

# Post-colonialism of Robinson Crusoe

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**Abstract:** Robinson Crusoe is a realistic fiction. From the perspective of realism, Robinson's perseverance, courage and never give up spirit on the desert island inspired generations of colonists and explorers. From the point of view of post-colonialism, Daniel Defoe reflected the imperialism and colonialism of that time through this work. Robinson's occupation, development and rule of the desert island is exactly the process of colonizers creating colonies, which is a true portrayal of colonizers' overseas expansion and occupation. This paper makes a deeper interpretation of Robinson Crusoe and analyzes the colonialist thoughts in it.

**Keywords:** Post-Colonialism; Colonialist Thoughts Expansion

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## 1. Introduction

Post-colonialism is the central idea conveyed by Robinson Crusoe. Robinson is full of adventure spirit, he defies danger and overcomes difficulties with his bravery and wisdom, which is also the main characteristic of Britain during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. From transforming the desert island alone to saving Friday, taming him and submitting to himself, Robinson's series of activities truly reflect the need of the Industrial Revolution. At that time, Britain opened an era of foreign plunder and colonial expansion. With the rise of the bourgeoisie and occupying the dominant position in the country, Robinson Crusoe cater to the psychological and spiritual needs of the bourgeoisie and strengthen their ambitions for external expansion. Through the analysis of Robinson's 28 years of life and activities on the deserted island, this essay presents a vivid picture of conquest the nature from British colonists. Robinson Crusoe is a typical literary work describing colonialism.

## 2. A Brief Review of the Post-colonial Theory

Post-colonialism, also known as post-colonial criticism, started in the late 1970s, flourished in the mid- to late 1980s and late 1990s<sup>[1]</sup>. After the end of the Second World War, with the decline of the colonial imperialist countries, the former colonies and semi-colonies gained political and military independence, however, colonialism did not die out. It continued to exist in the form of economy and culture. This theory has the following main characteristics:

Oppose Western-led narratives and advocate alienation narratives: Although the countries of colonies and semi-colonies achieved political and military independence after the end of World War II, the knowledge and theories about the essence of society belonged to the system of western colonialism which still influenced the colonial people who used them to analyze their own culture. The purpose of post-colonial criticism is to awaken people's subjective consciousness and completely eliminate the remnants of colonial culture.

Oppose Western cultural hegemonism and promote pluralist culture: Ending up with the World War II, the colonial countries lost the legal means to enslave the colonies and semi-colonies countries, which they used cultural infiltration, ideological indoctrination cultivating their own cultural elites to seek the dominant position in the world culture, and hoped to gain political and economic benefits through these means. The post-colonial critics strongly condemned the global cultural hegemonism, stressed that all national cultures had their own characteristics, the autonomy of each national culture should be respected in international society and firmly resisted bullying the weak in the culture field.<sup>[2]</sup>

Connotation of post-colonial Criticism: The essence of post-colonial criticism is against Eurocentrism and revolts the cultural hegemony promoted by developed western capitalist countries to the developing countries.<sup>[3]</sup> Post-colonial criticism focuses on the analysis of the methods used by the colonists to rule the colonies, the influence of the language, culture and religion of the colonists on the colonies, and the traces of the colonists leave behind in all aspects after the independence of the former colonial countries.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 3. Disregarding for Friday's original culture

Robinson's cultural penetration: After living alone on the desert island for 25 years, Crusoe saves the cannibal -- Friday who is an aboriginal of the island founded in an American cannibals' meat feast. From then on, Crusoe carries out the cultural infiltration and influences to Friday. Culture plays a very important, really indispensable role in empire building.<sup>[5]</sup> Robinson's cultural penetration to Friday lays a good foundation for establishment of the empire. Robinson rescues the victim, never asks his name, according to the European law, it is Friday, so he is named Friday, which actually distinguishes his hierarchical relationship with Friday. 'Yes' and 'No' demonstrate that Robinson's supremacy of hegemonism and Friday has no right to own his thinking and opinions.

First, I made him know his Name should be Friday, which was the Day I sav'd his Life; I call'd him so for the Memory of the

Time; I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my Name; I likewise taught him to say, YES, and NO, and to know the Meaning of them.<sup>[6]</sup>

Robinson is based on the standards of European civilization to ridicule and disregard Friday's civilization unscrupulously, even the days of living with Friday completely denies his original culture. Between the conversation of Robinson and Friday, they talk about the creator of all things, which Friday believe that the one is old Benamuckee who is the omnipotent, and controlling their nation's destiny, however, Robinson contradicts his comments, believing it is a trick. Benamuckee is the sacred creator of Americans and the source of everything in the American culture, just like the God in the European civilization, but Robinson's disdain for American civilizations and slander of their deity reflect his disregard for American civilizations. Edward W. Said expressed in *Orientalism* that all cultures had organic and internal relations, which were bound together by certain spirit, natural atmosphere or national concept. Outsiders can only enter into a certain culture by means of internal identification of history.<sup>[7]</sup> In fact, the religions and cultures of different ethnic groups have more or less common origins and kinship.

But I took it by another handle, and ask'd him who made the Sea, the Ground we walk'd on, and the Hills, and Woods; he told me it was one old Benamuckee, that liv'd beyond all.<sup>[8]</sup> I endeavour'd to clear up this Fraud, to my Man Friday, and told him, that the Pretence of their old Men going up the Mountains, to say O to their God Benamuckee, was a Cheat.<sup>[9]</sup> Robinson's cultural infiltration to Friday embodies all details of daily life. The first is to change his the original habits. Friday and his tribe have the custom of being naked, however, when Robinson bring him back to the place where he lives, he gradually cultivates his behaviour of wearing clothes and transforms his horrible way of eating human flesh so that Robinson take Friday hunting a sheep in order to let Friday taste the flavour of cooked food.

What would do there said I, would you turn Wild again, eat Mens Flesh again, and be a Savage as you were before? He lookt full of Concern, and shaking his Head said, No no, Friday tell them to live Good, tell them to eat Corn bread, Cattleflesh, Milk, no eat Man again.<sup>[10]</sup>

Next is to train labor technology to let him know the meaning of work. Robinson teaches him to sift grains and tells him that they are used to make bread, after a period of training, Friday is soon able to do the things proficiently by himself. Thirdly, Friday is enlightened to learn English, which is one of the most important ways of Robinson's cultural penetration. Language is the most perfect tool of the empire and the carrier of culture.<sup>[11]</sup> Speaking a language means consciously accepting a world and a culture.<sup>[12]</sup> Due to master English, Friday can read the Bible fluently and become a devout Christian, it is all thanks to Robinson's wonderful cultural colonization. In short, for the attack of the original culture from Friday and vigorously promoting European culture, Friday gradually is reconstructed the product of European civilization, become the spokesman of Robinson and European culture, acts as the proper assistant for Robinson to establish the desert empire.

#### **4. Development a desert island empire**

During the 28 years that the protagonist stays on the desert island, he continues to expand the geographic space of the empire, weapons, the Bible, and European civilization have become powerful conditions for Robinson to enlarge its territory and increase population. When he leaves the island, he chooses an agent to manage it and establishes the embryonic form of the empire. Even leaving the deserted island, he has never stopped to supply his spiritual and material help, replaces agents, and further promotes the establishment of the deserted island empire. Finally, combining with violence and culture, helping with self-effort and agents, the building of a hegemonic empire on the deserted island is completed.

Build the island nation: On the desert island, the first step about creation of the Robinson Empire is to extend the geographical space and constantly learns the distribution of animals and plants. When contacting with others, he has always recognized himself owning the strongest culture, and consciously advanced European civilization, however, at the same time, the ancient American civilizations—language, culture, and religion which are regarded as otherness and Robinson makes lots of effort to obliterate them. The colonists not only control political and military to the colonies, but also devote themselves to destroy the native culture. With the growth of population, Robinson makes himself as the only dominator of the island so that his own colonial rule is founded originally, based on these that the grand blueprint of the island nation is beginning. By use of Friday and his father, the islanders grow in number progressively who must swear to the Bible and sign a contract to obey Robinson's rule. At this point, the embryonic form of the desert island empire is formed. After returning to a civilized society that is twenty-eight years away, Robinson still cares about the island, then eight years later, he sets foot on the desert island again with manpower, material resources and weapons, which he brings to the island that is not only the necessities for life and survival, as well as the future development needs of artisans, to ensure that the residents here can live and work in peace and contentment. Robinson, who comes to the desert island empire again, acts both as the governor of the island and a condescending bystander. The consolidation of the island nation's rule by violence is not directed by Robinson himself, but through his two-term agents. Through a fatal blow to America savages, a solid foundation is laid for the construction of the empire.

Here I stay'd about 20 Days, left them Supplies of all necessary things, and particularly of Arms, Powder, Shot, Cloaths, Tools, and two Workmen, which I brought from England with me, a Carpenter and a Smith.<sup>[13]</sup> Besides this, I shar'd the Island into Parts with'em reserv'd to my self the Property of the whole, but gave them such Parts respectively as they agreed on.<sup>[14]</sup>

Friday's speechlessness and acting as Robinson's agent: With the cultural infiltration of Robinson, Friday changes the original living habits, learns English, converts to Christianity, and becomes a civilized person of full European standards and the spokesperson of European civilization. Friday vows never to leave Robinson, would rather pays the price of his life than to return to the previous mode of life, moreover gladly to be transformed into the Robinson's lobbyists, and he follows Robinson's command, kills his own compatriots, but there is not mercy. Robinson's cultural penetration has achieved the expected effect results.

Other agents: The external factors of the empire tend to be stable supported by violence, as the area of the desert island is in a state

of uninterrupted expansion, Robinson relies on other agents to improve the internal factors of the empire—the cultural penetration of the imperial subjects and their conversion to western civilization. First of all, the original inhabitants of the island enlighten other thirty-seven savages; secondly, by the agent of the island to implement the influence of Christian ideas; finally, in order to avoid unnecessary disputes in the future, the agent distributes the lands fairly to everyone for cultivation, but they only have the right to use it, Robinson collects the rent. At this time, Robinson only needs to control the overall situation and no longer deal with trivial matters. He has totally become an emperor, in this situation, the desert island empire is completed with the combination of violence and cultural penetration.

## 5. Beautification and Demonization

About Robinson Crusoe, whites are rational, wise, and promises, while the black men are a combination of ignorance, barbarism and evil. The captain, Robinson meets during his first adventure who is full of reason and courage. The second captain he encounters who is generous and upright. The author uses lots of words to describe the third captain who is the Portuguese captain that not only saves Robinson, but also helps him raise funds, forms a large-scale plantation in Brazil, as an assistant manages it for a long time, even though Robinson is on the desolate island.

In contrast to this, the author demonized Africans, Americans and Chinese in varying degrees through Robinson's words. When he arrives in Guinea for the third time, Robinson is detained as a slave by pirates for two years. As he flees, he passes through the territory of Africa. Before he has seen and contacted Africans, Robinson had compared blacks to lions and tigers, who ate the flesh of his own compatriots, and was indistinguishable from beasts. In fact, this is the value judgment of Orientalism which is a prejudiced way of thinking or system of knowledge. The author disparages Africans, Americans and Chinese in the guise of what the protagonist has seen and heard, narrating them as the embodiment of ignorance, cruelty and indulgence, and providing an opportunity to publicize European civilization and rationality.

This Convinc'd me that there was no going on Shoar for us in the Night upon that Coast, and how to venture on Shoar in the Day was another Question too; for to have fallen into the Hands of any of the Savages, had been as bad as to have fallen into the Hands of Lyons and Tygers; at least we were equally apprehensive of the Danger of it.<sup>[15]</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Robinson Crusoe is not only an adventure novel, but also a colonial novel that condenses the development of the bourgeoisie. In order to beautify their behaviour of aggression, the colonists are spared no effort to prove to the world that what they bring to the world is civilization, enlightenment and the salvation of barbaric nations. Robinson Crusoe complies with the requirements of the times and beautifies the overseas plunder of capitalism. Through this novel, readers can clearly understand the nature of colonialism and the means adopted by the colonists in the process of colonization. The post-colonial theory is the thesis of this essay, mainly discussing cultural colonization and cultural hegemony.

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