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Fragile Belonging in Consumerist Modernity: Ethical Disintegration, Family Reterritorialization, and Intercultural Communication in *At the End of Daybreak*

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Abstract

Purpose: Family protection can become conditional when social standing takes priority over another person's welfare. This manuscript examines that tension in Ho Yuhang's *At the End of Daybreak*, linking market-oriented status pressure to weakened responsibility, renewed family control, communication across social differences, and insecure belonging.

Method: The manuscript develops a cross-sectional audience-reception model with five constructs and 25 proposed seven-point indicators. It contains 312-cases and a 28-unit scene summary.

Findings: The results report positive coefficients for consumerist modernity pressure–ethical disintegration (β = 0.552), ethical disintegration–fragile belonging (β = 0.337), and ethical disintegration–family reterritorialization (β = 0.502). It also reports an indirect association of 0.180 and an interaction coefficient of 0.161. These values are not empirical confirmation of H1–H5. The narrative interpretation distinguishes restoring family authority from restoring secure belonging.

Originality: The contribution is a film-specific conceptual model connecting status pressure, responsibility, family boundary-making, communication, and insecure attachment. It distinguishes textual interpretation from a proposed audience-reception analysis.

Keywords: *At the End of Daybreak*, fragile belonging, consumerist modernity, ethical disintegration, family reterritorialization, intercultural communication, Malaysian cinema, audience reception

1. Introduction

Consumerist modernity is not simply a condemnation of consumption. In this study, it names an analytical condition in which market-mediated standards of achievement become criteria for judging personal worth and social membership. Consumer culture concerns the meanings and practices through which consumption organizes identity; consumerism privileges acquisition and market-defined success; modernity provides the wider setting of changing institutions, mobility, and self-making. The compound term is used here as a study-specific synthesis, not as a newly discovered historical concept or an already validated scale. Consumer culture theory supplies its principal intellectual tradition: markets offer symbolic resources for belonging, but access to those resources is unequal (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2018; Arnould et al., 2019). The central problem is therefore not whether characters possess luxury goods, but whether recognition and care become contingent on satisfying status expectations.

This problem matters because material insecurity and relational insecurity are not interchangeable. A person can remain physically inside a household while experiencing uncertain recognition, protection, or permission to speak. Research on belonging distinguishes attachment from the social boundaries governing inclusion (Allen et al., 2021; Lähdesmäki et al., 2021). Consumer research likewise shows that participation and aspiration do not invariably secure a settled identity (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022; Wickstrom et al., 2021). Here, 'lack' means insufficient material resources, status recognition, or a secure route to adulthood—not an absence of desire. Schooling, work, and family reputation become relevant to consumerism only when they operate as comparative measures of market-valued success; they are not inherently consumerist. This distinction prevents economic disadvantage, family obligation, and wrongdoing from being collapsed into a single explanatory label.

Ho Yuhang's 94-minute *At the End of Daybreak* (2009) provides a focused case for examining this tension. Tuck, a young adult living with his mother, becomes involved with Ying, a schoolgirl. The Rotterdam program identifies their ages as twenty-three and fifteen, making the unequal relationship central rather than incidental to the narrative (Ho, 2009; International Film Festival Rotterdam, 2010; MUBI, 2009). The film is situated in Malaysian independent cinema, while its international festival circulation makes the legibility of its domestic conflicts important for readers unfamiliar with that setting (Khoo, 2006). This article does not treat the characters as representative of all Malaysian families. It examines a particular fictional arrangement of class position, parental authority, and youthful dependency, asking how its conflicts become intelligible without turning cultural context into a national stereotype.

The analysis follows relationships rather than adopting a heroic viewpoint: attention is distributed across Tuck, Ying, and their parents instead of treating one protagonist's explanation as the moral standard for everyone else. Tuck's aimlessness, his mother's frustrated care, Ying's vulnerability, and her family's concern with reputation create different positions from which responsibility is understood. Describing these positions does not equalize the parties' power or excuse the adult's conduct. The key analytical distinction is between safeguarding a young person and protecting family reputation: adults may interpret exposure of the relationship as a reputational threat, but that interpretation should not displace attention from Ying's welfare.

Ethical disintegration describes the erosion of responsibility through denial, minimization, displaced blame, and the prioritization of self-protection over another person's welfare. It is a narrative-analytical construct adapted for this study, not a synonym for a clinically assessed condition or a claim that a validated 'ethical disintegration' instrument already exists. Its main theoretical resource is the social-cognitive account of moral disengagement associated with Bandura: mechanisms through which people suspend moral self-sanctions while maintaining an acceptable self-image (Newman et al., 2020). Status threat, dependency, and reputational anxiety are possible pressures, but not sufficient causes of harm. Research distinguishes mechanisms and contextual antecedents rather than assuming that disadvantaged people are less ethical (McCormack & Chowdhury, 2024; Ogunfowora et al., 2022). Silence is relevant only when its context suggests concealment or avoidance; fear, uncertainty, and resistance are alternative interpretations.

Family reterritorialization describes the re-establishment of authority over domestic access, movement, speech, and reputation after an existing arrangement is unsettled. The term adapts the territorial vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), read through DeLanda's (2016) account of relational assemblages, to family boundary-making. It does not imply that these authors proposed a family-reception scale. Its dimensions are spatial access, relational authority, and control over public disclosure. A crisis can prompt protection, negotiation, or coercive restriction; these responses must be distinguished. Southeast Asian family research provides context for changing care obligations, household structures, and intergenerational dependencies, rather than evidence that one response characterizes the entire region (Dommaraju, 2023; Schwittek & de los Reyes, 2023; Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung, 2022).

Intercultural communication concerns the negotiation of meaning and recognition when socially learned expectations differ. It is not restricted here to encounters between nationalities, but neither is every disagreement automatically intercultural. A class, generational, gendered, or linguistic distinction matters only when it shapes how an utterance, silence, obligation, or claim to dignity is interpreted. Communication accommodation and identity negotiation direct attention to social distance, face, and the recognition of a speaker's position (Giles, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2017). Intercultural communication breakdown denotes a failure to negotiate such differences, not simply the presence of difference. A critical approach avoids attributing fixed characteristics to Malaysian, Chinese, parental, or youthful identities (Dervin, 2016; Piller, 2017). Its significance is that identical restrictions may be understood differently when accompanied by explanation and recognition rather than contempt or exclusion.

Fragile belonging denotes attachment whose continuity, safety, or recognition feels conditional. Its dimensions are insecurity of inclusion, uncertainty about care, and restricted recognition or voice. It differs from loneliness, which can occur without contested membership, and from physical exclusion, which is only one possible expression of fragility. Belonging research and the social psychology of precarity make it possible to examine emotional attachment together with the conditions sustaining it (Allen et al., 2021; Coultas et al., 2023; Mahendran et al., 2023). Within the reception model, the outcome is a viewer's interpretation of the characters' belonging. It is not the viewer's own mental health, family experience, or level of social exclusion. That distinction also applies to the four explanatory constructs: they concern perceptions of the film, not diagnoses of its audience.

Existing scholarship supplies these conceptual resources but does not, by itself, establish the hypothesized relationships in this film or among its audiences. Consumer culture theory examines identity and market meanings; moral disengagement research investigates responsibility; family studies examine changing obligations; and intercultural scholarship addresses negotiation across social differences. The gap pursued here is their integration around a specific problem: whether a response presented as restoring family order can leave belonging more insecure. The contribution is to connect these literatures without assuming that consumer pressure inevitably causes wrongdoing or that all family

boundaries are oppressive. It also treats Malaysian cinema as a situated contribution to debates about precarious attachment, rather than as an illustration of a generalized 'Asian' morality (Rokka, 2021; Yeung & Jones, 2024).

The article therefore examines market-valued status, responsibility, family boundary-making, and communicative difference in interpretations of the film. The proposed statistical unit is the individual viewer's perception, not Malaysian society or the director's intentions. The following sections develop H1–H5, specify the reception model, present the results and analysis, and discuss its evidential limits alongside the narrative interpretation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumerist Modernity Pressure and Ethical Disintegration

Consumerist modernity shapes moral life by making social recognition a competitive field: people are expected to live successfully according to publicly recognizable standards. Consumer culture theory explains how markets provide symbolic resources for identity, distinction, fantasy, and belonging (Arnould & Thompson, 2018; Arnould et al., 2019). Yet the relationship between consumption and attachment is not uniformly negative. Consumption can sustain affiliations and meaningful practices, while the promise of collective belonging can also remain unfulfilled (Wickstrom et al., 2021). The theoretical issue is thus the conditionality of recognition, not consumption itself. Pressure arises when a person's credibility depends on demonstrating achievement despite limited resources. Attachment, dignity, and family reputation connect to consumerism only insofar as those relationships are evaluated through market-defined status. Desire for intimacy alone is insufficient evidence of consumerist modernity.

Consumption ethics research locates moral choices within tensions between individual commitments, social expectations, and institutional arrangements (Carrington et al., 2021). Moral disengagement provides a possible mechanism: a threatened self-image may be defended through justification, displaced responsibility, or minimized consequences (Newman et al., 2020). However, this is not a settled law that status pressure produces unethical conduct. McCormack and Chowdhury (2024) distinguish related forms of disengagement and neutralization, while Ogunfowora et al. (2022) examine multiple antecedents in work settings. Transferring those explanations to film reception requires an explicit change of level. The present gap concerns whether viewers who perceive stronger status pressure also perceive more avoidance of responsibility in the narrative. The expectation is theoretically informed, but the reviewed studies do not test this exact film-specific relationship. Accordingly, H1 proposes an association rather than treating a prior interpretation of the film as its proof.

H1. Perceived consumerist modernity pressure is positively associated with perceived ethical disintegration in viewer interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*.

2.2 Ethical Disintegration and Fragile Belonging

The hypothesized relationship between ethical disintegration and fragile belonging concerns the reliability of recognition. Belonging involves attachment and acceptance, but also the conditions under which membership is granted or withdrawn (Allen et al., 2021; Lähdesmäki et al., 2021). The conceptual debate is whether visible inclusion necessarily implies secure attachment. Walls and Louis (2023), in a school rather than a film setting, show the value of attending to participants' accounts of fitting in; that insight cautions against inferring security from institutional membership alone. Ethical disintegration potentially weakens confidence that a relationship will remain protective when maintaining it becomes inconvenient. The relevant link is therefore between perceived avoidance of responsibility and uncertainty about continuing care, not between a generic negative reaction to the film and another similarly worded negative reaction.

Moral disengagement and precarity research make this relationship plausible but leave an important gap between social experience and cinematic interpretation (Coultas et al., 2023; Mahendran et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2020). A viewer could recognize wrongdoing while still interpreting a family bond as secure; conversely, belonging might appear fragile before any explicit denial of responsibility. These possibilities prevent the hypothesis from becoming tautological. Ethical disintegration must be operationalized through appraisals of responsibility, whereas fragile belonging must concern the perceived security of attachment. In *At the End of Daybreak*, dependency within the maternal relationship and unequal accountability within the couple provide questions for interpretation, not independent confirmation of H2. The second hypothesis therefore states the following:

H2. Perceived ethical disintegration is positively associated with perceived fragile belonging in viewer interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*.

2.3 Ethical Disintegration and Family Reterritorialization

Family research presents households as active sites of care and negotiation rather than static containers of tradition. Changes in household composition, economic responsibility, migration, and youth transitions can redistribute authority and dependence (Dommaraju, 2023; Schwittek & de los Reyes, 2023; Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung, 2022). The theoretical

debate concerns whether boundary restoration primarily repairs care or consolidates control. Both are possible: a restriction can protect a vulnerable person, but its justification may also prioritize obedience and reputation. Family reterritorialization is therefore defined by the re-establishment of authority, not by an assumption that every boundary is abusive. Within the present model, the emphasis is on viewers' perceptions of restrictive or reputationally protective boundary-making following an ethical crisis.

A plausible relationship arises when perceived wrongdoing unsettles existing roles and prompts family members to reassert who can decide, speak, or remain in contact. Reterritorialization interprets that response as a reorganization of relations, rather than merely a parent's private emotion (DeLanda, 2016). The inference is an extension of the reviewed literature, not a claim that regional demographic studies established an ethical-disintegration-to-territoriality pathway. Its alternative is equally important: recognition of wrongdoing may lead to shared accountability, dialogue, or a reduction in coercive authority. The empirical question is which interpretation covaries with perceptions of ethical disintegration. The film's contrasting parental responses make this question relevant, but their presence cannot establish its answer among viewers.

H3. Perceived ethical disintegration is positively associated with perceived family reterritorialization in viewer interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Family Reterritorialization

Family reterritorialization functions as the hypothesized mediator between ethical disintegration and fragile belonging. The reasoning requires two distinct links. Perceived avoidance of responsibility can be associated with a perception that families reassert authority; that reassertion can, in turn, be associated with attachment appearing conditional on obedience, secrecy, or reputational conformity. Family scholarship locates care in ongoing practices and unequal obligations, while belonging scholarship distinguishes attachment from the power to determine inclusion (Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung, 2022; Lähdesmäki et al., 2021). Their conjunction supports the hypothesized indirect association while allowing the counter-case that a protective boundary accompanied by accountability could strengthen security. H4 therefore concerns the restrictive form of reterritorialization defined above, not every act of parental protection.

The gap is whether viewers distinguish moral damage from the social responses to that damage. The direct ED–FB relationship captures perceived insecurity associated with weakened responsibility; the indirect ED–FRT–FB relationship asks whether renewed family authority accounts for an additional part of that association. Family reterritorialization must consequently be measured independently of statements that already assert insecure belonging. Nor can a cross-sectional indirect effect establish that wrongdoing occurred first, that family control followed, or that the latter caused insecurity. Reverse ordering and shared evaluative dispositions remain plausible alternatives. The hypothesis is a theory-guided indirect association whose temporal interpretation would require additional evidence, rather than a causal sequence demonstrated by the plot (Hair et al., 2021). The fourth hypothesis is therefore:

H4. Perceived family reterritorialization mediates the positive association between perceived ethical disintegration and perceived fragile belonging in viewer interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*.

2.5 The Moderating Role of Intercultural Communication Breakdown

Intercultural communication research examines how identities and expectations are negotiated, not merely how messages move between fixed cultural groups. Accommodation, face, and identity negotiation offer explanations for why the same restriction can be understood as care, disrespect, or exclusion (Giles, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2017). Hou's (2023) analysis of intercultural conflict and Ali et al.'s (2022) study of overseas students concern contexts different from the film; they support attention to situated negotiation, not an assumption about universal national communication styles. The debate is whether conflict follows inevitably from difference or from the way difference is mobilized in unequal interaction. A critical intercultural approach favors the latter question and requires evidence that a social distinction is made consequential in communication (Dervin, 2016; Piller, 2017).

Moderation follows from this distinction. A family may redraw a boundary while acknowledging another person's vulnerability and explaining its limits; alternatively, it may communicate the same boundary through dismissal, shame, or an unequal right to define the situation. The hypothesized FRT–FB association should be stronger when viewers perceive the latter communicative conditions. This is not the same claim as a direct association between communication breakdown and insecure belonging. H5 concerns whether the association between boundary-making and belonging changes across levels of perceived breakdown. Class expectations of respectability, generational authority, and different understandings of intimacy provide possible contexts, but their mere presence does not establish an interaction. The statistical model must contain both main effects and the interaction, and its interpretation depends on the scales and centering actually used. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is:

H5. Perceived intercultural communication breakdown strengthens the positive association between perceived family reterritorialization and perceived fragile belonging in viewer interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*.

Together, H1–H5 specify relationships among viewers' interpretations, not laws governing Malaysian society or evidence of the director's intentions. Their contribution is to separate status pressure, responsibility, boundary-making, communicative conditions, and attachment sufficiently for the hypothesized relationships to be challenged.

3. Theoretical Framework

Consumer culture theory is the overarching orientation: it examines the symbolic organization of identity and value through markets. The social-cognitive account of moral disengagement explains how responsibility may be suspended (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2020). These perspectives distinguish conditions of status-dependent recognition from actors' responses. Class position is not an ethical diagnosis, and pressure is not moral failure. The two constructs are film-reception adaptations, not measures jointly validated in the cited literature.

The territorial component adds a relational and spatial level. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) vocabulary concerns the formation and disruption of arrangements; DeLanda (2016) emphasizes the heterogeneous relations holding them together. Family reterritorialization adapts this vocabulary to contact, household access, speech, and reputation without equating every boundary with violence. Southeast Asian care research contextualizes obligations and unequal resources, rather than testing the proposed paths (Yeoh et al., 2020). The question is what protection reorganizes, whose authority it strengthens, and whether the protected person retains a voice.

Communication accommodation and identity negotiation provide the communicative component, while belonging research specifies the outcome (Giles, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2017; Allen et al., 2021). These concepts distinguish responsibility, control, negotiation of social differences, and insecure attachment. A parent's restriction supports an FRT interpretation; it supports an ICB interpretation only when status or expectations become consequential in interaction, and an FB interpretation only when membership security is at issue. An event's relevance to each construct must therefore be explained separately. This limits conceptual overlap without claiming psychometric verification.

Figure 1 is the synthesis of these theoretical resources. It retains H1–H5 and distinguishes market-related pressure, relational responses to responsibility and control, and the communicative conditions of attachment. Its distinctive proposition is the indirect ED–FRT–FB relationship: whether perceived family reterritorialization accounts for part of the association between ethical disintegration and fragile belonging. Because boundary-making can also be restorative, these are testable expectations rather than a deterministic account of the narrative.

Malaysia provides context, not explanatory shorthand. The film's family and class relationships do not constitute a national personality (Khoo, 2006). International viewers' familiarity cannot be assumed without reception evidence; communicative difference must be identified in interactions rather than inferred from nationality. The model asks whether restoring a threatened relationship restores the other person's security or merely one's own authority.

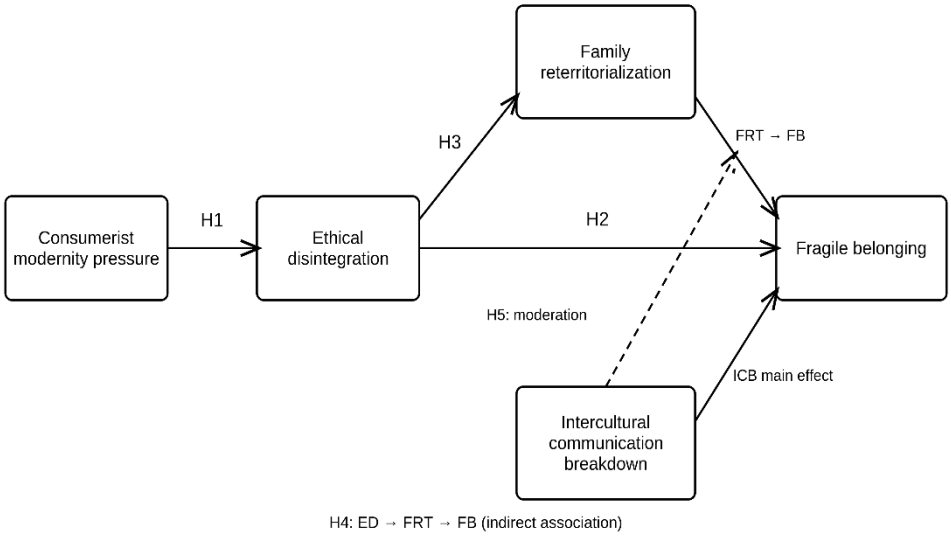


Figure 1. Authors' synthesis: hypothesized relationships among film-reception constructs

Note. H4 denotes the entire indirect ED → FRT → FB relationship. H5 denotes the FRT × ICB interaction predicting FB; both main effects belong in that specification. CMP = consumerist modernity pressure; ED = ethical disintegration; FRT = family reterritorialization; ICB = intercultural communication breakdown; FB = fragile belonging.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Unit of Analysis

The design is a cross-sectional audience-reception study of viewers' interpretations of *At the End of Daybreak*. The intended unit of analysis is the individual viewer. The five constructs concern perceived status pressure, responsibility, family control, communication breakdown, and insecure belonging. Scene-level interpretation remains separate from questionnaire-based analysis.

4.2 Audience Measurement

The questionnaire concerns interpretations of the film and its characters, not audience satisfaction, respondents' own unethical behavior, family functioning, or personal belonging. Its five constructs refer to perceived status pressure, avoidance of responsibility, family boundary-making, communication breakdown, and the characters' insecure attachment. The measurement specification assigns five indicators to each construct, with seven-point responses from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Table 1 shows the conceptual sources.

Table 1. Measurement constructs and conceptual sources

Variable	Items	Conceptual basis
Consumerist modernity pressure	Five	Informed by consumer culture theory and consumer liminality literature (Arnould et al., 2019; Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022; Rokka, 2021)
Ethical disintegration	Five	Informed by moral disengagement and consumption ethics literature (Carrington et al., 2021; McCormack & Chowdhury, 2024; Newman et al., 2020)
Family reterritorialization	Five	Informed by family transformation and care-temporality literature (Dommaraju, 2023; Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung, 2022)
Intercultural communication breakdown	Five	Informed by identity negotiation, accommodation, and facework theory (Giles, 2016; Hou, 2023; Ting-Toomey, 2017)
Fragile belonging	Five	Informed by belonging and precarity scholarship (Allen et al., 2021; Coultas et al., 2023; Lähdesmäki et al., 2021)

Note. Five indicators per construct are specified.

4.3 PLS-SEM Analysis

The proposed PLS-SEM assessment covers indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (rhoA), average variance extracted (AVE), and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). Structural reporting covers path coefficients, t statistics, p values, indirect associations, f^2, R^2, adjusted R^2, Q^2predict, root mean square error (RMSE), and mean absolute error (MAE) (Benitez et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2019, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2021; Shmueli et al., 2019).

The specified model is $ED = aCMP + \varepsilon_1$; $FRT = dED + \varepsilon_2$; and $FB = c'ED + bFRT + gICB + h(FRT \times ICB) + \varepsilon_3$. H4 concerns $d \times b$ and H5 concerns h; the interaction specification includes both main effects. With moderation, $d \times b$ is the reference-level indirect association, not a universal indirect effect. Cross-sectional estimates would not establish temporal causation.

4.4 Film-Scene Coding as Contextual Analysis

Table 2. Film-scene coding summary

Construct	Narrative units coded present	Percentage of 28 units	Dominant scene evidence
Consumerist modernity pressure	18	64.3%	Class comparison, education/status pressure, shame around dependency, reputation anxiety
Ethical disintegration	20	71.4%	Silence, denial, displaced responsibility, harm minimized as private trouble
Family reterritorialization	22	78.6%	Parents reclaiming authority over homes, bodies, movement, secrets, and speech
Intercultural communication breakdown	17	60.7%	Failed translation across age, class, gender, family role, and moral expectation
Fragile belonging	25	89.3%	Conditional care, insecure intimacy, shame, isolation, and unstable domestic membership

Table 2 shows the draft's counts across 28 narrative units. Multiple constructs can occur within one unit, so percentages need not sum to 100%.

The coding framework distinguishes status comparison (CMP), avoidance of responsibility (ED), reasserted authority over access or disclosure (FRT), failed negotiation of consequential social differences (ICB), and conditional attachment (FB). Silence alone is insufficient evidence of ED or ICB; a protective restriction alone is insufficient evidence of FB.

Applying these distinctions reproducibly requires the scene boundaries, coded evidence, and coder decisions.

The Discussion anchors its narrative interpretation in official festival descriptions (Busan International Film Festival, 2009; International Film Festival Rotterdam, 2010). These sources support case description, not the scene frequencies or numerical model. Visual and spatial interpretation draws on Rose (2016); the numerical illustration is not independent corroboration of that interpretation.

5. Results

5.1 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 3 retains the reported reliability coefficients and AVE values. They exceed commonly used thresholds (Hair et al., 2019, 2021).

Table 3. Reliability and convergent-validity statistics

Construct	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (rhoA)	Jöreskog's rho (rhoC)	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Consumerist modernity pressure	0.916	0.929	0.904	0.723
Ethical disintegration	0.916	0.929	0.904	0.724
Family reterritorialization	0.926	0.937	0.915	0.747
Intercultural communication breakdown	0.919	0.931	0.906	0.729
Fragile belonging	0.923	0.934	0.912	0.740

5.2 Estimated Model

Figure 2 shows the supplied path coefficients: CMP → ED = 0.552; ED → FRT = 0.502; ED → FB = 0.337; FRT → FB = 0.359; ICB → FB = 0.214; and FRT × ICB → FB = 0.161.

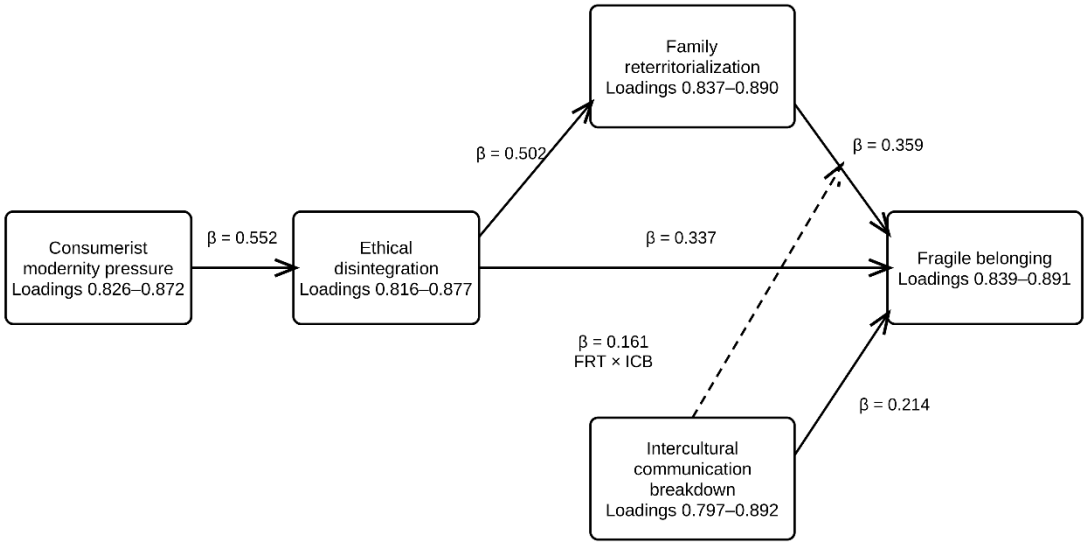


Figure 2. Structural model and reported standardized coefficients

5.3 Measurement-Item Fitness Statistics

The loadings in Table 4 range from 0.797 to 0.892, above the commonly applied 0.70 benchmark (Benitez et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4. Measurement-item loadings

Indicator	**CMP**	**ED**	**FRT**	**ICB**	**FB**
1	0.839	0.836	0.890	0.892	0.891
2	0.852	0.851	0.873	0.797	0.839
3	0.861	0.877	0.839	0.880	0.853
4	0.872	0.871	0.837	0.874	0.874
5	0.826	0.816	0.881	0.823	0.842

Note. CMP = consumerist modernity pressure; ED = ethical disintegration; FRT = family reterritorialization; ICB = intercultural communication breakdown; FB = fragile belonging.

5.4 Discriminant Validity

The HTMT ratios are below 0.85; the largest is 0.702 for ED and FB (Table 5).

Table 5. HTMT ratios

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Consumerist modernity pressure					
2. Ethical disintegration	0.612				
3. Family reterritorialization	0.460	0.638			
4. Intercultural communication breakdown	0.512	0.501	0.257		
5. Fragile belonging	0.503	0.702	0.655	0.493	

Note. All displayed ratios are below 0.85.

5.5 Path Effects Overview

Table 6 shows the direct, indirect, total, and f^2 values. The reported indirect association is arithmetically consistent at the displayed precision ($0.502 \times 0.359 \approx 0.180$), and $0.337 + 0.180 = 0.517$.

Table 6. Direct, indirect, total, and effect-size statistics

Effect	Beta	Indirect effects	Total effect	Cohen's f2
Consumerist modernity pressure -> Ethical disintegration	0.552		0.552	0.439
Ethical disintegration -> Family reterritorialization	0.502		0.502	0.270
Ethical disintegration -> Fragile belonging	0.337	0.180	0.517	0.139
Family reterritorialization -> Fragile belonging	0.359		0.359	0.188
Intercultural communication breakdown -> Fragile belonging	0.214		0.214	0.080
FRT x ICB -> Fragile belonging	0.161		0.161	0.057

Note. Values retained without re-estimation. The indirect and total associations are conditional on the moderator's reference level.

5.6 R^2 and Predictive Statistics

Table 7 shows R^2 values of 0.305, 0.350, and 0.546. However, the stated FRT equation contains only ED: a standardized single-predictor model with $\beta = 0.502$ would imply $R^2 \approx 0.252$, not 0.350. R^2 describes in-sample explanatory power, not overall goodness of fit.

Table 7. R^2 and prediction statistics

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
Ethical disintegration	0.305	0.303	0.214	0.834	0.671
Family reterritorialization	0.350	0.346	0.263	0.806	0.648
Fragile belonging	0.546	0.540	0.421	0.674	0.546

5.7 Structural Model for Path Analysis

Figure 3 shows the reported coefficients and t statistics. The indirect association is reported separately in Table 8.

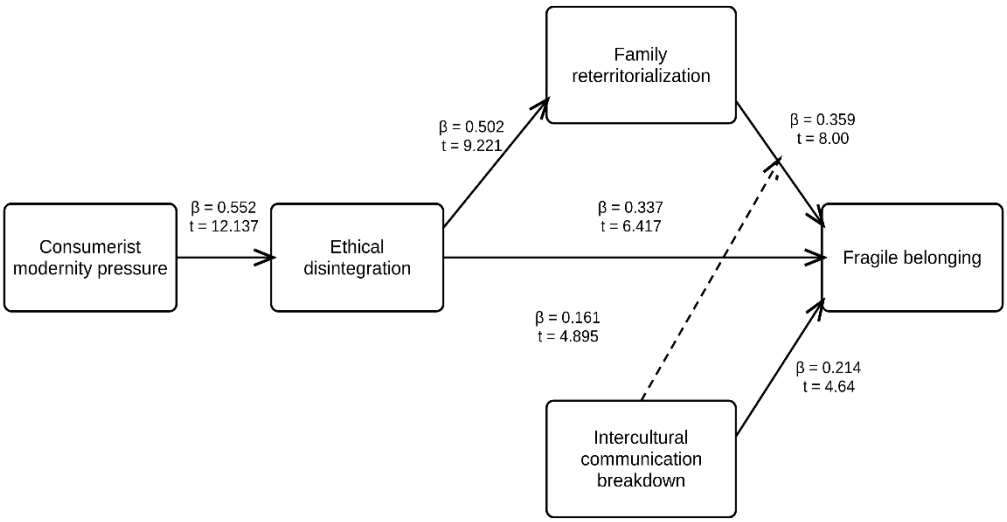


Figure 3. Structural model with reported coefficients and t statistics

5.8 Path Analysis

Table 8 shows the reported coefficients, standard deviations, t statistics, and p values for H1–H5. All displayed p values are below .001.

Table 8. Hypothesis-test statistics

Hypothesis / path	β	SD	t	p
H1. Perceived consumerist modernity pressure is positively associated with perceived ethical disintegration.	0.552	0.045	12.137	< .001
H2. Perceived ethical disintegration is positively associated with perceived fragile belonging.	0.337	0.052	6.417	< .001
H3. Perceived ethical disintegration is positively associated with perceived family reterritorialization.	0.502	0.054	9.221	< .001
H4. Perceived family reterritorialization mediates the positive association between perceived ethical disintegration and perceived fragile belonging.	0.180	0.031	5.768	< .001
H5. Perceived intercultural communication breakdown strengthens the positive association between perceived family reterritorialization and perceived fragile belonging.	0.161	0.033	4.895	< .001

Note. Reported values below .001 are displayed as $p < .001$.

6. Discussion

The conceptual model asks how a social world organized around status and family protection can accommodate dependency while weakening recognition. Consumer culture theory frames consumption as a system of meaning and difference, rather than conspicuous luxury alone (Arnould et al., 2019; Rokka, 2021; Roach et al., 2023).

The relationship's movement from online contact to motel encounters makes that question concrete. The Busan synopsis identifies these events alongside Tuck's dependency and Ying's adolescent boredom (Busan International Film Festival, 2009). They suggest privately acquired intimacy outside household authority: temporary access without a durable place in another person's life. Commercial space does not resolve unequal resources, age, or accountability, but neither does it inherently cause harm. The question is what remains unresolved when access is mistaken for recognition. Tuck's suspended adulthood recalls chronic consumer liminality: demanded flexibility without a secure route out of dependency (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022). His vulnerability neither diminishes Ying's nor excuses his responsibility.

The parents' discovery of the relationship shifts the conflict from secrecy to exposure. The official festival account describes a threatened criminal complaint rather than an uncomplicated restoration of family harmony (Busan International Film Festival, 2009). The ethical question is not whether adults should protect a fifteen-year-old; protection and the adult partner's responsibility remain central. It is whether the response allows her welfare and voice to remain the organizing concern. Rather than treating Ying's body as a threat to social order, the analysis locates the reputational threat in adults' interpretation of the relationship's exposure. Moral disengagement becomes relevant where a character substitutes reputation, intention, or inconvenience for an appraisal of harm (McCormack & Chowdhury, 2024; Newman et al., 2020).

Tuck's mother's attempt to obtain money from her former husband provides another narrative anchor, described as a humiliating return to a damaged relationship (Busan International Film Festival, 2009). Her care is constrained by available resources: protecting her son requires negotiating an earlier dependency. Sympathy for this action does not make every form of protection ethically sufficient. Reterritorialization identifies her renewed responsibility to manage the crisis and preserve the family connection at personal cost. Regional care research contextualizes such burdens without making this household representative of Malaysian mothers (Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung, 2022).

Reterritorialization also directs attention to homes, rooms, thresholds, and the right to speak. These spatial motifs raise relational questions: who can remain inside a relationship, who can set its conditions, who must speak through someone else, and who can decide what becomes public? In the narrative, the movement from concealed intimacy to parental management reassigns these rights. A viewer may nevertheless understand some restrictions as necessary safeguarding rather than coercion. That alternative is analytically important because it identifies the circumstance in which reterritorialization may strengthen, rather than weaken, belonging.

H4 directs attention from wrongdoing alone to the relational arrangements built in response to it. Protection may become surveillance, love may become possession, and moral defense may become reputational punishment; boundaries can also support safety when accompanied by accountability. Belonging research explains why membership and security need not coincide (Allen et al., 2021; Lähdesmäki et al., 2021; Walls & Louis, 2023).

Differences of class, generation, gendered obligation, and legal understanding become interculturally relevant when they shape competing definitions of care, dignity, or legitimate authority. Communication accommodation and identity

negotiation help examine these processes without assuming that all members of a cultural group speak alike (Giles, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2017). H5 accordingly proposes a stronger FRT–FB association under greater communication breakdown.

A boundary may be restorative when communicated through recognition and accountability, but destructive when expressed through shame, class contempt, or denial. This is an interpretive distinction, not a tested intervention. Neither family represents Malaysia as a whole. A critical intercultural reading keeps within-group differences and uneven power visible while allowing disagreement about their significance (Dervin, 2016; Piller, 2017). Cultural context thus concerns relationships, not a single national moral code.

The study also reads Southeast Asian crime drama as social diagnosis: a means of asking where law, desire, family, and class fail to align. This is the authors' interpretation, not audience consensus or a documented directorial intention. Settings can organize authority, access, and visibility; visual methodology also attends to framing, gesture, and absence (Rose, 2016).

Silence is equally important. Communication failure is not simply wordlessness but the inability of speech to create responsibility. In the film, concealment, self-protection, and the use of family authority can close discussion, while silence may also express fear, uncertainty, constrained agency, or refusal to participate in an unequal encounter. Face and identity negotiation help generate these competing interpretations rather than settle them in advance (Giles, 2016; Hou, 2023; Ting-Toomey, 2017). The analytical question is whose silence is being interpreted, by whom, and with what relational consequences.

Family reterritorialization should not be reduced to parental cruelty. Families can reorganize modern pressures through care, obligation, and discipline (Dommaraju, 2023; Yeoh et al., 2020; Yeung & Jones, 2024). An action may be understandable from a parent's position yet fail to restore a young person's security. This tension retains the characters' emotional difficulty rather than reducing them to variables.

The model preserves individual accountability while locating it within institutional and communicative arrangements. Structural explanations can excuse harm when they erase agency, whereas individual explanations can conceal conditions in which responsibility is evaded (Newman et al., 2020; Ogunfowora et al., 2022). Both levels matter: compassion for adult dependency cannot erase the asymmetry of a relationship with a schoolgirl.

Exposure need not resolve fragile belonging: public revelation may increase surveillance and shame even when described as repair. The central argument is that restoring order and restoring another person's secure place are different achievements. Belonging remains fragile when recognition, care, or a credible voice is conditional.

7. Conclusion

This study reads *At the End of Daybreak* through the difference between preserving a relationship and securing a person's place within it. Its contribution is not the claim that consumerism causes crime or that parental authority is inherently oppressive. It is a more specific account of how status-dependent recognition, weakened responsibility, and renewed family control can make attachment conditional. Intercultural communication matters because the terms of protection must be understood and negotiated across unequal positions, rather than merely imposed. The concept of family reterritorialization brings that problem into focus: returning a household to order may restore authority without restoring trust.

For teaching, the film offers material for discussing youth vulnerability, responsibility, family protection, and the distinction between cultural context and stereotype. These are possible uses, not evaluated learning outcomes, consistent with intercultural dialogue as engagement with difference (UNESCO, n.d.). The title's exhausted daybreak condenses the argument: becoming visible does not guarantee recognition. Care, control, and responsibility cannot be separated simply by deciding who belongs inside the family.

Ethics Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the survey. The survey was completely anonymous, and no personally identifiable data were collected, ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of all respondents.

Data Availability Statement

The data underlying the findings are not included in the manuscript. Any sharing or access to study data will be managed in accordance with applicable ethical, privacy, and institutional requirements.

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Author contributions

Jinxiu Wang was responsible for conceptualization, literature review, research design, data analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. David Hock Jin Neo contributed to theoretical development, methodology, and critical revision of the manuscript. Dongchen Xue contributed to literature review, data organization, and interpretation of the findings. Yan Li contributed to literature review, analysis support, and manuscript revision. Peng Sun contributed to conceptualization, supervision, project administration, and critical review and revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

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The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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