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Bodies of History: Disability and Historical Violence in Post-Emergency Malaysian Chinese Literature and Film

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines representations of disability in Malaysian Chinese literature and film in the aftermath of the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960), investigating whether Western critical disability frameworks can account for the complex historical and political conditions in the postcolonial, plural post-Emergency Malaysian society through which disability is experienced. Through an analysis of Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Ng Kim Chew's "Allah's Will" and "Dream and Swine and Aurora," and Tsai Ming Liang's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, the paper applies theories of narrative prosthesis, debility, crip time, and social and minority models of disability. While these frameworks highlight the symbolic, social, and political aspects of disability, their application to Malaysian contexts reveals certain limitations in the understanding of the intersections of bodily difference, racial identity, and historical violence. The paper therefore proposes a relational theory of disability, which posits that the meaning and significance of a bodily difference does not exist independently of the historical, social, and political circumstances in which it occurs.

INTRODUCTION

The end of colonial conflict rarely marks the end of its violence; instead, it lingers on in broken bodies, seeping even into literature, into cinema.

The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), a guerrilla war that took place in British Malaya (Malaysia before independence from British colonial control) between the Malayan Communist Party and the British colonial authorities, defined ethnic relations and state policies of the newly independent Malaysia (Jackson, 2008). In suppressing the insurgency, the British implemented policies such as forcibly resettling the ethnic Chinese Malaysians, conflating them with the communist forces and thus institutionalizing the Chinese as security threats, a narrative that has influenced modern policies long after independence (Stubbs, 2004). The British forcibly relocated over 500,000 ethnic Chinese into guarded 'New Villages' (Stubbs, 2004), many of them with no affiliations to the Communists, a policy of mass displacement and food rationing that caused generational trauma and caused the ethnic Chinese Malaysians to be regarded with suspicion even after Malaysia gained independence.

In its aftermath, the postcolonial Malaysian state has constructed a linear narrative of national progress, aiming to blot out evidence of the trauma resulting from the racial violence and wartime occupation from its history. While this sought to overcome the divisions of the colonial past, it marginalizes and erases the unresolved histories of Chinese political persecution (Loh, 2025). Chinese Malaysian literature and film often challenge this sanitized narrative through their portrayal of disabilities, presenting bodies that are unable to fit within the state's vision of fast-paced, seamless national progress. Although the conflict ended in 1960, it revealed a problem that reaches far beyond the borders of Malaysia: what happens when a state tries to construct a unified national identity after historical violence by suppressing or forgetting it?

Existing Western disability theories have developed different ways of explaining how bodies become socially marginalized in analyses of Western literature and film, but they do not adequately account for representations in which disability is inseparable from racialized historical identity. How, then, should disability be theorized in a postcolonial, plural society such as Malaysia? Although Western disability theories are useful for understanding how disabled bodies and minds challenge ideas of normality, they cannot fully account for Malaysian Chinese literature, as these texts and films portray disability through the historical lenses of colonial counterinsurgency and racialized governance, situated in Malaysia's unique case of triangular anxiety.

Through an analysis of Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists,* Ng Kim Chew's "Allah's Will" and "Dream and Swine and Aurora", and Tsai Ming Liang's *I Don't Want To Sleep Alone,* chosen for their different portrayals of the Malayan Emergency and its consequences, this paper proposes a relational theory of disability, which understands disability as being shaped by the interaction between historical context, social imbalances, and bodily differences. These texts and films primarily explore Malaysian Chinese heritage, and offer vastly different outlooks into the psyche of the Malaysian Chinese population following the Malayan Emergency.

In postcolonial, plural societies such as Malaysia, where racial identities and racialized politics have been shaped by the government(s), the relational theory of disability interprets disability as a historically and socially contingent experience rather than an individual condition. A plural society, in particular, refers to a society with multiple ethnicities that interact but do not assimilate together (Furnivall, 1948). In the context of Malaysian society, ethnic groups of Malays, Indians, and Chinese coexist together, but they each maintain their culture and ways. Under the British colonial authorities, waves of Indian and Chinese migrants had moved to the then British Malaya. The government established separate racial identities for each group and organized political and economic spheres to be arranged around these classifications. Consequently, race became intertwined with political status, economic opportunity, and social power.

WHAT ARE DISABILITY STUDIES?

Disability studies provide a framework for understanding how literature and film construct ideas of normality. Rather than treating disability as only a medical condition, critical disability theories argue that disabled bodies often expose underlying social and political assumptions in a society. This paper will

examine Malaysian literature and film through David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis, Jasbir K. Puar's framework of debility, Alison Kafer's crip time, alongside the social and minority models of disability, to test the application of a relational theory of disability.

METHODS: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This paper draws on five influential approaches within disability studies because each explains a different relationship through which disability can be understood. Taken together, these frameworks provide a range of established approaches against which a relational theory of disability can be tested.

Framework 1: Narrative Prosthesis

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis argues that disability in literature is often used as a narrative device, where bodily difference becomes a metaphorical symbol for developing plot, rather than being represented as a lived condition (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000).

Framework 2: Debility

Jasbir K. Puar's framework of debility shifts away from individual impairment toward the ways in which state power causes populations to be unequally exposed to harm and vulnerability, particularly under racialised systems (Puar, 2017). Puar chose to use the term 'debility' to describe how states intentionally wear out or injure certain populations, separating it from 'disability', which she sees as being tied to medical issues and rights-based calls for inclusion.

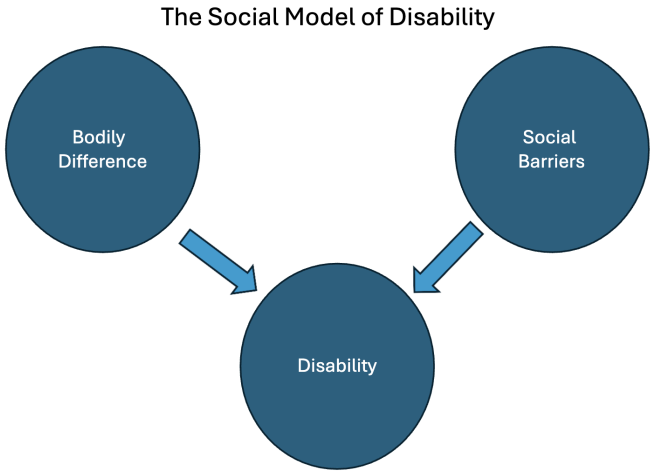
Framework 3: Crip Time

Alison Kafer's concept of crip time argues that disability disrupts the experience of linear time that is shaped by industrial productivity, portraying disabilities as being politically charged (Kafer, 2013). Conventional timelines often organize life around expected milestones such as education, employment, and marriage, treating deviations from these marks as failure. However, Kafer understands disabled experiences of time, whether through unpredictable life events or the incompatibility between their bodies and the task required, as exposing the political assumptions that lie within this expectation of linear time. Therefore, crip time can become a form of radical resistance by challenging the expectation that all bodies should progress according to the same productive schedule.

Framework 4: The Social Model of Disability

The social model depends on a clear divide between the impairment (the actual difference within the individual) and the disability (the disadvantage caused by a society that fails to accommodate such individuals), which argues that exclusion arises primarily from external, societal barriers rather than the body itself (Barnes and Mercer, 2004).

Figure 1
The Social Model of Disability

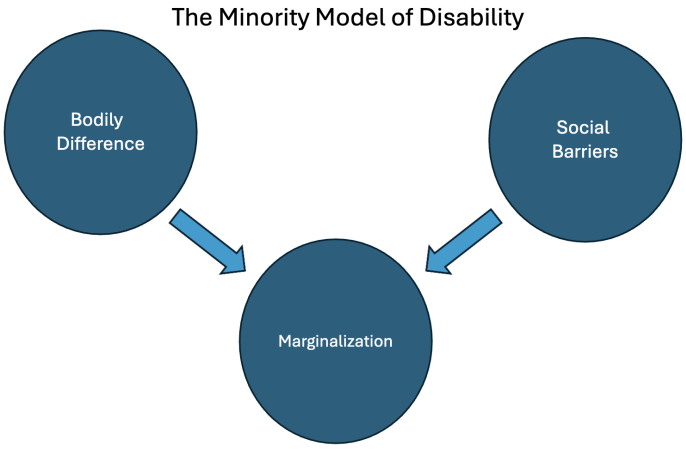


Note. Author's own conceptualization of model.

Framework 5: The Minority Model of Disability

The minority model similarly frames disability through rights-based social inclusion and political recognition. The minority model of disability understands disabled people as a marginalized minority whose exclusion results from both social and political barriers rather than from bodily difference alone.

Figure 2
The Minority Model of Disability



Note. Author's own conceptualization of model.

Application of Theoretical Frameworks

They are not treated in this paper as interchangeable or as a single 'Western' understanding of disability, frequently applied to mostly Western literature and film. Instead, they provide distinct analytical lenses through which to examine how disability is constructed in Malaysian Chinese literature and film, and why analyzing disability in a postcolonial, plural society requires the relational theory of disability.

THE QUESTION OF WESTERN FRAMEWORKS

These disability frameworks emerged from particular Euro-American historical contexts. The social model of disability, for example, developed alongside the disability rights movement and general reform in postwar Britain in the late twentieth century, demanding greater accessibility in the modern state (Tregaskis, 2002). Similarly, the minority model of disability draws from the civil rights movement in the United States of America and the subsequent Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, emphasizing disability as a basis for legal rights and political recognition (Burke and Barnes, 2017). These contexts have shaped the questions the models ask: how can social institutions be made more accessible, and how can disabled people secure recognition from the state? While such questions remain valuable, they do not fully reflect the reality of societies in which social identity and political inclusion have been shaped by colonial rule, political violence, and racialized governance. In this context, race determines vulnerability. For example, during the Malayan Emergency, Chinese identity became associated with communist insurgency, meaning that being Chinese could affect how someone was treated by the political and legal institutions, regardless of whether that individual had any communist affiliation. The Malaysian case exposes an aspect of disability that becomes particularly visible when bodily difference collides with racialized political power and histories of violence: disability is relational, because what makes a body vulnerable cannot be separated from the historical and social position that body occupies.

Therefore, the problem is not that these frameworks are inaccurate, but rather that treating them as universally applicable may deny certain understandings of disability that are situated in postcolonial, plural societies such as Malaysia.

FINDINGS: TOWARDS A RELATIONAL THEORY OF DISABILITY

This paper proposes a relational approach that can be used to analyze disability in contexts where bodily difference cannot be separated from racialized history and political power. It understands disability not as a condition of the individual body, nor solely as a societal barrier, but instead as a relationship between bodily difference, social identity, historical context, and power systems. While existing disability frameworks do offer important ways in which we understand how ideas of normality are created, they can risk separating the body from the historical and political circumstances that give the difference its meaning.

Firstly, disability is relational, rather than individual. The meaning and significance of a bodily difference does not exist independently of the circumstances in which it occurs. For example, an impairment can have different meanings depending on whether it results from an accident, illness, colonial violence, or persecution. Although the physical difference itself may remain, its social implications are shaped by the circumstances surrounding it. A person's missing fingers as a result of a concentration camp cannot be understood simply as an individual impairment. They are the consequence of imprisonment and torture during that time period, making the disability inseparable from the historical violence that produced it. A relational theory therefore distinguishes between the reality of bodily difference and the social and historical relationships through which that difference becomes defined as a disability.

Secondly, disability is produced through intersecting social identities. Identities such as race, class, gender, and citizenship determine how the body is classified. In the context of post-Emergency Malaysia, this is significant as racial identity became entangled with political affiliation. For example, the bodily impairment of a Chinese detainee cannot be understood independently of their political identity as a former member of the Malayan Communist Party. Their body becomes a part of the state's perception of the Chinese population as a collective security threat. Therefore, disability, in this view, is not experienced by an abstract individual, but by a person occupying a particular position within a social hierarchy.

Thirdly, disability is historically contingent. The power structures that determine which bodies are considered vulnerable or valuable are products of their historical circumstances. In postcolonial Malaysia, for example, colonial systems of racial classification and counterinsurgency turned Chinese identity into a category of political suspicion. This created new forms of vulnerability by determining which bodies and identities are exposed to violence and exclusion. Thus, the meaning of disability itself cannot be separated from the historical power structures through which particular bodies become vulnerable.

Disability is Relational, Not Individual

Disability is relational, rather than individual: the significance of an impairment does not exist independently of the circumstances in which it occurs. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, the protagonist Yun Ling's disability complicates Mitchell and Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis because her bodily injuries cannot be reduced to a metaphorical literary symbol, but instead emerge directly from the historical violence of the Japanese occupation in post-Emergency Malaysia. The book features the character of Yun Ling, who is a Malaysian-Chinese survivor of the Japanese concentration camps during their occupation of British Malaya in World War Two. Her disabilities are two-fold: she lost two fingers in the concentration camp, and in her old age, she is losing her memory to progressive aphasia.

While Mitchell and Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis may evaluate Yun Ling's missing fingers as being a symbolic crutch, serving as a metaphor for a character's inner turmoil, it contains Western biases. Narrative prosthesis assumes the disabled characters are used as plot devices to evoke pity in the reader or that the disabilities themselves are symbolic of the characters' inner turmoil. However, *The Garden of Evening Mists* is set during the Malayan Emergency, a period of massive social and political upheaval, and Yun Ling's missing fingers are a direct consequence of the Japanese occupation. As academic Jasbir K. Puar argues, prevalent in Western disability theories is the idea that the disabled person benefits from 'white privilege and class and economic mobility' (Puar, 2017). Rather than it being an individual accident, Yun Ling was a victim of mass concentration camps, aimed to strike fear in dissidents and enforce loyalty to the Japanese. As such, her disabilities are not an apolitical, symbolic crutch of inadequacy, but rather a reflection of the book's historical context and her geopolitical reality.

Yet Yun Ling's identity is situated within a plural society. J.S. Furnivall uses the term 'plural society' to describe a society containing different peoples, each practicing their own culture and religion, without much intermingling. In the context of Malaya, the British applied the colonial method of 'divide and conquer', by drawing racial divides and exacerbating ethnic tensions (Stubbs, 2004). The Malays were pitted against the Chinese and Indians, the Chinese and Indians against the Malays, and the Chinese against the Indians. Puar's theory of debility cannot be accurately applied to Malaya, as she assumes a binary model of the colonizer and the colonized: the colonizer physically maims the colonized to assert control. However, in Malaya, there was a unique triangular anxiety: the British colonizers relied on Chinese labor for their economic interests, the Malay elites wanted to maintain their political power over the economically-dominant minority, and both the British and the Malays feared the spread of the Chinese-led Communist uprisings in Malaya (Ryan, 1969). As the British worked together with the Malays, Puar's theory of debility falls short as the state's objective was not to physically disable the Chinese population, but rather to contain them politically and socially. Hence, while Mitchell and Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis is useful in highlighting how Yun Ling's missing fingers possess symbolic significance, it cannot fully account for their representation in the book. Her disability is not solely a metaphor for her psychological turmoil; her missing fingers are a direct consequence of the violence she experienced during the Japanese occupation. Mitchell and Snyder distinguish between disability as a lived experience and disability as a literary metaphor. However, in Yun Ling's case, the symbolic meaning of her disability emerges from her historical reality. The bodily and symbolic aspects cannot be separated because her impairment is itself a direct consequence of historical violence.

The same relationality appears in Tsai Ming Liang's *I Don't Want To Sleep Alone*. Tsai Ming Liang's 2006 film, *I Don't Want To Sleep Alone,* extends beyond the Malayan Emergency. Ultimately, it is a profound exploration of Malaysian society as a whole, capturing the suffocating weight and smog of historical trauma, set against the urban landscape of Kuala Lumpur (KL). The film revolves around a nameless ethnic Chinese man, known only as Homeless Guy, who is beaten up by gangsters. A group of Bangladeshi construction workers carry him back to their home to tend to his wounds, and among them, one of the protagonists, Rawang, spends the most time with the nameless man, tenderly taking care of him.

The film ends with a surreal shot of nurse Chyi, Rawang, and Homeless Guy floating on a mattress across the flooded basement of an abandoned construction site, while the city's air turns into toxic smog. Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis posits that traditional media uses disability as a plot device, which should be cured at the end to restore order - or that the disabled character dies. However, Tsai refuses to grant his characters a 'cure' or even death. Even as the toxic smog envelops Kuala Lumpur, the characters float on the mattress across the water, still alive, and the film ends in silence. Tsai thus demonstrates that their survival is not due to government intervention or the radical rebellion of Western disability studies, but rather an interdependency among humanity - that transcends racial barriers. Thus, Tsai rejects narrative prosthesis; like Yun Ling, the disabilities of the film characters cannot be reduced to apolitical metaphors. They are not symbols of a new, urban Malaysian. They remain exactly who they are: vulnerable, marginalized, and broken, thus forcing the audience to confront the reality of the country's damaged past. The film refuses to let broken bodies and broken time be used as cheap metaphors for national redemption.

Intersectional Identities and Disability

Disability is produced through intersecting social identities. The interaction between different identities such as race, class, gender, and citizenship determines what impairment means and what consequences it produces.

Ng Kim Chew's short story 'Allah's Will' highlights the limits of the social model of disability by showing how, in the aftermath of the Malayan Emergency, the state constructs Chinese identity itself as a collective political threat. Unlike the social model's assumption that exclusion can be addressed by removing societal barriers and accommodating difference, Ng portrays a state that actively creates that barrier by pushing forward the narrative that race determines political belonging. In 'Allah's Will', Ng tells of a Chinese ex-guerrilla of the Malayan Communist Party, who surrendered and was allowed to evade execution if he submitted to total cultural assimilation. The fractured racial tensions between the Malays and the Chinese engineered by the British policy of 'divide and conquer' were exacerbated by the Chinese affiliation to the Malayan Communist Party. The main character, whose name is not given, makes a request to the Malay officer, who was formerly his childhood friend, "This request is perhaps somewhat extreme. . . Please don't punish our entire race simply on account of our activities" (Ng, 2016, p. 125). Through the protagonist's appeal, Ng highlights how the state treats an entire race as a political ideology, revealing that his vulnerability is not understood by the state as an individual consequence of his political

actions. Instead, his Chinese identity becomes evidence of collective political danger. Ng thus depicts race as a socially produced difference that determines an individual's exposure to state violence, regardless of his individual actions.

This differs from the social model of disability, which distinguishes bodily impairment from the social barriers that prevent individuals from participating equally in society. In Ng's Malaya, however, the problem is not simply that an existing difference is inadequately accommodated. The state itself produces the disabling conditions by transforming racial identity into a basis for surveillance, displacement, and exclusion. In 1950, the Briggs Plan forcibly relocated over 500,000 ethnic Chinese, most without affiliation to the Communists, into 'New Villages' that were guarded by barbed wire, surveilled by officers, and were put under enforced curfews ("The Malayan Emergency: Digital Map", n.d.). The resulting vulnerability therefore cannot be explained solely as an external barrier against an otherwise neutral individual. From a relational perspective, Chinese identity becomes disabling not because it is inherently an impairment, but because the state attaches material consequences to that identity.

In the plural society under the terror of the Emergency, the state treats race itself as a collective social disability. The existence of the Briggs Plan dismantles the social model of disability, which argues that society fails to accommodate those with impairments. However, the social model fails to account for a circumstance when race itself becomes the difference that is stigmatized and when society is actively oppressing, rather than simply failing to accommodate. To escape execution, the protagonist of Ng's story is forced to sign a contract to relinquish his former cultural identity; 'You must never again use Chinese' (Ng, 2016, p. 126). Historically, following the Emergency, the state erased Chinese anti-colonial activism, contributions towards independence, and economic efforts, flattening all of it into simply communist terrorism (Low, 2021). Because the state viewed this race as being inherently dangerous to national unity - being racialized into a collective social disability, it sought to cure it through cultural conversion. Under the 1961 Education Act, the government defunded Chinese-medium secondary schools (Yow, 2021). However, forceful deportations were used to banish ethnic Chinese that were suspected of harboring leftist sympathies (Low, 2014); often, such deportations bypassed the courts and did not grant the suspect a trial. Between 1948 and 1953, the British deported over 24,000 ethnic Chinese (Hara, 2017). This fear of impermanent existence led the Chinese community to develop a protective silence, leading to generational amnesia (Tan, 2012).

In 'Allah's Will', the precariousness of their legitimacy is reflected in the protagonist's Malay friend saying, "Which of you Chinese didn't come from somewhere else? And yet you have the gall to fight about this and that. Do you want to become our masters? If we weren't so magnanimous, we could have sent you all back to China long ago!" (Ng, 2016, p. 139). However, despite the protagonist's total cultural conversion, he is still unable to assume the rights of a Malay citizen and notes that the 'Chinese flame' in his heart hadn't been extinguished; "A Chinese . . . But what is a Chinese? For thirty years, I haven't spoken Chinese, haven't written Chinese, and haven't read Chinese. Instead, I have spoken Malay, taught Malay, have abstained from pork, have eaten Malay food, married a Malay wife, and had Malay children. Yet, that Chinese flame in my heart hasn't been extinguished. Why is this?" (Ng, 2016, p. 138). The social

model's solution of providing accommodation and progressive reforms fails when the state is actively erasing the collective disability of the 'Chinese race' – and even the state's solution of cultural conversion is shown to fail in Ng's Malaya, with the protagonist musing: "I often wondered why couldn't I become completely Malay, given that I was no longer able to be completely Chinese?" (Ng, 2016, p. 138)

Tsai Ming Liang's film *I Don't Want To Sleep Alone* supports this view that race in a postcolonial context, visibility can become a mechanism of racialized violence, rather than liberation. One of the few lines of spoken dialogue in Tsai's *I Don't Want To Sleep Alone* is addressed towards the Homeless Guy in the beginning, when one of the gangsters demands: "'Speak up! What race are you? Probably Chinese." (Tsai, 2006). The Western minority model of disability asserts that disabled people are marginalized by social barriers, such as race. However, applying this minority model to this Southeast Asian film exposes its limitations in a postcolonial context. The model relies on a Western civil rights logic, assuming that greater visibility will lead to liberation. Yet, in Tsai's KL, shaped by the racial fractures of the Malayan Emergency, visibility leads to violence. Instead, the lasting silence throughout the film is the response to the gangster's demand to 'speak up.' The postcolonial state demands categorization to police differences, not to accommodate it.

Disability is Historically Contingent

History is an active agent in the ways society perceives bodies. In another of Ng's short stories, namely 'Dream and Swine and Aurora,' the explanatory abilities of Kafer's theory of crip time (the rejection of a linear timeline, with the expectation that all bodies are subjected to the same productive capacities) are limited due to the fact that Ng Kim Chew represents fractured time not as radical resistance, but as the psychological aftermath of post-Emergency state violence against the Chinese community. The story revolves around a Malaysian Chinese mother, who has lost track of time and her sense of reality; "Tell me the truth, am I dreaming now, or is this really happening?" she says to her daughter, after waking up from a series of events that turned out to only be nightmares (Ng, 2016, p. 45). The unnamed mother is a pig farmer, who wants to provide her many children with a better life than she has had. For most of the story, the mother is stuck in a series of hallucinations, no longer able to distinguish the difference between dreams and reality. Most of her dreams revolve around her desperation to provide her children with an education so that they can follow the linear timeline of success (going to university, graduating with a degree, getting a job), but the story constantly hints that she is haunted by her understanding that their racial classification will block her children from accessing this pathway. Her fractured relationship with time becomes disabling because of the contradiction between her traumatized mind and the state's sanitized timeline of linear progress.

Alison Kafer's concept of crip time celebrates the experience of non-linear time as being a radical political agency, proudly denouncing the timelines of capitalism. However, the mother's temporal disorientation is not an act of defiance, but rather her inability to fit into the government's narrative of linear progress. The mother initially relies on the linear timeline that the state provides: working hard so that her children can get education so that they can have social security, to validate their rights to exist in a state that views them with suspicion; "I've struggled my entire life, but what comforts me the most is that

I've managed to raise several children who went on to college" (Ng, 2016, p. 40). Yet her attempt to achieve security by following the linear timeline is disrupted by the government's institutionalized discriminations. This trauma surfaces in her nightmare, where a state official hands her an award for giving birth to a dozen children but then immediately criticizes her family's source of income; "Stop raising pigs. You know that we don't eat pork. Besides, . . . we can't stand the smell of pig manure" (Ng, 2016, p. 43). When the mother protests that it is the only way she can support her children's education, the official destroys her dream of security; "He smiled mischievously, 'Even if your children were to get an education, that wouldn't necessarily mean that they'll be able to find a job'" (Ng, 2016, p. 43). When the government's clean narrative of meritocratic linear progress fails her, her relationship with time fractures completely; "Didn't you graduate many years ago? Didn't you return home a long time ago? Didn't you earn your money in Sabah?" (Ng, 2016, p. 28). While Kafer's crip theory is framed as a rebellious act against capitalism, the mother's mental disorientation is a defense mechanism against state's discrimination. Kafer's theory operates on a privileged framework that assumes that a broken relationship with time is a tool that can be intentionally wielded against systemic norms. Thus, Ng illustrates that crip time in Malaya is not an act of radical resistance, but rather the psychological wound of a rigged national narrative.

In *The Garden of Evening Mists,* the protagonist Yun Ling's fractured temporal orientation is similarly reflective of the incompatibility between the nation's sanitized narrative and the trauma still felt by affected communities. The gardener Aritomo notes to Yun Ling, "You are still there, in the camp. You have not made it out", after she says, "Sometimes I'm so frightened... I'm frightened that this is how I will feel for the rest of my life" (Tan, 2012, p. 276). Alison Kafer's crip theory can be applied here to use Yun Ling's broken body and broken sense of time to contradict the state's narrative of clean, linear progress; during the Emergency, the government-sanctioned Malayan Film Unit produced documentaries and media to push forward the idea of clear progress, instead of addressing the bodily and mental trauma faced by the Chinese minority (Loh, 2025.)

There are long periods of silence in the film, only filled by the sound of mundane tasks, such as scrubbing the floor or smoking a cigarette; dialogue is sparse and little. Scenes are drawn out, sometimes uncomfortably long, with sudden cuts to another scene, and there does not seem to be an overarching storyline. Tsai's KL isn't glamorous, instead he strips away the romanticized version of the city to focus on the gritty details of urban life. We mainly see characters in stasis, waiting and sitting or lying in bed; they seem to be waiting for something. Similar to Ng's works, applying crip theory to this film risks flattening the geopolitical realities of a post-Emergency Malaysia. The stasis and silence of the characters cannot be read as an act of defiance, unlike Kafer's argument. Rather, the main cast of characters - a homeless person (Homeless Guy), a migrant worker (Rawang), a maid (Chyi) – are outcasts of the city's hyper-capitalist and breakneck speed. As they cannot keep up with the country's rapid modernization, they spend their days in slow and silent repetitive cycles, which Tsai utilizes to highlight the socioeconomic paralysis experienced by those excluded from the national promises of progress.

CONCLUSION

Disability theory cannot separate the bodily difference from the process through which bodies themselves become disabled. Ultimately, representations of disabilities in Chinese Malaysian media cannot be accurately understood through Western critical disability frameworks alone. While these theories explain how bodily differences, social constructs, and time itself shape representations of disability, their application to a post-Emergency Malaysia illuminates their inability to fully account for the relationship between vulnerability through racialized state power in a plural society. This paper thus proposes a relational theory of disability, in which disability is understood as being historically and socially contingent, allowing it to be applied to the unique triangular anxiety in Malaysian history. This approach does not reject existing disability frameworks, but instead recontextualizes them within the historical power structures that shape the bodies in question. In the case of post-Emergency Malaysia, disability must be understood through the legacy of racialized colonial control, the politicalization of the Chinese identity, and the continuing question of belonging within a plural society, categorized by the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups that maintain their own way of life.

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