



Regulation, Visibility, and Invisibility: A Study on the Representation of Same-Sex Elements in Mainstream Chinese Films Post-2010

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Abstract. This study systematically examines the representation practices of same-sex elements in mainstream commercial films of the Chinese mainland in the 2010s. This research finds that under the regulatory framework established by policies such as the “General Provisions for the Production of TV Dramas” in 2016, film creators have developed a complete “safe grammar”: by fragmenting and functionalizing the length of the film, same-sex elements are strictly confined to the periphery of the narrative; by de-sexualizing the camera and avoiding gaze, their emotional expression is stripped away; by constructing a text-safe zone through metaphorical and ambiguous dialogues; and at the narrative level, they achieve a thorough de-qualification and mainstream value incorporation, transforming it from a social issue into a narrative tool. This study employs a comparative case study and qualitative text analysis method, analyzing multiple films such as *Hello Mr. Billionaire*, *Successor*, and *The Dead End* to reveal these strategies. The core theoretical contribution of this article lies in operationalizing the tension between the individual and the structure as a dual-game nested system that includes both internal aspects (same-sex desires of individuals vs. social/family norms) and external aspects (creators vs. review system), and critically extending Mulvey’s Gaze Theory to “heterosexual hegemonic gaze” to analyze the visual mechanism of internalization of regulations. The research shows that this highly conscious self-discipline and compromise, although giving the same-sex elements limited visibility, also solidifies stereotypes and completes the safe incorporation of sexual minorities.

Keywords: Same-sex Films, Censorship System, Representation Strategies, Gaze Theory, De-sexualization.

1 Introduction

On a global scale, the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+) issues in media content such as films and advertisements has significantly increased in recent years. Especially in Western societies, there has been a stronger emphasis on the equal rights and opportunities for sexual

minorities [1]. Many countries and regions actively presenting diverse images of sexual minorities through mainstream cinema to promote social inclusivity regarding these topics [2]. However, within the context of mainland China, the representation of same-sex elements exhibits unique complexity and particularity. This particularity stems primarily from the strict regulation of the official censorship system, notably the “The general principles of the TV series” jointly issued in March 2016 by the *China Television Arts Committee and the China Television Drama Production Industry Association* [3]. Article 5, Item 6 of these rules explicitly stipulates that TV dramas must not contain “portrayals and displays of abnormal sexual relations and sexual behaviors, such as incest, homosexual, sexual perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual violence”. Although this policy directly targets television dramas, it has also, to some extent, impacted the related film industry, leading the entire audiovisual creation field to adopt more cautious strategies when handling same-sex elements. The trend of increasing control over the appearance of same-sex content in film and television since the 2010s becomes explicitly signified by official stance in 2016, providing a clear temporal context and research necessity for this study. Existing research has largely focused on independent or underground same-sex films, lacking systematic investigation into mainstream commercial films produced under these regulations. This paper aims to fill this gap, focusing on mainstream Chinese films post-2010, analyzing the presentation strategies and characteristics of same-sex elements from four dimensions: narrative presence, cinematography, dialogue, and narrative content.

This paper introduces Gaze Theory as its theoretical framework to dissect the visual mechanisms under regulation. Gaze Theory was initially proposed by Mulvey in 1975, critiquing the objectification, symbolization, and commodification of female characters from a male perspective in classic Hollywood cinema, known as the “male gaze”, where men are the viewing subjects and women the viewed objects [4]. In this study, the subject and object of the gaze are redefined: the subject is no longer men in a gendered sense, but rather a heteronormative hegemonic perspective; the object is same-sex elements or characters. This shift reflects how mainland Chinese films, under censorship pressure, employ visual strategies to avoid direct portrayal of same-sex affection, thereby evading policy red lines.

The study focuses on the representation of same-sex elements in mainstream films, with its core tension summarized as the tension between the individual and structure on dual levels. It makes two specific contributions. First, it articulates a nested analytical framework that captures how individual agency interacts with structural constraints at two distinct planes: within the narrative, the clash between queer desires and heteronormative expectations; behind the scenes, the friction between artistic vision and regulatory demands. Second, it reworks Mulvey’s original formulation into a heuristic of “heterosexual hegemonic gaze” to account for how censorship pressures become visually internalized. Through close readings of selected films, this study illuminates how on-screen representations emerge as negotiated settlements between these competing forces, thereby mapping the power geometries that produce constrained visibility for sexual minorities.

2 Literature Review

The study of same-sex elements in films has long followed two main approaches, and the gaps in this research form the core starting point of this article. In terms of the system, since the 1990s, the Chinese film censorship system has gradually become clearer. In 1997, the “Film Censorship Regulations” first included “indecent, pornographic” and other vague concepts as the censorship criteria [5]. In 2016, the “General Rules for Content Production of TV Dramas”, although targeting TV dramas, explicitly listed “homosexual” among the “unnatural sexual relationships and behaviors” that should not be portrayed, becoming a significant policy trend indicator and exerting a profound regulatory effect on film creation [3].

In terms of historical creation, another focus of academic discussion centers on those artistic or independent films that directly address homosexual issues. From the exploration of gender and identity in *Farewell My Concubine* and the grand narrative of the tragic times [6], to the intense confrontation between national power and individual desires in *East Palace West Palace* [7], and to the focus on pure personal emotions and ethical dilemmas in *Lan Yu*, these works constitute the serious exploration spectrum of Chinese-language same-sex films [8]. These studies jointly point out that in the early films of this kind, the same-sex issue itself was placed at the center of the narrative, and the core lies in exploring the profound tension between identity recognition, power regulation, and individual survival status.

However, there is a significant research gap between these two paths: there is a lack of systematic examination of the representation strategies of same-sex elements in films that entered mainstream commercial cinemas simultaneously, achieved relatively successful box office results, and had the broadest audience base. The aforementioned serious films are often restricted in terms of dissemination channels and scope due to their themes and expression methods, and encounter censorship difficulties. In contrast, the same-sex elements in films such as *Hello Mr. Billionaire*, *Successor*, and *The Dead End* have gained public visibility in a relatively safe manner. Therefore, unlike the previous serious discussions on the same-sex theme in films, this article focuses on analyzing the current creative reality, that is, the same-sex elements are difficult to be presented in full length as the core in mainstream films. It is precisely this restricted representation that becomes a channel for observing the public culture's perception of same-sex images, the strategic thinking of filmmakers under the constraints, and the subtle reflection of the mainstream social attitude. This research aims to fill this gap and systematically analyze how the same-sex elements, as a regulated symbol, have been embedded in the narrative of mainstream commercial films after the 2010s.

3 Methodology

To systematically examine the representation strategies of same-sex elements in mainstream Chinese films after the 2010s, this study adopts the comparative case study as the main research method. This method is suitable for conducting in-depth and

systematic descriptions and comparisons of multiple typical cases, in order to reveal the common patterns and internal logic behind a certain phenomenon [9].

Regarding the criteria for selecting cases and their representativeness, this study follows the following three principles when selecting cases: First, high popularity and mass appeal. The films must have been released in Chinese mainland cinemas and achieved certain box office success to ensure their representativeness as mass cultural products, which can reflect the most widespread dissemination and acceptance scenarios; Second, the time frame focuses on the post-2010 era, to align with the tightening trend of relevant censorship policies in the current context; Third, they contain explicit or widely interpretable elements related to homosexual, whether as a subplot or background setting. Based on this, films including *If You are the One II*, *Seeking Mr. Right*, *Red Amnesia*, *Tiny Times 3.0*, *Goodbye Mr. Loser*, *The Dead End*, *Hello Mr. Billionaire*, and *Successor* are selected. These films cover various genres such as comedy, suspense, drama, and romance, and the handling of the same-sex elements varies, collectively forming a rich sample for observing the diverse response strategies under regulatory conditions.

The analytical approach adopted in this study, which combines comparative case studies with qualitative text analysis, has inherent compatibility and explanatory power with the core tension framework between individuals and structures. Firstly, through juxtaposing multiple film texts produced under the same macro-structures (such as review systems, market environments, cultural norms), the comparative case study can systematically reveal the strategic spectra and common patterns exhibited by individual creative cases when facing shared structural pressures, thereby highlighting the shaping power of structures on individual expressions. Secondly, the specific analytical operations correspond to the two dimensions of the tension: in-depth textual analysis of film semiotics and narrative theory, aiming to decode how individual films handle the confrontation between individual desires and external values within their narratives; while the analysis of the length and role functions of the content involves cross-case quantitative comparisons, objectively revealing the systematic result that structural censorship and market regulations lead to the fragmentation and functionalization of same-sex elements on a macro level. Therefore, the design of this methodology aims to simultaneously capture the negotiation strategies of individual texts and the regulatory traces of macro structures, thereby conducting empirical operational analysis and verification of this tension.

4 Data Analysis

4.1 Length Analysis: Fragmentation and Functionalization of Content

In the mainstream Chinese mainland films produced in the 2010s and beyond, the representation of same-sex elements is no longer the main narrative thread. Instead, they are embedded in the plot in fragmented and functional ways. This practice aims to strictly control the duration and scope of same-sex content, making it serve to enrich the main narrative or create brief dramatic conflicts, thereby avoiding the risk of

ensorship. Specifically, same-sex characters or relationships are often simplified to background music, supporting roles with functional settings, or elements of genre films, such as comedic scenes. Their appearance is minimized, occupying only a small proportion in the entire film. This fragmented treatment makes it difficult for the censorship mechanism to detect the same-sex elements. At the same time, through functional attributes, they are given specific narrative purposes, such as promoting plot development or highlighting the protagonist’s image. However, this may also lead to the same-sex community being reduced to a symbolic tool, lacking in deep characterization.

To visually demonstrate this phenomenon, this study selected eight representative mainstream comedy films for length analysis. The following Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the appearance of same-sex elements in these films, including the types of sexual minorities, the nature of the relationships, the duration of appearance (estimated as a percentage of the entire film), the attributes of the characters, and the role in driving the plot. The data is calculated based on the actual content of the films, with the duration estimated in seconds and converted into percentages to reflect the fragmented nature.

Table 1. Same-sex elements in post-2010 mainstream Chinese cinema.

Movie	Year	Same-sex Char.	Emo. Nature	Dur.	Char. Attri.	Significance
<i>Hello Mr. Billionaire</i>	2018	The protagonist’s uncle and his partner	Implicit same-sex partnership	30 s (0.5% of the entire film)	Background characters	Since same-sex partners are unable to inherit the estate, the protagonist obtained the inheritance.
<i>Successor</i>	2024	The protagonist’s elder brother Ma and his foreign partner Peter	Explicit same-sex partnership	120 s (1.5%)	Comedic function roles	The foreigner taught the protagonist to practice a foreign language.
<i>Seeking Mr. Right</i>	2013	Zhou Yi, who is the female lead Wen Jiajia’s friend in the post-partum care center	A lesbian woman who went to sea to have a baby through surrogacy for love	270 s (3%)	Supporting role	Enrich the plot and provide a backdrop to shape the image of Wen.
<i>Red Amnesia</i>	2014	The protagonist Deng’s second son Zhang Bing	A homosexual who is under family pressure	120 s (2%)	Supporting role	Create an atmosphere of suspense and tension in the film.
<i>Tiny Times 3.0</i>	2014	One female lead’s younger brother Gu Zhun and his partner Neil	The same-sex couples in the original novel, and the ambiguous relationships in the film	3 min (2%)	Supporting roles	Enrich the family ethics relations in the film.
<i>Goodbye Mr. Loser</i>	2015	Meng Te (Montacute)	Men dressed as women	90 s (1.5%)	One of the key comedic segments	Create a comedic effect.
<i>The Dead End</i>	2015	Xin Xiaofeng, along with a designer	The designer fell in love with Xin because of his kindness, while Xin was using him	60 s (0.5%)	The main character and the supporting character establish a disguised relationship	Directly drove the core plot.
<i>If You are the One II</i>	2010	Jianguo	A comic supporting character	290 s (3.5%)	Supporting role, source of humor	Enrich the background of the protagonist’s social circle.

Note: Char. = Character; Emo. = Emotional; Attr. = Attribute; Dur. = Duration; min = minutes; s = seconds.

From the table, it can be seen that the appearance of same-sex elements takes up no more than 4% of the entire film, reflecting a high degree of symbolization and fragmentation. In *Hello Mr. Billionaire*, the same-sex relationship between the characters is only indirectly mentioned through dialogue. For example, the protagonist's great-uncle's same-sex partner, Mr. Jin, verbally explained the relationship between the two to the protagonist after watching the video of his great-uncle's will. The characters themselves did not appear directly, and although the duration was short, it was crucial in function: it was the fundamental cause of the inheritance issue, driving the protagonist's journey to become wealthy. However, this handling also has a touch of black humor, transforming the real-life predicaments of sexual minorities, such as inheritance restrictions, into comedic elements. To a certain extent, it consumes the issue of homosexual but avoids in-depth discussion.

In *Successor*, the same-sex characters appear in a more intuitive way. For instance, the protagonist's elder brother Ma Dajun's same-sex partner Peter refers to Ma's father as "father", Ma verbally explains to his parents that the two are "buddies sworn by brotherhood" who met abroad (but in reality, their relationship should be that of a couple), and even the Chinese surname of this partner is Ma (in line with the naming rule of following the husband's surname after marriage in the West). The two appear together at the end of the film to reach the top of the snow-capped mountain, etc., but the duration is still strictly controlled. Moreover, Ma's same-sex partner Peter is set as a Westerner, and this detail deserves in-depth analysis. It is not merely for creating a joke for foreign language practice, but also reflects a stereotype and cultural imagination deeply rooted in the local context: implicitly tying the same-sex identity with Western or modern concepts. This setting implicitly reinforces a perception that homosexual is an imported Western phenomenon, a product of modern urban culture or foreign influence, rather than a naturally existing emotional pattern in the local culture. Through identifying the same-sex partner as an outsider (a foreigner), the film ingeniously transforms a relationship that might challenge traditional family values into a comedic material of cultural collision, thereby downplaying the ethical discussions it might trigger. This is actually a more covert strategy of de-embedding, by transforming the same-sex partner into an exotic foreign cultural phenomenon, avoiding direct confrontation with the real situation and identity of the local same-sex community. However, this representation style tends to be symbolic and stereotypical, lacking emotional depth. This reflects the pros and cons of the functional strategy, that is; while giving the same-sex element visibility, it also reinforces stereotypes.

From the perspective of the tension between the individual and the structure, this representation method is precisely the product of the dual pressure. At the level of creative content, the true emotions and identity recognition of homosexual individuals, such as Ma and Peter in *Successor*, were forcibly incorporated and subordinated to the traditional patriarchal relationship narrative and cross-cultural comedic conflict framework of "buddying brothers". Thus, the individual desires and subjectivity were suppressed, transformed and incorporated by the grand family ethics and the external and local cultural oppositional structures. At the level of actual production, any attempts by film creators to deeply depict same-sex relationships were clearly restricted by the review system, an unchallengeable structural force. Therefore, the individual expression

ultimately compromised into a safe, symbolic, and easily reviewable otherized form of representation. Thus, the visible and strictly regulated same-sex elements on the screen are essentially the result of the individual (characters and creators) making strategic compromises and self-examination under the structural squeeze, and their limited visibility itself is the trace of the power game.

Apart from the comedy genres represented by *Hello Mr. Billionaire* and *Successor*, other types of films also commonly adopt this practice. In the suspense film *The Dead End*, the passionate scene between Xin and the gay designer lasted less than one minute. Its function was extremely instrumentalized, purely serving as a narrative trick to conceal the protagonist's criminal motive. In contrast, in the film *Red Amnesia*, the storyline of the gay second son was also brief, but its function pointed to social issues and was used to highlight the depression within the family and the generational conflicts. In the youth commercial film *Tiny Times 3.0*, the relationship between Gu and Neil was maximally contextualized and depersonalized, becoming a vague and ambiguous decorative symbol in the protagonist's elaborate relationship network. These cases all show that regardless of the type, the duration of the same-sex elements is strictly limited to the periphery of the narrative, and the depth of their representation gives way to their preset functions in the main line.

4.2 Analysis of Cinematic Language: The De-Sexualization of Cinematic Language and the Heterosexual Gaze

At the level of cinematographic language, in the mainstream Chinese films of the 2010s, when dealing with elements related to homosexual, a common strategy was to de-sexualize the content to avoid direct expression of sexual desires under heterosexual gaze. The core of this practice lies in using visual techniques to diminish the intimacy or erotic connotations of homosexual emotions, creating a non-desireful viewing approach that complies with censorship requirements. Specific techniques include: extensively using medium shots and long shots to maintain a physical distance, avoiding close-up shots that focus on same-sex intimate behaviors; using partial close-ups of the body, such as hand touches or back views, or using foreshortening to replace direct kissing or sexual scenes; and utilizing metaphorical expressions through environmental tracking shots, light and shadow changes, etc., to indirectly hint at the relationship between characters. Behind these techniques is the filmmakers' conscious response to heteronormative gaze, that is, through the lens, they avoid objectifying homosexual subjects as desire objects and instead present them as non-erotic and functional existences.

This study uses Eisenstein's Montage Theory and Bazin's Long-shot Theory as analytical tools. Eisenstein emphasized that juxtaposing shots can generate new meanings (such as rational montage through image metaphorizing inner emotions), while Bazin advocated for long shots and depth-of-field shots to maintain the multiplicity of reality [10]. In the handling of same-sex elements, montage is often used for metaphorical expression, for example, by juxtaposing shots of same-sex characters side by side with neutral images (such as natural landscapes), to implicitly suggest emotions; while long shots are used to place same-sex relationships in everyday life scenarios, making them

normalized rather than spectacularized. Taking *Successor* as an example, when depicting the interaction between the brother and the same-sex partner, the film mostly used medium and long shots, such as full-body shots of the two walking side by side, avoiding close-ups of faces or direct displays of intimate contact (Figure 1). This choice of shot selection weakens the intensity of emotions, presenting the relationship as ordinary social behavior rather than sexual expression. At the same time, the film used environmental tracking shots to divert attention, further achieving the de-sexualization.



Fig. 1. Sample shot of Ma and his same-sex partner Peter in *Successor*.

Close-up shots did exist, but they were mainly used to reinforce the stereotypes of same-sex characters to create comedic effects, or to serve the narrative of suspense, rather than to express the intimate emotions between same-sex individuals. For example, in *Goodbye Mr. Loser* and *If You are the One II*, the close-ups of the female characters' makeup, weak movements, and exaggerated expressions of Montacute and Jianguo were precisely to highlight the contrast with the conventional masculine traits, thus becoming the direct source of comedic laughs. This kind of close-up is a spectacle-like gaze that solidifies gay characters into a stereotypical visual symbol.

This practice, on the one hand, avoids the risk of censorship, but on the other hand, it may reinforce the otherness of same-sex emotions, suggesting that they are not suitable for direct viewing. The de-sexualization of cinematographic language and the avoidance of direct gaze reflect the adaptive creative process of films under regulation. It neutralizes the challenges posed by same-sex elements through technical means, but also implicitly perpetuates the heterosexual-centered visual order.

4.3 Analysis of Dialogue Language: The Metaphorical and Vagueness Characteristics of Dialogue Language

At the level of dialogue language, in the mainstream Chinese mainland cinema of the 2010s, the references to same-sex orientation or relationships were generally achieved

through metaphorical and ambiguous strategies. This practice provides an interpretive space through carefully crafted dialogues, enabling the target audience to understand it intuitively while avoiding leaving clear textual evidence that could be directly captured by the review mechanism.

Specifically, the ambiguity of the dialogue is primarily manifested in the avoidance and substitution of the definition of relationships. In the movie *Successor*, Ma, when introducing his same-sex partner to his parents, used the traditional patriarchal relationship term “sworn brother” to ambiguously replace the modern terms “couple” or “partner”. This indirect expression transforms the clear identity recognition into a sentimental narrative filled with regret and de-sexualization.

Secondly, the metaphorical nature of the dialogue is manifested in using specific contexts and subtext to imply the identities of the characters. In the movie *If You are the One II*, Jianguo, said to the protagonist, “Our situations are quite similar. You’re not asking me for a marriage proposal, but you want to find a cover-up”. This line, through words like “similar situations” and “cover-up”, implies Jianguo’s same-sex identity and the social pressure behind his actions, but this implication is always wrapped up in comedic dialogue and has not been explicitly revealed to uncover the underlying real social pressure. In *Seeking Mr.Right*, the lines of the lesbian character Zhou often directly revolve around her status as a prospective mother and the pressure of her career. Her sexual orientation itself is not the focus of the dialogue, but is reflected indirectly through her situation, such as going to the United States for surrogacy alone.

This systematic metaphor and ambiguity at the dialogue level precisely reflects the tension between the individual and the structure. At the narrative content level, as individuals, the true same-sex emotions, identity recognition, and language expression needs of the characters are suppressed by a series of structural forces such as social norms, family ethics, and heteronormative discourse. As a result, the true voices of the individuals are distorted and must be hidden beneath the socially acceptable cover, or retreat into unspoken ambiguous references. At the level of reality production, when creators attempt to present the individual expression intentions of the same-sex issue, it directly collides with the structural prohibitions of the censorship system. The consequence is that straightforward declarations are filtered by the author's self-examination and the censorship system, ultimately transforming into a dialogue mode filled with subtext and capable of being safely interpreted. Therefore, these ambiguous dialogues on the screen not only narrate the predicaments of the characters, but are themselves a direct manifestation of the internal compromise and external strategies of the creative individual in the face of structural constraints, in an effort to secure a limited space for expression.

4.4 Content Analysis: De-Problematization of Narrative Content and Incorporation of Mainstream Values

Looking at the mainstream cinema releases in the post-2010 era, the presence of same-sex elements in narratives has shown a systematic shift: from the early Chinese same-

sex films that seriously questioned identity, power and emotions, to a more problem-free and integrated expression that conforms to mainstream values.

Early films about homosexual, such as *Lan Yu*, delicately depicted the emotional predicaments of same-sex individuals in an environment lacking social support. *East Palace West Palace* even presented, from the perspective of homosexuals, the severe regulation and punishment imposed by the system on the same-sex community, and the power relationship was starkly exposed. These works focused on the same-sex issue itself as the core topic, carrying strong social criticism and humanistic concern. However, although the overall acceptance of homosexual in society has improved, in recent mainstream commercial films, this problematic aspect has been deliberately stripped away [11]. The social discrimination, equality of rights or ethical controversies that a homosexual identity may trigger are no longer the focus of the narrative.

Instead, there are three main strategies for incorporating same-sex elements: comedification, backgroundization, and functionalization. In the comedic aspect, for example, in *Goodbye Mr. Loser*, the plot where Meng transformed into Montacute utilizes the stereotype of male homosexuals being feminine, existing independently of the main storyline and forming a simple comedic scene; in *If You are the One II*, Jianguo's courting of the protagonist and his feminine makeup also fit the stereotype, aiming to create a comedic effect. In the background aspect, in *Seeking Mr. Right*, the lesbian character Zhou was only used to enrich the role spectrum of Wen's pregnant co-worker in the maternity center; while in *Tiny Times 3.0*, Gu and his same-sex partner Neil only served as a small part of the background of the character relationship network. Functionalization involves less emotional portrayal. Same-sex elements are completely toolized to serve a safer mainstream narrative goal. In *The Dead End*, it serves as a device to create suspense and conceal criminal activities; in *Hello Mr. Billionaire*, it functions as the premise for the inheritance dispute that drives the entire film. In such narratives, same-sex characters or their relationships are no longer a subject that needs to be understood and discussed, but rather a functional object that advances the main storyline, creates dramatic effects, or enriches the genre elements.

This fundamental shift in narrative perspective marks the transformation of the same-sex element from a subject of exploration to a tool for use. Its visibility is achieved at the expense of its inherent complexity, tension and subjectivity. Ultimately, the same-sex issue has been successfully neutered. It has transformed from a potential threat that could challenge the orthodoxy of heterosexuality to a symbolic element that can be easily assimilated by mainstream narratives and even used to reinforce the existing order, such as family ethics, legal justice, and comic logic.

5 Conclusion & Discussion

This article conducts an in-depth analysis of multiple Chinese mainland commercial films released in the post-2010 era in Chinese cinemas. From four dimensions, including the length of the film, the language of shots, the dialogue strategies, and the narrative content, it systematically examines how, under clear policy regulations, the elements of homosexual have achieved limited visibility in a highly strategic manner. The

study reveals that mainstream films have created a complete set of safe representation grammar: by fragmenting and functionalizing the length, it strictly confines them to the periphery of the narrative; by de-sexualizing the shots and avoiding the gaze, it strips away their emotional and desire expressions; by making the dialogues metaphorical and ambiguous, it constructs a gray area in the text that is both accessible and deniable; ultimately, at the narrative level, it achieves a complete de-qualification of the issue and the incorporation of mainstream values, transforming it from a social issue into a narrative tool. In essence, it is a highly conscious self-discipline and strategic compromise. The paper, through the analysis of exact cases, reveals how the gay topic has shifted from being a central topic of discussion to the periphery of exploitation, from an aesthetic and political resistance to a commercial and narrative device. This provides a specific model for us to understand how contemporary popular culture safely incorporates sensitive social issues.

This study demonstrates that this tension is not abstract but manifested concretely through ambiguous lines of dialogue for characters, deliberate camera avoidance, and functional design of the plot. Secondly, this study critically contextualizes and expands the Gaze Theory. Gaze is no longer limited to the gendered male gaze criticized by Mulvey, but reveal another power structure, the heterosexual hegemonic gaze, which functions as an invisible reviewer internalizing into the visual choices of the creators. The avoidance of same-sex intimate relationships in film shots, and the spectacle-like close-ups of same-sex individuals, are the specific practices of this heterosexual gaze under the pressure of regulation. This not only expands the application scope of the Gaze Theory, but also deepens people's understanding of how censorship goes beyond external regulations and becomes a visual unconsciousness.

However, the prevalence of this security strategy warrants profound reflection on its social and cultural implications. It has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it presents the elements of homosexual in a harmless manner, granting them unprecedented visibility in the mainstream, albeit distorted and highly exaggerated. This may objectively have a certain desensitizing effect. But on the other hand, this systematic presentation of homosexual as an other, a tool, de-sexualized, and tragic, not only fails to contribute to the construction of a diverse, equal, and healthy social perception, but may instead solidify and reproduce new biases and stereotypes. It simplifies complex identities into comic plots, transforms real social dilemmas into narrative fuel, and thus, on a symbolic level, achieves another symbolic annihilation and safe incorporation of the sexual minority group. What the public consumes in laughter or sighs is a symbol that has been thoroughly sterilized and deprived of any danger and subjectivity, rather than a real, complete person.

The main limitations of this study lie in the fact that the time range of case selection is concentrated from 2010 to 2024, failing to cover the latest policies and market trends; moreover, the research focuses on films and does not discuss the increasingly influential online audio-visual content. Future research can track the evolution of safe creation strategies on the topic of homosexual in the streaming media era, and further combine audience acceptance studies to explore how this regulated representation actually affects public attitudes and perceptions.

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