

Original Paper

Analyzing “Other” Construction in *Robinson Crusoe* from Post Colonialism Perspective

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Abstract

This paper uses the theory of post-colonialism to do research on “Robinson Crusoe”, taking the geographical environment (the desert island) and nation (Friday and Robinson) as examples, analyzes the construction of the other. And the characters analyzing reflects colonialism, which leads people to ponder. This paper is divided into four parts. The first part is introduction, in the first part, the author mainly introduces the background of “Robinson Crusoe”, the relevant post-colonialism theory, the theory of “others” proposed by Zhu Yuande (2007), as well as the current situation and purpose of the research. The second part is to analyze the two protagonists, Robinson and Friday, which reflects colonialism thought. The third part analyzes the construction of the other in “Robinson Crusoe” from two aspects: they are the geographical environment and the nation. The last part is conclusion.

Keywords

Robinson Crusoe, the other, post colonialism, construction, geographic and nation other

1. Introduction

Daniel Defoe was born in London as a butcher’s family belonging to the middle class. Throughout his life, he was a businessman, a soldier, an economist, a politician, a journalist, a booklet author, a public relations, and a novelist. Defoe is one of the earliest practitioners of the novel. He is even known as the father of English novels. As a prolific and versatile writer, he has written more than 500 books, treatises and journals from various angles.

Robinson Crusoe is a product of the bourgeoisie, who portrayed the colonists as heroes. At the same time, the novel does not in any way recognize the colonialism, regard possession and profit as the source of power for all acts, which is the embodiment of the colonial characteristics of capitalism.

1.1 The Authoring Background of Robinson Crusoe

Robinson Crusoe mainly describes Robinson's self-destruction to the island after the sea, and he did not give up, and he became more and more self-reliant, and ultimately achieved a rich and adequate life.

With the rapidly development of the economy of the capitalist countries at that time, and the economies of some feudal countries were suppressed, the gap between the two institutional countries was growing, which provided possibilities for colonialism. The success of the British industrial revolution had greatly increased productivity and required a large amount of resources to ensure industrial development. Since the British economy and the continuous innovation of technology rapidly developed, the travel and adventure of the British people prevailed, which provided a good background for Robinson's drifting. *Robinson Crusoe* can be seen as a true portrayal of British colonialism at the time. The character of the protagonist represents the character of the colonists at that time and represents the character of the bourgeoisie at that time (Guan, 2015).

Robinson Crusoe was written by Defoe, who was inspired by the experience of the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk. During a voyage of whale hunting, Selkirk was abandoned on a desert island for four years and more than four months. In 1709, he was rescued and was back to the United Kingdom. Defoe met Selkirk at a friend's party and was inspired by his experience. Defoe modeled himself on the legend of Selkirk and devoted his years of experience at sea to characters. He also fully used his rich imagination to carry out literary processing, making Robinson a small and medium asset at the time. The heroes in the mind of the class are the first idealized emerging asset figures in Western literature. He showed a strong bourgeois entrepreneurial spirit and enlightenment consciousness. At the same time, it also reflects the colonialism's color. Robinson's development and reign of deserted islands are exactly the same as colonists' colonization, and can be said to be a true portrayal of the colonists' overseas expansion of ceremonies and their occupation of other countries' territories.

1.2 Others Theory in Post-Colonial Theory

"Post-colonialism was an academic trend with strong political and cultural criticism that arose in the Western academic world in the 1970s. It was mainly a discourse that focused on the relationship between the sovereign state and the former colonies. Post-colonialism's unique is that it is not an ironclad theory; it has often changed since its inception to adapt to different historical moments, geographic regions, cultural identities, political circumstances, affiliations, and reading practices". (Guan, 2015)

"Post-colonialism" is also called post-colonial critical doctrine. It is mainly a kind of cultural discourse of intellectuals who are mainly composed of former colonial and third-world intellectuals living in the first world colonies and third world. It is their cultural care and cultural tendency. Being a cultural

phenomenon, it is a historical theory of human blood, tears and endurance. It is a reflection of the post-colonial state that has emerged in today's world. Its essence is to oppose Eurocentrism and to oppose the cultural hegemony which is pushed by western developed capitalist countries on developing countries today. The cultural hegemonism which promoted by the Chinese nation promotes the national culture and promotes its own national culture to return to its proper position from the marginal state of the world culture and even becomes a new cultural center (Yang, 2001, p. 76).

The other is a common term in western post-colonial theory. In post-colonial theory, westerners are often referred to as subjective "self", while colonial people are referred to as "colonial others" or directly called "other". "The other" and "Self" is a pair of relative concepts. Westerners regard "non-western world" other than "self" as "other", and they completely oppose each other. Therefore, the concept of "the other" actually implicates the ideology of the west. Chinese scholar Zhu Yuande defined the "other" as: "The objectified and intentional construction that one independent subject builds on another independent subject". (Zhu, 2007) The author Defoe was born in the capital of the United Kingdom, London, and his father ran a slaughter business, so he chose to do business. He traveled extensively and was successful in doing business. He was from the middle class family, and he was very concerned about capitalist industry, commerce, and trade. And he also advocated expanding colonies. In this work, he also expressed his own colonial claim.

Robinson built himself in two ways through the colonial process: The first method was to bring European advanced culture to the island by recording his daily life; the other method was to sacrifice the cost of the aboriginal (other). By demonizing them into a similar phenomenon, Robinson declared his superiority. In Robinson's transition to "Friday", the lifestyle, language, and religion of "Friday" were changed. However, he had no sense of resistance and thus became a silent other.

1.3 Research Status and Purpose

Throughout the ages, literary and art critic, literary historian, politician, and thinker have interpreted and analyzed *Robinson Crusoe* from different visuals and perspectives, presenting Robinson with different versions and images. Allen, a British literary historian, believes that *Robinson Crusoe* tells the adventures of an adventurer and the fables of his loneliness. In his view, Defoe symbolically describes the loneliness of human beings, because each of us is alone. The French enlightenment thinker Rousseau regards *Robinson Crusoe* as the best inspirational book for educating children. The famous American columnist Clifton Feldman has regarded Robinson Crusoe as one of the 100 must-read works (Xu, 2008).

When *Robinson Crusoe* was published, it received enthusiastic responses from readers, and it also caused many scholars to interpret Robinson Crusoe from different perspectives. For example, the domestic scholar Sun Hongxin's "*Robinson Crusoe* in the Field of Ecocriticism", the article interprets the text from two aspects: the anthropocentrism ecological view and the harmonious coexistence ecological view. Zhang Deming's "Space Narrative, Modernity and Empire Politics-Rereading

Robinson Crusoe” is a interpretation of the text from narrative techniques. Zhang Deming interprets from the dimensions of space poetics and space politics, and believes that Robinson has planned and constructed three spaces in the process of adventurous and stranded islands, namely self and other, center and edge, civilization and barbarism. Luo Shiping’s “On Colonialism in *Robinson Crusoe*”, using the perspective of colonialism to excavate the complex relationship between colonists and colonies, slave owners and slaves, the Whites and colored people, central culture and marginal culture, civilization and barbarism, Robinson and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* , and thus revealing the colonial theme contained in the works.

Robinson Crusoe has always been considered an adventure story, showing the courage and spirit of exploration of the British middle class. In the eyes of ecocritics, Robinson is not only a symbol of human conquest, possession, development, and hurt of nature, but also a symbol of the development of human society based on extensive and thorough plundering and reliance on nature. However, if we pay more attention on reading this novel, we will find traces of colonialism, that is, Europeans exploiting indigenous people and expanding colonies. In fact, it is the strong sense of overseas expansion that allowed Crusoe to acquire and rule a colony on a distant, non-European island. Therefore, *Robinson Crusoe* effectively reflected the ideology of Europeans at that time.

This article only discusses this book from the perspective of post-colonialism. And there are many scholars analyzed the work from this visual. For example, Guan Feng’s “Research on Post-colonialism of *Robinson Crusoe*”, Li Wei’s “Analyzing *Robinson Crusoe* under Post-colonialism Perspective”. This paper mainly analyzes the figure image in *Robinson Crusoe* and the image construction of “other” of geography environment and nation, and analyzes the work from the perspective of “other construction”, so that people can think deeply about colonialism and how to build their national dignity.

This novel is divided into three parts. The first part talked about Robinson’s three sailing experiences when he left home. The second part talked about Robinson’s experience on a desert island. The third part talked about that he came back from the desert island. Especially in the second part, Robinson’s personal colonialism is reflected in his vividness. This paper gives people a reflection on colonialism and inspires how to protect national dignity.

2. Character Analysis of *Robinson Crusoe*

Robinson Crusoe has two important protagonists. One is Robinson himself. The other is Robinson’s colonization and alienation of the indigenous people, “Friday”. The following will analyze these two characters separately.

2.1 Robinson

Robinson is a person with full of labor enthusiasm and a person of perseverance. In an unpeopled desert island, Robinson needed to solve the problem of survival. He thought that fancy was useless, so he removed all the things that could be removed from the boat, which provided the basis for his

subsequent survival. He constantly struggled with nature, changed his life with his own hands, and gradually achieved success. He lived alone on this deserted island for 27 years. Facing with life difficulties, Robinson's actions demonstrated the tough personality and heroic qualities of a tough man, embodying the creative spirit and pioneering spirit of the bourgeoisie's rising period. He was brave to fight the bad environment. He was unwilling to be mediocre and devoted himself to overseas life with full of adventures and challenges. It is with these qualities that he can always maintain the look of a civilized person. Of course Robinson is also a bourgeois and a colonizer, so he has the nature of exploitation and plunder.

Robinson constructed himself as "self" and changed the indigenous people on the island to "others". First, he used his own daily life style to bring the advanced culture of Europe to the indigenous people on the island to construct "self". He set the standard time on the island using the concept of European time (even if it was not necessary for him to contact the outside world). Shortly after landing, he set up a cross where he landed for the first time, engraved him with the date of his landing and cut the daily pitch so that "he has a calendar to calculate the sun and moon" (Defoe, 2010, p. 50). And secondly, when he learned that the indigenous people on the island were living in the same way, he ruled it again and affirmed his superiority. Robinson's transformation of "Friday" reflected his colonialism and his image of "Friday". In addition, Robinson's most effective way of constructing himself is a diary. Through such a subjective log, Robinson gradually restored his Eurocentrism. The role of the record includes setting the standard time and writing a diary. Obviously, the record convinced him that he was a civilized European and this provided him with an absolute authority over all the illusions about the island.

Robinson first carried out the ideological and cultural colonization. He not only used force to subdue "Friday", but also reformed his thinking. He took "Friday" as the other person, taught him to dress, eat cooked food, drink goat's milk, made him get rid of the habits of eating people, and instilled him with his own language and religious culture, taught him to speak, and made him believe that the original beliefs were false. In the end, he lost his own initiative and obeyed him. "Friday" was unable to revolt and became a silent other. Robinson as a white man, he had strong sense of racial superiority, so he believed that Indians and blacks were barbarians and they only were slaves of whites. He could teach these barbarians many things.

Robinson once again carried out land economic colonization. After he arrived in Brazil, he started a slave trade because of the lack of labor force in the plantation. When they arrived on a desert island, the indigenous people on the island and the island were treated as others and they were taken as existing. All the behaviors show Robinson's construction of "self" and transformation of "other".

2.2 Friday

“Friday” was a savage man who was a hard worker and a sincere person. When “Friday” rescued and educated from the indigenous people, he became Robinson’s faithful servant and friend and became a slave of “civilized man”.

As the representative of the indigenous people in the novel, “Friday” is a concrete example of the other. Europeans have a strong European-centric tendency and their impression of others is not good, and “Friday” has never had the right to speak (Zeng, 2015). When Robinson and “Friday” met for the first time, first of all, Robinson’s appearance of “Friday” was negative:

“His hair is dark and long, but not like wool; his forehead is tall and big, his eyes are sharp and lively. His skin is not so dark, brownish, but his nose is It’s small, but not as flat as the nose of a black man in general; his mouth looks good too, his lips are thin, his teeth are flat and white, and white as ivory”. (Defoe, 2010, pp. 148-149)

Said believes that Orientalism stems from the assumption that Europe is the center, and other cultures are in low status. European centrists use European culture as the standard and regard themselves as the center of world and world culture. On the one hand, they believe that they are better than colonial people; on the other hand, they think that all other cultures are inferior (Said, 1978). After “Friday” was saved, he followed Robinson to learn the life of a “civilized person”. Robinson called him “Friday”, and told him that his own name was “Master”. After becoming familiar with such titles on “Friday”, they began to “othering” change. First is to change the lifestyle. From dressing, eating cooked food, to using advanced tools and to the baptism of language and culture, the rapid changes of “Friday” made Robinson psychologically satisfied. “Friday” lost his cultural model, and feared Robinson with his guns, he slowly became obedient and became a faithful servant. The loss of his identity made him eventually become a silent “Other”. After language and belief were reformed, “Friday” finally lost its national identity. This is the epitome that European capitalist colonists used spiritual civilization to conquer colonies.

3. The Construction of “Others” in *Robinson Crusoe*

In the *Robinson Crusoe*, author Defoe used the desert island as a geographical environment, and took the island’s indigenous people, especially “Friday” as a racial other to identify the superiority and dominance of himself, and it showed his own image of colonial aggressors. The purpose of Robinson’s change of “Friday” was not to turn “Friday” into a “civilized man”. His real purpose was to let “Friday” completely obey him. Therefore, Robinson implemented a strategic transformation of “Friday”, including changing the original lifestyle of “Friday”, teaching him to speak English and indoctrinating Christian teaching, etc. (Zeng, 2015)

3.1 Geographical Others

The so-called geo-environmentalists, which means that Robinson used desert islands as their own

colonial rule in their novels, and regarded deserted islands as geographical other. Because of influenced by the era at that time, the author of the novel described Robinson as the image of an emerging bourgeoisie. In spite of his parental dissuasion, he decided to start his own adventure career without the knowledge of his family. When he first sailed to the sea, he encountered a terrible storm. Later, he discovered that it was very easy to do business in Africa and he made several trips. He finally met pirates and was captured as a slave. Two years later, he finally found an opportunity to escape and sailed for a few days on the sea. He was rescued by a ship which sailed to Brazil. After he arrived in Brazil, he sold his belongings and a young slave who followed him. Get the money to buy a plantation and begin to manage his own comfortable life. Robinson, a nature-loving adventurer, was not satisfied with the comfort of the status quo. After he heard the advice of some friends, he went to Africa to sell black slaves again. This time of experience brought great changes to him. Their boat sank near South America, and Robinson became the only surviving person to flow alone to a deserted island.

This desert island was full of novelty for Robinson. He found that it was totally different from the background of his life. The “Desert Island” has “otherness” at this time. He can only rely on his own ability to live. Of course, this desert island was a place full of possessiveness for European colonizers. So after he conquered the indigenous “Friday”, he declared that everything on this desert island was his private property. He began to build houses on desert islands, which he called “home”, in order to protect his security. Later he discovered that the island could grow grapes and crops to protect his food supply. After the three “homes” were fully established, Robinson had just started to fear the desert islands, and in the end he gradually fully adapted to the desert islands and “de-mutualized” the “desert island”, and gradually began to own these desert islands’ occupying, developing and ruling right.

At first, for desert islands, Robinson was the “Other”. Later, Robinson’s fears gradually disappeared and the colonial rule became more and more intense. The roles of desert island and Robinson were interchanged. For Robinson, the desert island became the other. The concept of “Other” is relative to “self”.

Defoe’s geography of others’ construction came into being with the colonial expansion of European capitalism. This geographical other focuses on practicality rather than on its romantic atmosphere. It is an object that can be conquered. Crusoe’s conquest of this geography is the idealization of European colonial expansion (Ma & Zhu, 2012).

3.2 Racial Others

After Robinson was stranded in the desert island, he evolved from atheism to Christians. He looked down on the indigenous people and called them “wild people”, because the indigenous people worshiped the primitive paganism and prevailed in the prevalence of human beings, which was completely contrary to the Christian civilization. Robinson’s spiritual reform on “Friday” was the embodiment of colonial deeds establishing Christian civilization in the colonies. Robinson implemented a colonialist approach. Those who drifted in the indigenous tribes were asked to return to

Robinson. He asked these people to sign the covenant and swear by the Bible, and always be loyal to Robinson.

For Robinson, the “Friday” and the indigenous peoples on the island were all “ethnic other”. Influenced by the European Cultural Center Theory, he believes that Indians and blacks are other people who are different from their white counterparts. They have “otherness” and are barbarians. They should all serve themselves. So after he controlled “Friday”, he wanted to remove the “otherness” on Friday and let him succumb to himself and become his faithful servant. So a series of changes have been occurred. For example, teach him to wear clothes, eat cooked food, drink goat milk, and of course teach him English and spread religious thoughts. When “Friday” still had the thought of “eating people”, he stopped again and again, and made “Friday” be afraid of him and slowly subordinated to him.

Robinson’s conquest, domestication and transformation of “Friday” is a process of “otherness reduction”. In Robinson’s mind, he himself is of course the supreme “monarch” on the desert island, and “Friday” is the appendant of his own demesne, with full of barbaric and backward primitive atmosphere. “Friday” is a subject who was waiting to be civilized. Friday’s mission of “deindividuation” and “otherness reduction” will be done by himself. “In western cultural tradition, ‘Other’ is not popular, and it is necessary to restore it to self. ‘Otherness reduction’ is a common technique used in western culture to deal with otherness in others”. (Zhu, 2007)

More than once, the book described in detail the indigenous people’s “eating people” custom. The author “demonized” local races, which highlighted the superiority of European culture and vilified the culture of other ethnic groups. This is also the embodiment of the author’s colonial rule.

4. Conclusion

During the 28-year deserted island experience, Robinson has come through several major stages of human civilization history such as collection industry, hunter-gathering, agriculture and graziery, preliminary manufacturing. He explored in horticulture, architecture, navigation, etc. He explored the entire island, fully explored and utilized all the resources on the island, and tried to transform it into his wealth. He conveyed such basic information and deep-rooted beliefs to readers with his own life experience: Conquest, transformation and possession of natural labor and production are the true and highest happiness.

This article begins with the interpretation of the “other” in post-colonialism from two major figures, Robinson and Friday, and concludes that Robinson was “Master” (self) and developed “Friday” as well as deserted islands through a series of colonial activities, such as land colonization, cultural colonization, etc. In order to highlight the superiority of European culture and conquer everything, the desert islands and “Friday” will be “changed” and make them become their own private property. Robinson’s self-building was based on his European-centralist cultural identity, and the loss of identity on “Friday” was due to Robinson’s cruel transformation. This article also analyzes *Robinson Crusoe*

from the construction of the geo-environment “Other” and the construction of the racial “Other”, and “demonizes” other ethnic cultures to prove that their cultural environment is “civilized” and others are barbarians. Whether it is the construction of the geo-others or the construction of the ethnic others under the theme of salvation, it is the result of Eurocentrism in the book of Defoe. Europeans do not think that their colonial expansion activities are a kind of aggression or conquest on other races. Instead, they think it is a kind of “rescuing”. They are guided by Christianity and taking African and Caribbean people from the low level. It was saved in a depraved, barbarian world. It makes us think deeply. Under the drive of the European Cultural Center Theory, will the Chinese culture become the next cultural other? No matter whether it is “geographical other” or “natural environmental other”, it is also an embodiment of post-colonialism.

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