

Character Analysis of Absurd Comedy Films from a Deconstructionist Perspective: A Study on Crazy Stone, Crazy Racer, and Crazy Alien

Yingrui Shi

Cheongju University, South Korea

Abstract: *The "Crazy Trilogy" is a series of films directed by Ning Hao, with each film focusing on jade, racing, and aliens as its narrative core. The protagonists in these films each possess distinct characteristics. By employing deconstruction theory, this paper deconstructs these characters to reveal the underlying social traits, specifically the situation of marginalized individuals within the broader social context. The study finds that the application of multi-linear narrative theory establishes a continuity and connection in the narrative structures of these three films. In addition to depicting urban marginalized characters, the director incorporates humanistic care and social expectations.*

Keywords: Multi-linear narrative, Deconstruction, Ning Hao, "Crazy Trilogy".

1. Introduction

Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy," which includes Crazy Stone (2006), Crazy Racer (2009), and Crazy Alien (2019), has become a classic in Chinese cinema due to its unique comedic style and profound depiction of ordinary characters. These three films skillfully blend social realities with comedic elements through black humor and absurd storylines, presenting a satirical portrayal of society. In these works, Ning Hao not only showcases diverse character traits through a multi-linear narrative approach but also uses comedic techniques to highlight the absurdity and hardships faced by ordinary people in society. The success of these films has broken box office records and sparked widespread discussion on cultural and social levels, marking them as significant milestones in Chinese comedy cinema.

This paper aims to deeply analyze the character traits in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy" by applying deconstruction theory and multi-linear narrative theory, focusing on how these characters are portrayed within a comedic context and their underlying significance. By examining the diversity and complexity of the characters in these films, the study explores how Ning Hao uses comedy to reveal social realities and present genuine social critique through absurd storylines. Specifically, this paper investigates how these characters reflect social injustices, individual predicaments, and the absurdity of power structures within the comedic narrative.

The analysis of the character traits in the "Crazy Trilogy" not only sheds light on Ning Hao's innovative narrative techniques in comedy but also enhances the understanding of contemporary Chinese comedy films. By analyzing how Ning Hao constructs these comedic characters within the frameworks of realism and multi-linear narrative, this paper offers new perspectives on character portrayal in comedy films. Additionally, this research enriches the academic discussion on Ning Hao's works and provides insights into the representation of social realism in Chinese comedy films.

2. Theoretical Background

This study is based on the principles of deconstruction and multi-linear narrative theory. These two theories not only have broad applications in film studies but also provide significant perspectives and methods for analyzing the characteristics of comedic characters in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy." This chapter will build a theoretical foundation for analyzing character traits in Ning Hao's comedies by exploring these theories in depth.

2.1 Principles of Deconstruction

2.1.1 Basic Concepts of Deconstruction

Deconstruction as a theory begins with its central figure, Jacques Derrida, and his concept of anti-logocentrism. Derrida's anti-logocentrism is primarily reflected in texts and has influenced subsequent thinkers, including the "Yale School" and Roland Barthes. Integrating deconstruction into film involves dividing the narrative background into several parts, dissecting an overall structure into multiple individual elements, and using these elements to further explore the essence of the original whole. In films, deconstructing social reality moves from society to family and then to the individual, creating an "observing the larger through the smaller" effect.

2.1.2 Realism Deconstruction in Films

In cinema, realism deconstruction is expressed not only through questioning surface authenticity but also by breaking traditional narratives and exposing hidden power relationships within characters and social structures. By deconstructing conventional presentations of characters and plots, realism deconstruction aims to reveal deeper social truths hidden beneath the "reality." In such narratives, characters often have complex motives, acting both as victims and influencers, reflecting the multifaceted and intricate nature of social reality.

Although Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy" is full of absurdity and comedic flair, the deconstruction of reality holds significant importance. Ning Hao reveals social structures and ideologies through intricate depictions of ordinary characters and

satirical portrayals of social reality. In these films, the protagonists serve as both carriers of absurd stories and metaphors for social conditions. By deconstructing traditional realist narratives, Ning Hao creates a world that is both real and absurd, adding depth to the films and allowing audiences to feel the absurdity and helplessness of reality amidst laughter.

2.2 Multi-Linear Narrative Theory

2.2.1 Definition and Development of Multi-Linear Narrative Theory

Originating from narrative studies, multi-linear narrative theory emphasizes the parallel development of multiple storylines, showcasing complex story structures and rich character relationships. Multi-linear narratives break the limitations of traditional single-line storytelling by presenting intersecting or parallel storylines, offering audiences a multidimensional narrative experience. This structure allows different storylines to develop from their own perspectives and intersect or clash at critical moments, adding complexity and depth to the narrative.

2.2.2 Application of Multi-Linear Narratives in Storytelling

The application of multi-linear narrative theory makes storytelling more dynamic and diverse. By juxtaposing different storylines, the narrative presents multiple facets of events and deepens character development. This technique is particularly effective in ensemble films, where multiple characters' fates are intertwined through multi-linear storytelling, adding complexity to their interactions and presenting a more comprehensive depiction of social reality. It helps to showcase the diversity within a group and individual reactions and actions in various social settings.

In Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy," multi-linear narratives are a key feature of the storytelling structure. Ning Hao interweaves the fates of various minor characters through multiple parallel storylines, such as the intricate plot surrounding the jade in *Crazy Stone*, the parallel racing and crime storylines in *Crazy Racer*, and the intersecting narratives involving humans, aliens, the police, and gangs in *Crazy Alien*. These multi-linear structures enhance the pacing and narrative tension of the films while adding complexity to character relationships, thus highlighting their multifaceted nature and the absurdity of social reality.

2.3 Integration and Application of Theories

While deconstruction and multi-linear narrative theory respectively emphasize the deconstruction of reality and the layout of complex storytelling, these theories are skillfully combined in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy." Through realism deconstruction, Ning Hao breaks traditional narrative patterns, uncovering the societal issues and internal conflicts of characters hidden beneath the surface; through multi-linear narrative, he weaves the fates of different characters into a complex ensemble. In this process, Ning Hao not only creates vivid comedic characters but also reflects broader social realities through their experiences.

This paper will conduct an in-depth analysis of the comedic character traits in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy" by combining deconstruction principles and multi-linear narrative theory. The focus will be on how these comedic characters are not only humorous elements in the plot but also reveal true social dilemmas and absurdities through deconstructed realist narratives. Ning Hao's use of multi-linear storytelling interlaces the characters' fates, offering audiences a rich narrative experience while making these ordinary figures more vivid and three-dimensional.

3. Character Analysis in Crazy Stone

Crazy Stone is the first film in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy," centering around a piece of jade and the fierce competition among thieves, security guards, and gangsters to obtain it. Using a multi-linear narrative structure, Ning Hao successfully creates a vivid group of minor characters who showcase unique comedic traits within an absurd plot, while reflecting societal dilemmas and helplessness. The following analysis delves into how these characters' multifaceted traits are expressed through the film's multi-linear structure and realist deconstruction.

3.1 Narrative Structure Analysis

The film employs a multi-linear narrative structure that unfolds multiple storylines simultaneously, interweaving and colliding to build tension. This approach not only heightens the comedic effect but also connects each character's actions into a complex social network.

Crazy Stone features three main narrative threads: the first follows Factory Director Xie, his son Xie Xiaomeng, and two security officers; the second involves the developer and his secretary, along with the professional thief they hire to steal the jade; the third focuses on a group of three petty thieves and their leader's girlfriend. These three groups are embroiled in a fierce contest over the jade. Ning Hao skillfully ties all the characters together through a car accident, setting the stage for the multi-linear plot.

The first storyline features Factory Director Xie, who decides to exhibit the jade in Guandi Temple to pay his workers' wages, with Bao Shihong and Sanbao in charge of security. The second thread follows the developer and his secretary, who hire an international thief to steal the jade to pressure Director Xie into selling the factory land. The third storyline revolves around the trio of petty thieves who plan to steal the jade for money. The film's first half focuses on the preparations of each group, while the second half depicts their clashes over the jade.

The developer and his secretary in the second storyline represent urban capitalists who stop at nothing for profit. To coerce Director Xie into selling the land, they hire a thief, but his repeated mishaps prevent him from acquiring the jade, resulting in the accidental death of the developer instead. The third storyline, involving the three thieves, intersects with the others at key moments, such as at the Paris Inn where Bao Shihong, the thieves, and the international thief all check-in, unaware of each other's identities. Props like the medicinal oil used for injuries become pivotal in connecting these stories.

3.2 Character Analysis

As the leader of the thieves, Mike embodies absurdity and helplessness. He appears cunning but fails due to unforeseen mishaps. Mike's meticulously planned heist often goes awry, such as when he tries to enter the exhibition through a manhole but crashes into debris. This scene highlights his "high intelligence, low success" trait and underscores the difficulties faced by ordinary individuals in navigating a complex society. Mike's failures provide comedic moments but also illustrate the helplessness of lower-class individuals confronting larger social systems.

Dao and Lao, Mike's bumbling assistants, are among the film's most comedic characters. When tasked with guarding the exhibition hall, they become distracted by a card game and fail to notice changes in their surroundings. This negligence even leads a street vendor to mistake them for customers. Their professional blunders not only elicit laughter but also emphasize the film's critique of the hardships and absurdity faced by the lower class, highlighting their struggle to change their circumstances.

Bao Shihong, the security captain, believes he is the last line of defense for the exhibition and takes his job very seriously. However, his efforts are continuously thwarted. In one instance, he mistakenly triggers an alarm, causing chaos in the exhibition hall. This scene demonstrates his strong sense of responsibility, juxtaposed with his ineffectiveness, illustrating the flaws in the security system. Bao's determination and futility become another significant comedic element, representing those who strive to maintain social order but are powerless in the face of societal complexity.

The behavior of the security team further reinforces their incompetence and the absurdity of their role. In one scene, a guard rushes through his patrol to be efficient, only to inadvertently activate the automatic doors and lock himself outside the hall. Though minor, this blunder reveals the team's numerous vulnerabilities and their inability to uphold actual order, symbolizing individuals burdened with duties but unable to navigate complex realities, deepening the film's satire.

Although the gangster leader has minimal screen time, he plays a crucial role as the story's invisible force. His control is manifested through phone calls and instructions. However, miscommunications lead to repeated failures among his subordinates, such as a failed pursuit due to poor coordination. This situation not only enhances the sense of an omnipresent power figure but also shows how such "power" becomes ineffective when faced with lower-class society. This invisible threat looms over the minor characters, binding their fate and underscoring their inescapable struggles.

4. Character Analysis in Crazy Racer

Crazy Racer is the second film in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy," continuing his focus on the struggles of marginalized individuals and his satire of societal realities. The film begins with a racing competition that intertwines the fates of various characters, forming an absurd yet intense chase. Through a multi-linear narrative structure, Ning Hao brings together

seemingly unrelated characters and uses their conflicts and interactions to present a deep reflection on social reality. This chapter analyzes the main characters to explore how Ning Hao uses comedy and realist deconstruction to shape their traits.

4.1 Narrative Structure Analysis

Crazy Racer features five main narrative threads. The primary thread follows Geng Hao, a disgraced former cyclist. The second and third threads involve a mob boss, Donghai, and a pair of assassins aiming to fund their marriages. The fourth and fifth threads center on a corrupt businessman, Li Fala, and a drug trafficker, Chachai. The film opens with the intersection of Geng Hao's and Li Fala's stories, showing how Geng Hao's career is ruined after being framed by Li Fala. The first and third storylines intersect when the assassins impersonate police and steal Geng Hao's truck as part of Li Fala's plan to have his wife killed. The intersection between Geng Hao and the mob boss occurs at Geng Hao's master's funeral, where Geng Hao is mistaken for the gang's target, and the master's ashes are taken. The film's narrative threads all converge at the racecourse in the climactic scenes.

4.2 Character Analysis

Geng Hao, a cyclist banned due to a doping scandal, embodies tragicomic elements as he is caught in a series of unfortunate events. The film begins with reporters exposing his alleged doping, ending his career and setting a somber tone. Despite this setback, Geng Hao does not abandon his pursuit of justice and tirelessly attempts to clear his name. In a key scene, he rides his bicycle to re-enter a race but accidentally gets caught in a chaotic confrontation sparked by a drug deal. His bewildered expression amid the ensuing violence and disorder highlights his futile attempts to escape, underscoring his determination and naivety in the face of harsh realities. Ning Hao uses this scene to depict the helplessness of ordinary people struggling against fate, satirizing society's hypocritical pursuit of honor—no matter how hard one tries to escape, unseen forces often pull them back.

The mob represents a constant source of pressure and threat, appearing powerful yet often engaging in ridiculous and inept actions. A notable scene involves the mob boss sending his subordinates to chase Geng Hao for a debt, only for them to repeatedly fail, even mistaking Geng Hao for someone else, leading to a series of absurd chases. This incompetence highlights the mob's comedic ineptitude, with subordinates generating continuous laugh-out-loud moments through miscommunication and mistakes. The mob boss, exasperated over the phone, symbolizes the loss of control and absurdity of power structures in society. This scene, through its use of absurdity, critiques the seeming strength yet practical ineffectiveness of power in controlling reality.

The assassins, Ah Tang and Ah Hao, play a major comedic role, frequently failing their missions and creating humorous moments through mistaken identities. A standout scene involves them mistaking an innocent bystander for Geng Hao's accomplice during a pursuit, resulting in chaos before they realize their error. The assassins' incompetence and blunders not only provide comic relief but also critique the

ineptitude of so-called "professional" figures when faced with real-life complexities. They symbolize individuals tasked with special roles who fail to perform effectively, reflecting the powerlessness of individuals within complicated social dynamics.

The police captain, representing the force of justice, is portrayed with a sense of helplessness, as he and his team consistently find themselves outmaneuvered. A telling scene involves the captain receiving orders to capture the gang and the drug trafficker, only for delays and mismanagement to allow the criminals to escape easily. In one operation, the captain's team arrives at an empty location, their intelligence outdated and ineffective. This recurring scenario emphasizes the captain's impotence as a symbol of justice, showing how the forces of justice are constrained and rendered ineffective by various power structures. This portrayal satirizes institutional inefficacy and hints at a deeper issue: the failure of justice to be maintained in a chaotic society.

These character portrayals in *Crazy Racer* collectively highlight Ning Hao's skillful use of comedy and realism to critique social structures, depicting how individuals—whether striving for redemption, enforcing power, or representing justice—struggle within a system that resists their efforts, often to an absurd and comedic end.

5. Character Analysis in *Crazy Alien*

Crazy Alien is the third installment in Ning Hao's "Crazy Trilogy," building upon the absurd comedic style of the previous films while incorporating science fiction elements. The film tells the story of ordinary people interacting with an alien civilization, showcasing a broader social backdrop for the fate of these characters. Through multi-linear narrative structure and cross-cultural conflicts, Ning Hao uses humor, satire, and realist deconstruction to reveal the absurdities of human society and the helplessness of ordinary individuals. This chapter will analyze the main characters and explore how they present complexity and social metaphors within the dual framework of comedy and realism.

5.1 Narrative Structure Analysis

Crazy Alien opens with four seemingly unrelated storylines that intersect throughout the film, facilitated by coincidences. The main storyline follows the down-and-out performer Geng Hao as he seeks investment to revitalize his monkey show. The three subplots involve an alien named Chika who lands on Earth and is mistaken for a monkey, Da Fei's schemes to sell animals for profit, and John, a C-country agent aiming to monopolize extraterrestrial diplomacy. The first convergence occurs when John visits Geng Hao's circus, mistaking the monkey Huanhuan for Chika. Geng Hao and Da Fei use this opportunity to deceive John and are taken to a C-country laboratory for a so-called diplomatic exchange. The second convergence happens when John realizes the "ambassador" is a monkey and returns to confront Geng Hao, just as Huanhuan comes into contact with Chika, whose consciousness takes over Huanhuan's body, starting a revenge spree. Overall, *Crazy Alien* features a simpler narrative setup compared to the previous films, adopting a streamlined style.

5.2 Character Analysis

Geng Hao, an ordinary monkey trainer, and his partner Da Fei, make a living from monkey performances. The film begins with a scene showing Geng Hao's daily life: performing in a shabby venue and struggling to earn applause and a meager income. This establishes Geng Hao as a tragic figure of the lower class, with simple goals—earning a living through hard work. However, the introduction of an alien spacecraft crash disrupts his ordinary life. When the alien intrudes, Geng Hao reacts with shock and fear, his frustration stemming from his inability to comprehend or control this extraordinary event. In one key scene, Geng Hao attempts to "train" the alien as a new performance act, treating it like his monkeys. This scene, full of absurd comedic elements, symbolizes the powerlessness and ignorance of ordinary people when faced with the unknown. Geng Hao's anger and anxiety reflect his helplessness in controlling his fate, emphasizing the struggles of ordinary individuals when confronted with unexpected life changes.

The alien character, stripped of its advanced technology, finds itself in rough interactions with Geng Hao. Initially depicted as a powerful and mysterious being capable of unsettling global powers, the alien becomes comically powerless once in Geng Hao's hands. In a notable scene, the alien is tied up and caged with a monkey, subjected to Geng Hao and Da Fei's attempts to control it. The alien's confusion and futile resistance reveal the clash of civilizations, highlighting the frustration of an advanced being reduced to the mundane realities of ordinary life. This depiction satirizes humanity's blind fear and violent response to the unknown. The alien's plight, despite being from a superior civilization, underscores the absurdity of cross-cultural interactions and their inherent conflicts.

Da Fei, Geng Hao's partner, embodies opportunism. Unlike Geng Hao's anxiety over the alien's arrival, Da Fei quickly sees potential for profit. He proposes using the alien for shows, imagining vast wealth from exploiting its abilities. Da Fei's calculating nature is clear; he represents the type of person who hopes to seize an opportunity to change his fate. However, his plans repeatedly backfire, particularly when the alien resists. One comedic scene shows Da Fei attempting to transport the alien in a crate, only for the alien's defiance to leave him in a ridiculous state. Ning Hao uses Da Fei to portray individuals whose greed and opportunism often lead to deeper predicaments.

International organizations in the film symbolize global power dynamics and their relentless pursuit of control. In one key scene, an elite task force is dispatched to capture the alien, closely monitoring it with satellites and advanced technology. This showcases the intense drive to control the unknown. However, the film deconstructs this image of power through their repeated blunders. A meticulously planned operation ends in failure due to miscommunication, allowing the alien to escape, and Geng Hao and Da Fei even manage to outwit the agents. This satirical portrayal emphasizes the fragility and arrogance of modern power structures and critiques their fear and monopolization of knowledge.

The local government and corporations symbolize the

profit-driven nature of society. In the latter part of the film, the local government, realizing the potential economic windfall from the alien incident, sends a team to manage public relations and capitalize on the event. In one scene, officials and businessmen hold an urgent meeting to brainstorm how to attract investment and tourists, even suggesting the construction of an "alien theme park." This exposes the profit-oriented mentality of local authorities, satirizing society's tendency to exploit and commercialize the unknown. Ning Hao critiques humanity's overexploitation and commodification of the extraordinary through this exaggerated narrative approach.

6. Conclusion

Ning Hao employs the principles of realist deconstruction to transform the objective depiction of characters traditionally associated with realism into a tool for questioning and satirizing reality. In the "Crazy Trilogy," realism is no longer a mere representation tool but becomes a means to deconstruct reality. Through absurd portrayals of ordinary individuals, Ning Hao reveals societal contradictions and the helplessness of individuals. Realist deconstruction enables the characters in the films to transcend being mere carriers of comedy and become mediums for critiquing and reflecting on social realities. By interweaving multiple storylines, Ning Hao creates a complex and tension-filled narrative structure. This approach not only enriches the content of the films but also allows each character's story to intersect and collide within a broader framework. The multi-linear narrative enhances the portrayal of an ensemble cast, giving each minor character independent space while connecting them within the overall plot. This technique not only elevates the pacing and appeal of the films but also provides ample scenarios for comedic effects to flourish.

The "Crazy Trilogy" showcases the unique charm of contemporary Chinese comedy films through its diverse character portrayals and profound reflections on social realities. By applying realist deconstruction and multi-linear narrative theory, Ning Hao successfully blends the absurd fates of ordinary individuals with social satire, creating a highly recognizable film style. These three films have achieved not only commercial success but have also provided new perspectives and methods for the development of Chinese cinema. Ning Hao's works remind audiences that behind the laughter lies deep insight and criticism of reality.

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