

Analysis of Hegemony in *Shame* from the Perspective of Postcolonialism

Weili Pan *

School of Foreign Languages, China Pharmaceutical University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210009, China

*Corresponding author: Weili Pan

Abstract

The Nobel Prize winner JM Coetzee's novel *Shame* was set in postcolonial South Africa. The experiences of the protagonist, Professor Lurie and his daughter Lucy, profoundly expose the continuing influence of colonial heritage and racial hegemony. In the novel, the power reversal, the fight for land ownership, and the violent conflict between whites and blacks not only reflected the complexity of identity politics in postcolonial society but also implied the criticism of Western cultural hegemony and the racial hierarchy. At the same time, the sexual assault scandal of Lurie and the violence suffered by Lucy are metaphors for the dual discipline of the body and spirit of the individual by colonial history. From the perspective of postcolonialism, this paper analyzes how colonial elites beautify exploitative behavior as the "mission of civilization" and how emerging power reconstructs the ruling order through violent means. Furthermore, against the background of contemporary globalization, this paper aims to provide critical reflection and theoretical enlightenment on the issue of cultural hegemony in global governance.

Keywords

John Maxwell Coetzee, *Shame*, hegemony, postcolonialism

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, the "cultural hegemony" of the United States has greatly affected the values and ideology of countries around the world. Xi Qinqin suggested that the values of American film and television include individualism and heroism; the universal values of freedom, equality and fraternity; and the "American Dream." (Xi, 2014). Ouyang and Zhong Lin noted that the United States "consciously takes 'human rights,' 'freedom,' 'democracy,' 'equality,' and 'the pursuit of happiness' as its core values" (Ouyang and Zhong, 2014). These values have become an important source of American cultural confidence and the main force of American cultural exports. This is reflected not only in the American political system but also in all aspects of its global cultural communication. Through films, television, literary works, news, etc., American culture has portrayed the image of other ethnic groups as a negative image of "not freedom, inequality, and undemocracy", which is contrary to its core values. This subtle influence not only distorts China's traditional cultural values to a large extent but also weakens other countries' identity with their own national culture and identity. Wu Liqin and Zheng Huan believe that American cultural works dominate unequal dialog and exchanges by creating "cultural differences", consolidating the central position of American culture in exchanges, and changing the values of the "other" cultural group in the exchanges (Wu and Zheng, 2017). This cultural difference shapes American culture as the "standard of world culture" and transforms the images of

other cultures through cultural export, thus affecting the self-perception of other cultural groups. Moreover, in addition to bringing strong culture shock to other ethnic groups, American culture also deprives other ethnic minorities of rights (Li, 2018). Lu Bo believes that the cultural hegemony of white Americans deprives blacks of their rights, breaks their cultural identity, and causes them serious psychological harm (Lü, 2013). This cultural hegemony is not only reflected through institutionalized racial discrimination but also constantly reinforced through cultural expressions and media performance, affecting the self-identity and social status of the black group.

The soft export of cultural works has become an important means for the United States to achieve cultural hegemony. Xin suggested that American cultural hegemony is reflected in three main aspects: the spread of American values as the national interest of the United States, the spread of the American dream to the world, and the spread of the popular culture of “American-style consumerism” to the world (Xin, 2016). Hu Yurong pointed out that the U.S. has established a strong media system and vigorously develops cultural undertakings and cultural industries. Television, movies, literature, news media, memorials, museums, and advertisements are all carriers of cultural and ideological infiltration, which reflect the strong values of the United States (Hu, 2018). According to statistics, the box office revenue of American movies accounts for more than 75% of the total box office revenue of movies worldwide, and the showing time accounts for more than 50% of the total showing time; 85% of the films shown in theaters around the world are from Hollywood; and the top 100 movies at the box office in movie history are absolutely Most of the films led by Hollywood (Bao, 2018).

Postcolonial theory provides a unique perspective for the study of the operation mechanism of American cultural hegemony and its influence on non-Western countries. Said pointed out in “Orientalism”, “the ‘East’ in the eyes of the Western countries in the 19th century was false and a figment of imagination; it was the Western discourse on the Orient that was associated with Western colonialism and imperialism.” Behind this false Orientalism is a power relationship, a dominance relationship, and a constantly changing hegemony relationship (Kulich et al., 2021). Jianxin Ding and Liu Chen noted that Coetzee’s novel *Shame* stood on the margins, revealing that the new decolonized South Africa had not freed itself from the influence of colonial ideology (Ding and Chen, 2019). Sheng Anfeng noted that the research of Homi Baba, a postcolonial theorist, focused on the social, cultural and historical issues of the colonies in the postcolonial period, especially the cultural impact of colonialism on the colonized, and his studies on cultural impact, traditional discourses on ethnic origin and the significance of these traditional discourses on contemporary cultural relations (Sheng, 2004).

This paper explores American cultural hegemony in *Shame* on the basis of postcolonial theory. The South African writer John Maxwell Coetzee won the Nobel Prize in Literature in October 2003 for his masterpiece *Shame*. As early as 1999, when his work *Shame* came out, it was the best book of the year by the New York Times Book Review. At the same time, he won the Booker Prize, the highest award in British literature, making Coetzee the only writer in the history of the Booker Prize to win this honor twice (Mao, 2007). Coetzee used the unique and contradictory narrative discourse characteristics of postcolonialism to profoundly reveal the unique social phenomenons of the postcolonial era of “usurper and harmony”, “Shame and glory”, and “decline and rise” in Africa after independence (Nobel Prize, 2003). A basic goal of Coetzee's novels is to reveal the human values and behaviors caused by the apartheid system in South Africa and to determine whether people can avoid the scars of history and regain civilization and dignity. His novel *Shame* is no exception (Wang, 2010). *Shame* has rich meanings in both content and allegorical meaning. Writers wrote about “moral Shame” (university professor Lurie was expelled for having an affair with a female student), “personal Shame” (her daughter was raped and robbed), and “historical Shame” (the fact that whites, who are descendants of colonizers, were eventually “reduced” to living under the patronage of local blacks at the cost of their honor and their bodies) (Cai, 2000).

The hegemony culture of the United States reflects the continuous expansion of its ideology through the media, politics, and cultural forms. In the novel *Shame*, many symbols and narrative methods precisely reveal this ideology. Like in the novel, Professor Luca is required to issue the apology statement that “the judging criterion is not whether it is from the heart”, which reflects the process by which American cultural hegemony imposes its values through the institutional framework. At the same time, *Shame*, as a masterpiece reflecting the decline of the colonial rulers and the resistance of the colonial nations, demonstrated the themes of cultural conflict and cultural oppression through delicate narratives. Although there are multiple indigenous languages in South Africa, almost all the dialog in the novel is conducted in English. This singularity of language implies

that African native languages are relegated to the symbols of the “other” and that Western culture achieves its spiritual rule through language colonization. The recurrence of symbols reveals the shaping and oppression of individual identity by culture and the global influence of hegemonic culture. Therefore, textual analysis of the specific symbols in *Shame* can not only reveal the internal mechanisms of cultural oppression but also extend from the symbolic representation to the social and historical levels, revealing in a deeper and broader way the impact of American cultural hegemony on other countries in post-colonial societies.

2. Hegemony uses didactic output to safeguard authority

In the novel, hegemony is repeatedly presented as the mechanism of maintaining privilege through cultural preaching. Taking the gender relationship as an example, the Caucasian professor David Lurie used his academic identity and literary discourse to beautify and package the sexual approach in his conversations with female students. “We want the beautiful creatures to keep blooming. Only in this way will the rose of beauty never die.” Poetic rhythm and romantic rhetoric, Shakespeare’s pentameter line became a tool of oppression. Personal desires were sublimated into artistic missions, his behavior became a noble pursuit of “beauty”, and David’s status as a teacher became the embodiment of cultural hegemony. In essence, this behavior is a manifestation of cultural authority. Through the nobility of romantic literature, it tries to rationalize the behavior of unequal rights. “Why? Because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her. It is part of the gift she brings to the world. She is obliged to share it with others.” Women’s bodies are defined as public property, and David uses the so-called attitude toward beauty to define the deprivation of women’s autonomy over their own bodies and the denial of women’s subjectivity. Superficially, this rhetoric is in the name of universal values but actually implies that hegemony uses cultural means to naturalize and rationalize oppression. With respect to the description of Italy, “Italy is a place that the British like to go very much. They believe that Italians still have not lost their nature and are less restricted by social customs and more full of passion.” Italy is described as “the untapped place in the eyes of the British.” “A place that lost its nature” implies the colonists’ depreciation of the colonized “other” and the stereotyped imagination of the “primitive Orient.” Using a kind of cultural superiority, David tried to narrate his desire as the “nature” of the colonized and thus beautified the act of oppression as the liberation of “nature”.

The order constructed by hegemony through moral teaching also exhibits multiple oppressive characteristics. David’s advice to his daughter Lucy, “Lucy, the matter could have been so simple. Close the kennel. Close it right away. Lock the house and pay Peter to look after it. Take a break for half a year or one year until the situation in this country improves. Go overseas. To the Netherlands. I will pay for it.” As a father, he tried to persuade Lucy to leave the farm with “kindness” and “love”, ostensibly out of safety considerations. In fact, this implies the denial of women’s subjectivity by patriarchy. As a protector, David defined Lucy’s persistence as “dangerous” and tried to justify his intervention in the “name of protection”. The logic of this behavior seemed to be exactly the same as the strategy of the colonists to occupy land in the name of “civilization.” By defining “safety” and “danger”, hegemony justifies the behavior of aggression and oppression, while stigmatizing the behavior of resistance as “irrational.” At the same time, David wrote to warn Lucy, “You are on the brink of a dangerous mistake. You hope to humble yourself before history. However, you are on the wrong path. It will put all your integrity into one.” Peel off all the layers; you will have no way to deal with yourself.” David’s attempts to discipline Lucy with abstract moral concepts such as “temperance” and “self-possession” also reflect the emptiness and hypocrisy of hegemony in exporting authority through moralistic preaching. What David was afraid of was not the suffering itself but the “stigma” that this suffering might project on himself. This also reveals the cruel truth of hegemonic discourse. At the individual level, moral teaching is only a tool of power in the face of specific suffering; the true thoughts of oppressed individuals are ignored, and the suffering they have suffered is not truly understood. The same is true from a historical perspective. Hegemony tried to dispel the suffering of colonized people with a series of moral teachings and denied the traumas it caused to individuals and races with glorified discourse. When David said, “That is history speaking through them” and “That seems to be a grievance, but it is not. It is passed down from our ancestors.” What is revealed behind the scenes is that the guilt of colonization was understood as historical inevitability, and the hegemonic logic in which specific evil deeds are beautified as historical pains and the blood and tears of the colonized are diluted.

3. The disintegration of hegemony causes character disorder and a survival dilemma

During the postapartheid social transformation in South Africa, the hegemony of the colonists gradually disappeared, and the language ability, racial privilege and intellectual authority that were originally symbols of civilizational superiority were reversed. When David attacked the farm, the literature professor, who was proficient in Romantic poetry and used both languages elegantly, was powerless to do anything about the atrocities. “123 He could speak Italian and French, but neither Italian nor French could save him in the darkest part of Africa. He was alone and helpless, and he became an Aunt Sally, a cartoon character, a man in a surcharge, a missionary wearing a sun visor, with his hands clasped and his eyes facing the sky, while the savages were discussing in their dialect how to throw him into the boiling cauldron.” Italian and French, as the symbol of the power of the colonists, was ineffective in the face of atrocities. Behind the failure of language is the disintegration of the hegemony system; language is no longer a weapon of hegemony but has exposed its fragility. The boiling cauldron also represents the “antiswallowing” of the colonists by the local culture. When the order created by the old hegemony collapses, what is left is not the restoration of equality but the more primitive reconstruction of violence and the birth of a new hegemony.

With the collapse of the colonial privilege system, David's economic status also changed dramatically. “91 his daughter, there was a time when he drove her to school and ballet classes and took her to the circus and the skating rink” Ballet classes, circuses, and skating rinks, the symbols of middle-class life, were symbols of David's former economic power and social status. However, when he was fired for the female student incident, he could only live in Salem Town, where his daughter lived, leading the country life that originally belonged to the colonists. “90 The heater in the car is broken, and I'm struggling to look out through the fog-shrouded windshield”; the failure of the heater symbolizes the failure of privilege, and the blurred windshield symbolizes David's inability to see the future of his life, and his disorientation in the new South African society. The contrast between his past middle-class life of enjoying merlot, crackers, and cheese and listening to Mozart's clarinet quintet⁽¹⁶⁾ and his present-day reality of huddling on his daughter's farm suggests that economic dislocation has stripped him from the cultural elite and reduced him to an exile in a postcolonial land. In addition, until the rape of Lucy, David's life fell to the bottom. “He couldn't imagine living in the house on Torrance Road again. He was just in the shadow of the university, hiding like a criminal, for fear of meeting his former colleagues. He had to sell the house and move to something newer.” He went to live in a cheaper apartment: “His financial situation was in a mess.” The house on Torrens Road was once a symbol of David's academic status because of its proximity to the university. The essence of their avoidance of their previous life is their sense of Shame at the disappearance of their status as intellectual elites. The spatial changes from single-family houses to low-cost apartments, as well as daily economic symbols such as housing, bills, and financial status, exposed a series of downgrades to David's life and, moreover, the disordered process of his economic life.

The disintegration of the hegemony system has had a dual material and spiritual impact on the protagonist David. At the individual level, David was severely traumatized. He could neither continue the identity of the colonial elite nor adapt to the new identity in postcolonial society. The unfinished manuscript titled “Byron” became the embodiment of this dilemma. Heavy work during the day consumed David's creative energy, whereas self-doubt at night shattered his confidence in writing. “156 If he has any purpose in coming here, it is to recuperate and regroup. However, now, he is losing himself day by day.” After experiencing the incident with his daughter, he fell into a mental breakdown. “Those demons did not let him go. He often has nightmares. In the dreams, he was soaking in a bed soaked with blood, or he was gasping for breath.” He was breathless and screamed silently, running from the pursuit of a man with a falcon face, that man seemed to be wearing a Benin mask, just like Thoth.” The recurrent bloody dreams revealed that David, the collapse of the spiritual world and the “blood bed”, alluded to the backlash of colonial violence. As former holders of colonial vested interests, David now faced the fear and moral guilt brought about by colonial history. At the level of family ethics, David suffered a more serious mental breakdown, and the intellectual authority as his father was completely reversed in his old age. “230 When his child was born, who would have guessed that in the end, he had to crawl in front of her and beg her to take him in?” “265 What a Shame” “It was such a high expectation that it ended up like this.” David has gone from the dominator of the family to a stray dog who lives with his daughter. The self-perception of “dog like” not only reflects shattered dignity but also once again reflects the backlash of colonial violence. As a symbol of colonial hegemony, the David was forced to experience the living situation of the colonized in his later years when his privileges disappeared. The recurring words “Shame”

and “begging for pity” are ostensibly the collapse of the patriarchal family structure, but in fact reveal the disintegration of the colonizer's privileged identity, and the inability of those with vested interests in the colonial era to maintain the old power structure and reconstruct the value of their existence in the new era.

4. Hegemony reconfigures power through violent oppression, land and body control

Hegemony reconstructs power through violent oppression. Lucy was attacked and raped by three black men. This act of violence is not only a personal tragedy but also the epitome of power reconstruction in postcolonial society. The perpetrator did not just violence against Lucy, but David and the group of dogs all became the targets of his revenge. “124 There was a loud bang, and blood and brains were splashed in the cage. The barking of the dog stopped for a while. The man fired two more shots. One dog was pierced through its chest and died immediately; a wound was opened in the throat of one dog, which fell heavily on the ground, with its ears flattened, and stared blankly at the every move of this man who would not bother to give him a coup de grace.” “The remaining three dogs had nowhere to hide and retreated to the ground. At the back of the shed, they were huddling around, howling softly. The man did not panic; he shot and stopped for a while and killed them all.” The perpetrators regarded violence as a tool of power control, trying to subvert the old order of the white-dominated society. The massacre of dogs in the cage reflected a hegemonic cycle of “containing violence with violence”. The oppressed resisted the violence of the oppressor, which further perpetuated the oppression structure. With respect to the description of the violence that David suffered, “121 he received a heavy blow on the head” and “he felt himself being dragged across the kitchen floor and then lost consciousness.” David’s white identity and former academic authority are in the limelight. They completely fail in the face of violence, and their bodies become the object of random violence. This act of violence reflected the vulnerability of white privilege in the reconstruction of power in South Africa and the transformation of violence from the unilateral imposition of white colonists to the revenge of blacks against whites; it also symbolized the shift of racial hegemony from whites to blacks.

After Lucy was raped, no one in the local black community called the police or condemned the perpetrator, which is a type of violence that is collectively acquiesced. As a black farmer, Peterrus did not directly commit violence, his invisibility before and after the attack and his refusal to help Lucy all suggest that he acquiesced and even used violence to accelerate power change. “139 Peterrus is still nowhere to be seen.” Peterrus is Lucy's neighbor and the actual authority in the local black community. His disappearance conveyed the acquiescence to the black community for violent revenge and paved the way for the elimination of the resistance of the white landowner Lucy and the eventual annexation of the land. The road was leveled. When David questioned his disappearance, Peterus used deliberately ignored language violence to dissolve David's discourse authority as a white male. “154 Petrus intentionally did not take his last sentence as a question.” This behavior also implies the inversion of power relations. The dialog dominated by whites in the colonial period has been turned black, who have become the subjects of the new hegemony. Similarly, the black group was even more indifferent to David’s allegations against delinquent youths at the ball. “170 ‘I'm going to call the police’, he said. There were murmurs of disapproval from the crowd beside him” “The guests made way for them. They no longer showed friendliness.” The essence of this collective acquiescence is the recognition of violence as a tool for the reconstruction of power. A series of means by the black group to use violence as a medium to dissolve the authority of the whites has also exposed the cyclic nature of hegemony.

Hegemony reconstructs power through land and body control. As black farmers, Peters took advantage of the land reform policy to gradually annex Lucy's farm. “175 The new pipelines have to pass through Lucy’s land, he said; fortunately, she has allowed him to do so. She is “visionary.” Peterrus invaded Lucy’s land subtly in the name of “modernization” and declared the process of beautifying this compromise, as “foresight” is a manifestation of the new hegemony’s concealment of the nature of land encroachment, just as the old hegemony used to rationalize the plunder of colonies with the “mission of civilization.” Petrus’ land expansion was not a one-time plunder but gradual advancement through subtle invasion and tacit protection from rape. “195 I have to take care of Lucy’s farm,” Peter said, “I have to be the farm manager.” The word “manager” implies that Petrus’ actual control over the land has exceeded Lucy’s ownership, and this behavior is also the continuation of the colonial logic of land monopoly.

In addition to land control, the new hegemony also achieves the reconstruction of power through the control of women’s bodies. “257 When a seed like that is given life, what kind of child does it become? When that

seed is poured into a woman's body, it is not out of love but out of hatred and is mixed together in a messy manner to insult her. To mark her, just like a dog peeing." David's description of the perpetrator's motivation reveals the nature of the violence committed by black people—retaliation for colonization. This act of revenge through the female body is just the expression of the new hegemony to demonstrate its power. At the same time, Petrus proposed marrying Lucy, ostensibly to provide protection, but in fact, he wanted to put the land under his own name. He formed a new hegemonic system by combining white land ownership during the colonial period with traditional African patriarchal structures. "263 He was proposing an alliance, a deal. I contributed land and in return I was allowed to burrow under his wing and be sheltered. Otherwise, he wanted to remind me that I was without any protection, that I was a prey to be hunted by everyone". Marriage becomes a transaction, and by exchanging land for "protection" Lucy is in fact accepting a double submission to the new hegemony: economic cession of land ownership and physical acceptance of the patronage of the black "patriarchy". David, who had been deeply ashamed, finally had to accept that his daughter had given birth to a black child. "279 He made the vaguest gesture toward his daughter, toward her body—"When I was born, the situation is different." Regardless of what, he will be a child of this land." David's gesture to the fetus in Lucy's womb implies that the black group's body control over Lucy has become a means. The birth of a child not only meant a fundamental transfer of land ownership but also symbolized the completion of the closed loop of the reconstruction of power of the black group. Lucy's body is instrumentalized as the medium for the transfer of race and land. As children of the land, the legitimacy of the child's identity no longer comes from white ancestry but from the submission to black sovereignty.

5. Discussion

This paper takes JM Coetzee's novel *Shame* as the research object to investigate the operation mechanism and transformation process of hegemony in postcolonial South African society through text analysis. The maintenance stage of cultural hegemony. Through the romantic poetic discourse and the moral preaching system, the colonial elites, represented by the white professor David Lurie, beautified the behavior of exploitation as "aesthetic pursuit" and "the mission of civilization", and the colonial ideology legitimized itself through intellectual authority. The collapse stage of the hegemonic system. With the end of apartheid and the rapid disintegration of the colonial privilege system, David encountered three dilemmas: the loss of academic authority, the fall of economic status, and the crisis of identity. Finally, there is the transformation stage of hegemony. The emerging hegemony, represented by the black farmer Petrus, completed the reconstruction of power through the use of violence, the competition for land resources, and the exercise of body control. This power change exposes the continuity of hegemony.

At present, academic studies on this topic have focused mainly on feminism, psychoanalysis, and postcolonialism. This includes the study of body politics from the perspective of feminism, the study of trauma narratives from the perspective of psychoanalysis, and the discussion of identity politics in the framework of postcolonial theory. Although scholars such as Lv Peng and Chi Zhang noted that the discourse of the imperial landscape "has become the expression of white people's desire in the postcolonial space, the transformation mechanism of hegemonic discourse implicit in the novel and its isomorphism with contemporary global cultural hegemony still remain to be explored in depth."

In addition, in the study of hegemony, in the postcolonial analysis of the diaspora's cultural identity crisis in "By the Sea", "the British divided the African colonial people into those who were different from themselves, were barbaric, and backward, on the basis of cultural differences; cultural hegemony has been established through school education" (Liu, 2024). This finding forms a cross-text echo with the plot in *Shame* that David uses literary education to implement symbolic violence. However, existing research has not systematically revealed the hegemony evolution exhibited in the work. Therefore, this paper starts from the symbols of hegemony discourse to reveal the internal mechanism by which hegemony in the postcolonial context achieves the transformation of hegemony and the continuation of its essence.

Hegemony occupies social resources through the control of discourse power, and the operation mechanism of hegemony in the novel is similar to that in the construction of hegemony in the United States through the soft export of cultural works. First, from the perspective of the nature of power, as symbolic capital, the right to discourse can shape social cognition. In *Shame*, David uses the authoritative discourse of literary classics to justify and even beautify his sexual exploitation, which is exactly the same as the universal value of "liberty

and democracy” that the United States has portrayed through Hollywood movies. Both make use of the emotional and cognitive shaping functions of cultural products to turn interest demands into seemingly objective and universal values. Second, from the perspective of historical continuity, the colonial system and contemporary cultural hegemony share the same internal logic. The discourse of “the mission of civilization” in the colonial period and some contemporary theories both construct moral superiority to conceal the essence of resource plundering. Finally, from the level of psychological acceptance, both articles take advantage of the audience’s “cultural inferiority complex” psychology. The admiration for Western literature by the black South African group and the advocacy of Western culture by contemporary developing countries enable the dominated to actively internalize the value standards of the ruler.

This paper is limited in its research scope. Although this paper analyzes the operational mechanism of cultural hegemony in the context of colonialism, hegemony, as a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, is reflected in many fields, such as politics, economy, and military affairs. This paper focused on the discussion of cultural hegemony. Although it can reveal in depth the operating mechanisms of discourse power and identity shaping, it is difficult to fully reflect the overall outlook of hegemony.

This paper has reference significance for the development of Chinese cultural industries. In terms of the mechanism for the introduction of cultural content, a multilevel content evaluation system can be established, which not only pays attention to the aesthetic value of cultural works but also conducts in-depth analysis of the ideology implied in them. Second, the localization strategy for the adaptation of cultural works should be improved. In the introduction process, the hegemonic narrative in the original work can be dissolved through adaptive adjustments to the relationship between the characters and the plot settings. Finally, an adaptation theory with Chinese characteristics is developed. In practice, and exploration, we have absorbed outstanding cultural achievements from all over the world while safeguarding the cultural and ideological security of the nation, thus forming a methodology with Chinese characteristics.

6. Conclusion

Shame by JM Coetzee profoundly reveals the relationship between cultural hegemony and violent power in postcolonial South African society through the degeneration of the protagonist David Lurie. Through the deconstruction of knowledge discourse, the novel demonstrates how colonial elites beautified exploitative behavior as “the mission of civilization” and how the emerging power reconstructed the ruling order through violent means. Under colonial hegemony, white intellectuals used literary education to implement symbolic violence, packaged racial oppression as an aesthetic pursuit, and encouraged the colonized people to internalize their value standards. At the same time, in the novel, the black farmer Peterrus used violence to seize the land and control the women’s bodies, which demonstrated the continuity of hegemony in the process of power change. Postcolonial theory not only deepens the interpretation of texts but also provides a critical perspective for revealing how cultural hegemony maintains its rule through discursive reconstruction.

Through the analysis of the power change process in *Shame*, this paper provides important inspiration for the issue of cultural hegemony in contemporary global governance. In the context of globalization, cultural hegemony has become an important dimension of international competition, and resistance to cultural hegemony should not stop at confrontation at the political level. It is also necessary to break the discourse monopoly of West-centrism and deconstruct the power logic behind its “universal values”. When China participates in global governance, it should be vigilant against the hidden colonization of Western cultural exports and, at the same time, build an international order on the basis of equality and mutual learning through dialog among civilizations.

References

- Bao, M. (2018). *The narrow victory of new culturalism: American films in the context of social transformation* [Online]. Available: <https://book.douban.com/review/9467381/> [Accessed October 30, 2025].
- Cai, S. (2000). A response from realistic literature to the clash of civilizations theory: Text analysis of disgrace By J. M. Coetzee *Foreign Literature Studies*, no. 4, pp. 97-101,174.

- Ding, J. and Chen, L. (2019). Marginalised groups in the novel shame from a postcolonial perspective. *Journal of Hunan University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 42-49.
- Hu, Y. (2018). The construction of American values and the consolidation of national identity. *Journal of Shaanxi Administrative College*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 16-20.
- Kulich, S. J., Komisarof, A., Smith, L. R. and Cushner, K. (2021). Re-examining intercultural research and relations in the COVID pandemic. vol. 80, pp. A1-A6.
- Li, H. (2018). A brief discussion on the influence of American culture on China's 'post-00s' generation. *Shanghai Business*, no. 8, pp. 22-24.
- Liu, Y. (2024). *Alienation, Hegemony and Reconstruction: A Post-Colonial Analysis of the Cultural Identity Crisis of the Diasporas in "The Seaside"*. Master's Thesis, Shandong University.
- Lü, B. (2013). The influence of American white culture on black cultural identity recognition (English). *Ideological Frontline*, vol. 39, no. S2, pp. 206-207.
- Mao, H. (2007). Realism's reflection on the postcolonial postmodern dilemma: An interpretation of the meaning of J. M. Coetzee's novel disgrace. *Theory Monthly*, no. 3, pp. 125-127.
- Nobel Prize (2003). *The Nobel Prize in Literature 2003 John Maxwell Coetzee* [Online]. Available: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2003/press-release/> [Accessed October 30, 2025].
- Ouyang, K. and Zhong, L. (2014). *How does the United States promote its own values* [Online]. Available: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/1013/c49150-25820716.html> [Accessed October 30, 2025].
- Sheng, A. (2004). *A Study of Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory*. Master's Thesis, Beijing Language and Culture University.
- Wang, M. (2010). The scars of human civilization: A postcolonial study of JM Coetzee's novel Shame. *Examination Weekly*, no. 40, pp. 31-32.
- Wu, L. and Zheng, H. (2017). Postcolonial interpretation of American culture in film distribution: Its impact and implications for Chinese university students. *Journal of Puer University*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 40-41.
- Xi, Q. (2014). A brief discussion on the American film and television image and its influences from the cultural perspective. *Journal of Guangxi Economics and Management College*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 59-64.
- Xin, X. (2016). American cultural hegemony and Chinese cultural security. *Leadership Science Forum*, no. 8, pp. 69-84.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open - access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).