western as a political tool to conquer the reader’s minds showing inferiority of the East. This novel construct discourse of Western domination as well as judgment of China’s tradition, which are funny, strange, and backward and need help. The discourse of West to dominate the Chinese tradition by degrading them and shows their better and rational way of life finally create the ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ about West as standard civilization.

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