

## **Seriousness, Banter, and Vulgarization: The Shift in the Meaning of Sex and Violence in Audio-Visual Works of the Northeastern Renaissance**

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### **Abstract**

The term “Northeastern Renaissance” carries a dual meaning: on the one hand, it represents an artistic movement that emerged in the late 2010s in the three Northeastern provinces of the People’s Republic of China (as well as the eastern regions of Inner Mongolia), bearing a manifesto-like quality; on the other hand, it is also ironic, as the Northeastern provinces have long been perceived as a region that was historically beyond the reach of China’s traditional elite culture, thus having little to revive or restore. This duality is reflected in the audio-visual works of Northeastern post-industrial culture, particularly in their depiction of sex and violence. These works exhibit an ambiguous attitude toward sex and violence—both critical and humorous. Building upon the absurdist foundation of Northeastern post-industrial culture, as discussed in the author’s 2024 academic presentation, this paper further explores the dual nature of sex and violence. The structure of the paper is as follows: The first section reviews my 2024 discussion on the absurdity in Northeastern post-industrial audio-visual works. The subsequent chapters focus on *Drifting Away*, a crime drama that aired in 2025, whose narrative elicited polarized reactions from the audience—some fervently idolized the four butcher-like serial killers, while others found the moral implications deeply unsettling. Finally, the author will analyze this contrast through the lens of the duality in Northeastern post-industrial culture, demonstrating how the intersection of Northeastern migrant culture and post-industrial conditions has given rise to a satirical art form that challenges traditional Chinese moral values.

*Keywords:* Northeastern Renaissance, post-industrial culture, sex and violence, satirical irony, censorship avoidance

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## Introduction

In a 2024 academic conference paper titled “Analyzing the narrative context of post-industrial audio-visual works in Northeast China from the absurdity in the documentary *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks* (2002),” I discussed how films, TV series, and popular songs set in Northeast China embody Albert Camus’s concept of absurdity.<sup>1</sup> Camus’s absurdity primarily refers to the “confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (1979, p. 32). In the paper, I pointed out that artistic works with Northeast cultural backgrounds often involve reflections on the era, which are typically expressed through black humor, specifically manifesting as self-mockery, joking about death, and the stark contrast between ideals and the present. These characteristics metaphorically represent the massive changes of that era, as around the turn of the millennium, Northeast China—namely Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and eastern Inner Mongolia—faced the same fate as the former Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries: the sudden shift from socialism to a free-market economy led to the collapse of numerous state-owned enterprises and massive worker unemployment. In this laid-off wave, workers began to doubt the superior social status of the working class promoted during the Mao era. It can be said that the absurdity in the Northeast is rooted in the irreconcilable gap between the real world and utopia in people’s hearts. This gap is mainly reflected in the loss of working-class identity and honor, leading people to question the rationality of socialist beliefs.

This article builds upon that discussion on Northeast audio-visual art, further exploring the satirical characteristics in films and TV series set in the Northeast, contemplating why they choose elements of poverty, violence, and sex trade, yet simultaneously avoid deep reflection on these social issues. The article will be divided into two parts: the first part will use some audio-visual works with Northeast elements, especially comedic ones, as case studies to discuss the satirical effects in the Northeast cultural context; the second part will focus on China’s new noir films and TV series, particularly *Drifting Away* (P. Chen producer, 2025), to discuss the exaggerated portrayal of violence and the reticence about sex in these works, as well as the situational irony techniques employed.

### Satire in the Cultural Context of Northeast China

For the convenience of discussion, I use the term “Northeastern Renaissance” works to collectively refer to literary and artistic works set in contemporary Northeast China. The term “Northeastern Renaissance” originated from a stand-up comedy performance by rapper Baoshi Gem (Yang et al., 2024). In my 2024 article, I compared elements from Baoshi Gem’s breakthrough work with some films and TV series set in the Northeast around the turn of the millennium, arriving at a general understanding of the Northeastern Renaissance, namely an alternative reflection on the collective trauma brought about by the post-Deng Xiaoping era’s shift toward political liberalism and economic marketization reforms. According to scholar Dai Jinhua, Northeastern Renaissance works represent a form of self-expression by an old logic facing aphasia as it is rapidly replaced by a new logic (Dai & Teng, 2022, Question: Why Northeast Writing Matters, para. 3).

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<sup>1</sup>The article “Analyzing the narrative context...” has three authors, and I am the primary author. The other two contributed only to translation and proofreading. Therefore, I will describe the content using the first-person perspective.

The attitude embodied in the “Northeastern Renaissance” artistic movement highlights the absurdity of reality’s gap without engaging in deep criticism, ultimately returning to the consolation of the subject. This characteristic, according to Tao Dongfeng (2007), stems from the canon-mocking literature that emerged in the late 1990s, namely “parodies, rewritings, and reshapings of canonic works” (p. 204). This literature is manifested explicitly in a batch of online literature that imitates the style of Hong Kong comedian Stephen Chow’s film *A Chinese Odyssey* (1995), structuring classical literature with reality. Tao believes that texts are mediated by social forces and are constantly reconstructed according to the social conditions at the time (p. 205), and canon-mocking literature is precisely the result of the nihilism caused by the “economic construction as the center” liberal policy and the temporarily shelved controversy over the Cultural Revolution. Timothy Bewes points out that this cynical creative attitude reflects distrust of “the account of the world offered by the world” (p. 1). Bewes notes that, besides questioning, it “traditionally favours symbolic, gestural rhetoric over conventional discussion, which avoids morbidity and introspection, furthermore, on the basis that the world is not worthy of such solemn regard” (p. 1).

However, unlike canon-mocking literature, the specific satirical methods of the Northeastern Renaissance are not through reconstructing literary classics, but through (moderately) mocking the current situation and self-mockery. For example, in the black comedy film *Free and Easy* (Geng, 2017), a soap salesman scammer (played by Zhang Zhiyong) uses anesthetics to knock out a young man (played by Chen Xi) and rob him of his money. When the young man catches up to the scammer, the scammer pulls out a gun and says to him, “[...] you should know that our society needs peace and harmony.” The young man leaves in anger and encounters a scammer dressed as a monk (played by Xu Gang). Perhaps out of spite, he robs the fake monk of all his amulets. When the fake monk chases after him to demand them back, the young man knocks him down. At this point, the religious scammer utters a line that seems to admonish the other: “Harmonious thoughts will save us from calamity.”

The word “harmony” (pronounced “hé xié”) appears twice here, both mocking the political program of “harmonious society” proposed by then-Chinese President Hu Jintao. In the internet context during Hu’s administration, “harmony” and its homophone “river crab” (pronounced “hé xiè,” similarly to harmony “hé xié”) became satirical terms (Flower & Leonard, 2016, p. 45; Osburg, 2016, p. 49), even changing their part of speech from noun and adjective to verb. For instance, in the later years of Hu Jintao’s administration, increased internet regulation made many words sensitive, so when netizens found a post deleted, they would say it was “harmonized,” implying it triggered the sensitive word list and was deleted by the Communist Party’s network administrators (Latham, 2016, p. 168). Therefore, in *Free and Easy*, the two instances of “harmony” represent two ironies: irony toward reality, i.e., I scammed you, but do not fight back because I have a gun; and self-mockery, i.e., you beat me, but do not continue because the current political slogan requires us to live in harmony.

Similar to canon-mocking literature, the true popularity of the Northeastern Renaissance was driven by the development of media and the internet. Initially, Northeastern comedian Zhao Benshan, from the late 1990s, created catchphrases for the following year in his performances at every Lunar New Year Gala, such as “plucking the wool of socialism,” “take a few steps if you’re not sick,” “what bicycle do you want (sometimes replaced with watch)?” In Zhao’s stage comedies, there is no shortage of ironic effects from exaggerated representations of social reality. For example, in *Zuó Tiān, Jīn Tiān, Míng Tiān* ([Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow] 1999), he played an elderly farmer from rural Northeast China who, facing the host’s request, had to give a report. The comedic contrast lies in his misunderstanding of a TV interview report

and a political meeting report in a rural committee. So, he loudly recites a prepared rhyme praising the Communist Party's governance in the countryside, describing the extraordinary life of the Chinese people and the "chaos" of Western democratic politics. After Zhao reads these "achievements" in an exaggerated tone, the audience bursts into laughter knowingly (CCTVGala, 2013a). In addition, Zhao accurately simulates the fraudulent behaviors popular in the Northeast during the layoff wave. For example, in *Mài Guǎi* ([Selling crutches] 2001), he plays a street scammer whose wife's kindness inadvertently cooperates with his scam, successfully selling a pair of crutches to a healthy chef (CCTVGala, 2013b).

It is worth noting that some scholars believed Zhao's performance insulted the image of farmers after watching (Xiao, 2012, pp. 36–38). However, Zhao's offense was not an isolated case; for instance, his peer comedian Pan Changjiang often joked about short people in stage plays (Pan himself is only 160 cm tall), and another well-known comedian Huang Hong faced audience complaints for insulting unemployed Northeast workers and community security guards in different works. It can be said that Northeastern performances inherently carry a playful nature, thus often offending certain groups.

From another perspective, this offense appears entirely different. For example, Zhao's farmer image actually punctures the kind and benevolent farmer seen in urban political propaganda posters, revealing the cunning, greedy, and politically insensitive (often showing a lag compared to current policies) aspects of Northeast rural areas. This satire represents an attempt to break through the boundaries of canon-mocking literature that avoids touching politics.

Zhao's humor masks political satire, but in the works of younger creators after the millennium, they attempt to push this satire further. According to Tao (2007), the younger generation (Tao refers to millennials) no longer cares about sanctity and views everything as an object of mockery (p. 212). One case is the flash animation series *Kuāng Kuāng Rì Jì* ([Kuangkuang's Diary] Si producer) broadcast online in 2009. This series reflects the childhood of people born in the 1970s and 1980s in mainland China, covering topics like school, games, love, and family. The story is told from a boy's perspective, where he is portrayed as somewhat slow and often unable to understand adults' deceptions. Initially, the animation satirizes deceptions from parents and educators encountered in childhood, but in the 19th episode, a special edition celebrating the Lunar Year of the Tiger 2010, the creators blatantly review the social injustices of the previous year in the form of Kuangkuang's dream, and at the end, show extreme revenge against the government's vested interests. In this version, one scene simulates the 1994 fire in Karamay, Xinjiang, where, according to China Youth Daily, someone shouted "let the leaders go first" amid the panicked students, causing them to miss the best chance to escape the fire (B. Liu & G. Liu, 1995, p. 39). The purpose of recreating this event in *Kuangkuang's Diary* is obviously to satirize social injustice.

With the development of the internet, official network regulation has become increasingly strict. Stage performances, TV series, films, and animations with political parody can hardly pass review. In this situation, the method of alluding to reality has shifted, as Dai puts it, exaggerating its "locality" to "provide a consumable feeling" (Dai & Teng, 2022, Question: Re-discussing "Northeastern Renaissance," para. 3, sentence 2). Next, I will select *Drifting Away*, a web series that exploded in popularity in early 2025, to analyze several manifestations of overconsuming locality, namely vulgarization and entertainmentization.

## Vulgarization, Entertainment, Violence Overflow, and Sexual Taboos in *Drifting Away*

Starting from *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (Diao, 2014), new noir films set in the Northeast have become prevalent in police/crime genre films, including *Burning Ice* (Du & Lu, 2017), *Day and Night* (Wu, 2017), *Why Try to Change Me Now* (Diao, 2023), *The Long Season* (Lu, 2023), *Frozen Surface* (Chen, B., 2024), and the latest 2025 broadcast *Drifting Away*. *Drifting Away* depicts criminals as protagonists, portraying the leader of the four-person dismemberment group as a character with Hannibal-like charm, which made the show's popularity surpass its contemporaries. However, this drama also sparked huge controversy because the character settings and plot highly overlap with the real 2002 dismemberment case in Jilin City, Northeast China, potentially causing secondary psychological trauma to the surviving victims' families. It can be seen that the object of mockery in this drama is not authority, officials, or the system, but has shifted to violence and murder. Next, I will analyze the creators' attempts to entertain violence and sex in this drama and the reasons behind them.

*Drifting Away* is set in 2002 in the Northeast. A dismemberment case occurs in a place called Snow City, and the suspects—Deng Ligang (played by Wang Qianyuan), Shi Bi (played by Ren Zhong), Song Hongyu (played by Wang Jiajia), and Ji Dashun (played by Zong Juntao)—escape the police blockade. The criminal police captain Peng Zhaolin (played by Guo Jingfei) embarks on a difficult pursuit. The four criminals commit another crime the following year, but one of the victims, a young girl Zhen Zhen (played by Zhao Jinmai), successfully escapes and later attends the police academy to become a police officer, teaming up with Peng to solve the case, finally capturing the four criminals in 2011.

The drama portrays the four murderers with considerable personality charm. Their cruel behaviors even become promotional strategies, such as an actress Li Fei'er reposting fans' screenshots of Song's using a spatula to kill in the drama to interact with fans (Eastern Business News, 2025a); and the show's promoters even compare the four's murder and dismemberment to meat-cutting standards in a meat processing plant (Eastern Business News, 2025b).

For this seemingly entertaining violence, we need first to review two important events in the modern history of the Northeast: the pre-industrial immigration wave and the post-industrial layoff wave.

The immigration wave, also known as “Chuǎng guān dōng (Crashing into Guandong<sup>2</sup>),” refers to the massive influx of population from northern provinces into the sparsely populated Northeast region for survival, from the end of the Qing Dynasty continuing to the famine years of the Mao era (Gottschang & Lary, 2000, pp. 4–10, pp. 135–144). The laid-off wave (pronounced “xià gǎng” in Chinese) refers to the 1990s, when China's economic reforms led to the market-oriented transformation of state-owned companies, resulting in the layoff of large numbers of workers or forcing them to leave their actual positions under the name of “agreement to retain labor relations,” stopping salary payments (Zhao, 2021).

The immigration culture lasting nearly half a century makes the Northeast different from the inland, with relatively thin Confucian social and moral views. Men and women working together in factories for long periods make the social atmosphere relatively open. Of course, the absence of traditional rural gentry systems and the atomized distribution of population also

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<sup>2</sup>Gguān Dōng is one of the old names for Northeast China. It refers to the region located east of Shanhaiguan, which is the easternmost pass of the Great Wall.

bred various violent organizations. The population dividend promoted during the Mao era led to a large number of births in the Northeast starting in the 1960s. However, when these children reached middle age, they encountered the nationwide layoff wave. This laid-off wave affected not only middle-aged people but also young people who, after graduating high school, were supposed to enter the enterprises and factories where their parents worked. These people were forced to flow from factory organizations into society, becoming unstable factors, one obvious phenomenon being the increase in violent crimes.

In recent popular series, *Burning Ice* and *The Long Season* feature two standout villains: Li Fengtian (played by Ning Li) and Fu Weijun (played by Jiang Qiming). Their common characteristic is the abuse of violence, i.e., resorting to violence for problems that do not require it: Li directly beats a provocative peer with a glass ashtray into the hospital; Fu twists the arm of a couple's son (a child) to force them to leave the city and return home.

The disorder caused by the abuse of violence angers the audience before conflicts escalate, so creators tentatively add realistic elements to explain this abuse, such as in *Burning Ice*, where Li initially kills untrustworthy gang leaders, making his violence seem justified; or in *Frozen Surface*, where the killer Jin Zhuhua (played by Lin Xiao) kills an adult male outside the mission target, motivated by his domestic violence against children. In some film-noir-style series, criminals are often portrayed as socially marginalized people. Li Fengtian, the debt collector in *Burning Ice*, is such a character; in middle age, he relies on violent debt collection for the underworld to survive. Fu Weijun, the deaf-mute youth in *The Long Season*, relies on organizing other social youths into gangs to establish himself in society. Of course, these series do not discuss the social reasons behind these villains' dire lives to avoid triggering official film censorship.

In addition to avoiding political discussions, what can attract the attention of censorship institutions is the portrayal of public officials. For example, in the noir film *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2014), the Berlin version includes a scene where the female protagonist Wu Zhizhen (played by Gwei Lun-mei), a suspect, sexually bribes the male protagonist, suspended police officer Zhang Zili (played by Liao Fan), on a Ferris wheel, while the Chinese release version cuts this scene (Yi Ge Shuoxi, 2025). A similar case is in the 2023 hit web series *The Long Season*, with inconsistent portrayals of police: a police officer, Li Qun (played by Tang Zeng), greedy for higher positions, is often despised by his hot-tempered but just superior Ma Desheng (played by Chen Minghao) and thus often satirized. However, when the plot reaches the point where Li has become the bureau chief, the important clue arranged initially to be solved by former officer Ma turns out to be information Li had long known, but he did not expose it for the sake of the old officer's face. This huge contrast in the character's portrayal is a failure in shaping, but given the high-quality narrative of the entire drama, we can understand this flaw as the director's compromise with the censorship system.

Thus, we find that when creators of Chinese police/crime genre films attempt to graft mature genre narrative frameworks from around the world, they encounter a problem: to avoid stereotypical police images while considering the many restrictions on police roles in the censorship system, they can only describe police protagonists as suspended, such as Zhang in *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, Yan Liang (played by Qin Hao) in *Burning Ice*, or retired, such as Ma Desheng in *The Long Season*, to allow them to have normal human sides, i.e., they have personal desires and selfish motives. When this mode is used frequently, it becomes tedious. At this point, a new creative breakthrough is to abandon shaping police and instead add personality charm to criminals. In *Drifting Away*, the creators deeply portray the butcher quartet:

Deng has leadership qualities, cunning and daring to take risks; Shi has the wisdom of a second-in-command, using his calm side to coordinate between the leader and others; Song has a fiercer temperament than male killers and knows how to use her female identity for convenience in life; Ji is a careless professional meat cutter from a slaughterhouse, the lowest in the team, sometimes responsible for creating laughs in the drama. In contrast, the police in this drama are flattened, idealized, and stereotyped. Peng combines many virtues, such as loving his family, persisting in justice, sympathizing with the weak; beyond that, he has no human side, i.e., whether he would abandon justice for overconcern about his wife and children? The drama does not show it, merely portraying this officer as an energetic person. This approach sacrifices the quality of the work to avoid economic losses from censorship.

Similarly affecting the work's quality is the drama's evasiveness about the sex trade. The creators describe phenomena in the Northeast during the layoff wave, such as some women having to rely on sex services, including accompanying guests to sing and dance in nightclubs, suffering sexual harassment from male colleagues, especially male leaders in offices, and prostitution in fixed venues to sustain life. However, the creators do not want to say sex trade so directly, sometimes simply avoiding the topic. Therefore, the drama has a strange narrative: at the beginning, before Song joins the butcher quartet, as a kidnapping victim, she hopes the others will not continue harming her on account of having had sexual relations with them. This straightforward line is striking because it reflects the plight of Northeast women in society during the lay-off wave. This is reproduced in some noir-style films and series, but very subtly, for example, in *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, the laundry shop owner long-term sexually harasses and molests Wu, but she endures it for survival. In *The Long Season*, college student Shen Mo (played by Li Gengxi) and unemployed worker Li Qiaoyun (played by Liu Lin) choose to work in nightclubs to survive. In *Frozen Surface*, a poor night school female student, Chen Xiaoming (played by Yang Yutong), chooses to be kept by capitalist Yan Hongqiao (played by Xing Jiadong) to escape poverty and bullying.

However, when Song joins the quartet and finds the next kidnapping target, Qiu Feng (played by Fang Yuanyuan) in a nightclub, the description of sex trade stops. The relationship between Qiu and the bandits disguised as businessmen is akin to that of friends who become familiar at a party, which obviously does not fit the professional setting. Unlike the abuse of violence, the portrayal of sexual behavior in the drama is even more conservative.

In fact, this conservatism should not be seen as the creators' avoidance of the censorship system; it should also consider the Northeast's immigration culture and post-industrial culture. According to a report from the Institute for Sexuality and Gender at Renmin University of China, local public attitudes toward sex work in the Northeast changed during the laid-off wave, manifesting as reduced condemnation of sex workers and understanding it as a survival method (Huang & Pan, 2009, p. 6); moreover, the area was initially composed of immigrants, with relatively open attitudes toward sex. This also creates a special phenomenon in films and TV, where audiences know what the director did not shoot, the director knows the audience understands what he wants to say, and due to review policies, he must abandon some scenes; thus, audiences outside this context are often puzzled by the plot, but those familiar with the context clearly understand the implications behind what the director did not mention. This is a form of situational irony, i.e., cleverly mentioning or deliberately avoiding in a special context to connect the audience with real prototypes, similar to the 2008 internet catchphrase “nǐ dòng

(you know),” as a mockery of political insider dealings behind social injustices (Guo, 2018, p. 139).<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is another irony, manifested as deliberately mentioning a political slogan in everyday life scenes, like the political report in Zhao Benshan’s stage comedy mentioned earlier. The satirical logic behind this lies in the various injustices encountered in the post-Reform and Opening-up era,<sup>4</sup> reminding people of the collectivism and class narratives of the Mao era; when someone encounters injustice but fears the punishment of revealing the truth, they choose to use politically correct slogans for irony. According to researcher Ching Kwan Lee (2000), these slogans have duality: on one hand, they belong to the collective memory of the Northeast with heavy industry as the pillar; on the other hand, they are ideological weapons actively chosen by laborers protesting injustices in the laid-off wave. Lee believes that the Maoist narrative context helps contemporary Northeasterners overcome the severe consequences of “demoralization and atomization” under massive unemployment (p. 235).

In Judith Audin’s words, political propaganda phrases have become puns, meaning in life, they are a “situational irony” (2016, p. 108), i.e., out-of-touch slogans spoken by people in reality as a mockery of the present. In *Drifting Away*, there is such mockery: the four criminals summarize their experience in kidnapping, murder, and dismemberment as “gan zhong xue (干中学 [learning by doing]),” a phrase from a famous Mao Tse-tung (1936) quote, “A revolutionary war is a mass undertaking, it is often not a matter of first learning and then doing, but of doing and then learning, for doing is itself learning” (*Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, ch. 1, sec. 4, para. 13, Sentence 3).

Moreover, in 2021, Xi Jinping mentioned this phrase at the opening ceremony of the Central Party School’s training class for young and middle-aged cadres (Qstheory, 2021). Due to the butcher quartet’s constant mention in *Drifting Away*, “learning by doing” became an annual hot meme, and many audiences unfamiliar with the Mao era context thought it was a phrase created by Northeasterners (Sa Jia Wang Erxiao, 2025). “Learning by doing” turns robbery, murder, and dismemberment into an experience report meeting for advanced workers in the collectivist era. This appropriation of political figures’ speeches is not accidental; it reflects the duality of China’s political vocabulary since the post-Mao era—on one hand, they are unshakable political views; on the other hand, their gap with reality gives them ironic effects.

The laughter created by Zhao Benshan’s report mentioned earlier illustrates this. Zhao’s character publicly recites a doggerel: “The spring breeze of reform blows across the land, the Chinese people are truly striving; united to cross the century, a big flood did not affect much” (CCTVGala, 2013),<sup>5</sup> causing the audience to roar with laughter. Here, there is a contrast: rural political reports were creations of the Mao era, while “spring breeze of reform” is a common metaphor for Deng’s economic opening policies. Zhao forcibly merges these two vastly

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<sup>3</sup>The phrase “you know” was even employed by official spokespersons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2014. During a press conference for the Second Session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, spokesperson Lü Xinhua addressed reporters regarding the corruption of a senior official who was rumored to be involved in a coup. He initially used formal rhetoric and later included the phrase “you know” to allude to the official’s likely fate. (Netease News, 2014)

<sup>4</sup>According to a World Bank report, China is experiencing increasing inequality and social disparity following the economic reform. The report attributes this issue to a combination of reforms, the household registration system, land financing, and tax policies. (Dollar, 2007)

<sup>5</sup>The original Chinese text is: “gǎi gé chūn fēng chuī mǎn dì, zhōng guó rén mín zhēn zhēng qì; qí xīn hé lì kuà shì jì, yī chǎng dà shuǐ méi zǎ dì”. (CCTVGala, 2013a)

contrasting things into one segment, creating laughter through emphasized recitation, which, in Audin's words, "illustrate[s] the gap between words and their absence of meaning in real life" (Audin, 2016, p. 108).

Whether in the portrayal of violence, sex, or political slogans, it reflects the audio-visual works' need to resist official values to some extent in the creation process. Of course, they are not social activists; doing so makes it easier to get a story background more suitable for commercial films.

### Conclusion

This article explores the characteristics shown in contemporary films and TV series set in the Northeast, namely the abuse of violence and conservatism toward sex. This situation is the result of creators testing the elasticity of the censorship system for commercial success. The cost of doing so is that films and TV series lack reflectivity, falling into a superficial trap where violence and sex trade are deliberately emphasized, while the cause of all this—the laid-off wave—is hidden. When values cannot be discussed and criticized, any noble slogan has an ironic nature, as if mocking the vast gap between utopia and the real world.

The problems brought by *Drifting Away*, including the entertainmentization and dumbing down of dismemberment and prostitution, are not simply attributed to the creators' quirks, but are the inevitable result of the harsh censorship system under current political pressure. Through analysis, we see that in the past decade's noir films and TV series, there is almost always a trend of avoiding reflection and moving toward nihilism. The creators' avoidance of censorship develops subtle ironic methods. However, in the long run, it will inevitably leave the audio-visual works of this era in a distorted state of development.

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