



## DOUBLE SHACKLES AND WOMEN'S BREAKTHROUGH: A CRITICAL STUDY OF PATRIARCHY IN "LAND OF LOST SOULS" UNDER FOUCAULT'S DISCIPLINARY THEORY

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### Abstract:

This paper takes the novel " Land of Lost Souls " by Malaysian writer Li Zishu as the research object, and combines Michel Foucault's disciplinary power theory with feminist perspectives to analyze the dual oppression of women by patriarchy and social ethics and their resistance mechanisms. Through close reading of the text and critical discourse analysis, the study reveals how explicit violence and implicit discipline in the novel conspire to act on women's bodies and identities, especially focusing on the dual marginalization of gender and disability faced by characters such as the blind girl Yinxia in the family, workplace and public sphere. The paper further explores the hidden resistance of women through deviant practices such as silence, illness, and madness, and its potential subversive significance to the power structure. This study provides an interdisciplinary analytical path for the study of Malaysian Chinese literature, and reveals the dynamics of oppression and resistance at the intersection of gender and ability from the perspective of the global South, which is enlightening for understanding the operation of structural power and the construction of subjectivity of marginalized groups.

### Keywords:

"Land Of Lost Souls"; Foucault's Disciplinary Theory; Patriarchy; Double Shackles; Resistance

## Introduction

"Land of Lost Souls" is a novel written by Malaysian writer Li Zishu. The novel is set in "Xidu" and takes the life experience of the blind girl Yinxia as the main line, interweaving the ups and downs of the fate of several families for decades. "Land of Lost Souls" presents the various aspects of Xidu women in a collection way" (Dewei., 2020), trying to present "a long scroll full of Worldly flavor of the market, depicting the ups and downs and changes of personnel in the Malaysian Chinese society in the past few decades" (Dewei., 2020). It demonstrates the tenacious vitality and deeply shows the survival picture of the Malaysian Chinese community in the torrent of the times. Since the publication of "Land of Lost Souls" in 2020, it has become a phenomenal work in the world's Chinese literature, attracting widespread attention and repercussions from all walks of life, and is even called the most important work in the new generation of Malaysian Chinese literature.

## Literature Review

Li Zishu's "Land of Lost Souls" has attracted widespread attention since its publication, and the academic community has discussed it from multiple angles including narrative art, character creation, cultural symbolism, and national allegory.

### *Realism and Narrative Techniques*

Wang Dewei pointed out that "Land of Lost Souls" is Li Zishu's return to realism, and through the interweaving of the omniscient perspective and the perception of the blind girl Yinxia, the city scene of Xidu is constructed. However, the novel does not stop at traditional realism, but deconstructs linear history with modernist techniques (such as non-linear narrative and time-space jumps), forming a "visual ruin" (Derrida's words), challenging the authority of traditional visual centrism (Dewei., 2020). Liu Shiyu further analyzed that through Yinxia's blind perspective, the novel transforms sensory experiences such as hearing and touch into narrative power, making the daily details of "Worldly" full of poetry, and at the same time enhances the tension of the text through foreshadowing and blank space (such as the truth of Yinxia's sexual assault) (Shiyu, 2021).

### *Group Image Creation and Women's Destiny*

Liu Shiyu (Shiyu, 2021) focuses on the complexity of male characters such as Old Gu and Xihui, such as Old Gu's selfishness and pathos, Xihui's cowardice and forbearance, revealing the survival dilemma of the lower-class characters. Xin Yang (Xinyang, 2024) focused on the "death writing" in "Land of Lost Souls", explaining Li Zishu's understanding of life consciousness and death concepts, as well as his affirmation and exploration of the value of individual life. Tang Lanxi (Lanxi, 2023) analyzed the suffering female images in "Land of Lost Souls" and believed that the female group is always in a social atmosphere where they may be suppressed at any time. This oppressive atmosphere permeates every plot of the novel, making the anxiety and uneasiness of the marginalized female images more prominent. In "Analysis of the Portrait of Malaysian Chinese Women in "Land of Lost Souls", Meng Yu (Yu, 2023) analyzed the causes of the plight of lower-class Malaysian Chinese women from the perspective of feminism and spatial theory. Han Yuxuan (Yuxuan, 2021) pointed out that the tragic cycle of three generations of women criticizes patriarchy and gender oppression, but Li Zishu did not fall into the feminist rut, but presented the grayness of human nature from an inclusive perspective. Feng, Yi-Ling emphasized the anxiety of the female body in "Land of Lost Souls" that is "uncomfortable" under the patriarchal gaze (Yiling, 2023). Tang Zhiqing further analyzes Yinxia's "restlessness": her desire for control in the chess game, her struggle

in the blind asylum, and her confession in the elevator all reflect her rebelliousness; but her dependence on Gu Youguang at the end also exposes the limitations of male redemption in the narrative of female growth (Zhiqing, 2024).

### ***Integration and Conflict of Multiple Cultures***

Wang Dewei and Shen Xiayan both focus on the symbolic meaning of Indian cultural elements (such as Ganesha). Ganesha's broken teeth are a metaphor for the spirit of sacrifice, and Laju's death implies the common historical trauma of the Malaysian Chinese and Indian communities. The novel constructs a cultural landscape of multi-ethnic symbiosis through cross-ethnic friendship (Yinxia, Laju, Xihui), but ethnic barriers (such as the absence of Laju's funeral) still expose structural contradictions (Dewei., 2020; Shen, 2022). Tang Zhiqing uses postcolonial theory to interpret Li Zishu's local writing's concerns about multi-ethnic mixing, power structure, and women's growth through three parts: "mobile real life", "mixed third space" and "women outside the margins" (Zhiqing, 2024). The "third space" of multiculturalism Tang Zhiqing introduces Homi Bhabha's "third space" theory to analyze the significance of Xidu HDB as a cultural mixing field. Indian barbershops, Chinese temple fairs and Malay markets are juxtaposed, and languages, beliefs and customs blend to eliminate ethnic barriers and form a "balanced cultural identity". Raju's death symbolizes the fragility of this utopian space, while Yinxia's internalization of Ganesha's "sacrifice" spirit reflects the marginalized's active absorption of mixed culture (Zhiqing, 2024).

In the current academic community, researchers generally focus on the internal structure of the text. Han Yuxuan (Han Yuxuan, 2021) proposed Li Zishu's criticism of patriarchy and gender oppression, but he believed that this criticism did not come from feminism, but was a display of the grayness of human nature. However, this study disagrees with this. Although the female characters in the work live in the market, they show their own struggle against the established fate. Although this struggle is small, it is full of power. Through the portrayal of the living conditions of these women, Li Zishu not only presents the complexity and multifaceted nature of human nature, but also deeply reveals the shaping and restriction of individual life by the power structure. Hu Xingcan (Hu Xingcan, 2022) cited Foucault's "panopticism" to prove the symbiotic relationship between vision and power. Tang Zhiqing (Tang Zhiqing, 2024) tried to explore the grassroots life of the Malaysian Chinese community with power theory, but they only touched on it and did not carry out detailed analysis.

Current research generally focuses on the oppression suffered by women, but the in-depth exploration of the root cause of women's tragic fate, namely power inequality, is rarely involved. This study intends to adopt a feminist theoretical framework, draw on Michel Foucault's disciplinary power theory, and combine text close reading with critical discourse analysis methods to provide a new theoretical perspective for the in-depth analysis of the female image in "Land of Lost Souls". The study will explore the conspiracy mechanism between patriarchy and disciplinary power, and from the perspective of the interaction between discourse and power, deeply analyze the explicit violence reflected in the direct oppression of patriarchy in "Land of Lost Souls", the implicit discipline shaped by the social system, and how women can achieve breakthroughs and resistance through "deviant expression "

## Research Methods

### *Close Reading of Text*

This method emphasizes an in-depth interpretation of textual details, focusing on micro-level analysis such as language, structure, rhetoric, and imagery, aiming to uncover the text's deeper meaning, authorial intent, or implicit ideology. In this study, Li Zishu's novella "Vulgar Land" undergoes a detailed observation and in-depth interpretation, focusing on the dual shackles encoded within the text: explicit oppression (family patriarchy) and implicit discipline (social ethics). It identifies "patriarchal directive discourse" and "deviant expressions" of female resistance, such as in the following passage: "The temple keeper gave Yinxia a fleeting glance and waved his hand, 'Go, go! We don't accept blind people.' In response to Lianzhu's question, the man responded irritably, 'You're blind. Why don't you learn massage or play the erhu?'" Patriarchal directive discourse includes imperative verbs like "go" and "not accept." It labels Yinxia as "blind" and offers derogatory suggestions: "Learn massage" or "play the erhu." Lianzhu's follow-up question, "Why not accept her?", directly questions male authority. The juxtaposition of family space and social space, which is full of gender discipline, reflects the interstitial nature of women's survival; through images such as illness, silence, and madness, it reveals the disciplined bodies of women and the hidden paths of resistance, once again confirming the dialectical relationship of "the coexistence of resistance and power."

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Focusing on the interaction between language and social power structures, this study aims to reveal how discourse constructs ideology and maintains or subverts unequal power relations. In this study, critical discourse analysis links textual details with social context, analyzing how discourse reproduces or challenges power relations. In Li Zishu's "Sutras," this study focuses on patriarchal directive discourse and female resistance vocabulary, revealing the asymmetry of power distribution through the asymmetry between male and female discourse. It also explores the power relations within a pluralistic society in a postcolonial context through patriarchal discourse and the compounding oppression of women. For example, temple priests, as representatives of male authority, exercise disciplinary power through exclusionary educational policies such as refusing to admit the blind. Yinxia is relegated to an "undisciplined body," while Lianzhu's interrogation attempts to break the male monopoly on resources.

### **The Double Shackles of Patriarchy and Women's Path of Resistance**

Foucault pointed out that disciplinary power is not simply direct violent oppression, but rather a more subtle and effective form of power. It permeates every aspect of social life, subtly influencing individual behavior, thought, and identity through a series of subtle and complex rules and procedures. The Chinese community in Malaysia is under the surveillance and scrutiny of policies and laws, and endures the discipline of social power. Chinese women in Malaysia, in particular, face multiple oppressions and constraints. Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir once pointed out that women are not born but made. Katherine Murray Millett and Kate Millett, in their book *Sexual Politics*, further emphasize that patriarchal society constructs a series of artificial values based on biological differences. These values, regarding gender roles, temperament, and status, are carefully maintained through ideology, biology, psychology, economics, education, mythology, and religion, thus rationalizing, styling, and internalizing them, ensuring long-term domination over women. Therefore, gender inequality in society is a product of human will. Within the framework of the patriarchal order, women are confined to subordinate and controlled gender roles. Over the

long-term process of gender division and discipline, women gradually adapted to the hegemony of male ideology, ultimately developing what is known as "docile flesh." When Kate Millett introduced "patriarchy" into feminist theory, it became a core concept and foundational tool for analyzing gender relations. As Engels argued, gender inequality and class inequality coexist within the family. This demonstrates that within a patriarchal system, women not only face direct oppression from patriarchy but also endure the unfair constraints imposed by social ethics. This "double yoke" complicates the struggles faced by Chinese Malaysian women in their struggle for their rights and freedom. In *The Common Place*, we can clearly see the close collusion between patriarchy and disciplinary power, and how this collusion profoundly impacts women. Therefore, drawing on Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and a feminist perspective can provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender and power in *The Common Place*, revealing women's struggles and resistance in the face of patriarchal oppression.

### **Explicit Shackles: Patriarchal Directives and The Violent Discipline of Family Space**

#### ***Patriarchal Directive Discourse: Violent Coding of Derogation and Manipulation***

According to Foucault's concept of "micropower," language also embodies a strict form of power and is a crucial means of manipulating and controlling others. When Lianzhu and Yinxia visited the ancient temple to inquire about the charity school and its admission requirements, the temple keeper gave Yinxia a fleeting glance and waved, "Go, go! We don't accept blind people." In response to Lianzhu's further questioning, the man responded irritably, "You're blind, why not learn massage or play the erhu?" (Zishu, 2021). Garland-Thomson (Garland-Thomson, 2020) emphasizes that disability is not a physical "defect" but an identity constructed by society through the environment, cultural representations, and institutions. First, the temple keeper's statement, "We don't accept blind people," was not an objective statement but rather a ruling through the power discourse of socially constructed identities and exclusion from educational institutions. This defines people with disabilities as "bodies that cannot be disciplined," equating disabled bodies with "defective" identities, thereby depriving them of their right to education and solidifying the normative hegemony of "sighted people." Secondly, the temple keeper's response also highlights the suppression of female autonomy by male authority within patriarchy. His unpleasant and dismissive attitude undermines female subjectivity. Lianzhu, Yinxia's aunt, strives to secure educational opportunities for her, but the temple keeper, as a representative of male authority, rejects her with unquestionable force, highlighting the male control over resources and opportunities. The temple keeper's response to Yinxia's desire for an education reveals the patriarchal system's deep fear of women's access to knowledge. Education is seen as the exclusive domain of male authority, and women, especially those with disabilities, are excluded from the knowledge system to maintain the existing power structure.

Foucault noted that institutions of power that exercise control over individuals create a "binary division (normal/abnormal)" (Manaf & Quayum, 2001). Garland-Thomson (Garland-Thomson, 2020) argues that disabled bodies are "gazetted" as other, abnormal, and in need of correction. Thus, Yinxia's blindness is "gaze-gaze-ed" by Lao Gu and others, constructed as "abnormal," and her desire to attend a charity school is seen as a "deviant" from standardized education. Dahui's suggestion to "learn massage" and Lao Gu's rebuke of Yinxia for "not knowing her limits" are superficially "well-intentioned suggestions" or "realistic considerations," but in reality they are the gentle face of standardized violence. This violence

does not rely on physical oppression, but rather through "commonsense discourse," such as the "kind advice" that blind people can only do menial work. This naturalizes power oppression, achieves disciplinary purposes, and internalizes Yinxia's identity as an "inferior subject." Of course, this "gaze" comes not only from men but also from women. For example, Xihui's mother sees her as a "burden" and fears that Lao Gu will force Yinxia to marry Xihui. This demonstrates that disability discrimination is internalized into social structures.

***Body Control: Power Rituals of Marriage Transactions and Violence Performances.***

Auntie Mapiao's mother, Ms. Qiu, was abducted to Southeast Asia by the elders of the clan when she was a teenager. After a short period of upbringing, she was forced to get married. Her first marriage partner, Wu, was addicted to gambling, frequently absent from work, unable to bear family responsibilities, and from time to time violent to his wife and children. Ms. Qiu supported the family independently, but was frequently despised and abused by her husband's family. Later, her husband lost contact, and the relatives who abducted Ms. Qiu to Southeast Asia took the opportunity to transfer her to a middle-aged man named Ma again with tea gifts as a matchmaker. Ms. Qiu had no autonomy in marriage, and the elders of the clan could arbitrarily manipulate her marriage destiny, which demonstrated the power structure in the traditional clan system. The elder imposed discipline on her through the kinship network to control her body and marriage. From "accepting tea gifts from other families again" (Zishu, 2021) From the word "again", we can see that Ms. Qiu's first marriage was also based on the tea gift transaction. Her personal wishes were not taken seriously, and marriage and happiness were only regarded as the economic value of the tea gift. Tea gift, as a means of economic exchange, reflects the reality that Ms. Qiu was objectified as a tradable object. In the first marriage, although Ms. Qiu independently shouldered the burden of the family, she still could not escape the fate of being despised and abused; in the second marriage, her husband ignored Ms. Qiu and her children and resolutely abandoned the family and returned to his hometown. Behind the violence and economic exploitation in these two marriages, there is a gender logic that women are men's private property and that the marriage relationship gives men the right to dominate women's bodies.

At the funeral ceremony after his father's death, Dahui "scratched his head with one hand and took the cigarette handed to him by his uncles with the other hand. He seemed a little overwhelmed, and the cigarette in his hand was lit" (Zishu, 2021). This scene became a symbol of the handover of patriarchy. The lighting of the cigarette also meant that Dahui officially assumed the patriarchal role in the family. From then on, he was able to fulfill the responsibility of "brother taking the place of father", use the cane to discipline his younger brother, and serve as the main speaker in the family. He could "grab his wife's neck, hit her head against the wall once or twice", "the child was frightened and cried, and the old father-in-law was so scared that he trembled outside the door" (Zishu, 2021) The result of violent behavior is just "being kicked out of the house". Violence has become the default means for men to maintain family authority; he can also be "abandoned by his mistress" or "high on drugs" (Zishu, 2021). When a man is in power, he can abuse his spouse without any reason or explanation. Violence is the most naked display of patriarchy. It overrides women or weak groups and exerts influence without scruples. This display of violence is not only physical harm, but also a symbolic ritual of power, which establishes men's absolute control over women or the weak bodies by inflicting pain.

### **Hidden Shackles: The Standardized Coding of Social Ethics**

Kitchen Discipline: Spatial Solidification and Intergenerational Transmission of Gender Roles  
Foucault pointed out that "the human body is manipulated, shaped, and disciplined. It obeys and cooperates" (t. b. L. B. a. Y. Y. Michel Foucault, 2019). Judith Butler pointed out in "Gender Trouble" that "the reality of gender is created from continuous social performance" (Butler, 1990), "it is a style/programmed action that is repeated over the years" (Butler, 1990). Through social education, "women are defined as having to take on more trivial, emotional and intensive family care roles" (Huang He, 2003). In the repetitive performances day after day, the female role is disciplined as "family first", shaped and disciplined in the kitchen, trapped in the traditional gender division of "men are responsible for the outside and women are responsible for the inside", and women also "obey and cooperate" (t. b. L. B. a. Y. Y. Michel Foucault, 2019) and actively adapt. Huilan needs to balance work and raising children. Yinxia's mother Liang Jinmei gave up her career development to take care of the blind girl, which invisibly reproduces this unequal gender division of labor. It can be said that the imbalance in gender division of labor is actually the joint product of male-dominated power and female self-compromise.

Foucault pointed out that space is an important carrier of the operation of power. The kitchen in "Land of Lost Souls" is a disciplinary field that sanctifies motherhood through repetitive labor and intergenerational transmission, and confines it to the ethical framework of "female dominance". Women's career advancement space is restricted by the deprivation of time and energy, and women have long lost their right to speak and resist. Liang Jinmei's kitchen labor trajectory perfectly illustrates this point of view: when Yinxia was rejected by the Ancient Temple Charity School, Liang Jinmei whispered in the kitchen; when the pregnant girl jumped off the building, Liang Jinmei "chopped meat in the kitchen" (Zishu, 2021); when the ritual was performed upstairs, Liang Jinmei "washed, cut and cooked in the kitchen" (Zishu, 2021). At home and outside, when big and small things happen, Liang Jinmei can always be found in the kitchen. Her whispers in the kitchen and her constant presence in the kitchen reveal Liang Jinmei's lack of voice. The kitchen is not only a place where women lose their voice, but also a place where intergenerational discipline between women is passed on. Liang Jinmei would say to Yinxia with apology: "Mom is so sorry for giving half of the pot to your sister" (Zishu, 2021). "Chanjuan spent a lot of money to hire someone to renovate the dining room and kitchen" (Zishu, 2021), but now it is filled with the "claypot pots and pans brought from the HDB flats" by the Hemen Fang family. These old "claypot pots and pans" are placed in Chanjuan's newly renovated restaurant, just like the transmission of kitchen discipline from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law.

### ***The Double Discipline of Disability and Gender: Three Dimensions of Systemic Exclusion***

Social ethics implements implicit control through the binary division of "normal/abnormal". Yinxia has a deep desire for knowledge and education, but her body, which is labeled as "abnormal" by the standardized society, inevitably encounters the systematic exclusion of marginal life by power technology under the dual disciplinary network of patriarchy and disability discrimination.

### ***Educational Exclusion: The Disempowerment of Knowledge and the Violence of the "Abnormal" Label***

Yinxia's desire to attend Gu Miao Charity School was rejected. Her thirst for knowledge directly challenged the societal stereotype that women with disabilities should remain confined

to the home. Her mother's words, "Your father won't agree" (Zishu, 2021), clearly demonstrate that the right to education for women (especially women with disabilities) is implicitly considered an appendage of patriarchy, making the family the initial cage of gendered discipline. This also reflects that Yinxia's mother has been thoroughly "disciplined" by social norms, even implicitly accepting the legitimacy of ableism. When Yinxia attempted to enter Gu Miao Charity School, she was rejected and ridiculed. While visiting Xihui and Lazu's school, her hands and knees were covered in "bloodstains" (Zishu, 2021). And while learning Braille at the Mishan New Village Blind Home, she was assaulted by a member of the opposite sex. All of this seems to suggest that women with disabilities are inherently meant to "stay within their own limitations," confined to the narrow sphere of life society has tailored for them. All of this, in turn, reinforces stereotypes that women are "troublesome" and "weak," and that people with disabilities are "abnormal" and "burdensome." Consequently, educational institutions logically exclude women with disabilities from the knowledge system, upholding the privileges of able-bodied men.

### ***Occupational Restrictions: Gendered Labor Exploitation Under Productive Discipline***

Yinxia first learned weaving skills, and was later hired as a taxi operator. Her career choice was limited to "disabled positions". These measures seem to be "help", but in fact they are to incorporate people with disabilities into the productive discipline system. Society assumes that blind people can only engage in low-end labor such as operators and weaving net bags. This restriction on career development actually reflects institutionalized ability bias. Yinxia's "sweet voice" was labeled as "the flower of the radio station" (Zishu, 2021). On the surface, this is a compliment to Yinxia's voice, but in fact, through metaphorical substitution, Yinxia's professional ability is transformed into a "flower" with sexual appeal. By repeatedly using this label, the driver group anchored Yinxia's workplace value on "feminine traits" rather than her professional ability. When Yinxia asked driver 1348 to help pay attention to the appearance of the passenger, 1348 subconsciously teased: "Our radio flower is going to marry?" (Zishu, 2021) And 7503 even hinted in a vulgar tone: "You have to do it for her, touch that person, and feel his size and weight" (Zishu, 2021). This sentence is not simply sexual harassment, but a form of discourse discipline. By sexualizing Yinxia's body, even if she was not directly touched, she was forced to accept the identity of "workplace sex object" and endure the secondary discipline of gender labels. Yinxia's experience reveals that disabled women are suffering from the dual constraints of gender discipline and disability discipline.

### ***Emotional Repression: The Mental Confinement of Shame and Moral Kidnapping***

Yinxia is labeled as "incomplete" in the eyes of society. Her identity as a blind girl is defined as an "incomplete" existence by society. Therefore, even though Yinxia is clever and skillful, "it would be amazing if she could go to school" (Zishu, 2021). Even though Xihui has a vague affection for her, he still cannot get rid of his implicit prejudice against the "disabled". After Xihui and Lazu secretly took Yinxia to school and scratched her hands and legs, Xihui's mother said to Xihui sarcastically, "If you get disfigured, humph, Old Gu's wife will definitely ask you to marry this blind girl" (Zishu, 2021). This sentence not only exposes the discrimination against Yinxia as a blind woman, but also regards marriage as a compensation or burden for "disabled people", further deepening the social prejudice against disabled women. The unspeakable affection for Ismail, an English teacher at the blind home, was written in the letter. No matter how it was softened and modified, it was considered "frivolous and explicit" by herself (Zishu, 2021). Society solidifies disabled women as "others" through shame and moral kidnapping, depriving them of their emotional autonomy. Yinxia's identity as a blind woman

is like an invisible shackle, which not only restricts her free development in society, but also makes it difficult for her to have emotional autonomy. Yinxia's experience is a common dilemma faced by disabled women in a patriarchal society. They not only have to endure physical inconveniences, but also face various prejudices and discrimination from society, which makes them difficult to pursue freedom and equality. All of the above exposes the double marginalization and discrimination faced by disabled women.

## **Hierarchical Operation of Disciplinary Mechanisms: Power Collusion Between Space and Profession**

### ***HDB Flats: Transparent Cages in a Panopticon***

The core of the panopticon theory is to achieve all-round monitoring through spatial layout to ensure that the monitored person is always "visible". In the book "Land of Lost Souls", the Kinta flats in Xidu are a typical representative of the panopticon-style spatial layout. The flats are 20 stories high and are home to more than 300 households. The high density of residents makes the corridors, elevators and public areas naturally form a strict monitoring network. For example, when Yinxia was sleepwalking as a child, she was witnessed by her neighbor Baohua who came back from overtime at night. When the ritual was held in Dahui's house for the pregnant woman who jumped off the building, the neighbors upstairs and downstairs all "became quiet" and "held their breath" (Zishu, 2021), showing great concern for the movements of Dahui's family. The design of the Kinta flats unconsciously constructed a "transparent cage", where every move of the individual is exposed to the vision of others, forming a collective unconscious mutual surveillance, and the living conditions, behaviors and even family conflicts of the residents are exposed and nowhere to hide. Although Yinxia, as a blind girl, is somewhat protected from the direct intrusion of outside eyes, she can feel the oppression and ubiquity of the "visibility" discipline more deeply through hearing the movements of the neighbors. The violent quarrels in Dahui's house, the whispers of neighbors, and the collective peeping during the ritual all permeate her living space in the form of sound waves. This "auditory panopticon" not only strengthens Foucault's disciplinary logic of "continuous visibility", but also highlights the alternative monitoring mode after the disabled are deprived of visual power. This is a variant of Foucault's "panopticon", revealing the pervasiveness of disciplinary power. In addition, as a microcosm of the Tin City society, the operation of the spatial discipline of Kinta Flats also reflects the general oppression and surveillance of women in the patriarchal society. In such a social environment, women are often placed under stricter surveillance, and their behavior, moral qualities and even private lives are strictly judged and scrutinized by the outside world. The interweaving of this spatial discipline and gender politics further exacerbates the marginalization of women in the patriarchal society, making them face greater challenges in the pursuit of freedom and equality.

The Politics of Smiling in The Workplace: The Disciplinary Logic of Gendered Service Norms Huilan was promoted from foreman to deputy manager at Xilinmen Seafood Restaurant, but she still had to endure customers' difficulties. Foucault constantly emphasized that normalization is the core mechanism of discipline. At Xilinmen Restaurant, "smile" (Zishu, 2021) is constructed as a mandatory physical norm in the service industry. This smile is not a natural expression of emotion, but an institutionalized and constantly practiced facial performance. Through repetitive practice, body movements are closely bound to professional identity. In the service industry, it is necessary not only to respect and obey customers' requirements, but also to provide customers with patient and gentle emotional values. However,

in the same service industry, there are different gendered practices. As a deputy manager, Huilan was faced with the lady who "came up with a lot of ideas to toss people after a meal" (Zishu, 2021). In such a situation, she also had to "keep forcing a smile" (Zishu, 2021) until "the smile froze on her face" (Zishu, 2021), however, those "handsome and strong" (Zishu, 2021). Male waiters can easily please middle-aged and elderly ladies. This gendered service requirement makes female employees such as Huilan not only face the challenge of professional skills on the road to career advancement, but also have to bear the additional pressure brought by gender roles. Huilan's experience at Xilinmen Seafood Restaurant is a microcosm of gender discipline in the professional field.

This restaurant is like a Foucaultian "panopticon" (t. b. L. B. a. Y. Y. Michel Foucault, 2019). Huilan needs to adjust her expression at all times to cope with the gazes of all parties. Her every smile and every movement is judged invisibly. This constant surveillance comes not only from customers, but also from colleagues and management. They form a multiple surveillance network, which forces Huilan to be vigilant at work at all times to ensure that her words and deeds conform to the norms of the service industry. In such an environment, Huilan's body gradually becomes a product of discipline. Her smile becomes mechanical and rigid. This is not only the result of professional requirements, but also a deep imprint of gender discipline on her. She transforms the oppressive smile into a "professional skill" and becomes an accomplice of the disciplinary system.

### ***Covert Resistance Strategies: The Spectrum of Resistance from Silence to Madness***

Foucault believes that power and resistance coexist, and women have never stopped looking for possibilities to break through the cracks in discipline. In the male-dominated political carnival, women are often marginalized, but they have a unique way of nurturing the power of resistance in silence. This resistance is not a direct confrontation, but a more subtle and profound way of expression.

### ***Silent Resistance: Internalized Trauma and Silent Expression***

Auntie Ma Piao's mother, Ms. Qiu, after experiencing two marriages, firmly "vowed not to marry again" (Zishu, 2021). However, this determination not to marry again was not due to the fact that the widow's identity was bound by moral norms to the ethical framework of "being faithful to one man", but due to her complete disappointment with the role of "husband". Since then, she has purchased a piece of land, built a house, and made a living independently, breaking the spatial limitations of the traditional "inner chamber". With extraordinary willpower and hard work, Ms. Qiu resisted the discourse discipline in a silent way, transformed herself into a text of resistance, and opened up a living space in the cracks of the disciplinary system.

As a blind girl, Yinxia felt like "a weaver girl who had violated some heavenly law" after her body was violated (Zishu, 2021), weaving net bags at home all day long. In the long-term social and family discipline, Yinxia subconsciously believed that the fault was also on her, so she fought against the pain with silence, as if she had violated the law of heaven. The silence at this time is the mark of the trauma of the disciplined body. Choosing silence is essentially to transform physical trauma into the "invisible" side of others. Silence itself becomes a weapon of resistance. By keeping silent, it constitutes "active aphasia" of patriarchal discourse, making it impossible for physical experience to be included in the discourse archive of power. Of course, Yinxia's silence is an active choice, and she resists silently through labor practices such

as weaving net bags. Therefore, "silence" is really the "invisible" resistance that Foucault said, which disintegrates the visibility of power by refusing to participate in the discourse archive.

### ***The Body Breaks Down: Illness as an Indictment of Disciplinary Violence***

Huilan, who had been smiling and chatting at Xilinmen Seafood Restaurant, "suddenly felt deflated" as soon as she got home. "She could no longer control herself and collapsed on the bed" (Zishu, 2021). The scene of Huilan collapsing in a pile of clothes late at night implies the final collapse of the disciplined body. The wrinkled pile of clothes when she collapsed exposes the hidden nature of the family as a disciplinary institution; the face that is stiff with laughter reveals the oppression brought by the workplace as a panoramic open-view institution that accepts "irregular and frequent inspections". Under the dual discipline of women at home and in the workplace, Huilan's "body suddenly bursts like a balloon filled with liquid" (Zishu, 2021), her physical collapse is the result of physical overdraft and emotional repression, the trauma of internalized disciplinary power, and the body's secret resistance in the form of illness, which also reveals the unsustainability of exposing the power network .

Yinxia's visual impairment was unfairly labeled as "disabled" in society. The Ancient temple Charity School refused to accept her, and the radio station's job opportunity was only given because of "urgent need for manpower" (Zishu, 2021), and Old Gu's strong guarantee, so she barely got the opportunity to start as a part-time job. However, Yinxia's extensive knowledge and excellent memory amazed the taxi drivers of the radio station and spread the word. Yinxia stood out in the workplace with her extraordinary memory, turning her physical defects into part of her legendary career, completely subverting the traditional disciplinary concept. From being distrusted at first to becoming a well-known "pillar" in the radio station (Zishu, 2021), Yinxia's transformation was regarded as a miracle by her colleagues and a treasure by her boss. The change from old employees calling her "Xia girl" to "Xia sister" (Zishu, 2021) completely broke the stereotype that "blind girl" or physically ill disability equals incompetence, and dispelled the social prejudice against physical illness with her outstanding technical ability.

### ***Madness Crosses the Line: The Subversion of Power through Irrational Expression***

Chanjuan was a teacher. As a teacher, she had to maintain a "rational" and authoritative image. However, the student's suicide broke this norm. The moral requirements of society for teachers are like shackles. Even after the student died, the principal still "earnestly persuaded" her to believe that "she should take more responsibility for the girl's death" (Zishu, 2021). After marriage, Chanjuan was regarded as a "scholar" by her mother-in-law, Hemen Fang, but her resignation made Hemen Fang "not very satisfied" (Zishu, 2021). Her value was ultimately simplified to the fact that "people who have read books are indeed different, and they are more accurate in calculating" (Zishu, 2021) practical skills. In the workplace, because of the girl's death, the principal labeled her as "extreme", causing her to be publicly criticized many times; at home, she could not stand staying at home with her mother-in-law all day long, and her mother-in-law constantly denied her value. The gender division of labor in the family further compressed her spiritual space, which eventually led to her "nightmares". (Zishu, 2021), people become irritable, smash things, pull their hair and scream heartbreakingly. Chanjuan's nightmares and mania are the mental collapse after the failure of discipline, and also a silent accusation against the "normal" standards imposed by society. Foucault believes that "madness" is a product defined by social power (t. b. L. B. Michel Foucault, 2003), and Chanjuan's "abnormality" is actually an inevitable crack under the oppression of power.

The blind girl Yinxia was labeled as "abnormal" by society and was seen as a weak person who needed care. Therefore, her mother stipulated that she could only walk as far as Baluo Chinese Primary School and People's Park if she was accompanied by someone (Zishu, 2021). However, Yinxia has been stubborn and strong-willed since she was a child. Because of this, despite her congenital disability, she is unwilling to stay at home like other disabled people, taking odd jobs and doing casual work. Although "abnormality" can restrain Yinxia's body, it cannot imprison her soul. In sleepwalking, Yinxia moves freely and agilely, and she doesn't look like a blind person at all. Yinxia's sleepwalking symbolizes women's subconscious escape from the oppression of reality. This irrational and uncontrollable dream madness is an unconscious resistance and transgression to the blind people's obedience to the law. At the 100-day banquet for Aunt Lianzhu's child, Yinxia was so frightened that her face turned pale, her hands trembled, and she shouted loudly when she reached out to take the child. The madness was also a resistance to social discipline. Yinxia was raped and pregnant, "Liang Jinmei regarded this as a great shame, and she wished she could erase it from everyone's memory" (Zishu, 2021). The dean shirked responsibility and advised Auntie Ma Piao and others to keep the peace. Even Yinxia, whose mother had sternly warned her: "Is this a glorious thing? If you want to be a human being in the future, you can't even tell Xihui and Lazhu" (Zishu, 2021). Social discipline makes women ashamed to speak up to defend their rights when they are illegally violated. The child is directly strangled in the embryo, making a blind person endure the double "silence" of body and mind. When others thought that everyone, including Yinxia, had forgotten about the incident, Yinxia's shouting and unconscious crying after touching the child was tantamount to telling everyone: the harm can be ignored, but it has never been forgotten. Yinxia's irrational "mad" behavior is not abnormal in the sense of pathology, but an inevitable product of social discipline oppression, and an "other" shaped by civilization through power relations. As Foucault pointed out in "Madness and Civilization", "madness" is the reverse side of the definition of "rationality", an "abnormality" constructed by power, used to consolidate the "normal" authority of power (t. b. L. B. Michel Foucault, 2003). Chanjuan's "screaming and throwing things" late at night, Yinxia's uncontrolled crying in public, these "abnormal" behaviors reveal the hidden trauma, and it is through subverting the definition of "rationality" that the absurdity of the discipline system is exposed.

### Research Findings and Theoretical Significance

This study reveals that patriarchy in "Vulgar Land" not only exerts overt oppression through direct domestic violence (such as marriage transactions and physical control), but also exerts profound control over women through implicit discipline within social institutions and cultural ethics (such as educational exclusion, occupational gendering, and emotional moral coercion). Yinxia, a blind woman, endures the disciplinary mechanisms that intersect gender and disability, her body doubly "othered."

However, women are not entirely passive. Qiu's economic independence, Yinxia's professional success, and Chanjuan's frenzied resistance all embody hidden strategies of resistance. While these strategies do not completely overturn the power structure, they do create temporary rifts within the disciplinary network. The significance of this study lies in:

Providing an interdisciplinary analytical approach to the study of Malaysian Chinese literature that integrates Foucault's theory and feminist perspectives;

Enriching the case of gender studies in the Global South, particularly highlighting the subjectivity and complexity of disabled women in multicultural contexts;

Providing theoretical supplements to comparative literature and social theory regarding the specific forms of "discipline and resistance" in non-Western contexts.

## Conclusion

"Land of Lost Souls" is not only a family epic but also a micro-political history of how women survive and resist in a disciplinary society. Drawing on Foucault's disciplinary theory and incorporating feminist perspectives, this article reveals how patriarchy and colonial legacies exert control over women through multiple mechanisms, while also affirming women's ongoing resistance through their bodies, silence, and madness. Future research could further explore similar themes in other Southeast Asian Chinese literatures, or apply this framework to gender analysis in other postcolonial and disability-intersecting contexts.

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