



# The Color of Post Colonialism of “Metamorphosis” Writened by Wangmeng

Yuhan Zhang(✉)

Chinese Language and Literature, Northern University of Technology, Shijingshan District,  
Beijing 100043, China  
zyh18101385851@126.com

**Abstract.** “Metamorphosis” is a literary work that describes the half and half social environment in modern China. It is not a strict post colonial work, but the colonized mentality expressed in it strongly shows the confusion and despair of Chinese modern intellectuals in cultural identity. The incompatibility of culture and the disillusionment of the strong desire to seek roots led to the tragedy of Chinese modern intellectuals.

**Keywords:** “Metamorphosis” · Postcolonial · Intellectuals

## 1 Introduction

As a semi colonial and semi feudal society, modern China was inevitably invaded by Western ideology while receiving the western advanced science and technology culture. This is very obvious in the modern Chinese intellectuals, especially the post-modern intellectuals of the May 4th movement who accepted the western advanced culture. They are all more or less marked by the Post Colonial hegemonic culture.

Western ideology invaded China with a strong posture, especially in the late May 4th movement. The intellectuals who grew up in the later period of the May 4th movement are different from the early intellectuals in their inferiority complex and sensitivity. They are full of confidence and narcissism.

They think that they can resist the Chinese tradition after receiving the new education. They hate everything in their own country and yearn for the west, including food, clothing, housing, transportation and religious beliefs. From the root of this situation, it is actually the result of western culture’s extrusion and competition for the survival space of Chinese traditional culture. Taking Ni Wucheng, the protagonist in Wang Meng’s novel “Metamorphosis”, as an example, it reflects the tragedy of intellectuals in the late May 4th period, which is similar to the “odd” and “superfluous”. It once again shows the tragic fate of Chinese modern intellectuals brought by the attack of Chinese and Western cultures, and also shows the hegemonic nature of colonial culture and colonial ideology.

## 2 Rootless Drifting Person

### 2.1 Diating from the Soil of Its Own Culture

Ni Wucheng was born in a feudal landlord family named mengguantun, where feudalism was closed, ignorant and backward. Perhaps because his ancestors took part in the Hundred Days Reform (in 1898), with a natural revolutionary gene, Ni Wucheng had an awareness of advanced ideas without a teacher. At the age of nine, he began to study the articles of Zhang Taiyan and Liang Qichao at the foreign school.

At the age of ten, he could eloquently accuse the barbarity and ignorance of foot binding, and began to lose sleep because of thinking about the meaning of life.

It can be said that Ni Wucheng at this time was the rudiment of modern intellectuals with an enterprising mentality, denouncing feudal vices and actively learning advanced western ideas. However, when his tall and strong mother tried to suppress the “evil spirit” of Ni Wucheng leading to the West with opium smoke and masturbation and damaged his healthy legs, something changed. He could not forgive his cousin and could not reconcile with this absurd incident until he went to Europe to study.

In the west, Ni Wucheng spent his study abroad and learned about western civilization with a pious colonial mentality.

As the western patriarchal hegemonic country, the West’s dissemination of civilization in the East has the purpose of domination and colonization.

The combination of the two kinds of mentality of different subjects happened to complete the dissemination of the colonial cultural mentality.

Ni Wucheng recognized the independence of love and freedom of marriage in the West, but he lived lavishly in his marriage with Jingyi, regardless of his family, and completely forgot the Chinese traditional virtue of being responsible for the family;

Similarly, he advocates freedom and equality, but when asked how to solve the current problems of national distress and national fragmentation, he shows the same numb and blank look as Meng Guancun’s face.

He does not remember the patriotic feelings of the Chinese people since ancient times that “As long as it is good for our country, we are willing to sacrifice our lives.” and even defended his contacts with the traitors in his mind.

Instead of remembering the ancient maxim of “being close to the virtuous officials, being far away from the villains”.

So far, in Ni Wucheng’s mind, the traditional Chinese culture has become a useless civilization that store dirt and accept filth (shelter evil people and countenance evil practices), discards it like an old shoe, casts away the traditional Chinese virtues, deviates from the soil of his own culture, and blindly favors Western civilization. To a certain extent, his own culture has become the foil of a powerful Western culture.

### 2.2 Typical Sense of Western Superiority

As a Chinese, Ni Wucheng should not have reflected the unique Western-style superiority of Western rulers in the face of Eastern civilization. However, as a post may 4th intellectual who accepted Western civilization from childhood and studied abroad for

two years, Ni Wucheng began to regard himself as a Western civilized person under the gradual rendering of Western colonial culture.

In his eyes, Western civilization is elegant and clean, while Chinese civilization is crude and dirty.

In the conversation with Du Shenxing, some talk about “brushing your teeth” is scientific, but it is based on eating a delicious casserole of white meat.

Because a pot of delicious casserole stew has inspired Ni Wucheng’s excited and joyful vitality, making his embarrassment and blush disappear instantly. This is typical hedonism. Hobbes believes that happiness is just one desire after another. It is obvious that as long as the appetite is satisfied, Ni Wucheng’s sense of superiority will come to his mind.

The excessive consumerism also gave Ni Wucheng great satisfaction and superiority. He pawned his watch for the fourth time to buy western toys; He seems lofty and does not bow to a silver dollar. In fact, he is extravagant and loves consumption. He thinks that what he buys is a symbol of wisdom and advanced civilization, and that it is a ladder of human progress, but he owes a debt regardless of the actual situation of his family. I feel bored in the roar of Jingyi’s frequent “where is the money?”.

In fact, this is precisely the superiority of the supporters of the western culture who think they are superior to the people at the bottom of the East who need to live. They mold themselves into progressive idealists, and they naturally despise and belittle the Oriental people who struggle on the survival line. It is a nihilism that ignores the reality, and it is a superior embodiment of the typical Westerners standing high and unaware of human suffering.

### 2.3 The Sinking of Contradictions

Departing from his own culture and the superficiality of his understanding of western culture, Ni Wucheng has become a vagrant with no roots in spirit. He can neither find his way nor return. Under the environment of collision between Chinese and Western cultures, Ni Wucheng suffered from the extrusion of traditional feudal culture and Western colonial culture. Under the torture of this kind of mental torture, only the body of almost all beautiful things was left.

He thought that he could rely on Western civilization as an escape route, but was blocked by Western consumerism and hedonism, so he could not find any way out, which made his spirit and situation more contradictory and painful.

Under such circumstances, Ni Wucheng chose the indulgence of odd people, indulged in extravagance, and was ambiguous with many “girlfriends”, allowing himself to immerse himself in the illusory ideal, regardless of the reality of life.

He accepted Western colonial culture and showed great willingness to accept it; He abandoned the excellent traditional virtues of China, but he could not get rid of the temperament of mengguantun people.

In such a contradictory situation, he kept falling and sinking, so, in the old age, in order to show his own advancement and science, he accepted cataract surgery by a rural doctor at will, resulting in blindness in the old age. Ni Wucheng has always been in this spiritual dilemma, fighting alone and losing all the time.

### 3 The Mentality of Intellectuals Under Colonialism

#### 3.1 Alienated Western Culture

Strictly speaking, “Metamorphosis” is not a post colonial work in the real sense, but Ni Wucheng’s almost colonized mentality is fully consistent with the characteristics of the cultural hegemony of the post colonial literary suzerain over the marginal countries. As an ideology, Orientalism is also Orientalism, and Orientalism is also cultural hegemonism. As Orientalism, the purpose of Orientalism is not to spread knowledge to people, but to seek the domination of the West over the East [1].

Therefore, it will not give real guidance and cultural communication to Ni Wucheng, a student from the East.

He adopted an attitude of worship, admiration, and even blind obedience to Western-style civilization. “living” describes the scene of Ni Wucheng taking a bath.

In the semi colonial and semi feudal society where “bathing” civilization has not been popularized, Ni Wucheng has become the number one fan of “bathing” culture.

In the process of bathing, he should “soak in hot water again and again, beat the pancreas on his body again and again, wash it again and again, rub it again and again, and wash it again and again. The skin of his whole body is flushed, rubbed and washed, including the armpits, elbows, knees and ears. If there is no mud to rub, he still needs to wash it. He is always afraid that he has not cleaned it” [2]. He thoroughly implemented the “bathing culture” with an extreme and blind attitude, just like his excessive desire and dependence on Western culture. When life is unhappy, taking a bath is like getting a new life. Obviously, this is a funny thing, but it is not uncommon for Ni Wucheng. It is precisely because of his personal mentality of blind obedience and excessive infatuation that he demonized the original normal western culture and made the original normal cultural communication become a kind of hegemonic cultural communication.

#### 3.2 Cross-Ethnic, Cross-Cultural, Cross-Language Integration

The interweaving of various languages, cultures and nationalities in “Metamorphosis” has created a picture of colonization in the occupied areas of modern China.

Ni Wucheng studied in Europe and is good at English, French and Japanese.

More importantly, he was also proficient in the dialect peculiar to mengguantun.

When he talked and talked about Kant in English, and when he happily read English to Jingyi, Jingyi only felt that these foreign languages were as unbearable as ducks; When he exposed his vulgar dialect in front of a pot of white meat, his thinking mode was pulled back to the backward and ignorant mengguantun mode.

From the perspective of language, modern Chinese intellectuals began to accept Western-style language and perspective to express their emotions and life, and the colonial invasion in the spiritual and cultural fields began.

The entanglement of several languages and the alternation of several modes of thinking make Ni Wucheng live in a contradictory cultural space.

Different cultural thinking methods and different cultural backgrounds made him so agonize that he said: “if I were born in Rome or become a spitting landlord like my uncle, it would be much better than now.”

Ni Wucheng's mentality reflects the confusion and despair of modern intellectuals' self-identity under the great collision of Chinese and Western cultures in a half society.

#### 4 Reflection from a Post-colonial Perspective

Ni Wucheng's half understanding of Chinese and Western cultures has led him to linger on the surface of Chinese and Western cultures. He can neither inherit the excellent traditional culture nor touch the core of western advanced civilization. He has no one to rely on in his arrogance and is difficult to find his identity. From the colonial perspective, it is not difficult to see the colonial tendency of modern intellectuals in the process of spreading western civilization. In the fact that China has become a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, modern intellectuals have lost their confidence in their own culture, thus giving birth to a cultural awareness that the West is superior to the East as a colonized. Semi colonies have long been history, but the sequelae of this cultural trauma can hardly be eliminated.

Cultural self-confidence, in other words, means cultural inferiority. In the environment of cultural inferiority, people unconsciously rely on and yearn for western culture, which leads to such phenomena as "worshiping foreign countries and fawning on foreign countries", "the moon is round in foreign countries" and "run culture". In the white world, the colonization thought that the "white people" are superior is also rooted. Under the unconscious combination of the suzerainty and the marginal countries, the colonization is highlighted, and the "decolonization" becomes a difficult problem to solve. At the beginning of "Metamorphosis", Zhao Weituo, who is exiled in a foreign country but still deeply loves the motherland and loves the culture of the motherland, actually represents the intellectuals who grew up under the leadership of new China in the 1980s.

They began to have recognition and confidence in their own culture. From the 1980s to the present, it is the stage of increasingly close globalization. At the moment when western culture is invaded by more covert cultural consciousness, we should clearly realize that we should not be colonized by force, but also avoid cultural colonization.

#### 5 Conclusion

Under the background of the great integration of the world, this paper studies the mentality and behavior of the modern intellectuals in "Metamorphosis" from the perspective of post colonialism, which provides more experience and inspiration for the contemporary Chinese intellectuals on how to maintain national independence in the process of cultural integration. Only by establishing a high degree of cultural self-confidence, inheriting and carrying forward the excellent culture of our own nation, enhancing our own cultural identity of our own nation, at the same time, correctly treating foreign civilizations, avoiding following blindly and superstition, and intercepting high-quality culture on the basis of high self-confidence to carry out localization transformation and adaptation can we better maintain our cultural independence.

## References

1. WangJia-chuan. (2003) Said’s postcolonial theory is the reference and transformation of Gramsci’s cultural leadership theory. *Journal of Huaiyin Normal University (PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES EDITION)*(06),734–739.
2. Wang Meng. (2004) “Metamorphosis”. People’s Literature Publishing House, Beijing
3. Xia Yisheng. (2011). Ni Wucheng: The dual “Superfluous Man” of cultural and political revolution——reread Wang Meng’s “Metamorphosis”. *Contemporary literary world*. (01),89–92.
4. Xu Zidong. (2004). Reread “Metamorphosis”. *The Contemporary Writers’ Review*. (03),69–73.
5. Liang Panpan. (2010). Reflection and continuation of history—— analysis of Wang Meng, “Metamorphosis”. *Journal of Guangxi Institute of Education*. (01),39–42+60.
6. Yan Tao tao, Qian Wenbin. (2004). Said postcolonial culture theory dialysis. *Journal of Shayang Normal Junior College*. (03),66–69.
7. Zou Xiao. (2022). The Post-colonial Color of Yu Dafu’s Sinking. *Guo Moruo Journal*. (01),60–64+69.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

