

Out of Shadow: Tan Twan Eng in the Malaysian Literary Context

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Abstract—In Malaysian literature, few contemporary writers have emerged as prominently and poignantly as Tan Twan Eng. His works not only explore the complexities of cultural identity, shed light on the historical, social, and political realities of the Chinese Malaysian experience, but also incorporate postcolonial ecocritical perspectives and elements of cross-cultural fusion. Through his narratives, he offers a unique perspective that resonates with readers and contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonialism, identity, and cross-cultural interactions. This paper embarks on a nuanced reading of Eng's novels, endeavors to position his works within the larger framework of Malaysian literature, exploring their role in shaping and redefining the nation's literary canon. It delves into specific aspects of Tan Twan Eng's literary contributions, paying particular attention to his treatment of historical narratives, the exploration of cultural identities, and the integration of ecological elements. Through this analysis, we seek to unravel the unique qualities that distinguish Tan Twan Eng's novels and their significance in the Malaysian literary context.

Index Terms—Tan Twan Eng, multicultural Malaysia, Malaysian identity, Eco-Postcolonialism, novels

I. INTRODUCTION

Tan Twan Eng is a contemporary Malaysian novelist and lawyer, known for his critically acclaimed novels *The Gift of Rain*, *The Garden of Evening Mists*, and *The House of Doors*. Tan Twan Eng published his first novel, *The Gift of Rain*, in 2007, which marked the beginning of his journey to becoming one of Malaysia's most celebrated authors. He is best known for his 2012 book *The Garden of Evening Mists* which won the Man Asian Literary Prize and Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, making Tan Twan Eng the first Malaysian to be recognized by all three awards. He is one of the judges of the International Booker Prize 2023, the first Malaysian author to be appointed that role. His novels have been translated into more than 25 languages renowned for their exploration of historical and cultural themes, as well as their lyrical prose and intricate characterizations. Since he received the Man Asian Literary Prize as the first Malaysian writer, he has drawn much attention in the world. As one of the representatives of a new generation of Chinese Malaysian writers, Tan Twan Eng is more and more important in the literary circle, and he is even named "an excellent author" by his readers. The Man Booker Prize is one of the most prestigious awards in English-language literature. Tan Twan Eng's second novel, *The Garden of Evening Mists*, won the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. This award recognized his exceptional storytelling in the historical fiction genre. His novels often delve into themes of memory, identity, and the impact of history on individual lives. Eng's writing is profoundly influenced by his extensive travels and his experiences living in various countries, including South Africa and the United Kingdom. These encounters with different cultures and landscapes have contributed to the rich tapestry of his storytelling. His literary career is characterized by a deep exploration of historical and cultural themes, often intertwined with Malaysia's complex identity. Tan Twan Eng's literary journey is notable not only for its literary prowess but also for its profound engagement with the Malaysian experience. His works navigate the intricate tapestry of Malaysia's cultural heritage, reflecting the nation's multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural facets. With a focus on themes ranging from history and memory to identity and the environment, Tan Twan Eng's novels resonate deeply with readers, offering a unique perspective on Malaysia's past and present.

Eng's position and contributions in the Malaysian literary context highlight his significant role in shaping the landscape of literature in Malaysia. The combined impact of his dual shortlistings for the Booker Prize and the dual wins for *The Garden of Evening Mists* at the Man Asian Literary Prize and the Walter Scott Prize demonstrates his global recognition and influence. These accolades not only celebrate individual works but also emphasize Eng's overarching impact on the literary world. The global recognition of his storytelling prowess contributes to the broader conversation on the diversity and richness of contemporary Asian literature. This article embarks on an exploration of

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Tan Twan Eng's literary contribution and the profound influence he has wielded within the Malaysian literary realm. Further, it explores how his works have not only enriched the nation's literary landscape but also transcended its boundaries to gain international acclaim. The discussion centers on the thematic, stylistic, and cultural elements that distinguish Tan Twan Eng's novels and their significant impact on the Malaysian literary tradition. Through a comprehensive reading of his writings, this article highlights the profound connections between literature and identity, history, and environment in the Malaysian context and serves as a gateway to a comprehensive exploration of Tan Twan Eng's contributions to Malaysian literature within the broader context of contemporary global literature.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tan Twan Eng's works deeply rooted in the historical context of colonialism and its impact on Malaysia have gained critical acclaim and popularity and have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies and critical analyses. His works are known for their evocative prose, intricate storytelling, and deep exploration of themes such as cultural identity, memory, history, and the complexities of human relationships. He explores the legacies of British colonization, the struggles for independence, and the complex aftermath of decolonization (Smith, 2019). Tan Twan Eng skillfully blends historical events with fictional elements, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination. His narratives offer alternative perspectives on historical events, challenging conventional narratives and offering new insights into the complexities of the past (Poon, 2016). Tan Twan Eng's life and early influences offer valuable insights into the foundations of his literary journey. From his multicultural upbringing to his educational pursuits and encounters with diverse cultures, his experiences have shaped his unique perspective and narrative style. Additionally, his engagement with literature, both as a reader and a writer, and his exposure to cross-cultural experiences have further enriched his storytelling. By examining these aspects, we gain a deeper appreciation for the roots of his literary achievements and the distinctiveness of his voice in the literary world (Tan, 2015). Tan Twan Eng's writings often intertwine personal experiences with larger historical events. His personal encounters, such as travel experiences, family history, and encounters with historical figures, have influenced his storytelling. The colonial legacy in Malaysia has deeply impacted his understanding of power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and postcolonial issues (Menon, 2013).

Tan Twan Eng draws upon the rich cultural heritage and traditions of Malaysia, incorporating them into his storytelling. Traditional customs, folklore, and rituals are interwoven into the narratives, emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and the complexities of cultural hybridity (Wang, 2019). Mythology and symbolism are integral to Tan Twan Eng's storytelling. He incorporates myths and symbols from various cultural traditions, infusing his narratives with layers of meaning and exploring universal themes of love, betrayal, and redemption (Lim, 2017). Tan Twan Eng's exposure to different cultures through travel and living abroad has enriched his perspective and informed his portrayal of cultural encounters and hybridity. His experiences in Japan, for example, have influenced his depiction of Japanese culture, history, and aesthetics in novels like *The Gift of Rain* (2007). This intercultural exchange and blending of cultural elements contribute to the exploration of identity and the complexities of belonging (Lee, 2018).

The postcolonial era in Malaysia is a significant backdrop for Tan Twan Eng's narratives. He portrays the challenges faced by individuals and communities in the process of nation-building, the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the complexities of multiculturalism and national identity (Goh, 2016). Eng's novels, such as *The Gift of Rain* (2007), *The Garden of Evening Mists* (2012), and *The House of Doors* (2023) explore the aftermath of British colonial rule and its effects on individuals and societies. Through his characters, Eng delves into the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial contexts (Leong, 2017). The theme of diaspora and the search for a sense of belonging are recurrent in Tan Twan Eng's works. His characters often grapple with questions of identity and place, navigating between their ancestral heritage and the contemporary world. This exploration of diasporic experiences and the longing for a home resonates with readers who have undergone similar journeys (Hanif, 2020).

III. MULTICULTURAL MALAYSIA IN TAN TWAN ENG'S WORKS

Malaysian literature is a rich tapestry woven from the threads of diverse cultures, languages, and historical influences. Nestled in Southeast Asia, Malaysia boasts a unique literary tradition that reflects its multicultural and multilingual society. This literature has evolved over centuries, shaped by indigenous storytelling, the legacies of colonialism, and the contemporary dynamics of a modern, pluralistic nation (Zakaria & Jusoff, 2010). Malaysian literature is a vibrant and diverse tapestry of literary expressions that reflect the rich cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Malaysia (Al-Attas, 1977). It encompasses writings in various languages, including Malay, English, Chinese, Tamil, and indigenous languages, each contributing to the nation's literary landscape (Al-Attas, 1977). The history of Malaysian literature traces back to precolonial times when indigenous communities shared their stories, myths, and folktales through oral traditions. The arrival of various colonial powers, such as the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, significantly impacted the development of Malaysian literature. Colonialism brought new languages, religions, and cultural influences, which, in turn, influenced the literary output of the region (Salleh & Abdullah, 2003). The Islamic literature also plays a significant role in Malaysian literary history, with works like the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and *Hikayat Abdullah* offering insights into the cultural and religious dimensions of the nation. The colonial period, lasting until Malaysia's

independence in 1957, witnessed the emergence of Malay-language literature influenced by European literary forms, marking the beginning of modern Malaysian literature (Aw, 2011).

Malaysia is known for its vibrant festivals, and the three novels written by Tan Twan Eng are replete with rich and immersive descriptions of cultural traditions from various ethnic groups. Through his meticulous writing, he brings to life the customs, rituals, and celebrations that are an integral part of Malaysian life. Whether it's the Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, or Diwali, the festivals provide moments of cultural immersion and celebration. These festive scenes not only showcase the diversity of traditions but also emphasize the importance of cultural celebrations in fostering a sense of community and shared identity. Readers are transported into a world where they can smell the incense at a Chinese temple, taste the flavors of Indian cuisine, and hear the rhythms of Malay folk songs.

Another striking feature demonstrating the multicultural Malaysia in Tan Twan Eng's works is his inclusion of multiple languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of Malaysia. Growing up in Penang, Malaysia, Tan Twan Eng was exposed to a multilingual environment, including Mandarin, Hokkien, and English. The linguistic diversity of his surroundings and his exposure to different languages fostered a deep appreciation for linguistic nuances and the interplay between cultures. His immersion in literature during his early years was influenced by a wide range of authors and literary movements. Language and literature had a profound impact on him, shaping his cultural identity, literary aspirations, and narrative sensibilities. The multilingual environment of his upbringing, his exposure to diverse literary works, and the cultural and mythological influences he encountered all contributed to the richness and depth of his writing. Understanding the influence of language and literature in his formative years allows us to appreciate the intricate linguistic tapestry and literary craftsmanship evident in his acclaimed three novels. This linguistic inclusivity not only enhances the authenticity of his storytelling but also bridges cultural gaps, making his works accessible to a broad readership. Eng's deliberate interplay of languages and traditions showcases the beauty of Malaysia's multicultural mosaic. Readers encounter characters conversing in Malay, Hokkien, Japanese, and other languages, mirroring the multilingual reality of the country. This use of diverse languages serves to make the narrative more authentic and inclusive. It acknowledges the linguistic identities of different ethnic groups and highlights the importance of language as a carrier of culture. It also invites readers to engage with the linguistic diversity of Malaysia, fostering an appreciation for the nation's cultural richness.

Given Malaysia's colonial history, British and Western cultural influences are also integral to Tan Twan Eng's narratives. *The Gift of Rain* masterfully captures the colonial era's ambiance, from the grandeur of British mansions to the wartime experiences of locals. The clash of Western and Eastern cultures, especially during World War II, forms a central theme in the novel. The Japanese Occupation of Malaya during World War II profoundly influenced Malaysian history, for example, in *The Gift of Rain*, the reader is introduced to the Chinese martial art of Tai Chi, the Japanese tea ceremony, and the Malay practice of shadow puppetry. These cultural elements are not mere background details but are interwoven into the narrative, enriching the story and creating a deep sense of place. In *The Gift of Rain*, Eng also beautifully incorporates the art of batik, a traditional Malay textile technique, into the narrative. The character of Philip Hutton, who forms a close bond with Endo-san, a Japanese diplomat, becomes entangled in the world of espionage during World War II. The novel showcases the intricate process of creating batik, highlighting its significance in Malay culture. The act of crafting batik, with its intricate patterns and motifs, becomes symbolic of the fusion of cultures and the complexities of wartime relationships. Tan Twan Eng's vivid descriptions of the batik-making process evoke a sense of reverence for this traditional art form. He further delves into this period in *The Garden of Evening Mists*. He artfully incorporates Japanese cultural elements, such as the creation of a Japanese garden and the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, into the narrative. The meticulous research and attention to detail in depicting these aspects make the story authentic and immersive. Through the character Aritomo, a Japanese gardener, he explores the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi, which values imperfection and transience. This philosophy intertwines with the novel's themes of memory, healing, and reconciliation, highlighting the cross-cultural influences at play.

IV. ASPECTS OF TAN TWAN ENG'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO MALAYSIAN LITERATURE

A. Aspect 1: Exploration of Malaysian Identity

Tan Twan Eng's works delve into the Malaysian identity, capturing the struggles, aspirations, and dilemmas faced by individuals in Malaysia. His characters often navigate between their multicultural heritage and their Malaysian surroundings, grappling with issues of belonging, assimilation, and cultural preservation. In novels like *The Gift of Rain* and *The Garden of Evening Mists*, he portrays the complexities of Malaysian identity through multi-dimensional characters and intricate plots (Chua, 2018). Eng's novels also delve into socio-political realities that have shaped Malaysian identity. Through the lens of his characters, he addresses issues such as colonialism, cultural conflicts, and the struggle for independence. By bringing these socio-political themes to the forefront, Eng contributes to a critical examination of the forces that have shaped the nation, influencing how Malaysians perceive their own identity.

The Gift of Rain is set against the backdrop of the Japanese occupation of Penang during World War II, offering a poignant exploration of colonialism and its impact on Malaysian identity. The protagonist, Philip Hutton, grapples with his mixed heritage as the son of a wealthy British trader and a Chinese mother and faces the challenges of belonging to both the Chinese and European communities in Penang. Chua (2013) asserts that the novel "explores the dilemma of Chinese identity in Malaysia, emphasizing the dichotomy between the Chinese heritage and the surrounding Malaysian

culture". Philip's journey becomes a metaphorical exploration of the tensions and negotiations involved in navigating Chinese Malaysian identity. Eng delves into the complexities of identity, loyalty, and the moral quandaries faced by individuals navigating the tumultuous period of colonial rule. Through Philip's experiences, readers witness the profound effects of colonialism on personal and cultural identities, highlighting the broader socio-political landscape. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Eng skillfully explores the tensions between different ethnic communities—Malay, Chinese, and Japanese reflecting the socio-political realities of a nation in transition. The character of Yun Ling Teoh embodies the complexities of Chinese Malaysian identity. As a survivor of the Japanese occupation and a Chinese woman working in a British-dominated society, Yun Ling faces the challenge of reconciling her personal history with her present circumstances. Huang (2014) states that the novel "depicts the struggles of Yun Ling Teoh in reconciling her Chinese heritage and her Malaysian context". Tan Twan Eng presents Yun Ling's experiences as representative of the broader Chinese Malaysian community, highlighting their continuous negotiation of identity in a multicultural environment. *The House of Doors* explores the post-independence period, reflecting on the aftermath of the Malayan Emergency and the establishment of a new nation. Eng's depiction of this historical period contributes to a critical examination of the socio-political forces that shaped Malaysia's trajectory toward nationhood, especially contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges inherent in forging a unified national identity post-independence. In conclusion, Tan Twan Eng's novels serve as powerful vehicles for exploring and reflecting on the socio-political realities that have shaped Malaysian identity. By weaving these themes into the fabric of his narratives, he not only enriches the literary landscape but also contributes to a broader societal dialogue about the complexities of history, culture, and the ongoing quest for a unified Malaysian identity. By addressing themes of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage, Eng speaks to universal human experiences. Simultaneously, he proudly showcases the distinctiveness of Malaysian identity, making his works a cultural ambassador on the global literary stage. The global recognition of Tan Twan Eng's works positions Malaysian identity on the international literary stage. Eng becomes a cultural ambassador, showcasing the complexities and richness of Malaysian identity to a global readership.

B. Aspect 2: Representation of Malaysian Historical Context

Tan Twan Eng situates his stories within specific historical contexts, offering insights into the Malaysian experience across different time periods. His meticulous research and attention to detail recreate the socio-political climate of Malaysia, particularly during significant historical events such as World War II, the Japanese occupation, and the post-colonial era. In the realm of Malaysian English literature, Tan Twan Eng's novels have garnered both critical acclaim and popular recognition. His unique storytelling style and thematic explorations have captured the attention of readers and scholars alike, shedding light on the experiences and struggles of the Chinese Malaysian community. By anchoring his narratives in historical realities, he provides readers with a deeper understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by the Chinese Malaysian community (Huang, 2014). His portrayal of historical context in his novels reflects his nuanced historical perspective and his commitment to capturing the complexities of the past. His works present a blend of personal and collective histories, showcasing the ways in which individuals navigate the tumultuous events and cultural transformations of their time.

Eng's exploration of forgotten histories is a prominent aspect of his novels, as he aims to shed light on events, communities, and perspectives that have been overlooked or marginalized in mainstream historical narratives. He skillfully weaves these forgotten histories into the fabric of his stories, bringing them to the forefront and giving them the attention they deserve. One key aspect of Tan Twan Eng's historical perspective is his dedication to exploring forgotten or marginalized histories. He sheds light on lesser-known events, experiences, and communities that have been overlooked in mainstream historical narratives.

Tan Twan Eng uncovers obscure or lesser-known historical events and incorporates them into his narratives. He conducts meticulous research to unearth hidden stories and brings them to the forefront of his novels. By doing so, he challenges the dominant historical narratives and expands our understanding of the past. His novels often give voice to marginalized communities whose stories have been silenced or neglected. He highlights the experiences and perspectives of these communities, allowing readers to gain insight into their struggles, triumphs, and contributions. Through his characters, he humanizes these communities and helps restore their presence in historical discourse. By doing so, he challenges traditional notions of history and enriches our understanding of the past. In *The Gift of Rain*, he examines the impact of World War II and the Japanese occupation of Malaya on the Chinese community. The novel delves into the historical backdrop of political upheaval, resistance movements, and the struggles faced by the Chinese during this period. Through the character of Philip Hutton, a mixed-race protagonist, Tan Twan Eng offers a nuanced exploration of cultural identity and the complexities of loyalty within a colonial context. By intricately embedding his narratives within specific historical periods, he ensures that the experiences of Malaysia's past are not forgotten. The novels become a vehicle for preserving the collective memory of events such as the Japanese occupation during World War II, the Malayan Emergency, and the nation's struggle for independence.

Eng's historical perspective is multilayered, encompassing not only major historical events but also the individual experiences and perspectives of his characters. He goes beyond the surface-level historical facts to delve into the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of his characters' lives. Characters like Philip Hutton in *The Gift of Rain* and Yun Ling Teoh in *The Garden of Evening Mists* become conduits for exploring the impact of historical events on personal identities, relationships, and aspirations. Eng presents a nuanced portrayal of the impact of historical events

on the lives of ordinary individuals. His works serve as a bridge between past and present, inviting readers to engage critically with history and fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of the past. By representing the historical context in his novels, Tan Twan Eng contributes to the Malaysian literary landscape by shedding light on lesser-known aspects of history and promoting a deeper understanding of the Chinese community's experiences within the broader multicultural Malaysian society.

Tan Twan Eng's representation of Malaysian historical context in his novels has a profound impact on Malaysian literature. Through the preservation of historical memory, the humanization of historical figures, the fusion of fiction with historical facts, the exploration of postcolonial identity, the critical examination of national history, and the global visibility of Malaysian history, Eng contributes to a rich and multifaceted narrative that enhances the understanding of Malaysia's past and its significance in shaping the nation's literary landscape. The global success of Tan Twan Eng's novels ensures that Malaysian history reaches a wide international audience. Readers from around the world encounter Malaysia's historical context through his works, gaining insights into events that may be unfamiliar to them. This global visibility not only broadens the reach of Malaysian literature but also serves as a cultural ambassador, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

C. Aspect 3: Engagement With Memory And Trauma

Tan Twan Eng excels in resurrecting forgotten historical memories, weaving narratives around marginalized and often overlooked aspects of Malaysian history. His novels possess a profound historical significance as they bridge the gap between Malaysia's colonial past and its postcolonial present. They engage with the complexities of this history, unravel forgotten narratives, and challenge readers to reflect on the enduring legacies of colonialism. His exploration of forgotten histories often involves engaging with collective memory and trauma. He confronts painful episodes from the past, such as war, political upheaval, and social injustice, and examines their enduring impact on individuals and communities. Through his characters' memories and reflections, he delves into the emotional and psychological repercussions of these historical events.

Eng intricately weaves the landscape into the narrative, creating a symbiotic relationship between memory and the physical environment. The settings in his novels become repositories of memory, serving as silent witnesses to historical events. His commitment to this endeavor is notably evident in *The Garden of Evening Mists*. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, the tea plantation and the titular garden become integral to the characters' memories and serve as a backdrop for their personal journeys of healing and reconciliation. The novel delves into the largely unexplored history of the Japanese Occupation and the experiences of the Chinese community during that period. Twan Eng highlights the Japanese internment camps in Malaya, shedding light on the sufferings of those detained and the blurred boundaries of collaboration and resistance. Moreover, *The Garden of Evening Mists* unearths the forgotten art of Yugiri, a fictional Japanese garden that becomes a central motif in the narrative. The narrative meanders through the aftermath of the Japanese occupation and the Malayan Emergency, shedding light on the struggles of individuals and communities in the postcolonial era. The novel captures the transformation of the Malaysian landscape from colonial tea plantations to an independent nation, mirroring the broader historical transition. Through the lens of this garden, Twan Eng invites readers to contemplate the resilience of human creativity amid the darkest times in history. Through meticulous research and vivid storytelling, Twan Eng's novels offer readers a lens through which they can contemplate Malaysia's colonial history. He confronts the painful legacies of colonialism, including issues of identity, cultural heritage, and power dynamics. His works prompt readers to question the reverberations of colonialism in the present and how it shapes contemporary Malaysia.

In *The Gift of Rain*, Tan Twan Eng masterfully and poignantly addresses the theme of historical trauma through the lens of loss and grief. Characters grapple with the death and destruction wrought by war, leading to profound emotional scars that persist long after the conflict ends. Philip Hutton, the central character, grapples with profound historical trauma resulting from his complex loyalties and actions during the Japanese occupation. When Philip collaborates with the Japanese, providing them with information about the British forces, it stems from a desire to protect his loved ones and the people of Penang. This act, however, leads to a profound sense of guilt and internal turmoil. Eng portrays the consequences of betrayal during wartime, adding depth to the historical trauma experienced by characters. The betrayal of trust, whether intentional or circumstantial, leaves scars that resonate through the narrative.

Eng's engagement with memory and trauma extends beyond depicting suffering; it also explores the potential for healing through storytelling. Characters in his novels use narrative as a means of processing and understanding their traumatic experiences. The act of storytelling becomes a form of cultural therapy, allowing individuals and communities to confront the past, share their stories, and embark on journeys of healing and reconciliation. Tan Twan Eng's novels intricately weave a narrative thread that goes beyond the depiction of suffering and trauma; they explore the profound potential for cultural healing through storytelling. Eng's characters employ the act of storytelling as a powerful mechanism for processing, understanding, and ultimately healing from traumatic experiences. In "The Gift of Rain," Philip Hutton, the protagonist, uses storytelling as a form of catharsis. His narrative unfolds as a confession, a way of unburdening himself from the weight of his experiences during the Japanese occupation of Penang. By recounting his involvement with the Japanese, the complexities of collaboration, and the moral ambiguities he faced, Philip engages in a process of self-reflection and disclosure. The act of sharing his story becomes a personal journey toward healing, allowing him to confront the traumas of the past and seek a form of redemption. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Yun

Ling Teoh, a survivor of a Japanese internment camp, writes a memoir as a means of reckoning with her traumatic past. The memoir becomes a vessel for processing her grief, loss, and the haunting memories of war. Eng elegantly weaves Yun Ling's narrative, exploring the interplay between memory and storytelling. Through the act of recounting her experiences, Yun Ling not only confronts the personal traumas but also contributes to the broader cultural memory, shedding light on the collective experiences of those affected by historical events.

Eng depict the cultural and social memories brought about by historical events. Through his meticulous research and attention to details, Tan Twan Eng brings to life the historical memories among Malaysians, capturing the struggles, resilience, and cultural nuances of the community. His exploration of memory and trauma in his novels contributes significantly to Malaysian literature by offering a nuanced and empathetic perspective on the personal and collective experiences of individuals affected by historical events. This thematic exploration resonates deeply within the literary landscape, influencing how readers engage with the past and understand the lasting impact of historical trauma.

D. Aspect 4: Incorporation of Cross-Cultural Influences

Tan Twan Eng's profound influence on Malaysian literature can be attributed, in significant part, to his nuanced portrayal of Multicultural Malaysia in his works. He intricately weaves together the diverse cultural threads that make up the Malaysian identity. In his novels, readers are immersed in a literary landscape where Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous cultures coexist. Eng's exploration of multiculturalism becomes a narrative canvas, allowing him to depict the complexities and harmonies of Malaysian society. By doing so, he captures the essence of the nation's identity and contributes to a deeper understanding of its diverse heritage.

The rich tapestry of cultures, histories, and traditions within Malaysia serves as a thematic backbone, allowing Eng to make outstanding contributions to the nation's literary landscape. Tan Twan Eng's incorporation of cross-cultural influences in his novels serves as a testament to Malaysia's multicultural identity. He naturally incorporates the cross-cultural influences into his narratives. He seamlessly integrates elements from various cultural traditions, including Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Western, reflecting the multicultural fabric of Malaysian society. This fusion of diverse cultural influences enriches his stories and highlights the interconnectedness of different communities, fostering a sense of unity amidst diversity. His ability to seamlessly blend elements from diverse cultures enriches his narratives and provides readers with a deeper understanding of the complex tapestry of Malaysian society. Through his literary craftsmanship, Tan Twan Eng bridges cultural gaps and fosters appreciation for the interconnectedness of cultures in a globalized world. Tan Twan Eng's skillful integration of cross-cultural elements in his narratives demonstrates his ability to showcase the fusion of different cultural influences within the Chinese Malaysian context. Through his storytelling, he presents characters and settings that embody a rich tapestry of diverse cultural traditions, highlighting the interconnectedness of various communities and the complexity of cultural identities. In *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Yun Ling and Aritomo initially face challenges in understanding each other due to differences in language and cultural references. Their evolving communication becomes a significant aspect of their relationship, demonstrating the effort required to bridge cultural gaps. By presenting a narrative that embraces a broader, global perspective, Eng contributes to a literary landscape that reflects the interconnectedness of diverse cultures and the universal aspects of the human experience.

E. Aspect 5: Contribution to Eco-Postcolonialism

Literary studies in our age exist in a state of constant flux. Ecocriticism has stepped from periphery to the center and leaped a hot study in western literary criticism. Ecocriticism has developed into a stage to "reconsider, rediscover, reissue" the traditional texts about nature (Boehmer, 1993). Nowadays the environmental problems of technocratic-industrial societies are beginning to be seen as manifestations of what some individuals are calling "the continuing environmental crisis" (Deloughrey, 2015). Ecology has been one response to the continuing crisis and it has realized a transition from shallow ecology to deep ecology to reawaken our understanding of Earth wisdom more than just to reform. Arne Naess says that "what we need today is a tremendous expansion of ecological thinking, and we need specially to cultivate a deep ecological consciousness. Huntington, an American political scientist, once said in the preface to the Chinese version of his book "the Clash of Civilizations and the Reconstruction of World Order "that arousing people's attention to the danger of the clash of civilizations will help promote the dialogue of civilizations in the whole world (Huntington, 1996). Eco-Postcolonialism, a theoretical framework that explores the intersections of ecology, colonialism, and postcolonial studies, is evident in Tan Twan Eng's novels. Eng's position and contributions in Malaysian literary context highlight his significant role in shaping the ecological perspective of literature in Malaysia. His works not only explore the complexities of cultural identity, shed light on the historical, social, and political realities of the Chinese Malaysian experience, but also incorporate postcolonial ecocritical perspectives and elements of cross-cultural fusion. Through his exploration of ecological themes within a postcolonial context, Eng contributes to a nuanced understanding of the relationship between nature, culture, and the legacy of colonialism in Malaysia.

Tan Twan Eng's novels are characterized by a profound ecological sensitivity, where the natural environment is not just a backdrop but an integral and dynamic force shaping the characters and narratives. Eng's writing is characterized by sensory-rich descriptions of nature. The sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the natural world are vividly portrayed, engaging readers' senses and immersing them in the ecological tapestry of the stories. In his novels, characters interact with the natural environment in meaningful ways. Whether it's Aritomo's gardening practices, the

cultivation of tea, or the martial arts training, the narratives emphasize a respectful and reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. The natural environment influences the characters' emotions, decisions, and personal growth. Eng demonstrates how the characters are shaped by their surroundings, suggesting that nature is not just a static backdrop but an active participant in the unfolding narratives.

The Gift of rain is set in Penang, and the descriptions of the island highlight its natural beauty. Eng weaves a vivid tapestry of landscapes, from lush rainforests to coastal vistas, showcasing the diverse ecosystems that characterize the region. The sensitivity to Penang's natural environment contributes to a rich sense of place within the narrative. Eng uses nature symbolically to convey deeper meanings. For example, Rain, a recurring motif in the novel, serves as a powerful symbol of transformation. It is not merely a meteorological event but carries deeper meanings related to cleansing, renewal, and the cyclical nature of life. The protagonist, Philip, undergoes profound personal and cultural transformations, paralleling the transformative qualities of rain. This symbolic use of natural elements adds layers of meaning to the narrative, showcasing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between human experiences and the environment. The practice of martial arts in the novel is intricately linked to nature. The training sessions take place in natural settings, emphasizing a connection between physical discipline and the surrounding environment. This portrayal underscores the idea that human activities, even those as rigorous as martial arts, can be in harmony with nature. In *the Garden of Evening Mists*, the highlands are not just settings; it becomes characters with agency. The mist-laden valleys, the carefully cultivated landscapes, and the tea plantation all reflect the intricate relationship between nature and human history. The mist in the novel that envelops the highlands symbolizes the ambiguity of memory and history. It obscures and reveals, echoing the complex layers of personal and collective narratives. The mist becomes a metaphor for the elusive nature of truth and the challenges of reconciling with a past marked by conflict and colonial rule. Aritomo, the Japanese gardener, transforms the land into a Japanese garden as a way of reconciling with the past, addressing the ecological and cultural consequences of both *Japanese* occupation and British colonialism. The Japanese garden, with its meticulous design and representation of different seasons, serves as a symbolic space for cultural reconciliation. This symbolism extends beyond aesthetics to encompass historical healing and the complex interplay of colonial and postcolonial forces.

Eng's works exhibit a postcolonial consciousness that interrogates the legacy of colonialism and its impact on Malaysian community. His narratives often feature encounters between different cultures, highlighting the complexities and challenges of cultural hybridity in postcolonial settings. His characters navigate the intersections of Chinese, Malay, and British cultures, grappling with cultural assimilation, preservation of heritage, and the clashes and harmonies that arise from intercultural interactions. Through these encounters, Tan Twan Eng explores the dynamics of power, privilege, and cultural exchange in the postcolonial context. The logging activities in *The Gift of Rain* associated with British colonial presence in Malaya exemplify colonial exploitation. The British colonial powers are shown to exploit the rich timber resources of Penang with forests transformed and landscapes scarred by human intervention. Eng vividly portrays the environmental impact of colonialism through the depiction of deforestation and logging activities. The novel portrays the impact of colonial exploitation on indigenous communities that depend on the land for their livelihoods. Eng's detailed depiction of deforestation and its consequences contributes to Eco-Postcolonial discourse by linking colonial economic pursuits to the ecological transformations of the landscape. Ecological consequences are also addressed in another novel, *The House of Doors*: The conversion of land for large-scale agricultural activities is accompanied by ecological consequences. Eng alludes to the environmental changes brought about by the tea plantation, including potential disruptions to the natural ecosystem. This portrayal contributes to the Eco-Postcolonial discourse by linking colonial economic pursuits to environmental transformations.

In summary, Eng exemplifies a profound ecological sensitivity, where the natural world is intricately woven into the fabric of the stories. Through rich and detailed descriptions, symbolic use of nature, and a nuanced portrayal of human-environment interactions, Eng creates narratives that transcend mere settings and instead immerse readers in the dynamic and interconnected world of nature and human experiences. Through his narratives, he offers a unique perspective that resonates with readers and contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonialism, identity, and cross-cultural interactions. One of the notable aspects of Tan Twan Eng's works is his incorporation of postcolonial ecocritical perspectives. His novels often delve into the relationship between humans and the natural environment, highlighting the ecological issues and the impact of colonialism on the natural world.

V. TAN TWAN ENG'S MAJOR INFLUENCE ON MALAYSIAN LITERATURE

Tan Twan Eng's literary achievements have had a profound impact on Malaysian literary scene. His works have garnered critical acclaim both locally and internationally, earning him prestigious awards and nominations. Through his success, he has inspired a new generation of Chinese Malaysian writers to explore their cultural heritage, tackle social issues, and contribute to the evolving literary landscape of Malaysia. Tan Twan Eng's novels have had a profound impact on the exploration of literary themes within Malaysian literature. His works delve into a range of themes that resonate with the Malaysian experience, such as cultural diversity, historical memory, and ecological consciousness. Through his complex characters and their experiences, he explores the multifaceted nature of being Chinese in Malaysia, capturing the nuances of cultural hybridity, intercultural encounters, and the negotiation of multiple identities. His

works offer a fresh perspective on Chinese Malaysian identity, moving beyond stereotypes and engaging with the complexities of lived experiences.

The portrayal of the multicultural and multilingual aspects of Malaysia has in his works influenced other writers to similarly celebrate the nation's rich tapestry of identities. His nuanced depictions of interethnic relationships and interactions have encouraged writers to explore the complexities of Malaysian society, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity. His incorporation of historical and postcolonial themes in his works has had a profound impact on Malaysian literary scene. By engaging with postcolonial perspectives, he invites readers and fellow writers to critically examine Malaysia's colonial past and its ongoing reverberations in the present. Tan Twan Eng's engagement with Malaysia's colonial and postcolonial past has prompted a reevaluation of historical narratives within Malaysian literature. His novels have encouraged writers to revisit forgotten histories, shedding light on overlooked aspects of the nation's heritage. As a result, Malaysian literature has become a platform for reexamining the Malaysian history from diverse perspectives. Tan Twan Eng's incorporation of eco-postcolonial themes has sparked a greater awareness of environmental issues within Malaysian literature. His eco-imagery and symbolism have encouraged other writers to explore the relationship between humans and nature in the Malaysian context. This has led to a growing body of eco-literature that addresses environmental concerns and advocates for ecological sustainability.

Tan Twan Eng's innovative narrative techniques have garnered attention and admiration within the Malaysian literary community. His ability to seamlessly weave together multiple timelines, employ rich symbolism, and create immersive atmospheres captivates readers and inspires fellow writers to experiment with narrative forms. His narrative craftsmanship has elevated the standards of storytelling in Malaysian literature. His nuanced portrayal of Chinese Malaysian characters and their experiences breaks away from clichéd narratives and offers a more authentic and complex representation of their identities. This has opened up new avenues for dialogue and understanding, fostering a greater appreciation for the cultural diversity within Malaysian society. His success and recognition as a prominent Malaysian author have paved the way for emerging writers to explore their own voices and narratives. His achievements have inspired a new generation of Malaysian writers to delve into diverse themes, experiment with different literary styles, and engage with social and cultural issues in their works. His impact on the literary scene extends beyond his own writings, as he has served as a catalyst for the growth and divers.

In conclusion, Tan Twan Eng's influence on Malaysian literature extends to both emerging writers and the exploration of literary themes. His impact can be seen in the inspiration he has provided to aspiring authors and the transformation of Malaysian literature to encompass a broader range of cultural, historical, and ecological themes. As Malaysia's literary landscape continues to evolve, Tan Twan Eng's legacy remains a guiding force, shaping the narratives that define the nation's literary identity. Tan Twan Eng's impact on Malaysian literary scene cannot be overstated. His literary achievements transcend the boundaries of conventional storytelling, offering readers a profound exploration of identity, culture, and the environment. His impact on Malaysian literature is evident not only in the thematic richness of his works but also in the way he has contributed to the global visibility of Malaysian voices. Through his compelling narratives, he has brought Malaysian stories to a global audience, challenged stereotypes, and enriched the literary landscape of Malaysia. His contributions have inspired other writers, fostered cultural dialogue, and opened up new possibilities for representation and understanding within Malaysian literature.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tan Twan Eng's literary background is a tapestry woven from his multicultural upbringing, personal experiences, and literary influences. Through his works, he delves into the complexities of human existence, illuminating the struggles and triumphs of individuals within the postcolonial and ecological contexts. His works exhibit a unique blend of Eastern and Western literary influences, reflecting his engagement with both classical Malaysian literature and Western literary traditions. The literary contributions of Tan Twan Eng stand as a testament to the richness and complexity of Malaysian literature. Through his intricate narratives, deep character explorations, and masterful incorporation of cultural influences, Tan Twan Eng has left an indelible mark on both Malaysian and global literature. His unique contributions to Malaysian literature are multifaceted. He skillfully portrays the multiculturalism and multilingualism of Malaysia, offering readers a glimpse into the nation's rich tapestry of identities. His exploration of historical and cultural themes, particularly those related to the Japanese Occupation and the postcolonial era, provides a nuanced perspective on Malaysia's complex history. Furthermore, his incorporation of eco-postcolonialism adds a distinctive environmental and postcolonial dimension to his works. Tan Twan Eng's ability to bridge cultural gaps and convey profound human experiences has made his novels resonate with readers worldwide. His impact on Malaysian literature extends beyond his individual works. He has played a pivotal role in raising the profile of Malaysian literature on the international stage. Tan Twan Eng's impact on Malaysian literature cannot be overstated. His novels are not only captivating literary works but also windows into the cultural tapestry of Malaysia and convey universal human experiences.

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