



**COLONIALISM  
TOWARDS CHINESE SOCIETY  
IN W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S *THE PAINTED VEIL***

**A THESIS  
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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, the writer is interested to analyze colonialism in William Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*. The purposes of the thesis are to analyze how the British colonization works during the cholera epidemic in China, to analyze how the response of China society about British colonization, and to analyze the perspective of the Western toward the Eastern which is implied in *The Painted Veil*.

In doing this research, the writer uses method of library research. The object of the thesis is William Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* and the supporting data are any information related to the analysis of the object which are taken from the library or internet. The writer also uses postcolonial approach to help explain the issues in *The Painted Veil*. To investigate the issues, the writer uses colonialism theory by Ania Loomba.

The results of the thesis is that British colonialism in China has three purposes. Those are: *gold* which is related to the economy domination, *gospel* or christianization, and *glory* which is related to domination of a nation. The colonialism results in positive and negative response from the Chinese. There is also the view from the Western toward the Eastern. The negative views from the West are stereotypes on how the West looks at the East. The Western thinks that their culture, appearance, manner, belief, and education are better than the Eastern. There is a line boundary between the West and the East. The line boundary makes a nation is different from the other.

Keywords: Colonialism, Western, Eastern

## INTRODUCTION

As seen throughout the long history, The West became colonizer and many Africans and Asian countries became the colonized. In the nineteenth century, Great Britain became the largest colonizer. The Great Britain quickly gained control of almost a quarter of earthland. Many English people believed that Great Britain was predestined to rule the world. Those beliefs affected on how Great Britain treated the colonized. The Great Britain dominated the colony. The colonizer took the natural and human resources, oppressed the colonized with policies, and invoked the European religious belief to the colonized.

In early twentieth century, England's political, ideological, social, and economic domination started to disappear. The colonized countries started to gain their independence. Although the colonization disappears, the colonization in other form arises. The colonization in narration stands still. The object of the narration is the colonized countries. The author of colonizer country uses the narration to write the assumptions and the doctrines, while the object has no space to speak up.

Such phenomena can be seen in the literary work that will be discussed in this thesis, that is William Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*. It is about a love story of British couple, Walter Fane and Kitty Fane, in China during Cholera epidemic. Living in China as a newlywed couple is not easy. The couple must also deal with the problems involved in China society. The problems are so complex. The British couple finds difficulties to adapt with China society since the China residents consider them as a part of British colony. As British persons, the couple also has their own assumptions about China and its residents.

William Somerset Maugham as a British author who has life experiences in China writes *The Painted Veil* based on his experiences. The author as a British man uses the narration in the novel to create the assumptions and the doctrines that China is like what the author describes. This leads to the interesting discussion of postcolonial study.

Colonialism, as one of the object of postcolonial study, can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods involves practices such as trade, plunder, negotiation, genocide, enslavement, and rebellion. The phenomenon of colonialism analyzes on how the colonization happens and how the response of the colonized nation towards the colonizer.

Considering the background explained above, the writer is interested in researching the novel as the object of the thesis entitled "Colonialism towards Chinese Society in William Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*".

### **Summary of *The Painted Veil***

Kitty Garstin, a British woman, married Walter Fane, a bacteriologist, who worked as government doctor in Tching Yen, China. Actually, Kitty did not agree with the idea to marry Walter Fane, but she had no choice since Kitty wanted to live separately from his mother.

Soon after their marriage, the newlywed couple moved to Hong Kong. They moved to an area called Tching Yen. At the beginning, everything seemed to be happy and pleasant. Kitty waited for her husband after work, but Walter was too busy with his works. Kitty felt that their marriage was not happy as she wanted. She felt that their marriage was empty.

In a social gathering, Kitty met Charlie Townsend, an assistant of secretary government. Charlie Townsend was a nice man. He matched with Kitty very well. Finally, they had a love relationship secretly. For the next two years, they had their affair without no one knew including Walter. Walter Fane still devoted to his wife deeply although their marriage was in trouble and empty.

Later, Walter Fane knew what happened between Kitty and Charlie. Still, Charlie Townsend assured Kitty that he would stand by her. He also promised that he would not let Walter Fane to intervene again. Yet, Walter Fane gave Kitty an ultimatum. He was threatening Kitty that he would divorce her if she did not come with him to move to Mei Tan Fu, a place with Cholera epidemic in China. Walter also made a deal with Kitty. He would divorce Kitty if Dorothy Townsend, Charlie's wife, divorced Charlie and Charlie remarried Kitty.

Kitty went to Charlie immediately. She begged Charlie to divorce Dorothy, but Charlie refused. Now, Kitty knew Charlie's true-nature. As she went home, she found that Walter had packed her luggage. Kitty realized that she had no other choices. She had to accompany Walter to Mei Tan Fu. The journey they took was unpleasant. Kitty felt heartbroken. Walter did not speak at all to her.

In Mei Tan Fu, Kitty met Mr. Waddington, a deputy commissioner. Mr. Waddington accompanied Kitty to adapt the China society. It was a difficult time for Kitty. She met new people. Some were friendly and some were unfriendly. With the guidance from Mr. Waddington, Kitty started to adapt with the society. She came to a chapel where she acknowledged some French nuns. She also met Mr. Waddington's wife who was a Manchu.

In that chapel, she helped to take care babies and taught the Chinese children. Soon, she learned about love. She realized about what love was and she could understand his husband more and more. In Mei Tan Fu, Kitty was pregnant, but she was not sure who the father was.

The cholera epidemic was not cured yet. It was getting more and more dangerous every day. Walter was busy in his laboratory finding the cure for Cholera Epidemy. One day, Kitty was told by Mr. Waddington that Walter was dying because of Cholera. He was infected by Cholera while doing his research. Kitty felt sorry for Walter because she could not give him a lot of love. On the next day, Walter died.

After taking care the things in Mei Tan Fu, Kitty moved back to Hong Kong. She met once again with The Townsends. Dorothy asked her to stay with them longer, but Kitty refused it. Kitty moved to England. She found that her mother had died. Her father was appointed as Chief of Justice in British Colony in Carribean. She ensured her father to bring her to Carribean. Kitty, finally, dedicated all her life to take care of her father and his son, who was named after Walter.

## **British Colonialism in China in *The Painted Veil***

British colonialism in China is related to domination of British towards China in some aspects. There are three aspects in British colonialism in China. These three aspects are the motivation and the reason why the British government conquers China.

### **A. Material Domination**

One of the aspects of colonialism in China is *gold*. It is the aspect of domination which is related to economy. The domination in economy shows the flow of complex relationship between British and Chinese people. This flow forms a relation between the masters and the subordinates. The relation of masters and subordinates are shown in the using of '*amah*'. *Amah* is Chinese servant. The British calls the Chinese who helps them in their house and serves them with *amah*. They cook the dishes, clean the house, and help their masters. Every British household in China has *amah*, such as the one that the main character, Kitty, has. Kitty has *amah* in Tching Yen and in Mei Tan Fu. The *amah* helps her according to the masters' orders. For example when Kitty moves to Mei Tan Fu, the *amah* helps her to pack the things and when she arrives in Mei Tan Fu the *amah* also helps her to settle as the following quotation, "*I'll go and take off my hat,*" said Kitty. *Her room was next door to that in which they sat. It was barely furnished. An amah was kneeling on the floor, the lamp beside her, unpacking Kitty's things* (Maugham, 1934: 104). Based on that quotation, it can be seen that the relation between Kitty and *amah* is the master and her subordinates. The British colonialist pays some money to the Chinese people to become their servant. The high position of British colonialist in Chinese society makes this relation occur.

The British colonialist dominates the Chinese by using them as their subordinates, and then by paying some money, the British colonialist can own and use the Chinese as their helper. The Gold aspect is not only related to the gold or money that is produced from the trading activity, but also related to the masters and subordinates. Based on the relation, it can be seen that there is money flowing from British to Chinese. The money flows from the masters to their subordinates to support the condition of the masters and the subordinates as well.

## **B. Ideological Domination**

The second aspect of colonialism in China is *gospel* or the Christianization. *Gospel* is one of the purposes of colonizer to conquer the other nations. The British colonialist comes to China with a mission to spread Christian. The British colonialist spreads either protestant or catholic to the residents of the colonized country. This mission is brought by the West missionaries. They build chapels and place missionaries in China. In a chapel, there are some nuns. Those nuns are led by a leader called *The Mother Superior*. In the chapel, there are also orphanage and hospital. In orphanage, they take care of the Chinese children. The Chinese children who are brought to orphanage is mostly the children whose parents die because of cholera or the children who is bought by the nuns because their parents abandon them, as what *Mother Superior* explains to Kitty below:

“You know of course,” she said, ... , “that they only orphans in the sense that their parents have wished to be rid of them. We give them a few cash for every child that is brought in, otherwise they will not take trouble, but do away with them.” (Maugham, 1934: 136)

To bring the children into the orphanage, the nuns pay some money to parents. The children in the orphanage learn making embroideries, sewing, and hemming. The Chinese children that live in the orphanage are baptized soon as they arrive. The same thing also happens to the people who suffer in hospital as follows:

The Mother Superior look at them with an amused smile. “They seem very lively. Sometimes they are brought in only to die. Of course we baptized them the moment they come” (Maugham, 1934: 139).

They baptize the children since it is the way they make the children become a Christian. They also teach the children with the Christian doctrines since they are young so when they grow up, they can spread the doctrines to the society.

## **C. Political Domination**

The third aspect of British colonialism in China is *Glory*. The *glory* is related to domination to a nation. By dominating other nations, the British can claim that land where another nation belongs is also theirs. Tching Yen and Mei Tan Fu is the China's land that they claim. In Tching Yen, Britain has its own government. It forms their colony. The government also has the positions that support the colony such as governor, colony secretary, and deputy commissioner. They become the first class society in Tching Yen, while the China residents stay as the second class society in their own country. The same thing also occurs in Mei Tan Fu. The highest position in this area is deputy commissioner. Mr. Waddington is the deputy commissioner in Mei Tan Fu. The positions that the Britain has in China's government make sure that the domination of Britain works. The British colony has power to build facilities in Tching Yen such as the club, tennis court, and luxurious houses, as described in the quotation: *He talked a good deal about China... ,but indeed the life in Tching Yen sounded quite jolly; there were clubs and tennis and racing and polo and golf* (Maugham, 1934: 26). When a nation has a privilege to have its own government in the other's land, it means that nation has totally control that land. By controlling the other's land and building its own government, British government totally declares that they have a larger area than the other.

### **The Response of Chinese towards British Colonialism in *The Painted Veil***

#### **A. Pro-Colonial Response**

Colonel Yu as a Chinese has pro-response to the British colonization. It cannot be said that the Colonel Yu totally agrees with what the British does in China land, but Colonel Yu is one of the Chinese residents that assists Dr. Walter Fane to take control the cholera epidemic in Mei Tan Fu. Colonel Yu accompanies Dr. Walter Fane to guard the Mei Tan Fu's border in order to forbid people to come to Mei Tan Fu. It is to prevent the cholera epidemic to extend.

While Dr. Walter Fane is dying because of Cholera, Colonel Yu assists him and also sends the chairs to pick Kitty up. Colonel Yu also sends some soldiers to guard Kitty so she arrives in Yamen safely. As Mr. Waddington says to Kitty as follows:



“You musn’t be upset. I don’t exactly know what’s the matter. Colonel Yu sent this officer to me and asked me to bring you to the Yamen at once”

...

The soldiers followed immediately behind them.

“Colonel Yu has sent chairs. They’re waiting on the other side of the river.”

...

“Colonel Yu wanted to, but he wouldn’t let him. Colonel Yu has been with him all the time.” (Maugham, 1934: 212-214)

Based on some Chinese points of view, what Colonel Yu does cannot be understood, but for Colonel Yu, it is his job. For him, it is also the way he saves his people. The British that comes to Mei Tan Fu is a doctor and his wife. The doctor has a mission to cure Cholera and cannot help him, except assisting the doctor, to make sure the doctor and his wife safe in Mei Tan Fu.

### **B. Anti-Colonial Response**

Another response from the Chinese resident is anti-colonial response. In *The Painted Veil*, the anti one is represented by the Chinese who stares at Kitty unpleasantly, as described below:

It was a curio dealer’s; and the Chinese who were sitting about stared at her unpleasantly; she hated the ingratiating smile of the old man who took her to the back of the shop and then up a dark flight of stairs. (Maugham, 1934: 8)

For the Chinese society, most of them dislike towards the British colonialist. The Chinese people dislike because the British colonizers come to their land, and they take over all of the resources. They take all the goods from their own land, and then they leave nothing to them. It is unfair.

The British is called barbarian by Chinese, as follows: “...*perhaps unconsciously, he had adopted the Chinese view that the Europeans were barbarians and their life a folly ...*” (Maugham, 1934: 117). That Chinese people

describe British colonizers as a barbarian is reasonable. British people take everything that they can find in China. They get benefits not only from financial matter, but also from humans.

The anti response also comes from Mr. Waddington whose nationality is British. Although he is a British, his point of view is different. He is amazed with the Chinese life style. He is no longer thinking that he is a British and it is his job to conquer China, but he starts to think about Chinese's way of life. He has been lived in China for twenty years and it is an enough time for him to think that it is better to learn about China. He is quite open minded about what happens between Britain and China as described in the following quotation, *he seemed to look upon life in a spirit of banter, his ridicule of the Colony at Tching Yen was acid;...* (Maugham, 1934: 117).

When the British thinks that China language is decadent, dirty, and unspeakable, Mr. Waddington learns the language and China history. He also reads Chinese novel. Kitty's opinion is that Mr. Waddington unconsciously adopts Chinese view as described in the quotation,

*...he often told Kitty stories from the Chinese novels and Chinese history... It seemed to her that, perhaps unconsciously, he had adopted the Chinese view that the Europeans were barbarians and their life a folly...* (Maugham, 1934: 117)

Mr. Waddington who marries a Manchu girl also decides to spend his rest of life in China. It is not like the other British people who have opinion that China is an oppressed nation and they can take everything then leave, but Mr. Waddington feels China like home.

## CONCLUSION

*The Painted Veil* novel tells a British young woman who marries a doctor. She and her husband move to Mei Tan Fu, a rural area in China, where she finds some conflicts with the Chinese people and its society, she also has to survive from Cholera epidemic that spreads in Mei Tan Fu. *The Painted Veil* novel also

pictures the colonialism of British colony in China and some views of British people toward Chinese society.

Colonialism of the British colony in China happens with three main purposes. The three main purposes of British colonialism in China are *Gold*, *Gospel*, and *Glory*. *Gold* represents colonialism which is related to economic domination. *Gospel* is related to religion domination or christianization, then, *Glory* is related to domination to a nation. The colonialism of British colony in China produces some responses from Chinese. There are two responses; pro-colonial response and anti-colonial response. The pro-colonial response comes from Colonel Yu, while the anti-colonial response comes from Chinese people generally and from a British man who marries a Manchu girl, Mr. Waddington.

Based on those explanations, it can be explained that there is a culture boundary between the West and the East. The two nations have their own culture, ideology, and belief. The difference between the West and the East is very crucial. It draws line between the two nations. The line boundary between those two nations cannot be interrupted and the boundary make a nation is different from another.