

Deconstruction of Madness and Reconstruction of Civilization: Narrative Breakout of Marginalized Groups in the Film “*Little Me*”

Sensen Zhang¹, Guili Zhang²

¹School of Art, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, China

²Network and Information Center, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, China

Email: 1079946102@qq.com, 1079946102@qq.com

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Abstract

Using Foucault’s theory of “*Madness and Civilization*” as a framework, this study analyzes the narrative construction of Liu Chunhe, a cerebral palsy patient, in the film *Little Me*. Through the protagonist’s physical alienation, behavioral transgressions and social gaze, the film reveals that the disabled group is pathologically constructed as the “extraordinary other” in the mainstream discourse system. Simultaneously, it deconstructs the implicit condition under the regulation of “civilization” with the help of grandmother’s level-headed care, the acceptance of the café owner and Ya Ya, and so on. The study reveals the relationship between individual resistance and discrimination. The study reveals the tension between individual resistance and social norms, criticizes the suppression of special groups by the rational order, and proposes a path of inclusive social construction from “sympathy” to “co-existence”, providing a new theoretical perspective for the study of film and television with disabilities.

Keywords

Madness and Civilization, Disabled Groups, Cinematic Art, *Little Me*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance of the Study

The film *Little Me* focuses on the survival of Liu Chunhe, a cerebral palsy patient, and through his interactions with his family and society, it challenges the dichotomous framework of “insanity” and “civilization”, and echoes Foucault’s critique

of the regulation of power and the reconfiguration of subjectivity. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault points out that “madness” is not a natural category, but an “other” constructed by the mechanism of social power, and its opposition to “civilization” is essentially the opposition between power and civilization. Its opposition to “civilization” is essentially the exclusion and discipline of the abnormal body by the discourse of power.¹ However, through Liu Chunhe’s narrative, the film transforms this opposition into a dynamic dialogue: his “abnormal” behavior is not a symbol of “insanity,” but rather a resistance to and reconstruction of the definition of “civilization” (Li, 2011). His “abnormal” behavior is not a symbol of “madness”, but a resistance to and reconstruction of the definition of “civilization”. In the film, Liu Chunhe is blamed by the passengers for his uncontrolled fall on the bus, and his job search is repeatedly rejected due to his cerebral palsy status, which maps out the “civilized rejection” of the disabled group in society - a kind of violent regulation in the name of “normalcy”, which is a form of “civilization”, and a form of “civilization”. The movie reflects the “civilized rejection” of the disabled in society - a kind of violent discipline in the name of “normalcy”. However, the film reverses this gaze through Liu Chunhe’s perspective: when he uses Yuan Mei’s Moss to inspire his students at a training center, his self-explanation that “even a moss flower as small as a rice plant can bloom like a peony” is not only a declaration of his own value, but also an exercise in “aesthetics of survival” - through the poetic self-explanation of “aesthetics of survival”, he is not only a declaration of his own value, but also an exercise in “aesthetics of survival”. It is not only a declaration of one’s own value, but also a practice of “the aesthetics of existence” - through poetic self-expression, the “abnormality” is transformed into a differentiated art of existence. This narrative strategy is intertextual with Foucault’s “technology of the self” in his later years, that is, the individual reconstructs the disciplined body and identity through creative practice.

The social significance of the film lies in the fact that it deconstructs the solidified boundary of “insanity/civilization” through visual language such as mirror montage (e.g. Liu Chunhe’s emotional interaction with the “normal” Ya Ya). Ya Ya’s rejection of Liu Chunhe due to social pressure reveals the hidden logic of reproduction and resource distribution behind “civilization”, while the shot of Liu Chunhe driving a car symbolizes his awakening of subjectivity as he breaks free from the shackles of both the physical and social worlds. This kind of narrative not only provides the disabled group with a space for subjective speech, but also forces society to reflect on the legitimacy of its exclusionary mechanism through the “gaze reversal” between the audience and the characters.

The significance of this study is to analyze the innovative expression of *Little Me* through an interdisciplinary perspective (film and television narratology and the archaeology of madness), and to reveal how the image becomes a “cultural device” that reconfigures social cognition. Through Liu Chunhe’s practice of survival, the film transforms Foucault’s “topology of power” into a fluid narrative of life, ultimately pointing to a more inclusive social landscape where “madness” and

“civilization” are intertwined. The boundaries between “madness” and “civilization” are dissolved by the aesthetics of symbiosis.

1.2. The Current Status of Domestic and International Research

The study of films about disabled people focuses on characterization and social significance, and many scholars and filmmakers have devoted themselves to exploring how to break the stereotypes of disabled people, such as the example of the role of Forrest Gump and the promotion of social attention to disabled people, as well as the relationship between such special groups and the society, etc. The performance of the protagonist Yi Yangqianxi is a breakthrough in acting, which has been called “skull-crushing performance” by many industry insiders. The performance of the protagonist, Yi YangQianxi, is a breakthrough in his acting skill and role, which is called a “skull-shattering performance” by many industry insiders. In addition to the breakthroughs of the actor’s own physical and verbal performance, the deep-seated “human nature” of this movie is even more thought-provoking. Existing studies on film symbolism are mostly based on humanistic inspirations, but there is no analysis of this kind of film in the perspective of “madness and civilization”, so this study focuses on this, in-depth exploration of the complex tension between the disabled group, as a marginalized group “defined” by the mainstream rationality, and the rational order of the society, and analysis of the film text. This study focuses on the complex tension between the disabled group, as a marginal group “defined” by mainstream rationality, and the rational order of the society, and shows the process of their struggle for the right to speak from “insanity” to “civilization” through the interpretation and analysis of the film texts.

1.3. Research Methodology and Innovations

This thesis integrates a variety of research methods, such as textual analysis, case study and comparative research, in order to analyze the film *Little Me* in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner. Firstly, the textual analysis method explores the connotation of the film’s narrative structure, characterization and thematic expression, and explores the presentation of the existential state of the disabled group and the point of convergence with the theory of “insanity and civilization”; secondly, the case study method compares *Little Me* with the same type of films about the disabled group, such as *Forrest Gump* and *Oasis*, often through the use of the case study method. The second one uses case study method to compare *Little Me* with similar films about disabled people, such as “*Forrest Gump*” and “*Oasis*”, which often portray disabled people as “heroes” beyond physical limitations through “inspirational narratives”, but such narratives imply the pursuit of “normalization” and the tacit acceptance of social standards and reasonableness. But this kind of narrative implies the pursuit of “normalization” and the tacit acceptance of the rationality of social standards. On the other hand, *Little Me* rejects this kind of unidirectional modeling and exposes the exclusionary nature of the

social structure itself, which is closer to Foucault's critique of the power mechanism. On the one hand, the law of comparative study is used throughout the film, on the other hand, the theory of "insanity and civilization" is combined to compare the marginalized "insanity" of the disabled group in the film, and on the other hand, the theory of "insanity and civilization" is combined to compare the "insanity" of the disabled group in the film. On the other hand, combining the theory of "madness and civilization", the film contrasts the marginalized "madness" of the disabled group with their pursuit of "civilization", thus showing the conflict and integration process.

Its innovation is that it breaks through the limitation of previous films that study disabled groups purely from the perspective of humanistic concern and inspiration and introduces Foucault's theory of "madness and civilization" to analyze in depth the contradictions and conflicts between the disabled groups in the film, as a marginalized group "defined" by the mainstream rationality, and the social order. As a marginalized group "defined" by mainstream rationality, the movie analyzes the contradiction and conflict between the disabled group and the social order. It breaks through the traditional perspective and provides a new perspective for research and social civilization thinking.

2. The Insane Imagery of the Movie *Little Me* Presents That

According to Foucault, insanity is not a natural state, but the definition and regulation of "irrationality" in a rational society. In the film, Liu Chunhe's physical alienation and behavioral transgressions are the products of such rational discipline, and he rebels against "civilization" under the social discipline through the representation of "insanity".

2.1. Representations of Physical "Madness"

The problem of irrationality in art is generally manifested in two aspects. One is the irrational image in artworks, and the other is the irrational behavior of artists.² In the movie *Little Me*, Liu Chunhe, the main character, has cerebral palsy, which causes his body to display a series of "crazy" signs that are different from those of normal people (Qin, 2018). In terms of body movements, he walks with a staggering pace, as if he will fall down at any time, his leg muscles tremble uncontrollably, and his knee joints are often bent and difficult to straighten, resulting in a seriously abnormal gait. In terms of hand movements, the fingers are contracted and it is extremely difficult to grasp objects. For example, if you try to pick up a pen, your fingers will keep shaking and it will take a long time before you can barely hold it. Facial expression is also abnormal, the corners of the mouth from time to time twitching, face muscles twisted when speaking, eyes are also difficult to focus due to involuntary head shaking, showing a sense of wandering, panic, these external manifestations intuitively show the body's "out of control" state, and the norms of physical action followed by the ordinary people in stark contrast, as in a kind of "confinement" of the body, the patient is in a kind of "confinement" of the

body. It is like being in a kind of madness “confined” by the body, deviating from the normal body norms. This heterogeneity of the body echoes Foucault’s revelation of the “bestial view of madness”, that “when the medical gaze constructs the non-conforming body as an object in need of correction, the body itself becomes a topological space for the regulation of power”.

2.2. The “Insanity” of the Behavior Manifests Itself

Liu Chunhe’s behavior also shows a lot of “irrationality”, in sharp contrast to society’s secular rules and regulations. Despite the limitations of his physical condition, he insisted on learning to drive, practicing in the driving school, his body is difficult to coordinate the operation of the steering wheel, pedals, and even nearly caused an accident, the people around him are casting surprised stares, that his behavior is full of dangers and recklessness, but he does not give up easily, and is determined to break through the confinement, to master the skills that are difficult to reach in the eyes of the ordinary people; seeking employment, he saw the café job posting, then he did not hesitate to apply, in front of the interviewer, he went to apply for the job. In his job search, he saw a job posting for a café and applied for the job without hesitation. In front of the interviewer, he insisted on improvising the names of the dishes and tongue twisters despite his trembling hands and slurred speech, which appeared to be almost “crazy” to others, but he threw his weight behind it just to seize the opportunity to integrate into the society, and to prove that he is an “ordinary person with a good memory! He is a “normal person with a good memory”. This insistence on going against the norm highlights his extreme desire for a normal life, as if he were outside the norms of rational behavior, challenging the established “civilized” order in his own “crazy” way.

2.3. Metaphors of Social Gaze and Closure

In the social situation constructed by the movie, Liu Chunhe is surrounded by different gazes from people around him, and these gazes are like shackles, trapping him in the stereotype of “madness”. In the movie, he says, “I’ve bumped into all kinds of gazes in the crowd, some pitying me, some fearing me, some loathing me, but there is seldom a look that dares to look at me directly.” (Lei, 2025)

At the birthday party, he blew out the candles many times to no avail, and was ridiculed and disliked by the crowd; on the bus, the driver saw him getting on the bus with difficulty and impatiently urged him to get on the bus; after he gave up his seat for others and thus caused the brakes to be fallen, the passengers also looked sideways to accuse him and urged the driver to hurry up, and deliberately alienated him; in the organization to give the children a trial lecture, even if he was ridiculed mercilessly, he also insisted on finishing the lecture, even if he was finally rejected. Still being rejected... This ubiquitous attention to the different, so that Liu Chunhe is always in the situation of being scrutinized, marginalized, and become the mainstream social vision of the “crazy” symbols, highlighting the dis-

abled groups in the process of integration into the community encountered a strong resistance, and the established “normal” order of the society to form a sharp conflict. This highlights the strong resistance encountered by the disabled group in the process of social integration, which is in sharp conflict with the established “normal” order of society. This mechanism of exclusion is similar to the confinement of the insane during the classical period, in which the dichotomy between the “normal” and the “abnormal” was realized through physical segregation and psychological alienation

Through the presentation of Liu Chunhe’s “crazy” state, the movie not only reveals the plight of the disabled group in society, but also provides the necessary background for the subsequent gentle guarding and deconstruction.” (Figure 1)

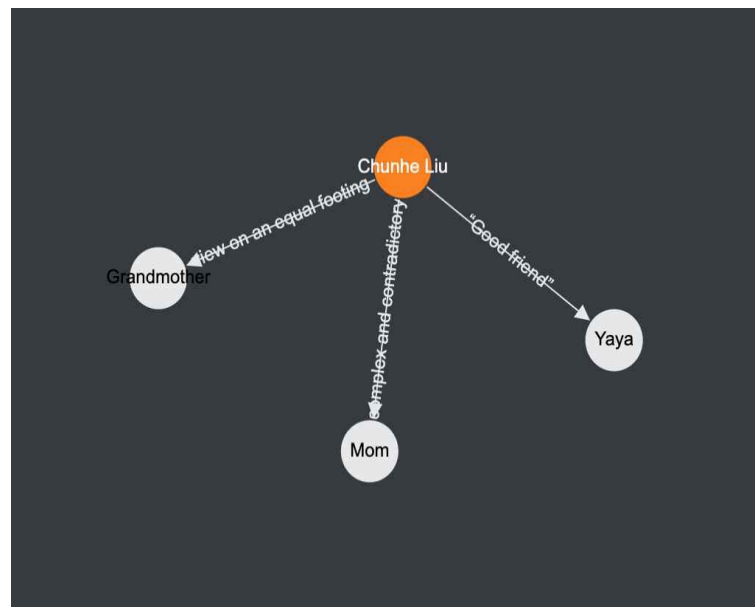


Figure 1. Character relationship chart of *Little Me*.

3. The Warmth of Guardianship in a Civilized Perspective

3.1. A Level-Headed and Open-Minded Grandmother

Simone, always well-dressed, with fashionable curly hair and a fluent dialect, looks at Liu Chunhe with a level head. She is positive, optimistic and open-minded. She does not confine Chunhe like his mother does, but takes him out with practical actions; she actively takes Chunhe to socialize and play the drums, affirms Chunhe’s ability to support his artistic pursuits, and fosters Chunhe’s self-confidence with love and encouragement; when Chunhe goes to the coffee shop for a job interview, he does not choose to protect Chunhe from all sides, but silently follows him behind. When Chunhe went to the coffee shop alone for an interview, he did not choose the “all-around” protection, but followed Chunhe silently behind him, and when Chunhe gained success, she would cry with joy and celebrate with Chunhe together. Grandma’s actions not only let Liu Chunhe find an outlet for his emotions in art, but also gave him invaluable self-confidence, making

Chunhe believe that he can pursue his dreams like a normal person, and that he can still feel warmth and hope in spite of his predicament, so that he can have more courage to fight against the label of “madness” imposed by the outside world, and gradually find his own “madness”. In this way, he has more courage to fight against the label of “madness” imposed by the outside world, and gradually finds his own “Spring and Jingming”.

3.2. Paradoxical and Special Moms That

Liu Chunhe’s mother is not the flawless one in most movies and TV dramas; instead, she is puzzling and contradictory. As in the essay collection *All Realms*, Keizan wrote about his understanding of mother’s love. “Can a mother’s love be glorified. I don’t think there’s ever been a perfect mother, a perfect mother’s love. In fact, true mother’s love is a mixture of exhaustion, guilt, sadness, hardship, anger, loneliness and other emotions. Women who haven’t been loved well are hardly the mothers who can be loved unless they are able to reflect, educate themselves, and keep learning. Otherwise, motherhood, like relationships between men and women, can be controlling and possessive, and end in disappointment and distance.” From the movie, it is easy to see that the mother is also a lack of motherly love in childhood (Zhou, 2025), can not help but remind me of a sentence: I am also the first time to become a mother. Compared to Grandma’s open-mindedness, Mom’s feelings towards Liu Chunhe are more complex and entangled. Foucault criticized modern psychiatry for exercising power control in the name of “treatment”. Mom’s overprotection of Chunhe and her attempts to “correct” his life by restricting his movements are in fact a reflection of the implicit discipline of the family and society towards the disabled, depriving them of their autonomy. “It’s your life, and it’s my life,” says the mother, who seems to be controlling and selfish, but in fact contains an incredibly tender and even-handed view.

3.3. Somewhat “Inexplicable” Friends

Tiny Me is the first movie in China to address the emotional needs of people with cerebral palsy. The movie boldly presents Liu Chunhe’s sexual needs and desire for love, breaking through the traditional avoidance of emotional issues in handicapped subjects. According to Foucault, rational society regards desire as “irrational” to be suppressed, and through this plot, the film criticizes the prejudice of society in “de-sexualizing” people with disabilities. Like the “stealing girl” in “Mama,” Ya Ya is also virtualized, with neither a place to come nor a place to go. She is Chun Wo’s dream of spring, the fantasy of youth, the poem of broken dreams. The pursuit of feelings is the key to Chunhe’s search for himself. While his family and work are frustrated, the appearance of Ya Ya confirms that Chunhe is a “normal person”, and that even cerebral palsy groups have lust, and his love for Ya Ya can be seen as Liu Chunhe’s longing for a sound body. His love for Ya Ya can be seen as Liu Chunhe’s desire for a sound body. By possessing Ya Ya, he

tries to indirectly obtain the complete body he has been dreaming of.

3.4. Admission of Social Minorities

In the movie *Little Me*, the character design of the café owner presents a complex dialectic of power. This character is not a simple symbol of utilitarianism, but a microcosm of the social discipline mechanism and a carrier of individual ethical awakening, whose behavioral logic and value transformation reveal the dynamic process of Foucault's saying that "power produces both repression and resistance". The owner of the café may have a utilitarian purpose at first, trying to use Liu Chunhe's disability to gain fame for the store and attract customers, but he is gradually impressed by Liu Chunhe's hard work and persistence. In the movie, the owner of the café first explains in detail to Liu Chunhe the intensity of his work during the interview, and carefully examines whether he is capable of doing the job. Liu Chunhe proves that he can do the job despite his disability by pacing back and forth, naming dishes, and slurring his words, proving that "I'm an ordinary person with a good memory". Therefore, Liu Chunhe was able to get the job mainly because his hard work and positive attitude were recognized and appreciated by the café's owner.

In addition, the interaction between the elderly and Liu Chunhe in the movie also constitutes a relationship of mutual redemption. From their initial dislike of Liu Chunhe to their gradual acceptance and encouragement of him, this process not only reflects the mutual understanding and support between marginalized groups in society, but also demonstrates the warmth and kindness of human nature. Liu Chunhe also brings convenience and happiness to the elderly by teaching them how to use smartphones, further deepening their emotional ties.

4. Deconstruction of "Madness" and Reconstruction of "Civilization"

4.1. The Deconstruction of the Symbol of Madness under the Discipline of Civilization

Liu Chunhe's character demonstrates the essence of what Foucault called "madness". According to Foucault, madness is a state that mixes vision, disorientation, images, hallucinations, language, sleep and wakefulness, day and night, etc. Liu Chunhe shows this mixed state through his behavior and language in the movie. Liu Chunhe shows this mixed state in his movie through his behavior and language. For example, he asks his mother, "Who made me like this?" This question not only reflects his confusion about his own identity but also reveals his labeling and stereotyping by society.

4.2. Resistance to and Reconstruction of Civilization

Liu Chunhe's rebellion against civilization and pursuit of self-worth reflects Foucault's critique of the relationship between "madness" and "reason". According to Foucault, modern medicine considers madness as a disease and incorporates it

into the field of mental illness, thus constructing a social framework centered on rationality. Liu Chunhe, through his actions, challenges this framework and tries to break the limitations imposed by the society to find his own way of living. In the movie, the details of Liu Chunhe's daily life, such as the cicada molt, the metaphor of the suitcase, the embracing of the skeleton to fall asleep, and the phantom of Thunderclap, all symbolize his exploration of self-identity and his desire for freedom. These details not only enrich the character's inner world, but also reflect the complexity of what Foucault called "madness" as a cultural phenomenon. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Mutexes.

5. Reflection and Revelation of the Film on Social Civilization: from "Sympathy" to "Co-Existence"

5.1. Stereotypes of Special Groups Are Broken Down

"Liu Chunhe, standing on the podium, puts all his efforts to teach the children, and with the metaphor of "moss flower", the movie subverts the traditional stereotype of cerebral palsy patients, while Liu Chunhe's rich spiritual world and the dignity of pursuing with all his efforts is a call to the society to respect the personality and potential of the disabled groups, which are marginalized in the society and no longer seen as "abnormal", but special ordinary people. The film appeals to the society to respect the personality and potential of the disabled group, and that these marginalized groups are no longer "deviants" in people's eyes, but special ordinary people. To a certain extent, this will help to break the public's stereotype of the disabled and create a good social effect. It is easy to fall into the narrative trap of consuming suffering and displaying the body, but "*Little Me*" does not create a spectacle, but also uniquely uses a skeleton model props to visualize the body, which directly contrasts with Chun Wo, and its meaning is more obvious and far-reaching (Qiao, 2025). Because of these values, the creative team also used a poem by Gong Su, a poet with cerebral palsy, so that we can truly see the talent of special groups and respect their expression (Rao, 2025).

5.2. The "Co-Existence" with Liu Chunhe and Others in a Level-Headed Way

Liu Chunhe's encounters reflect the general plight of the disabled group, there are many obstacles in education, employment, public space, etc., but this group of people with broken bodies has the most complete soul, which reminds me of Shi

Tiesheng, “Life is as long as a dark room, but it doesn’t prevent me from writing spring poems”. Liu Chun and time and again to fight with the beast in life is to prove that he is a normal person, whether the disabled group and normal people can be the same as a fair education; whether normal employment; whether normal survival in public space; whether there are emotions, sexuality.... All these problems not only let us reflect, but also let the society wake up, for the disabled group of the greatest respect is to level with Liu Chunhe “in”.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Summary of the Study

The film *Little Me* presents the world of Liu Chunhe, a cerebral palsy patient, from an innovative perspective. Under the perspective of “insanity and civilization”, the film also presents the complex situation of the disabled group. On the one hand, Liu Chunhe is marginalized and misunderstood due to his physical manifestation of “insanity”, his “irrational” behavior, and his “insanity” position in the eyes of the society. On the other hand, the tolerance, equal treatment and acceptance given by family members, friends and a few members of the society give them some personal space while they are being disciplined.

The film profoundly reveals the contradictions and conflicts between the individual’s pursuit of “normalcy” and social norms, civilized appearance and hidden discrimination, emotional demands and realistic responses, and at the same time breaks down the stereotypes of special groups and shows the glory of human nature, which is exactly the same as the “aesthetics of existence” put forward by Foucault in his later years. This is precisely the intertext with the “aesthetics of existence” proposed by Foucault in his later years - when individuals transform abnormality into the art of existence through self-technology, they are actually reconstructing the topology of the social disciplinary mechanism. This film is not only a masterpiece of artistic creation in its delicate portrayal of the disabled group, but also, at the social level, prompts the public to reflect on their attitudes towards the special group, provides inspiration for the promotion of social civilization and the realization of justice, and makes people realize that respecting every “*little me*” is the key to a more civilized and humane society.

6.2. Research Outlook

In the end, *Little Me* does not yet provide a utopian solution: Chunhe receives a letter of acceptance from the teacher’s college, his grandmother removes the silk scarf she has been wearing around her neck, and he does not become a “success” in the secular sense of the word, but he questions the absolute authority of reason with his very existence. As Foucault said, “Respect for madness is the lowest limit for recognizing the truth of mankind”. Through its perverse anti-climactic narrative, the film suggests that the game between civilization and madness has never stopped, and that real progress may lie in embracing the symbiosis between rationality and madness - like Chun Wo’s trembling but firm fingers, which bear

the weight of discipline and the power to write resistance. “Future research can further explore the applicability of Foucault’s theories in different cultural contexts, or analyze the narrative strategies of disability films from a cross-cultural perspective.”

At the end of the text, I conclude with the following poem.

I’m a flower that never fails to bloom.

In my heart of life.

Hiding a skeleton of a migratory bird.

My roots are in the dirt.

My heart is on a white cloud.

Don’t worry about me dying at the pace of travelers.

I have a faith that never falls to the ground.

I’ll take the rain, I’ll take the rain.

I’m going to get into the soil.

To be a late-sprouting seed in the coming year.

I’m one of millions of lakes.

I’m going to turn my life into an epic movie.

My life is 10,000 times more springtime and beautiful.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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