

ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการปลดอาณานิคมและความหลากหลายทางภาษาในนวนิยายจีน มาเลย์เรื่อง *Monkey Cup*

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The Intersection of Decolonization and Linguistic Diversity in a Malaysian Chinese novel: *Monkey Cup*

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษากลยุทธ์การปลดอาณานิคมในวรรณกรรม *Monkey Cup* ของ Zhang Guixing ผ่านแนวทางวรรณกรรมหลายภาษา โดยใช้ทฤษฎีการปลดอาณานิคมทางภาษาของ Ngugi wa Thiong'o วิเคราะห์ว่านวนิยายเรื่องนี้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ จีน และดาเยกในการปรับเปลี่ยนอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมหลังอาณานิคมอย่างไร ผลการศึกษาพบว่าแทนที่จะปฏิเสธภาษาอาณานิคม (ภาษาอังกฤษ) โดยสิ้นเชิง นวนิยายเรื่องนี้ได้ปรับโครงสร้างความสัมพันธ์ทางอำนาจใหม่ โดยลดทอนความสำคัญของภาษาอังกฤษผ่านการต่อต้านของตัวละครและยกระดับภาษาจีนและดาเยกขึ้น โดยภาษาจีนยึดโยงความทรงจำทางวัฒนธรรมและปรับตัวให้เข้ากับบริบทของมาเลย์เซีย ในขณะที่ภาษาดายักกลายเป็นแรงผลักดันเชิงวรรณกรรมและเชิงวิจารณ์ที่ต่อต้านแบบแผนของอาณานิคม ปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาษาเหล่านี้ก่อให้เกิดความหลากหลายที่ยังรักษาลึกเชื่อมโยงความเป็นดั้งเดิมและความทันสมัยเข้าด้วยกัน นอกจากนี้ นวนิยายเรื่องนี้ยังแสดงให้เห็นบทบาทของความหลากหลายทางภาษาในการทำทลายลำดับชั้นของอาณานิคม และเสนอทางเลือกหลังอาณานิคมที่ครอบคลุมนอกเหนือจากลัทธิชาตินิยมหรือโลกาภิวัตน์

Abstract

This paper explores the decolonization strategies in Zhang Guixing's *Monkey Cup* through multilingual literary practices. Using Ngugi wa Thiong'o's theory of linguistic decolonization, the study analyzes how the novel employs English, Chinese, and Dayak to reshape postcolonial cultural identity. Rather than absolutely rejecting colonial languages, the novel reconfigures power relations by marginalizing English marked by characters' resistance and elevating Chinese and Dayak. Chinese anchors cultural memory and adapts to the Malaysian context, while Dayak becomes a poetic and critical force countering colonial stereotypes. The interplay of these languages forms a rooted cosmopolitanism that bridges tradition and modernity. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how linguistic pluralism can challenge colonial hierarchies and offer inclusive postcolonial alternatives beyond nationalism or globalization.

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1. Introduction

"Historically, Southeast Asia was one of the most colonized regions of the world" (Chua, 2008, p.231). However, since postcolonial studies have been dominated by European-language writing, the valuable postcolonial thoughts in

Southeast Asian literature have been buried and ignored. In particular, the writing of Malaysian Chinese literature is often processed and created through the writer's standpoint which distorts historical information. During the colonial period, the Chinese immigrants in Malaysia were oppressed by the colonizers. At the same time, they oppressed local indigenous people, too.

As a result, some works written in Southeast Asian languages criticized the misconduct of Chinese immigrants under colonial rule while failing to acknowledge that these immigrants were themselves subjected to oppression and played a vital role in building the nation. For example, Malaysian scholar Zhuang Huaxing is known for his creative, critical, and translational work in both Chinese and Malay. His research argues that Malay literature often portrays Chinese characters as unscrupulous, treacherous, and cunning capitalists through the use of specific narrative strategies, symbols, and metaphors (Zhuang, 2005).

Some literary works deliberately overlook the crimes committed by Chinese immigrants under colonial rule and instead selectively glorify their virtues such as diligence and wisdom while portraying them as national heroes as some books illustrated in the following context. To memorialize the pioneering contributions of their ancestors, many Malaysian Chinese writers have produced novels and stories that reconstruct a history of Chinese life marked by struggle and entrepreneurship. For instance, Zheng Liangshu's *Legend of Qingyun* (1987), *Selatang Fengyun* (1987), and *The New Dawn of Johor* (2000) highlight the adventurous spirit and self-reliant perseverance of Chinese settlers. A more prominent example is Fang Beifang's Malaya Trilogy, which comprises *The Boss* (1980), *The Tree is Big and the Roots are Deep* (1985), and *Flowers Floating and Fruits Falling* (1994), all of which reinforce narratives of heroic endurance and cultural identity (Jia, 2018).

Through diverse methodologies and perspectives, these scholarly analyses demonstrate that a considerable number of literary works in both Malaysian literature and Malaysian Chinese literature offer only a partial portrayal of Chinese immigrants and their historical role during the colonial period. Whether Chinese immigrants are partially portrayed as national heroes or as aggressors, such representations inevitably distort the writing of colonial history to some extent. This not only diminishes the scholarly value of the literary works but also reduces the complexity of the characters and the depth of their humanity. For example, Hamish Dalley's *The Postcolonial Historical Novel* (2014) argues that despite its formal and thematic diversity, the contemporary postcolonial historical novel is characterized by a realist imperative that positions fictional narratives as serious interpretations of contested pasts.

Malaysia experienced successive waves of colonial rule beginning in the early 16th century. After the decline of the Malaccan Sultanate, the region was controlled first by the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and finally the British who established comprehensive colonial administration by the early 20th century. During World War II, Japanese forces occupied the territory until Britain resumed control after the war. The Federation of Malaya gained independence on August 31, 1957, and later merged with Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah in 1963 to form Malaysia, though Singapore withdrew in 1965, leaving Malaysia with its current territorial configuration.

Zhang Guixing's novel, *Monkey Cup*, respects historical facts and describes not only the brutal rule of the colonists and the miserable lives of the local indigenous people, but also the dilemma and cruel means of the Chinese family caught between the two in the context of between the two poles of the colonial administration and the indigenous people. And generally, *Monkey Cup* is written in Chinese. Although English and the Dayak language appear occasionally, they are presented in translated Chinese form and play an important role in advancing the plot and revealing the novel's themes. (All the quotations cited in this article originally appear in Chinese in the novel *Monkey Cup*, and have been translated into English by the authors.)

The novel tells the story of Zhi, a Malaysian Chinese teacher who returns to his hometown Sarawak in Malaysia from Taiwan after being expelled from school and embarks on a journey to find his missing sister, Limei. After giving birth to a deformed baby, Limei took the child into the rainforest and has never been heard from since. As Zhi goes deeper into the rainforest, he not only gradually uncovers his sister's fate, but is also forced to face the tangle of history and grievances between four generations of his family and the local Dayak indigenous people. This novel begins with the perspective of a descendant of Chinese immigrants. It looks back on the history of his ancestors' pioneering work during the colonial period, as well as their role in the oppression of the indigenous Dayak community. The narrative also reveals how this process of development was mixed with acts of violence and wrongdoing under pressure and temptation from British and Japanese colonial rulers.

The novel encapsulates the dilemma of Chinese immigrants in colonial Malaysia by narrating how colonists control the production materials and rule and kill civilians with brutal means. When colonial control is resisted by Dayak and Chinese communities, Zhi's ancestors took up the position of colonial agents. They continued the exercise of colonial power by building industrial chains inside plantation areas which allow the extraction of labor and resources from the Dayak population. At the same time, they also create material wealth and contribute to the development of the land. After the withdrawal of colonial powers from Malaysia, the Chinese family (Zhi's family) which was once tools of colonial expansion remains on the land and stubbornly preserved the legacy of colonialism until Zhi is eventually killed by the Dayak people. The operation of murder also obliterates the future of Yu's family. The execution of Zhi by the Dayaks becomes a symbolic act of resistance and historical revenge.

Drawing on his identity as a descendant of Chinese immigrants, Zhang uses the death of Zhi to express his attitude of resistance and decolonization toward Malaysia's colonial history. This attitude is also shown through repeated scenes in which linguistic hybridity comes to the fore in the novel. The city dwellers speak limited English with Zhi, showing the lasting influence of colonial language control. By comparison, the Dayak people neither speak nor value English, showing their rejection of colonial power. Furthermore, they demonstrate a strong commitment to preserving their indigenous culture through communication and poetic creation in the Dayak language. Meanwhile, the Chinese family tells their history in Chinese and the book is also written by Chinese, showing a unique cultural stance and group identity (Zhang, 2000).

This research argues for significant societal implications through its decolonial literary analysis of Zhang Guixing's *Monkey Cup*, particularly by examining the roles of English as a tool of colonization, Chinese as a tool of recording and decolonization, and Dayak languages as tools of resistance and decolonization. Central to its contribution is the challenge to colonial knowledge structures embedded in language hierarchies. By foregrounding Ngugi wa Thiong'o's theory of linguistic decolonization, the study reveals how English, which serves in the novel as a cultural bomb functioned historically to erase indigenous epistemologies. "The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (Ngugi, 1987, p.3). In this novel, English frequently appears as a tool of the dominant class. The protagonist, Zhi, often judges others' poor English from a superior position when speaking fluent English. In the recollections of the Chinese family's history, English is portrayed as a tool of colonial power and a representative of the bureaucratic system. While raising the social status of its users, English lowers the status of others. It thus becomes an extension of power and control in the cultural domain. Within this system of judgment, the use of English in social settings undermines the cultural confidence of others. Those who are not fluent in English are forced to accommodate the fluent speaker, while also having to accept their judgment. This is the effect of the operation of cultural bombs in the novel.

In contrast, Chinese and Dayak languages function as tools of resistance against cultural imperialism, shaping a space that is independent from English. Chinese serves a dual purpose: it is a main medium for recording history and creating stories, while also maintaining a degree of neutrality between English (as part of the colonial system) and Dayak (as a language of local culture). In the novel, Dayak carries the historical and cultural memory of the Dayak people, along with their spirit of resistance. It pushes back against the colonial tendency to label indigenous cultures as primitive ones.

In 1987, Ngugi found the following:

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature; the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (p.16)

In this novel, Dayak people express values of unity, resilience, and courage, as well as a deep respect for their history and the nature through their poetry. By foregrounding the practice of Dayak language, the novel restores these previously marginalized values as key frameworks for understanding history and indigenous culture.

This study further reveals how linguistic hybridity constructs a decolonial space that challenges colonial epistemologies through the interweaving of Chinese for historical narration and storytelling, Dayak for poetic creation, and English as a legacy of colonial dominance and superiority. This hybridity not only celebrates the cultural complexity of Malaysia but also functions as a form of creative resistance that destabilizes the singular authority of English. By analyzing how each language carries different ideological roles, this study shows how literature uses language strategies to recover marginalized voices and redefine power dynamics in the postcolonial era. It contributes to the broader field of decolonial studies by doing so. Specifically, this paper would provide a way to find out the importance of decolonization and methods to accomplish it in reality by analyzing the novel's context with decolonization theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous studies about Zhang Guixing's *Monkey Cup*

In existing research on Zhang Guixing's novel *Monkey Cup*, scholars have explored its decolonial themes through attention to the novel's sensory writing and spiritual hybridity. However, a major gap remains in examining how language mediates power by shaping interactions among English, Chinese and the indigenous Dayak language. Jia (2016, 2018) traces the history of Chinese immigrants in Malaysia based on Zhang's works and includes other works of Malaysian literature to call attention to issues like geopolitics and fluid identity. But the role of language as both a colonial and decolonial tool is overlooked. Huang (2015) studies the novel's use of sensory writing and argues that it vividly presents the rainforest's ecological environment and has strong literary value. Yet, she does not discuss how multilingual expression helps portray a diverse Malaysian society. Jin (2009) shows that Chinese immigrant writers who choose to write in Chinese reflect a sense of psychological and cultural identity. Still, this perspective is not extended to address colonial or decolonial contexts. Zhang (2023) argues that the novel presents a Chinese family maintaining traditional beliefs in Malaysia, reflecting the author's cultural identity. However, this view stays within the scope of Chinese culture and does not explore how cultural expression can support decolonial thought. Zeng (2013) focuses on the novel's exotic cultural and ecological elements but misses the role of indigenous languages and their decolonial significance.

Huang (2019) argues that three languages which are Chinese, English and Dayak interact in this novel to record the decay of Chinese immigrant family instead of embracing creolization. She puts forward a core critique of creolization: when situated within the framework of settler colonialism, creolization tends to fall into a trap where the superficial appearance of cultural fusion serves to obscure the act of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their sovereignty. Her point of view further proves the rationality of Ngugi's theory of language decolonization and encourages us to explore ways to defeat language colonization and cultural colonization by establishing the dominant status of local languages. Carlos Rojas (2022) studies the region's sociopolitical structures which is reflected on humans' relationship to the local ecosystem in both *Monkey Cup* and *Elephant Herd*. In his paper, places where colonial legacies remain unaddressed, species, ethnic groups and individuals are all destined to live in a transitional state of ambiguity. His argument inspires us to have a strict consideration of social structure in *Monkey Cup* and analyze the practical way of linguistic decolonization within the novel's context. And also, it inspires us to claim that linguistic decolonization could break this ambiguity and give the local people a revive to their culture by driving culture bombs out of their land. Inspired by the two scholars' argument, this paper will analyze the practical linguistical decolonization by ensuring the dominant position of local language and defeating colonial languages in the novel.

These gaps show the need for a systematic study of how *Monkey Cup* illustrates Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1987) theory of language hybridity. Ngugi sees language as both a weapon of colonial control and a means of resistance through native and hybrid forms. The novel's use of English as a symbol of colonial power, Chinese dialects as carriers of memory and identity, and Dayak as a mark of indigenous culture has yet to be explored through this lens. This offers a valuable chance to understand how language shapes and challenges power in postcolonial Malaysia.

2.2 Decolonization Theory: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Language and Decolonization Theory

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's groundbreaking work *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature* (1987) provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how *Monkey Cup* functions as a decolonial text. Ngugi's theory centers on the relationship between language and colonialism, arguing that language was one of the most powerful weapons used by colonizers to control colonized peoples and also the core to operate decolonizing resistance.

2.3 Language as Cultural Bomb

Ngugi introduces the concept of language as a cultural bomb and a weapon that destroys people's belief in their own culture and forces them to adopt the colonizer's worldview.

Ngugi advances the argument as follows:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. (1987, p.3)

When colonial powers imposed European languages like English or French, they were not simply changing how people communicated. They were fundamentally altering how people understood themselves, their history, and their place in the world. Colonial education systems taught colonized children that their native languages were primitive and worthless, while European languages represented civilization and progress.

2.4 Language as Carrier of Culture

Ngugi argues that language is inseparable from culture. “Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (Ngugi, 1987, p.16). This means that when colonizers destroyed native languages, they also destroyed entire ways of understanding life, relationships with nature, spiritual beliefs, and social structures.

The colonial education system causes people to become strangers to their own cultures and view their traditions as backward or shameful. At the same time, they could never fully belong to the colonizer’s culture, leaving them in a state of cultural limbo.

2.5 Language as a Tool of Decolonization

Ngugi also shows that language can be a tool of liberation, as he said, “The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe” (Ngugi, 1987, p.4).

He believes decolonization involves reclaiming native languages and using them to express indigenous knowledge, values, and experiences. When colonized peoples write literature in their own languages, they resist colonial cultural domination and assert the validity of their own worldviews.

2.6 Decolonization Theory’s Application to *Monkey Cup*

Zhang Guixing’s *Monkey Cup* demonstrates exactly the kind of linguistic decolonization described by Ngugi. The novel shows how the colonial language English attempts to dominate the indigenous population through the colonial bureaucracy and destroy the cultural confidence of the Dayaks and other language users through the protagonist Zhi’s use of English, while also describing how people resist by adhering to their indigenous languages and cultural creations. The text itself also achieves decolonization by refusing to privilege any single language and instead creating a multilingual space where different ways of knowing can coexist.

3. Research Methodology and Research Framework

3.1 Research Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach integrating postcolonial literary theory, close textual analysis, and symbolic interpretation to critically examine the decolonial themes in Zhang Guixing’s *Monkey Cup*. Drawing on Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s framework of language as a cultural bomb and a tool of resistance, the analysis explores how colonial power structures are subverted through the interplay of English, Chinese, and Dayak languages.

3.2 Research Framework

This research framework is anchored in decolonization theory from Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1987), which conceptualizes language as both a mechanism of colonial domination and a vehicle for liberation.

As he claims in *Decolonising the Mind*:

The classes fighting against imperialism even in its neo-colonial stage and form, have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle. These classes have to wield even more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures. They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. (1987, p3)

Based on this theory, the framework operates on three interconnected analytical levels to examine how *Monkey Cup* employs linguistic strategies for decolonial purposes.

The first level focuses on identifying and analyzing instances where English functions as what Ngugi terms a cultural bomb, examining scenes where the protagonist Zhi uses his English fluency to establish superiority over other characters, thereby perpetuating colonial hierarchies and cultural alienation. This analysis reveals how English serves not merely as a communication tool but as an instrument of power that reinforces colonial epistemologies and undermines indigenous cultural confidence.

The second analytical level examines the dual role of Chinese language as both a tool of historical documentation and cultural preservation within the colonial matrix. The framework recognizes Chinese as occupying a unique intermediary position between the colonial language of English and the indigenous language of Dayak, serving as a medium through which the Chinese immigrant experience is recorded and transmitted across generations. This level of analysis explores how Chinese functions as a repository of collective memory, enabling the preservation of cultural identity while simultaneously documenting the complex historical relationships between Chinese immigrants, colonial powers, and indigenous communities.

The third level investigates how Dayak language operates as a vehicle of indigenous resistance and cultural reclamation, embodying what Ngugi describes as the authentic voice of the colonized that challenges imperial domination. The framework examines instances of Dayak poetry and oral expression within the novel, analyzing how these linguistic practices serve to maintain indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual beliefs, and cultural values that resist colonial erasure. This analysis reveals how Dayak language functions as a tool of decolonization.

The framework’s synthetic dimension explores the novel’s creation of linguistic hybridity as a form of creative resistance that transcends binary oppositions between colonizer and colonized languages. This hybridity manifests itself through the interweaving of English, Chinese, and Dayak languages within the narrative structure, creating what can be understood as a decolonial counter that challenges the singular authority of any one linguistic tradition. The framework analyzes how this multilingual approach destabilizes colonial knowledge hierarchies while celebrating Malaysia’s cultural complexity, ultimately contributing to broader decolonial discourse by demonstrating how literature can serve as a site of linguistic and cultural resistance.

Through this multilayered analytical approach, the research framework enables a comprehensive examination of how *Monkey Cup* employs language not merely as a literary device but as a political tool for challenging colonial legacies and imagining postcolonial futures. The framework’s strength lies in its ability to connect micro level textual analysis with macro level theoretical insights, revealing how individual linguistic choices within the novel contribute to broader patterns of decolonial resistance in literature.

Figure 1

Three Analytical Dimensions of Decolonization in This Paper

Analytical Dimension		
English as Colonial Domination	Chinese as Cultural Documentation	Dayak as Indigenous Resistance

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4. Result and Discussion

The research presents the linguistic landscape depicted in *Monkey Cup* by exploring how English, Chinese, and Dayak languages interact within the novel. By analyzing their roles, functions, and the power dynamics they embody, the study aims to uncover the mechanisms of linguistic resistance and hybridity as a form of decolonization. It investigates how English is rejected and fails as a tool of symbolizing colonial dominance and how Chinese serves as a solid foundation for cultural identity and documentation. This study also investigates how Dayak can operate decolonization through language by vibrant poetry creation. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research aims to understand the novel's decolonizing achievements, its contributions to decolonization theory and its implications for multicultural societies.

4.1 English: The Rejected Colonial Domination

In the linguistic landscape of *Monkey Cup*, English occupies a rather awkward position as the official language imposed by the colonial government. It has never truly integrated into the daily communication of local communities. This state of "being rejected" itself constitutes a form of silent resistance.

English in the novel mainly appears through British colonial government bureaucrats and the protagonist Zhi. But every time that English appears, the respondent answers in broken and unskilled English. Such dialogs appear many times in the book and authors would demonstrate them in following context.

When the British colonists desire to use Zhi's grandfather to achieve their own political and military tasks, they are only rejected by the Chinese. The grandfather uses a respectful attitude and broken English to package his plan of not wanting to participate in a struggle that would not benefit him.

Zhang narrates this scene in his novel as follows:

Zhi remembers that when more than 20 British soldiers, armed with live ammunition and wearing camouflage uniforms, entered the home, grandfather, who had just finished smoking opium, and Er Nu Niang stood at the door to welcome them. The British soldiers looked around casually, and spent most of their time around the governor, eating the fruits offered by the Yu family and talking about this huge herbivore that is endangered in Borneo. Zhi's grandfather said in stuttering English "Corn garden...pepper garden... you go and search... I don't dare to... go in after dark..." The young British soldiers, sweating and tired, shook their heads and said to each other "Oh, come on. No No No..." (2000, p.36)

English has not produced a strong effect in the land of Malaysia as a tool of the colonizers and a cultural bomb. And every time Zhi uses English, he can only get broken and non-fluent English answers. "Is there...something?' her English stumbled as she reached Chi's ears. 'I'm looking for Yu Limei, a woman who has just given birth...'Chi supported her English. 'Is she...your wife?' 'No. My sister" (Zhang, 2000, p.16). The repeated appearance of unsmooth English in this book shows an embarrassing fact. As a means of cultural domination and a cultural bomb imposed by colonizers, English plays a significant role in undermining the cultural confidence of local residents and distorting local culture, history, and values through the language of the colonizers. The colonizers want to use cultural bombs to create the impression that their civilization and language represent advancement and superiority while local indigenous culture and language represent primitiveness and backwardness. Even if this sense of superiority temporarily takes root in the hearts of some local residents, it cannot change their lifestyle and way of expression. The role played by this cultural bomb in Malaysia is as intermittent as the English spoken by local residents.

Such contexts reveal the alienation between English and the lives of local people. Residents of this country cannot truly master and use English for deep cultural expression. This language deficiency does not stem from intellectual deficiency, but because the cultural connotations carried by English are fundamentally incompatible with their life experience.

The decline of English as a language is closely related to political changes. The British colonists who once colonized this land lost their ruling status after withdrawing from the Malaysian political stage. When they reappeared on this land, their identities had changed from colonists to ordinary citizens.

As Zhang (2000) writes in *Monkey Cup*:

This reporter witnessed an angry policeman questioning an Englishman in a town on the edge of a forest. He declared the Englishman a sexual adventurer. He roamed around Malay and Chinese villages, offering perfume, soap and sweets to women and girls. They refused to accept them. The indignant husband and father complained to the local police station. The police ordered the Englishman to complete his academic investigation as soon as possible and leave the town. (p.131)

The police officer, as a representative of the local government system, exercises complete autonomy in his dealings with the British. The order to leave the country as soon as possible also shows how English was incompatible with the local culture and was eventually expelled. English, as the language of Britain, carries colonial culture and values. Its attempts to conquer and rule Malaysian soil were ultimately met with strong resistance from local culture and values, and it had to leave in disgrace.

This phenomenon reveals the limitations of what Ngugi calls the “cultural bomb.” While language as a colonial tool possesses destructive power, it becomes pale and powerless when it lacks deep cultural soil. English on the land of Malaysia is like a failed transplant of foreign vegetation, never truly able to take root.

4.2 Chinese: Cultural Documentation

In stark contrast to the marginalization of English, Chinese occupies a central position in *Monkey Cup*, serving not only as the protagonist Zhi’s mother language tongue, but also as the carrier of the entire Chinese community’s cultural identity and spiritual homeland.

As the protagonist’s mother tongue, Chinese undertakes the most direct and authentic function of emotional expression. Inner monologues, family conversations, and emotional expressions in the novel are primarily conducted through Chinese. This use of the mother tongue is not a deliberate cultural choice, but an instinctive cultural return.

When the protagonist faces life’s confusions, historical inquiries, and identity bewilderment, Chinese becomes his most reliable thinking tool and means of expression. The grammatical structure, expressive habits, and cultural connotations of Chinese are highly compatible with the protagonist’s thinking patterns which enables him to maintain internal cultural consistency in a complex multicultural environment.

“Zhi, Ali is not your biological sister,’ grandfather said” (Zhang, 2000, p.145). “We have too many enemies,’ Grandfather said” (Zhang, 2000, p.149). In order to take revenge on Zhi’s grandfather, the Dayaks give one of their children to his grandfather as a granddaughter, in order to find out where the Chinese family has hidden the gold and take revenge on the Chinese family when they have grown up. This is because they firmly believe that the Chinese family’s wealth was obtained by plundering the Dayak people. The suspense that runs through almost the entire story is revealed through the conversation between Zhi and his grandfather. The well-known struggle between the two families is finally inherited and resolved by their descendants.

As Zhang writes as follows:

“In the morning when farming was busy, the great grandfather hid a hunting rifle and more than ten bullets in the insulation layer of the Huang family, and reported it to the Japanese. As a result, three adults of the Huang family were shot by the Japanese, and the youngest daughter was raped and killed under a rambutan tree. The Huang family’s land was quickly occupied by my great grandfather to plant pepper. Their bodies were hastily buried by the great grandfather in the wild, and a few days later, they were eaten by big lizards. After a vast depression bordering the orchard was cultivated into fertile land by the Pan family, the great grandfather made plans on the silk cotton tree and instigated the governor to destroy and intimidate. Soon, the Pan family’s land also became part of the Yu family’s orchard. Every time the great grandfather climbed a branch of the silk cotton tree, his ambition to expand the Yu family’s land became more unattainable” (2000, p.142).

The secrets of the family always reveal the tip of the iceberg through the conversations between Zhi and his family. In the conversations between the interlocutors who are all Chinese immigrants, and the language used is Chinese, Zhi and his family put down their disguises and began to share some real information. This information is objective without false embellishments which shows a real and objective position. These records not only express the Yu family’s contribution to the local park business, but also truly depict the crimes and blood stained in the process of the Yu family’s expansion and development. The author Zhang did not avoid covering up this bloody aspect because of his Chinese identity. On the contrary, he used Chinese to truly depict the two sides of history, the righteous side and the evil side. In this position, the real history and family entanglement stories are revealed. As the mother tongue of the Chinese immigrant family, Chinese has taken on the responsibility of recording and expressing. As a result, it resists the distortion of history, culture and values by colonial languages. This story told in Chinese is independent of the colonial language and is not influenced by the values, culture and historical attitudes represented by English, thus creating an independent cultural space to pursue decolonization.

Moreover, Chinese proverbs and idioms that appear in many places in the book reflect Chinese culture and values. “Never get tired of looking at each other (Xiang Kan Liang Bu Yan)” (Zhang, 2000, p.110) and “A long way (Qian Li Tiao Tiao)” (Zhang, 2000, p.129). These idioms and proverbs not only accurately express the author’s intention, but also reflect the humor, tenacity, and fighting spirit in Chinese culture. These cultures and values expressed through the Chinese language can never be replaced by other languages or colonial languages. The existence of these languages subtly expresses a culture different from colonial culture, resists colonial language and culture, and creates a decolonial space.

4.3 Dayak Language: Indigenous Resistance

The most impressive linguistic phenomenon in *Monkey Cup* is the powerful vitality and creativity displayed by the Dayak language. Contrary to the colonial discourse’s stereotypical image of being “primitive and backward,” Dayak language runs throughout the novel in the form of poetic creation, embodying the depth, elegance, and pride of indigenous culture.

The novel repeatedly features fragments of Dayak poetry, which are not simple repetitions of ancient legends, but poetic responses to contemporary life. These powerful verses demonstrate the language’s capacity for both traditional warfare imagery and contemporary expression.

When Badu, the indigenous warrior, cuts off Zhi’s head, he once again chants the indigenous poem he had chanted many times in the rain forest.

“I am the Dayak war song, piercing the enemy’s brain and scattering the enemy’s soul;

I am a Dayak warrior, cutting off the enemy's head to flatter my lover;

I am an otter seeking a mate, hunting catfish to pursue the female otter;

I am a fragrant pitcher plant, chewing the meat and nourishing the enchanting branches and leaves;

I am a roaring bear, luring the female bear to crawl under my crotch;

I am a clouded leopard shot by an arrow, and the blood is like rain dyeing a jungle red;

I am a helmeted and armored crocodile, rolling up a whirlpool and overturning warships;

I am a tusked long-bearded pig, crossing the river and crossing the forest to devour the rotten fruit that made me drunk and troubled;

I am a fanged long-bearded pig, crossing the river and crossing the forest to devour the rotten fruit that made me drunk and troubled;

I am a heroic dugong, my sperm floods the vaginas of a thousand female dugongs;

I am a Dayak hunter, my body is covered with tattoos of killed animals and birds;

I am a Dayak farmer, the girls sing me while planting rice and shoveling the soil." (Zhang, 2000, p.171)

Dayak poets use their language to create poetic works that reflect real life, express inner emotions, and explore philosophical questions, demonstrating the rich expressiveness and continuous creative vitality of this language. These poetic works maintain traditional rhythm and structure in form while incorporating modern themes and concerns in content. They are both an inheritance of traditional culture and a creative response to modern challenges. The most prominent feature of Dayak poetry is its profound ecological consciousness. These poems closely connect human life with the natural environment, expressing through poetic language the concept of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The flora and fauna of tropical rainforests, rivers and mountains, seasonal changes all become important materials and spiritual sources for poetic creation.

This ecological poetics not only has literary value but also profound philosophical significance. It provides a development concept different from Western industrial civilization which shows another possibility for the relationship between humans and nature. The creation and transmission of Dayak poetry itself embodies cultural pride. Against the backdrop of colonial rule attempting to demean and eliminate indigenous culture, the Dayak people persist in and develop their cultural traditions through poetic creation. At the same time, it demonstrates strong cultural confidence and national pride.

This cultural pride is not blind self-glorification but is rather based on deep recognition and sincere love for their own cultural values. Dayak poetry proves the excellence and irreplaceability of indigenous culture with its unique aesthetic character and spiritual quality.

The Dayak language in *Monkey Cup* challenges colonial assumptions about indigenous cultures. The novel presents Dayak poetry as a form of literature with significant aesthetic and intellectual value. These poems express key ideas about the environment, identity, and cultural continuity. The act of poetic creation preserves Dayak beliefs in animism, spiritual practices, and social customs. It also reflects concern about ecological destruction and cultural erosion. Poetry functions both as a medium of historical memory and as a response to contemporary threats.

The oral tradition that supports these poems represents an alternative epistemology. It is grounded in bodily experience, collective memory, and reverence for nature. This mode differs from written knowledge and rationalist frameworks. It emphasizes a holistic understanding shaped by emotion, ritual, and community. Dayak poetry affirms the value of indigenous voices in public discourse. Its metaphors draw from local ecosystems and reflect intimate

knowledge of place. These images connect geographic specificity with universal emotional meaning. The poems advocate for environmental responsibility, cultural dignity, and social justice.

These works are not static or nostalgic. They belong to an ongoing cultural practice. The Dayak poetic voice remains creative, adaptive, and oriented toward the future. *Monkey Cup* frames this voice as essential to national identity and relevant within global literature and decolonization studies.

4.4 Organic Fusion of Three Languages: Decolonization Practice

The decolonizing significance of *Monkey Cup* lies not only in the treatment of individual languages, but also in the new cultural space created by the organic fusion of three languages. This fusion embodies true cultural pluralism and a decolonial stance.

By displacing English to the margins, positioning Chinese at the center, and sustaining the vitality of Dayak, the novel effectively reconfigures the linguistic hierarchy that had been entrenched during the colonial era. Within this newly articulated linguistic order, it is no longer the colonizer's language that holds a dominant status, but rather indigenous and ethnic languages that are accorded appropriate recognition and legitimacy. Rather than being merely a superficial or technical adjustment, such a shift in linguistic valuation constitutes a profound reorientation of cultural values and power relations. By doing so, the novel signals a decisive break from the legacy of colonial cultural hegemony and advances a new framework grounded in principles of cultural parity and pluralistic coexistence.

The preceding discussion leads to the following findings. The coexistence and integration of three languages provide a solid foundation for sustained dialog among different cultural traditions. This situation enables the expression and mutual recognition of diverse cultural values within a shared communicative space. In this novel, the Chinese language conveys rational and reflective qualities. Dayak presents intuitive and poetic dimensions, while English expresses global tendencies. Each language finds meaningful forms of articulation and contributes to the broader cultural landscape.

This process does not represent a simple aggregation of cultural fragments. Instead, it reflects a dynamic and constructive interaction grounded in mutual understanding and respect. Such interaction allows each tradition to retain its distinct characteristics. At the same time, it encourages engagement with and incorporation of valuable elements from others. The result is not the loss of cultural specificity. Rather, it is the emergence of a richer and more interconnected cultural experience. Furthermore, the research of Huang (2019) reinforces this argument by revealing that the interplay among Chinese, English and Dayak languages in the novel does not merely celebrate creolization. Instead, she demonstrates that within a settled colonial framework, the appearance of cultural fusion can obscure the dispossession of indigenous sovereignty, thereby highlight the need to restore the dominant status of local languages as Ngugi proposes. Likewise, Rojas's (2022) examination of Zhang's novel further supports this view by showing how unresolved colonial legacies produce a persistent state of sociopolitical and ecological uncertainty. His findings suggest that linguistic decolonization can break this uncertainty and create the conditions for a revitalized cultural landscape. Together, these two scholars' insight provide strong evidence for the claim of this paper.

Furthermore, the linguistic fusion emerging from this interaction facilitates the development of a new cultural identity. This identity resists both narrow nationalism and the uncritical adoption of Western norms. Shaped by an indigenous perspective, it is characterized by openness and a capacity to affirm traditional cultural values. It also shows a willingness to integrate positive contributions from external sources. In doing so, it reflects a mature cultural confidence and a rational approach to navigating cultural diversity in a globalized context.

The organic fusion of three languages in *Monkey Cup* creates a revolutionary model for postcolonial cultural reconstruction that transcends the binary opposition between tradition and modernity, local and global, indigenous and foreign. This multilingual strategy represents a sophisticated form of cultural bricolage that draws selectively from different linguistic resources while maintaining critical distance from any single cultural system. The novel demonstrates how different languages can complement rather than compete with each other with each contributing its unique strengths to a more comprehensive understanding of human experience. This linguistic democracy creates space for multiple ways of knowing and being rejecting the hierarchical ordering that characterized colonial discourse. The fusion process becomes a form of cultural creativity. It produces new hybrid expressions that would not arise from a single linguistic tradition. Characters switch between languages based on context, audience, and emotion. This shows that multilingual life is natural when it is not limited by artificial boundaries. The novel argues that cultural authenticity does not depend on linguistic purity. Instead, it grows out of creatively using what is available in response to specific historical conditions.

4.5 Multiple Constructions of Historical Memory

The coexistence of three languages presents historical memory in multiple dimensions, with each language carrying different historical experiences and cultural memories. Chinese narration serves as a repository for the collective memory of Chinese immigrants, capturing their experience of uprooting, their resilience in building new lives, and their determination to preserving cultural heritage. The Dayak language preserves the historical memory of indigenous peoples that have traditional life in harmony with nature, rich and colorful cultural ceremonies, and tenacious resistance when facing external impacts. These memories embody the depth and value of indigenous culture.

By allowing different historical memories to dialog and blend, the novel creates a multi-layered historical picture. This coexistence of multiple historical memories both avoids the limitations of singular historical perspectives and provides a more comprehensive viewpoint for understanding complex colonial history.

5. Conclusion: Decolonizing Practice of Linguistic Pluralism

Through this multilingual writing strategy, *Monkey Cup* successfully achieves decolonization at the literary level. This decolonization is not achieved through simple linguistic substitution but through reconfiguring linguistic power relations, activating indigenous linguistic vitality and creating spaces for cultural dialog. The novel's decolonizing achievements are mainly reflected in four aspects: overthrowing linguistic hierarchies, revitalizing indigenous languages, constructing multicultural identities and innovating literary expression. These goals are achieved through a multilingual approach that empowers marginalized voices and fosters cultural exchange.

5.1 Core Achievements of Decolonization

The novel's decolonizing achievements are evident in several key aspects. This approach disrupts colonial linguistic hierarchies through the strategic marginalization of English and the privileging of Chinese and Dayak languages, effectively reconfiguring established power relations. It revitalizes indigenous linguistic vitality, particularly through the display of Dayak poetic creation, which affirms the creativity and modernity of native tongues. The novel also constructs a multicultural identity by organically blending multiple languages, fostering a cultural identity that is both rooted and inclusive. Additionally, it creates innovative literary expression by blending sensory writing with linguistic experimentation to forge a unique aesthetic style

5.2 Contributions to Decolonization Theory

The practice of *Monkey Cup* enriches and develops Ngugi's decolonization theory. It proves that decolonization does not necessarily mean completely rejecting colonial languages but can be achieved through reconfiguring linguistic relations. At the same time, it also demonstrates the remarkable adaptability and creativity of indigenous languages in modern contexts.

5.3 Implications for Multicultural Societies

As a successful decolonizing literary work, *Monkey Cup* provides valuable reference for handling linguistic and cultural issues in multicultural societies. It demonstrates how to achieve cultural dialog based on respecting cultural differences, how to achieve cultural innovation while maintaining cultural characteristics, and how to construct positive cultural identity while opposing cultural hegemony.

Zhang Guixing's *Monkey Cup* is therefore not only a literary masterpiece, but also a successful cultural experiment. It provides valuable experience for cultural construction in the decolonization study field and contributes a unique voice to the diversified development of world literature. It shows how to change the colonial domination of a single language through peaceful and diversified development, and how to demonstrate cultural inclusiveness and more development possibilities through communication and interaction in multiple languages.

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