

# Image of Ip Man 2: National Mentality Cultivation in New Post-Colonialism

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**Abstract:** The film *Ip Man 2: Legend of the Grandmaster* has constructed a civilian hero image – Ip Man, who would not change in poverty and hardship or surrender before despotic power, fought against the arrogant colonist boxing champion Milos and defended the dignity of the Chinese. The match between Ip Man and Milos was about justice and injustice. Colonialism has gone, but the Western countries launched neo-colonial aggression against China instead. The film also plays a dual role in constructing a new history and deconstructing the neo-colonialism. Chinese cinema must cultivate a national mentality in the context of neo-colonialism.

**Keywords:** Ip Man 2; Image Construction; Civilian Hero; Neo-colonialism; National Mentality.

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## 1. Introduction

The movie *Ip Man 2: Legend of the Grandmaster* (hereinafter referred to as *Ip Man 2*) has constructed a civilian hero image that is widely welcome, which reflects a gratifying reality: Chinese who have a sound national mentality turn reasonable and love Chinese traditional culture and advocate the spirit of equality and mutual respect. Compared with the hero in previous martial arts films, who can be admired as relatively inaccessible, Ip Man presents a civilian hero image. No matter what predicament, he always calmly deals with it reasonably: Fighting against Hong Zhennan with a rational and restrained attitude, Fearless to challenge the once British boxing champion Milos. The movie successfully constructs Ip Man as an excellent national mentality spirit idol who reflects the national mentality of self-esteem, rational science, openness, and tolerance.

## 2. Civilian Hero: Deconstruct Cultural Hegemony of Neo-Colonialism

The film's production and consumption can not be separated from the historical context. Ip Man had no competition with foreign boxers while living in Hong Kong. In the film, the hero, Ip Man, defeats British boxer Milos, which is only a constructed story. Ip Man had been training many apprentices till his old age, and he held himself aloof from the earthly world in Hong Kong... [1] Ip Man, the civilian hero, successfully gained strong resonance in the audience.

### 2.1. The Psychological Wounds Left by Colonists to the Chinese Nation Need Cure

From 1840 to 1949, the Chinese nation suffered from the invasion of the Western powers, including the colonialists. Hong Kong, occupied by the British, was not returned to China until 1997. John Buchan described China In 1922 as follows: Thousands of quick-thinking brains unable to extricate themselves indulged in fancy but shallow ideas. They can only struggle futilely with no goal or driving force while the world snickers at the side. [2]Such Westerners showed contempt for traditional Chinese culture and ignored

the dignity of the Chinese nation; hence, the image of China they constructed is distorted absolutely. Therefore, one of the missions of Chinese films is to deconstruct neo-colonialism. *Ip Man 2* participates in reconstructing that period of history and the identity of the Chinese nation, aiming at curing the psychological trauma left in the colonial period.

### 2.2. Chinese should Guard Against the Cultural Invasion of Western Movies

The old colonialism has become stale, but the Western countries are stepping up more subtle neo-colonial cultural aggression against China. With a large population base and colossal market, China is naturally an essential goal for Western cultural invasion. Image culture supplies consumption and entertainment and disseminates social values and political views, which influence the spirit of the society. Chinese movies must maintain their national characteristics to avoid being engulfed by Western movies. The civilian hero image of Ip Man vividly illustrates the essence of Chinese martial arts and the profound implication of cultural values. In China, martial arts have always been closely associated with the traditional culture of national loyalty, moral courage, and personal humility. Hence, when the Chinese martial arts defeated foreign boxing in the film, the foundation of Western cultural logos collapsed instantly.

### 2.3. Constructing a Civilian Hero to Maintain Chinese Traditional Humanism

Most of the hero images in Hollywood movies are otherworldly and beyond people's reach. Chinese nations have suffered the pain of semi-colonial domination. The hero images in Hollywood can not substitute for those in Chinese films because the latter are full of humanistic care of local places, local culture, and local experience. Ip Man, the civilian hero, gives the audience a sense of ordinary life, which causes strong resonance with them. Correspondingly, the film sets an immoral British boxing champion, Milos, as an anti-hero who stands for the Western values of colonial rulers. Finally, Ip Man beat the arrogant Milos, who showed his contempt for Chinese culture. The match between the two sides is a struggle in which the colonial people fight the sovereign state against the misuse of force and pledge their

lives to defend Chinese culture.

### **3. Civilian Hero Image Invites Great Resonance in the Chinese Audience**

In the movie, Ip Man was successfully constructed as a civilian hero with sophisticated martial arts who had deep feelings for his family and nation. “Star image is not a careless pack of representation and the quality open to interpretation. It is a structure of ambiguity.” [3] Similarly, it is constructed by the needs of the contemporary time. Let’s analyze how the film successfully created the civilian hero and how the movie interprets the national mentality from the elements: props, scenes, dialogues, lenses, and plots in three aspects.

#### **3.1. Living in Hardship with Lofty Ideas and Adhering to the Life Principle**

Despite his hardships, Ip Man always kept a calm and indomitable spirit. The movie portrays the hero as an amiable person in vivid detail instead of deliberately overstating Ip Man. Except for teaching Wing Chun Kongfu, he practiced martial arts at home, abiding by the “slow in words and swift in action” principle. Ip Man lived a poor life when he arrived in Hong Kong. The Expelling Poverty of Yang Xiong makes the glory and wealth seem insignificant and ridiculous in the eyes of ordinary people.[4] Fortunately, with the help of his friend, he rents a shabby building rooftop as a martial training venue. Ip Man dressed in a long gown with a learned and elegant temperament. He was so sophisticated in martial arts that he was good at subduing the active with serenity, conquering the unyielding with the yielding. Every gesture and move is never put on a hollow display. The exciting story with the perfect soundtrack leaves a touch of the oriental charm of autumn leaves, which is independent and undefeatable.

Ip Man was generous to others, for he would not accept the tuition of poor disciples and could barely afford the essential living expenses. Ip Man had a strict Confucian education, which required him to restrain himself, value justice above material gains, be modest and prudent, and be generous to others. Ip Man practices what he preaches, as the old maxim goes: “Neither poverty nor humbleness can make him swerve from principle; neither threats nor forces can subdue him.” He was generous to offer food and money to the delirious man Zhou Qingquan, while he was fearless in fighting against the cruel and arrogant Milos.

#### **3.2. Be good to Friends, Faithful to Family, and Courteous to Other People**

In *How to Study in the Analects* by Confucius, he pointed out that “in the application of the rites, harmony is to be prized.” The essential spirit of harmony is establishing a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. In Confucius’s opinion, “As the main body, the individual self not merely exists in personal, but exists as a member of the group who bears corresponding responsibility.”[5] Ip Man is a responsible man considerate to his wife. Although they lived in a shabby house with a simple daily diet, they were pleased. When Ip Man argued with the martial artist Hong Zhennan, they fought against each other. The latter almost hurt the little son who came to call him for dinner. The former picked up the boy quickly and guarded him well in his arms. Ip Man reminded, “Which is more important, to have a match with me or to have dinner with family?” His words hinted that it

was insignificant for the Chinese to fight each other while cherishing the family was the most important.

Ip Man was tolerant of family members, juniors, friends, and colleagues, but he hated the bullying of British champion Milos, who showed his contempt for Chinese culture. Before Ip Man challenged the British champion, the three family members had dinner silently without tears or courageous words. Ip Man decided to entrust the pregnant wife and his child to the landlady and challenged Milos, who claimed he would not pull his punches. Family was undoubtedly important, but he bravely left home to fight for his country. After winning the box, he replied to the reporter that he most wanted to go back home. In the movie, Ip Man runs across and down the flyover of the neighborhoods, and then the lens turns into slow motion. The running action is light and happy, demonstrating his passion for his wife and children and eagerness to be ordinary townfolk.

#### **3.3. With a Strong Sense of National Pride and Fearless to the Despotic Power**

Ip Man was not the man who was kept alive without serious ambition. When he faced the despotic power of the British boxing champion, he challenged the nation's dignity. Unfortunately, the martial arts overlord Hong Zhennan had been killed in cold blood in the fierce roundtable battle with the boxer. Ip Man recognized that he could not hope for the tolerance of the foreigner in the ring as well as out of the ring. Only by persistent struggle could he obtain equality and self-esteem.

In the Sino-Western boxing press conference organized by the British, Milos lifted his horn and boasted he would accept any challenge. At that time, the camera lens descended and took a high angle to shoot, which showed the arrogance of the British boxer. However, Ip Man, in a poised but not arrogant manner, publicizes he will challenge against him. Then, the lens cleverly inserts the joss stick in the middle of both men as a dividing line, implying that the two sides are irreconcilable. Just as Louis Giannetti said, symbols can refer to the non-surface significance or change the meaning according to the different contexts of drama.[6]

During the match between Ip Man fighting against Milos, the movie presented several flashbacks, which overlaid the lenses of Hong Zhennan blown heavily by Milos. This parallel montage endows the challenge with a moving feeling. Ip Man ultimately defeated Milos by avoiding the latter's malicious dash and fought back against it while the opponent had missing errors. With the repeat quick strikes, Ip Man could have hit him to death before the referee announced the suspension; however, Ip Man stopped beating him because the purpose of punishment on Milos already reached. Since the arrogance of the enemy was eliminated, why not forgive him? This was in line with the Confucian benevolence ideology and the equal doctrine advocated in *The Bible* that all people shall not kill each other.

### **4. Healthy National Mentality in the Neo-colonialism Context**

The national mentality is the cognitional, psychological, and emotional tendencies when the nation faces significant events or emergencies in everyday life. In the context of neo-colonialism, one of the social functions of the film is to reconstruct the history and foster a healthy national mentality, which makes the "collective unconscious" immersed into the

blood of the Chinese nation. It is the psychological power to promote the development of individuals, society, and the government and the soft power of Chinese culture. In my opinion, developing a healthy national mentality will –

#### **4.1. Help Cultivate a Sense of National Pride and Enhance National Cohesion**

Only with a healthy national mentality can people understand themselves, properly deal with interpersonal relationships, have a dialectical view of success or failure, and bravely face difficulties and setbacks with perseverance. Ip Man's Wing Chun Kongfu was very professional. His gesture naturally showed his sophisticated martial art and extraordinary temperament. In the movie *Ip Man 2*, when he declared to challenge the British champion known as "Tornado", his colleagues in martial arts in China heartily inspired and helped him. The Hong Kong press circle created a favorable public opinion environment on newspapers and broadcasts, which showed a mighty national cohesion.

Ip Man thought that the aim of practicing martial arts was not to show off, let alone kill people. In contrast, it was stupid and cruel that Milos arrogantly clamored to challenge any Chinese and would not show any mercy. Milos was strong but would only use brute force. In other words, he didn't understand the Chinese martial arts philosophy of conquering the unyielding with the yielding, checking the dynamic with the static. Ip Man avoided the heavy blow and beat the fatal body area between his shoulder and hip with skilled martial arts. He was destined to be defeated.

#### **4.2. Remind People to Cherish Cultural Heritage and Maintain Traditional Culture**

A mentally healthy man will not accept Western things unquestioningly and cherish the traditional cultural heritage. Ip Man, always in a simple but elegant white shirt and blue gown – the typical Chinese conventional costume, was neither humble nor pushy. The words he taught to his disciples conformed to Chinese traditional philosophy, that is, adhering to the doctrine of doing nothing but the most important things until he obtained victory. One of the film's underlying themes is "love": love family, love friends, love the younger, love the elder, love the community, and love the motherland. As the French Film philosopher Andre Bazin said, the film is truly the art of love, which is better than any other artistic work. [7]

As a man versed in literature and martial arts, he loved China. He has deep Chinese literacy and devoted himself to defending the dignity of the Chinese traditional culture. As Milos openly despised the Chinese traditional way of burning joss to measure time in the press conference, Ip Man directly retorted his opinion: The custom of burning joss was to measure time and remind everybody to be humble – This was Chinese traditional culture. He claimed decidedly with solemn mood and determination of look in the eyes, which shocked Milos.

#### **4.3. Upgrade the National Image and Integrate into the International Community**

Only with a healthy national mentality can people consciously know how to maintain an excellent national image. Since China has frequent economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, the manners are often linked with the country's image in the international community.

CCPC, the governing party of China's seventeenth congress report, indicated that it needs to enhance national cultural soft power at the strategic level. In terms of cultural soft power, it means restoring its voice in international politics.[8] The movies of traditional Chinese culture will construct a national mentality of conservative, rational, scientific, tolerant, and open, establishing a national image of the country with leading soft power.

Ip Man, whoever he met, the Chinese martial arts master or the British boxing champion, always maintained a reasonable manner without any arrogance, even when he won a fierce match. He believed that although the status of people can be distinguished as high and low, the personality should not be characterized as noble and humble, so everyone should respect each other. Such an advocate for equality won the heartfelt applause of the audience, including the British. Whatever the traditional culture is, it should be respected by other nations. Ip Man advocated dialogue between the West and the East rather than air narrow nationalism.

## **5. Conclusion**

The movie is vital to reconstructing colonial history and spreading traditional Chinese culture. In the context of neo-colonialism, Chinese film should "create a Chinese film culture of internationalization and set a cultural identity and communication platform in China through Audio-visual images." The movie constructed Ip Man as a spirit idol against imperialists and a civilian hero with an excellent national mentality. When the British boxer knocked the Chinese opponent, Hong Zhennan, down to the ground, he raised his fist jauntily and said, "That is the power." But Ip Man finally defeated the boxer, demonstrating the force worship was ridiculous. He said, "Where can we find the most powerful fighter in the world?" The foundation of the Western colonialism hegemony collapsed with a loud crash. Here, the movie played dual functions in deconstructing neo-colonialism and reconstructing a new history, providing a worthy reference for developing a healthy national mentality in the context of neo-colonialism.

## **Biography:**

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