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# **The Cinematic Representation of CPTSD caused by Modern Family-A Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Western Films**

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## **Abstract**

Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), a sibling disorder to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was recognized as a distinct psychiatric diagnosis in 2018 (World Health Organization), while remaining ignored by the newest version of the American Psychiatric Association (APA)'s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM) in 2022. In addition to all diagnostic requirements for PTSD, CPTSD encompasses three clusters collectively known as Disturbances in Self-Organization (DSO), including affect dysregulation, negative self-concept and disturbances in relationships according to International Trauma Questionnaire (Cloitre et al., 2018). Hitherto, research on CPTSD focused on film studies remains limited.

Thus, this study centers on film itself, aiming to fill this gap in knowledge. Research on CPTSD in China began in 2019 (Tian et al., 2019). Currently, researchers continue to focus their attention on psychology, conducting localized studies among the young adults (Yang and Liang, 2022) and students (Li et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023). Since CPTSD was first proposed by Judith Herman in 1992 (Herman, 1992), it has a history of over 30 years. Substantial pathological research has been conducted on defining CPTSD, developing diagnostic tools, symptoms, causes, understanding differentiation from other disorders, formulating treatment methods and examining specific populations overseas (Alpay et al., 2022; Sarr et al., 2024). However, with a global perspective, research on CPTSD, particularly in relation to film, is still in its early stages. CPTSD presents a significant gap in both its depiction in films and the exploration of cinematic healing, warranting further discussion and investigation.

Family has historically been shaped by unequal patriarchal structures (Li, 2019). As victims traumatized by this toxic authority, individuals tend to rationalize the behavior of abusers, direct their aggression inward, and refuse to seek external help (Wang and Li, 2023). This societal-level difficulty in DSO form a collective, national manifestation of CPTSD, which in urgent need of research. The article will take the five main symptoms of CPTSD outlined by Peter Walker in his book main symptoms are summarized as: emotional flashbacks, toxic shame, and interpersonal disturbance. Analyzing two films- Chinese producer's Cao Baoping's film, *Crossing the Sea of Anger* in 2023, and 2020's "I Want to End This" by American director Charlie Kaufman, to shed a light on how Chinese and Western culture describe the symptom.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Family, CPTSD, Identification