The Dilemma of Adolescents in Different Cultural Contexts—A Comparative Study of "Youth Diary" and "The Perks of Being a Wallflower"

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Abstract: As an important carrier of cultural dissemination, movies not only record social reality, but also obtain perceptible forms at the social level through specific narrative and visual strategies. By comparing and analyzing "Youth Diary" and "The Perks of Being a Wallflower", this article attempts to understand the presentation and generation mechanisms of adolescent difficulties in different cultural contexts from the perspective of visual writing. The adolescent dilemma is not a projection of a single social problem, but the result of continuous construction and reproduction under the joint action of family structure, social value norms, and education system.

Keywords: "Youth Diary"; "The Perks of Being a Wallflower"; Adolescent dilemma

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a continuous increase in social attention surrounding the issues of adolescent mental health and campus violence. Along with factors such as academic pressure, strained peer relationships, identity dilemmas, and institutional neglect, teenagers have gradually become a highly vulnerable and powerless group in modern society. As an important form of cultural expression, movies often reveal the specific forms of adolescent difficulties in daily life through emotional storytelling and visual presentation, reflecting different societies' deep understanding of "growth," "success," and "normalcy." Therefore, examining the plight of young people from the perspective of visual writing has important cultural and academic value.

Campus violence is an important component of adolescent difficulties and has long been understood as the result of individual behavioral misconduct or peer conflict. This way of understanding to some extent obscures the structural and normative factors behind campus violence, simplifying the problem into a moral or psychological case. However, there are significant differences in the mechanisms, manifestations, and ways in which campus

violence is understood and handled in different cultural contexts. Comparing visual texts from different cultural backgrounds can help break through a single cultural perspective and reveal the multiple social roots of adolescent difficulties.

The Hong Kong film "Youth Diary" and the American film "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" both focus on the campus as the core space, focusing on the oppression and trauma that teenagers encounter during their growth process. However, the two show significant differences in narrative strategies, emotional expression, and violent presentation. Through a restrained and introverted visual style, "Youth Diary" depicts how teenagers gradually lose their expressive space in silence and self denial in a highly performative and standardized environment; However, 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' presents the vulnerable situation of minority groups in the interweaving of campus system failure and social prejudice in relatively open conflicts and confrontations. The two films not only showcase the specific forms of campus violence in different cultural contexts, but also reflect the different understandings of adolescent subjectivity in their respective societies.

Based on this, this article takes "Youth Diary" and "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" as research objects, and compares and analyzes the presentation and generation mechanisms of adolescent difficulties in different cultural contexts. The research is not aimed at plot comparison or value evaluation, but rather focuses on the interactive relationship between cultural norms, institutional structures, and visual narratives, aiming to reveal how adolescent difficulties are shaped, seen, or obscured under different social conditions, thereby providing a more three-dimensional analytical perspective for understanding the issue of campus violence.

2. The adolescent dilemma in "Youth Diary"

Kong Lingshun commented on "Youth Diary" and said, "This is an era of anxiety: what we don't have, we long to have; what we have, we fear losing."[1]Anxiety is transmitted from adults to families, from society to schools.

The difficulties faced by teenagers in "Youth Diary" are not directly manifested as sudden campus violence incidents, but rather through a slow, restrained, and highly daily visual writing style, depicting how difficulties gradually arise in seemingly orderly and normal growth environments. Campus and home spaces are not chaotic or out of control places. On the contrary, they are highly stable in external order, with clear rules and clear goals. It is in this stable structure that the pain of adolescents is constantly compressed, delayed, and ultimately disappears.

The movie avoids reinforcing descriptions of direct conflicts. The oppression on campus appears more in a cold way: ignored gazes, skipped questions, and understated emotional expressions. This treatment makes violence no longer manifest as clearly identifiable behavior, but rather as an atmosphere that permeates daily interactions. The language of the camera often stays at the character's reaction rather than the event itself, and what the audience sees is not the occurrence of conflict, but the silence, hesitation, and avoidance after the conflict occurs. This way of expression reinforces the concealment of the dilemma, making it seem 'insufficient to constitute a problem', but it continues to accumulate on an emotional level.

The presentation of campus space in the film is particularly noteworthy. Classrooms, corridors, exam scenes, and other spaces are repeatedly photographed, but lack clear emotional fluctuations. Space itself does not pose a threat, but it appears indifferent due to its highly standardized nature. Students are placed in a unified order, and individual differences are minimized to the greatest extent possible. The image presents the insignificance and silence of individuals in the collective structure through a large number of distant and static compositions, making the dilemma of teenagers not come from direct attacks from others, but from a sustained but indescribable state of

neglect.

In the movie, the image of teenagers is not constructed as subjects with strong resistance or explicit emotions. On the contrary, characters often exhibit a high degree of self-suppression and emotional restraint. Pain is not fully expressed through language, but is presented in the form of physical state, eye changes, and behavioral hesitation. The image repeatedly presents the moments when characters try to express themselves but ultimately give up, making "unspoken emotions" one of the important contents of the film. This expression is highly consistent with the emphasis on patience, self-restraint, and emotional internalization in East Asian culture. The presentation of family scenes in the film also follows this logic. Family does not appear as an obvious space for conflict, but rather as a gentle yet persistent pressure environment composed of words of care, expectation, and responsibility. The lack of intense arguments or obvious emotional disorder in the image is replaced by seemingly natural demands and evaluations. This approach ensures that family stress is not seen as abnormal, but is naturally incorporated into the growth process. This kind of daily writing presents a seamless connection between the difficulties faced by teenagers at home and on campus.

There is also no clear emotional outlet provided to the audience in terms of narrative structure. The overall pace of the film is slow, with sustained and restrained emotional expression, lacking dramatic explosive points. This rhythm arrangement gradually makes the audience realize that the difficulties faced by teenagers do not stem from a single moment of loss of control, but rather from long-term accumulation. Through the extension of time, images present difficulties as a form of 'delayed harm', whose destructive power is not reflected in intensity, but in persistence. The extensive use of low saturation colors and concise ambient sound weakens the emotional rendering effect. This style choice avoids emotional consumption of pain and refuses to romanticize the difficulties faced by teenagers. The moderate use of music makes emotions more dependent on the visual and character states themselves, thereby enhancing the sense of reality. This imaging strategy makes the dilemma appear more relevant to daily life and more difficult to classify as an "extreme case".

The choice of narrative perspective further reinforces the internalized characteristics of adolescent difficulties. The story is not fully explained or intervened from an adult perspective, but rather unfolds through fragmented memories and subjective experiences. The audience is not always able to obtain complete information, and this information asymmetry makes understanding itself difficult, and also reproduces the situation of teenagers being "unable to be fully understood" in reality at the formal level. The image not only presents the dilemma in terms of content, but also simulates the perceptual state of the dilemma in terms of narrative structure.

3. The adolescent dilemma in the American cultural context of "The Perks of Being a Wallflower"

Unlike "Youth Diary" which presents adolescent difficulties through restraint and silence, "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" chooses a highly explicit and conflict-facing visual writing style. Guo Yunfei interpreted the movie "Wallflower Boy" and said, "The 'wallflowers' are clearly out of place in mainstream society. In the colorful and passionate dance hall, the wallflowers are like an disharmonious factor. They sit alone on chairs leaning against the wall, trying to integrate into society but unable to find a way. They simply isolate themselves from the outside world."[2] The film explicitly places campus violence and the plight of young people in public spaces, making them an unavoidable reality through visible humiliation, public identification, and ongoing confrontation. Here, pain is not hidden under the daily order, but is exposed in an intuitive and sustained way to the gaze of others, forming a

dilemma form with "being seen" as its core feature.

The film presents conflicts very clearly at the visual level. The campus space is shaped into a highly open public area, where classrooms, corridors, playgrounds, and other places are not neutral backgrounds, but stages where conflicts repeatedly occur. The camera often directly targets the violent behavior itself, and the audience can clearly see the entire process of verbal humiliation, physical pushing, and group watching. This approach makes violence no longer a vaguely perceptible atmosphere, but a behavior that can be clearly identified, thereby enhancing the sense of reality of the predicament at the visual level. The Perks of Being a Wallflower places the adolescent subject in a highly exposed position. The gender temperament and physical expression of the protagonist are constantly identified, discussed, and ridiculed, and their identity is not established through self narration, but is repeatedly named in the eyes of others. Through a continuous labeling process, the adolescent dilemma is presented as a state that is constantly confirmed by the outside world: individuals cannot return to the private sphere and can only bear the pressure brought by their identity in public spaces. This visual writing style highlights the highly visible feature of differences in American campus culture. The film does not simplify violence as malicious behavior of a few individuals, but presents the diffusion of difficulties through group reactions. The perpetrator, bystanders, and silent individuals together constitute the interactive structure in the campus space. The images capture the gaze and attitude of bystanders multiple times, making the audience aware that violence does not only exist in direct actions, but also in collective indifference and tacit approval. This presentation method makes the difficulties faced by teenagers no longer a personal experience, but a collective experience.

The overall progress of the movie is relatively tight, with frequent conflicts and significant emotional fluctuations. Not giving the audience too much buffer space, but instead escalating the dilemma through continuous event stacking. This rhythm arrangement reinforces the sense of tension and keeps teenagers in a highly alert state. Images present violence as a normalized experience rather than an accidental event through repeated conflict scenes. Use bright and realistic campus environment sounds more often, weaken artistic processing, and enhance the sense of recording. Music often appears at critical emotional nodes to enhance the impact of conflicts rather than soothe emotions. This choice makes it impossible for the audience to maintain a safe distance from the character and forces them to confront the cruelty of the predicament. We do not pursue subtlety here, but emphasize the directness of emotions, making pain an undeniable presence.

Unlike the internalization of difficulties in "Youth Diary", the adolescent difficulties in "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" are always presented in an outward form. The character did not completely transform pain into self-denial, but was forced to respond to others in conflict. This response does not necessarily imply resistance or liberation, but rather further exposes the individual's vulnerability. The image repeatedly presents the process of adversarial failure, showing that difficulties do not disappear due to expression, but may be exacerbated by expression. The emergence of school administrators and teachers has not truly ended violence, but rather appears more as symbolic entities in narratives. The image does not emphasize the absence of institutions, but presents a state of "seemingly existing but difficult to exert effectiveness" through limited and slow intervention. This approach acknowledges the difficulties faced by teenagers in form, but fails to effectively alleviate them in reality.

The movie does not completely stand on a single subjective standpoint, but presents conflicts from multiple perspectives to make the audience aware of the complexity of the dilemma. The film does not provide a complete emotional outlet for the characters, nor does it attempt to solve problems through simple moral judgments. Images focus more on how difficulties are constantly reiterated through continuous interaction, keeping teenagers in a

state of being watched and evaluated.

Through highly visible and positive visual writing, 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' portrays the adolescent dilemma in the context of American culture as an open, confrontational, and identity based experience. Unlike the dilemma characterized by silence and internalization in the East Asian context, the pain here is not hidden under order, but exposed in public space, becoming an unavoidable yet difficult to escape reality. Through this expression, it is revealed that in a cultural context that emphasizes individual expression and diversity, adolescent difficulties may still persist in a more direct and brutal form.

4. The root causes of the difficulties faced by three teenagers

In the process of adolescent growth, the family should bear the functions of emotional support, psychological regulation, and risk buffering. However, in reality, this function often undergoes structural displacement, and the home is no longer a buffer for difficulties, but rather an amplifier for stress. In the different cultural environments presented in the two films, although the lack of family function takes on different forms, the results both point to the rupture of the adolescent support system.

In "Youth Diary", the family does not appear in obvious forms of conflict or violence, but instead forms a continuous emotional pressure structure with responsible words such as "for your own good" and "should do so". He Xuelian pointed out, "The 'this is for your own good' mechanism is essentially a reward mechanism, and its cleverness lies in catering to students' instinctive egocentrism. Its cruelty lies in the inability to immediately prove or falsify it."[3]

The family function is not completely absent here, but has undergone a directional transformation: emotional understanding and listening have been replaced by performance expectations and moral requirements. The emotional distress of teenagers is difficult to identify as a problem that requires a response, but is understood as a "normal cost" in the process of growth. The transformation of this family function makes teenagers lack a safe emotional outlet when encountering campus setbacks or psychological crises, and can only internalize pressure into self denial.

In contrast, the lack of family function in 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' is more manifested as unstable and fragmented support. Whether a family can provide protection for adolescents often depends on the attitudes and positions of specific family members, rather than stable structural guarantees. When families are unable to effectively intervene in campus conflicts, teenagers are forced to face pressure from peers and public spaces alone. In this situation, the family no longer constitutes a reliable safe haven, but becomes a variable that may provide support or remain silent. The commonality between families with "excessive responsibility" in the East Asian context and families with "unstable support" in the American context is that families fail to provide sufficient emotional support space for adolescents. When family functions cannot effectively respond to the psychological needs of adolescents, individual difficulties are more likely to be amplified in campus and social spaces, and gradually evolve into irreversible psychological crises.

In addition to family factors, the structure of social value norms is the deeper root of the sustained generation of adolescent difficulties. Society constructs a normative model of "ideal youth" through educational systems, public discourse, and cultural narratives, and based on this, continuously evaluates individuals. When teenagers are unable to meet these norms, their difficulties are seen as personal issues rather than structural problems.

In the East Asian cultural context presented in 'Youth Diary', social value norms are highly centered around

grades, discipline, and self-control. Success is defined as quantifiable and comparable outcomes, while emotional expression and psychological vulnerability are seen as negative factors that affect efficiency. This value structure requires teenagers to constantly adjust themselves to adapt to external standards, rather than gaining space for understanding. Social norms are transmitted through both family and school channels, causing teenagers to tend to attribute responsibility to their own lack of ability or will when facing failure or pain, thereby exacerbating internal conflicts.

In 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower', social value norms are more reflected in the emphasis on 'normality'. Although American culture emphasizes diversity and individual expression, this tolerance is often built on the premise of not deviating from the mainstream order. The implicit expectations of gender temperament, physical performance, and identity traits constantly mark differences in public spaces. Once teenagers are identified as "outliers", they are prone to become objects of collective attention and exclusion. In this value structure, the dilemma does not stem from the expression itself, but from the continuous scrutiny and evaluation triggered by the expression.

Although the value norms in the two cultures have different forms of expression, their operational logic is similar: society constantly compresses the individual's space of possibilities by setting "what kind of youth should be". When adolescents are unable to conform to this ideal model, their predicament is often moralized or psychologically treated, while the social structure itself is held accountable. The institutionalization of these value norms has led to the long-term dilemma of young people being seen but difficult to solve.

The weakening of family functions and the imbalance of social value norms together constitute the core mechanism for the generation of adolescent difficulties. Families have failed to effectively absorb social pressure, and society continues to exert pressure on individuals through normative systems, placing adolescents at the intersection of multiple expectations. Under this structure, difficulties do not occur by chance, but are the result of continuous production and reinforcement.

5. Conclusion

Image writing is not only an artistic presentation of the difficulties faced by teenagers, but also a social cognitive approach. The true response to the plight of adolescents may not lie in strengthening management or requiring individual adaptation, but in rebuilding a social structure that can accommodate differences, fragility, and failure. This is precisely the important inspiration that film art provides for real-life discussions.

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