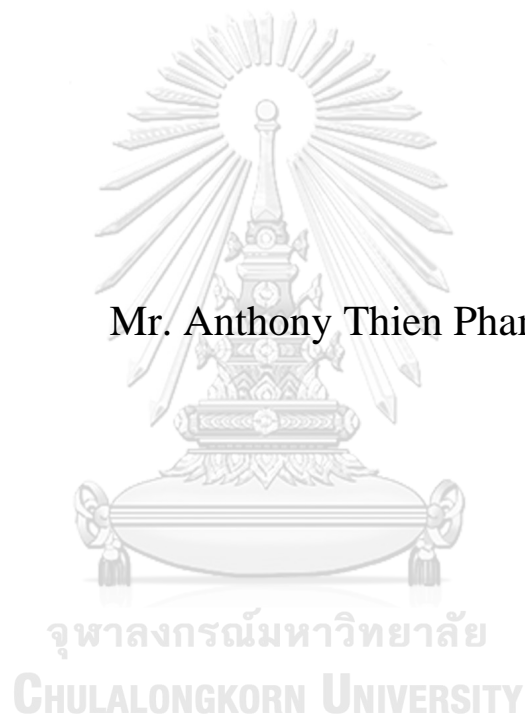


THE THAI PERCEPTION OF THE BOUNDS OF
MASCULINITY: AN ANALYSIS OF BOYS' LOVE DRAMA
SERIES

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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การประกอบสร้างการรับรู้ของไทยต่อขอบเขตความเป็นชาย: การวิเคราะห์ของละครชุดชายรักชาย



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา สหสาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

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งานศึกษานี้มุ่งสร้างความเข้าใจพื้นฐานเกี่ยวกับเรื่องเพศสถานะและเพศวิถีภายใต้บริบทสังคมวัฒนธรรม การเมือง และเศรษฐกิจของประเทศไทย อธิบายความซับซ้อนของความรักแบบชายรักชายในละครที่มีพื้นฐานการสร้างจากละครโทรทัศน์แบบญี่ปุ่นและจีน โดยวิเคราะห์จากวิวัฒนาการของละครแนวชายรักชายในสังคมไทยที่ผลิตขึ้นในช่วงปี 2014 ถึง 2018 ผ่านกรอบทฤษฎีการใช้ประโยชน์และความพึงพอใจและแนวคิดการพึ่งพาเพื่อที่จะทราบหลักการที่ทำให้ละครแนวดังกล่าวเติบโตและประสบความสำเร็จ นอกจากนี้งานศึกษานี้ยังนำแนวคิดเรื่องเพศวิทยา (ทฤษฎีเกวียร์) และการประกอบสร้างทางสังคมมาใช้เป็นกรอบคิดเพื่อทำความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางความคิดซึ่งถูกยอมรับในขอบเขตของความเป็นชาย ในตอนที่งานศึกษานี้ให้คำอธิบายว่าละครแนวชายรักชายแท้จริงแล้วมิได้หักล้างคำอธิบายกระแสหลัก ทว่ายึดโยงกับวิถีคิดแบบกระแสหลัก ซึ่งไม่ได้ลดทอนความเป็นชาย แต่กลับสร้างรูปแบบความเป็นชายอย่างเลื่อนไหล



สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา
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The study lays a foundation for understanding gender and sexuality within a Thai sociocultural, political, and economic context and goes on to elaborate how Thai boys' love drama series productions are built upon the foundation of their Japanese and Chinese predecessors. An analysis of the evolution of boys' love drama series within Thailand will be conducted from the years 2014 to 2018, utilizing the Uses and Gratification Theory as well as the Media System Dependency Theory in order to rationalize growth and success of the genre. Queer Theory and Social Constructivism are applied in order to better understanding the shifting conceptions of what is permitted within the bounds of masculinity. In its conclusion, the study illustrates how Thai boys' love drama series productions are not truly subversive of mainstream narratives and, in fact, serve to reinforce them. However, this does not discount the ways in which it allows Thai men to engage in more flexible models of masculinity.



Field of Study:	Southeast Asian Studies	Student's Signature
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Background of Study

Internationally, Thailand is often acknowledged as a haven for queer communities (GSNContributor, 2017; Ragavan, 2017; Tandon, 2018). It is not a development that is a result of intentional policy-making by the Thai state, but rather a coincidental evolution that was a byproduct of many social, political, and economic factors (Jackson, 2011a). Though this assumed narrative of openness is applied to the entirety of the queer community, the gay community within Thailand has been able to experience unprecedented and unparalleled representation in media (Appendix IV).

The sudden development of representation in media for male-male relationship is most obviously noted within drama series, which are popularized online through digital or social media (Jackson, 2011a). For example, in the year 2007, Thailand saw its first movie featuring and centering around an openly male-male romantic narrative (Sakveerakhul, 2007; ศักดิ์วีระกุล, 2550). Just ten years later in 2017, Thailand saw a dramatic increase in production of movies and drama series with openly male-male romantic narratives: an estimated total of five movies, four short films, and sixteen drama series (Appendix IV). Furthermore, male-male narratives are even utilized in commercials for the marketing of products, such as KA Lip Care (KAPaveemol, 2017), KA UV Sun Cream (KAPaveemol, 2018), and Cathy Doll CC Cream (KarmartsClub, 2018).

It is clear that this phenomenon within Thailand is of growing significance in the modern age. The industry for production of queer, specifically boys' love, narrative is large and continues to grow each year. It may be of interest to note that

despite the burgeoning success of the Thai boy's love genre, the industry is largely populated, produced, and presented by heterosexual, or straight, individuals (Mahavongtrakul, 2017). Furthermore, there is a crucial and significant difference between boys' love narratives and gay narratives which will be discussed in detail further on in this study.

As previously stated, there is an openness toward queerness within Thailand in regards to gender and sexuality that is unlike any other modern-day nation-state. How then does one explain the limited representation of actual queer narratives within the entertainment industry that capitalizes off of boy's love narratives? This study outlines the evolution of perceptions and approaches to the production of boys' love narratives within the entertainment industry. In laying out this evolution, the study will apply relevant theories in order to understand how the sociocultural perceptions impact the approach of production for Thai boy's love drama series, and vice versa. This will be particularly analyzed through the way the Thai boys' love drama series industry approaches the topic of masculinity within its romantic male leads, who are often portrayed by heterosexual, or straight, men. This analysis will also lend itself to understanding why the popularity of boys' love drama series within the Thai entertainment industry does not necessarily extend to other queer narratives.

1.2 Research Question

1. What has the evolution of the boys' love genre industry in Thailand looked like?
2. In what ways does this evolution indicate a shift in understanding of masculinity within Thai society and vice versa?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to understanding the evolution and impact of the boys' love genre industry in Thailand. To meet such ends, the study seeks to analyze how presentation of boys' love productions and Thai society impact one another. It is important to understand this because, as the literature will show, Thailand has experienced a significant shift in understandings of gender, sexuality, and various aspects of identity due to the coming of westernization and modernity. A greater understanding of this phenomenon may have implications for insight into how Thai society has managed to reconcile conflicting notions of identity and how it continues to redefine these identities for itself.

By utilizing the particular lens of media and drama series, the study will also be able to glean how the entertainment industry helps to shape discourse regarding the defining of identities. In that same vein, the study will be able to explore how culture and society, alongside current definitions and understandings of identities, influence the entertainment industry. In conclusion, the study will shed light on how the presentation of men in boys' love relationships will help to shape society's understandings of masculinity and provide implications for what effects that may have on the society as a whole.

1.4 Hypothesis

As will be shown in this chapter, the uses of Queer Theory, Social Constructivism, Uses and Gratification Theory, and Media System Dependency Theory provide many tools with which to better study and understand the unique issue

presented by this study. The overlapping conceptual model will allow the study to analyze the society, the culture, the history, and the language of the Thai nation. The understanding of these will then feed into the understanding of modern-day conceptions regarding *phet* (romanized as *phet*), gender, and sexuality within Thailand. Together, these two will provide a platform with which to study the production of BL media within Thailand and see how it produces effects which in turn affect the construction of masculinity within a Thai social context.

1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of the study will focus primarily on the past five years for boys' love productions in Thailand (2014 – 2018). As stated previously, there has been a significant increase in the production of boys' love narratives; as such, this study will look at boys' love narratives within Thai drama series in general, but will have a particular emphasis on the following four series:

<u>Producer</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Series Title</u>	* <u>Rating</u>	* <u>Review %</u>	** <u>Fan Subscribe Count</u>	** <u>First Episode Views</u>	** <u>Most Viewed Episode</u>
Mr. Big Picture	2014	^ Love Sick The Series	8.3	53.9%	8,984	535,563	535,563
Wealth Enterprise	2015	^ Love Sick The Series	8.5	54%	11,119	774,674	774,674
GMM	2016	SOTUS The Series	8.9	67.8%	159,704	4,125,892	4,662,236
GMM	2017	SOTUS S The Series	8.8	61.0%	95,123	5,093,980	5,164,377
TV Thunder	2017	Together with Me	8.8	63.3%	82,632	2,019,700	5,009,985
TV Thunder	2018	Together with Me: The Next Chapter	7.6	40.1%	82,632	2,921,867	3,444,602
Wabi Sabi	2018	Love by Chance	8.8	63.8%	197,076	10,639,223	10,639,223

Table 1. Scope of Study

* Data is sourced from MyDramaList website (www.mydramalist.com)

** Data is sourced from LINETV website (tv.line.me)

^ Series will receive an additional season in 2020

Data sourced on 11 October 2019.

These four particular series were chosen for several reasons. The first reason was that these series focus primarily on boys' love narratives, with the main male lead actors portraying characters who fall in love with one another, while also including additional boys' love narratives in the sub-plots through supporting characters. Series that only featured boys' love narratives as sub-plots or side-stories were not considered for analysis as those characters did not receive a significant enough amount of time on screen in order to be analyzed thoroughly or properly.

These four series were also selected due to their success, popularity, and relatively high acclaim in the year in which they were produced and made available for consumption. The standard for this measurement is sourced from two different websites: MyDramaList and LINE TV. The significance of their popularity is due to their reach; the assumption would be that the greater following they have, the more impact their meanings will have on the society in which they are embedded.

MyDramaList is an online website that catalogues Asian dramas, movies, and series, as well as various other forms of entertainment (MyDramaList, 2011). Based on user interaction, they are able to gather information that includes viewer ratings, viewership counts, and reviews. Furthermore, they are able to utilize that data in order to generate overall rankings of media forms across different genres, countries, languages, and types.

One of the reasons that these four series were selected for analysis is because they were rated highly by viewers. Most Thai series that focus on gay or boys' love characters are rated between 7.0 to 8.8, with an average of 8.1 out of 10 (Table 1). However, the five listed series generally ranked above that and ultimately served to pull up the average ranking of the genre. Furthermore, each of these series had a

higher reported percentage of feedback from viewers. Thai drama series that focused on a gay or boys' love narratives received responses from a range of 23-65% of their reported viewers. The four series selected clearly received a higher percentage of feedback from viewers in comparison to their counterparts (Table 1). The one exception would be *Together with Me: The Next Chapter*. Although some may argue that the lower percentage of feedback for *Together with Me: The Next Chapter* could be due to its relatively recent production, this argument can be countered and debunked by the high percentage of feedback for *Love by Chance*, which was produced at approximately the same time.

LINE TV is a popular streaming website in Thailand to watch movies, series, and other various media forms (LINETV, 2015). Data sourced from LINE TV's website provided information including the number of subscribers for each series and the number of views collected on each episode. The selected four series had some of the most subscribers to their channel and some of the highest viewership (Table 1). Viewership of a series was judged based off of its first or pilot episode and its most viewed episode.

Furthermore, *Love Sick the Series* is considered as one of the four series to be analyzed due to its significant role as the first Thai drama series that centered around a boys' love relationship in the early stages of the boy's love genre industry's development.

1.6 Methodology of Study

Based off of these two platforms, MyDramaList and LINE TV, the study decided to focus on four particularly series that have established themselves as

prominent boys' love narratives. They have shown to be the most acclaimed, the most popular, and the most successful of their genre. Furthermore, the four series are evenly spread across the time span of 2014 – 2018, providing a short-term glance at the evolution of production and narrative-writing within the genre; the study will be able to analyze how each of the following series built upon the experiences of their genre predecessors.

In the analysis of the drama series within the industry, the study will seek to address previous issues within queer media, specifically boys' love narratives. Some of these issues include stereotyping, reductionism, dehumanization, and a general lack of understanding for the nuanced narratives of non-normative identities (Zhou, Paul, & Sherman, 2018). To do so, a trend within the boys' love genre must be first identified. Then, the four series will be compared to the trend in order to identify whether or not they follow or deviate from it. The expectation is that as society becomes more progressive in its conception of what is deemed queer or non-normative, the media will shift to mirror that social progress. The same can be said of the relationship in reverse: as media pushes the envelope regarding what is appropriate for depiction, society begins to understand and accept concepts that were once foreign to them.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The following section discusses a number of theories that are applied in concert throughout the study. All informational graphics provided are made for this study in order to visualize the theoretical model of use. The theoretical framework established by such theories will be applied in order to provide concluding analysis as well. Queer theory provides a deconstructive lens to addressing gender and sexual identities, whereas Social Constructivism allows the study to apply the deconstructive lens to social conceptions of ideologies. The Uses and Gratification Theory will establish a cyclical relationship between the audience and the increase in quality or quantity of productions, whereas the Media System Dependency Theory will illustrate how society, audience, and industry are intimately tied to one another.

1.7.1 Queer Theory

Queer Theory draws from various perspectives, but underscores them all with a deconstructive narrative to challenge their fundamental assumptions (McCann, 2016). It focuses on the practices and assumptions that are socialized by a society around the sexualization of people, their desires, and their actions. Thus, it challenges the normalization of heteronormativity by deconstructing it and questioning the assumptions that it posits regarding society and humanity (Stryker & Currah, 2014).

In this context, it becomes understood that sexuality and other categories of identity are socially constructed, shaped and bounded by the conception of history, culture, and society (A. I. Green, 2007). For example, the creation of gender categories pre-dates one's individual existence; these categories are created by those who came before the individual, who in turn are simply born into the system.

Individuals must then identify themselves in accordance to the social norms that are established for them and have little to do in the actual construction of identification categories; social construction of these ideologies occurs on a societal level. Along this line of thought, it then becomes apparent that the creation of social identification categories is dependent on where knowledge and power lie within a specific society. Queer theory looks at the creation of these social identification categories, particularly sex, gender, and sexuality, and challenges that particular social order and its various intersections.

Queer theory, though, does pose a few problems to itself. As it seeks to deconstruct social constructions, it in of itself is a social construction. Some argue then that queer theory is not usefully applicable as it eventually deconstructs itself (A. I. Green, 2007). However, this does not change the fundamental position that sexuality, gender, and other identity categories are social constructs. As such, queer theory's deconstructive tool is still crucial for the understanding of identity categories. The goal is not to deconstruct everything, but to deconstruct the concepts that are bounded within society in order to acknowledge their state as bounded constructs, rather than as immutable facts.

Furthermore, queer theory's heavy emphasis on deconstruction leaves it without a pathway to enacting societal change; queer theory focuses on theoretical deconstruction but poses no solution to addressing real world issues by actualizing its theories (McCann, 2016). However, it does look to spaces that center around non-heteronormative narratives as critical sites of resistance against the greater, oppressive, heteronormative society (A. I. Green, 2007). Because queer theory in and of itself

provides only a means to critique and challenge, this study must look to other theories in order to supplement its analysis and arguments.

1.7.2 Constructivism and Social Constructivism

Constructivism posits that all knowledge is constructed through society and the interactions of the people within the society (Hirtle, 1996). As such, all knowledge exists within a social context and can never be neutral. There is no factual knowable truth that exists beyond this context as all meaning is given to a socially constructed idea through the interactions of people within a given society (Yilmaz, 2008). Knowledge can, therefore, never be objective or permanent. The following diagram illustrates how constructivism perceives the construction of knowledge: as a negotiation between an individual, their community, and the surrounding environment.

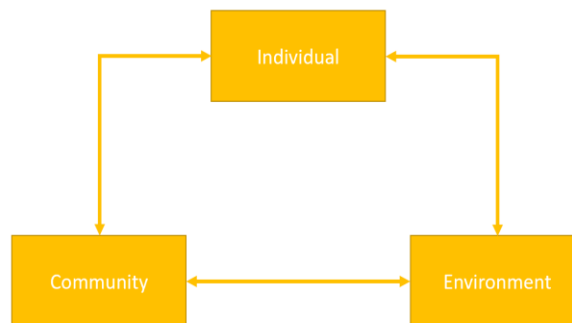


Table 2. Theory of Constructivism

Constructivism, as a whole, has three perspectives through which to be able to view it: the endogenous perspective looks at the individual's mind and their previous life experiences, the exogenous perspective looks at the environment and social setting, while the dialectic perspective looks at the interaction between the two

(Yilmaz, 2008). It is important to understand that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but, rather, are important variables of a greater image that this study seeks to visualize and apply.

There are additional forms of constructivism as well: social, psychological, and radical (Yilmaz, 2008). Radical constructivism claims that all knowledge is merely a compilation of other constructs that were previously constructed and thus knowing anything is simply knowing its components in an endless cycle. Psychological constructivism is the construction of meaning based on an individual's lived experiences, thereby implying that all meaning is somewhat tinted with idiosyncratic significance. Social constructivism argues that all knowledge is constructed through social interactions between people through various fields, such as politics, religions, economy, science, power, and self-interests.

Social constructivism, being the most significant of the three for this study, will have an additional focus, but the study will not completely ignore its counterparts. Social constructivism thus acknowledges that culture and society are critical aspects of the construction of any ideology (Kim, 2006). Human activity gives meaning to otherwise meaningless concepts and socialization occurs through a learning process. As social groups grow and develop together, the significance and meaning they construct into certain ideologies shifts with them, all throughout their history.

Social constructivism can be additionally be broken up into four various perspectives: cognitive tools, idea-based, pragmatic or emergent, and transactional or situated (Kim, 2006). The cognitive tools perspective claims that a community will produce a product together and give meaning to it through their social processes. The idea-based perspective looks at how systems of education prioritizes certain main

ideas that are then used as common building blocks for following socially constructed ideologies. The pragmatic or emergent perspective looks at how social learning occurs on a need-based basis and is facilitated through the individual, the community, or both. Lastly, the transactional or situated perspective focuses on how the environment interacts with the community or the individual in order to help shape social constructions.

The following diagram illustrates the social constructivist model as proposed by Vygotsky (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). It illustrates the zone of proximal development, during which an individual is able to receive guidance and support from those who have participated in the society before them. They then supplement what they are given with their own experiences and reflections before they are able to internalize the knowledge and repeat it for automation. In this way, all knowledge that an individual possesses is a social construction of previous social constructions in combination with their own experiential understandings of their community and society.

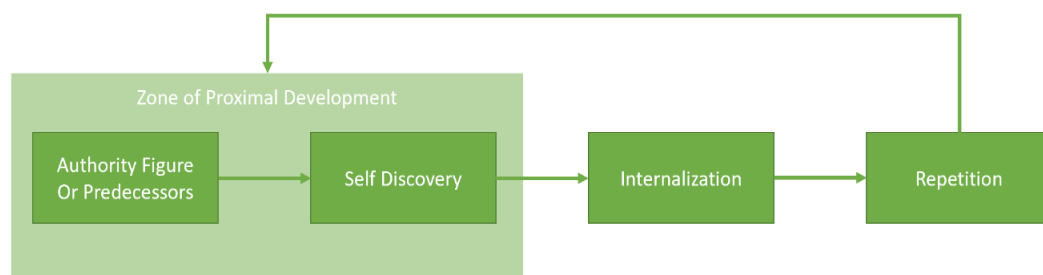


Table 3. Theory of Social Constructivism

1.7.3 Uses and Gratification Theory and Media System Dependency Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory (henceforth, referred to as UGT) focuses on the use of media within society, particularly by the audience of interest (Kamm, 2013). The approach does not necessarily look at how the audiences are impacted by the media, but rather what the media compels them to do. Positive experiences with a certain media will incentivize the audience members to continue engaging with that specific media, whereas negative experiences will deter them. Therefore, the UGT studies the audience members' motivations, intentions, and behaviors in relation to the media of consumption. This is increasingly more accessible through the use of modern-day technology, such as the internet.

The following diagram was produced by Kamm and illustrates how both society and individual needs help shape the consumption of certain media forms (Kamm, 2013). As society and individuals define what their basic needs are, the problem drives the motivation for the behavior. Should the behavior or action provide satisfaction, the consumption of the particular media continues; should it not be satisfied, the media is discontinued and another is sought out.

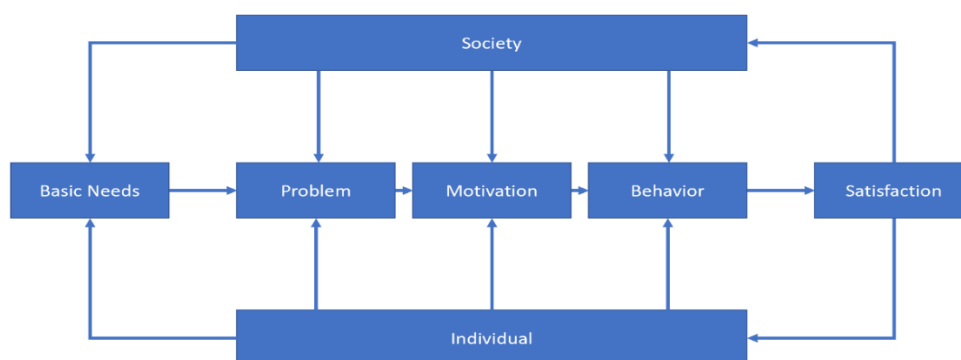


Table 4. Theory of Uses and Gratification Theory

The Media Systems Dependency Theory (henceforth, referred to as MSDT) studies the impacts that media has on the audience members in a more nuanced way (Riffe, Lacy, & Varoukhakis, 2008). It focuses on individuals in order to gain a micro-level understanding and on the society as a whole to gain a macro-level understanding of such impacts. MSDT thus looks at six scopes of understanding the motivations for particular media consumption: self-understanding, which is learning about oneself; social understanding, which is learning about one's society; solitary play, which is enjoying one's alone time; social play, which is connecting with other members of one's community; action orientation, which is developing ability or motivation to take action; and interaction orientation, which is developing ability to adapt to new or difficult situations (Patwardhan & Yang, 2003; Riffe et al., 2008). These motivational scopes, though, are not mutually exclusive and can occur simultaneously in various levels of intensity.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur introduced the Media System Dependency Theory in 1976 (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The model illustrates how society, media, and the audience influence one another. Media is able to maximize its outreach and area of effect by communicating with both society and its target audience. The produced effect can then in turn produce an effect on both the society and the media industry.

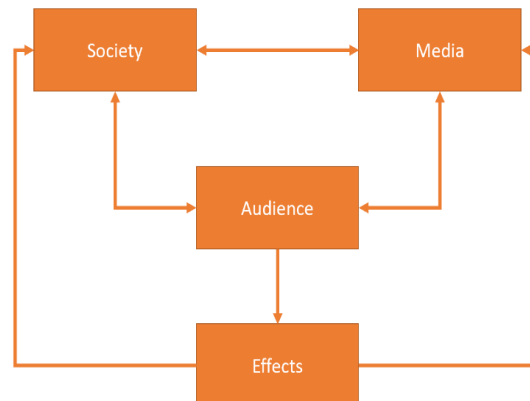


Table 5. Theory of Media Systems Dependency Theory

This study will utilize these theories in concert with one another in order to establish a lens with which to analyze and understand the dynamics between Thai society and Thai media. Media productions and social perceptions engage in a cyclical cycle wherein one impacts the other mutually. As nuanced narratives are increasingly produced within the media, social perceptions expand to demand more. As society becomes normalized to non-traditional gendering, media productions reciprocate by producing narratives that increasingly challenge that norm. As such, traditional notions of masculinity prior to their engagement with the boys' love genre industry will result in an expanded definition of what masculinity encapsulates.

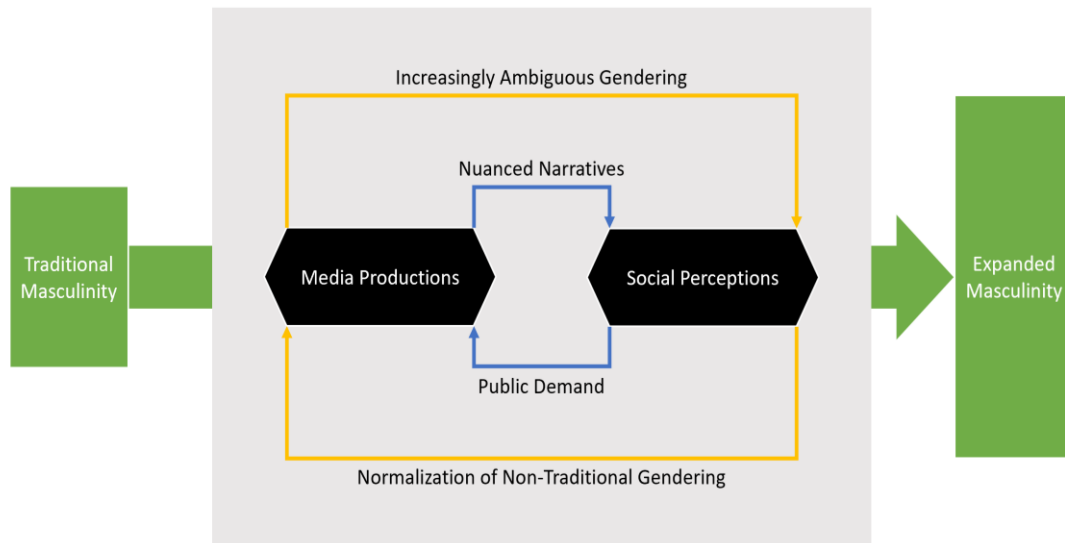


Table 6. Theory of Application in the Study

1.8 Key Terminologies

- Gender – looks at the social process by which individuals are organized within a society into categories of sexed behaviors; this most commonly occurs across a binary between man and woman, masculine and feminine (Beasley, 2005; E. Green & Peterson, 2006).
- Sexuality – looks at the interests of an individual in regards to the sexualization of their desires; this often operates across a binary as well, between heterosexual and homosexual (Beasley, 2005; E. Green & Peterson, 2006).
- Cisgender – a term utilized to describe individuals whose gender align with the gender assigned to them at birth based on their genitals or reproductive organs (Stryker & Currah, 2014).
- Transgender – a term utilized to describe individuals whose gender do not align with the gender assigned to them at birth based on their

genitals or reproductive organs (E. Green & Peterson, 2006; Stryker & Currah, 2014).

- Intersex – a term given to individuals at birth regarding any deviation from the binary of genital or reproductive organ identification; it can also be used to identify individuals whose deviation are not phenotypically visible, such as those with XXY sex chromosomes or various hormonal reactions (Stryker & Currah, 2014).
- Heterosexual – a term used to describe individuals who are “straight” or are sexually attracted to the gender that is opposite their own (E. Green & Peterson, 2006).
- Homosexual – a term used to describe individuals who are sexually attracted to those of the same gender (E. Green & Peterson, 2006).
- Heteronormative – the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm of humanity or that heterosexuality is innately superior to any other expressions of sexuality (E. Green & Peterson, 2006).
- Masculinity – a concept that is socially, historically, and culturally linked to and opposite of femininity; it defines which concepts are masculine and which are non-masculine; as such, the focus of masculinity is often men; it is not only viewed as femininity’s opposite but it’s superior (Beasley, 2005, 2013).
- Femininity – a concept that is socially, historically, and culturally linked to and opposite of masculinity; it defines which concepts are feminine and which are non-feminine; as such, the focus of femininity

is often women; it is not only viewed as masculinity's opposite but it's inferior (Beasley, 2005).

- เพศ (romanized as *phet*) – a Thai word that denotes an individual's identity regarding gender, sexuality, expression, and relationship; there is no English-equivalent term for this nuanced identity descriptor (Jackson, 2000).
- กะเทย (romanized as *kathoey*) – a Thai word that denotes a third gender category separate from man and woman; historically, it referred to intersex people, but now typically refers to individuals who are labeled male at birth but have self-identified as another gender (Jackson, 1997a, 2000).
- Queer – a term that has many definitions; it can be used as an umbrella term to include individuals who are neither heterosexual nor cisgender; it can also be used to describe someone that is not heterosexual; it has had a history of being utilized as a slur but has been reclaimed by some members of the queer community (E. Green & Peterson, 2006; Stryker & Currah, 2014).
- Boys' Love – this term (also abbreviated as BL) is a genre of media that depicts the romantic love between two male characters; sexual relationships can occur but they are used as means to an end, rather than serving as ends in and of themselves (Zanghellini, 2009; Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017).

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF BOYS' LOVE

In this chapter, the study discusses in what ways the boys' love genre has been defined by previous academic literature, particularly in regards to the productions of Japan and China. It goes on to explore how the genre served as a subversion of the mainstream narrative by challenging fundamental social beliefs and practices. However, this chapter also cites a number of counterarguments that claim such subversions are more accurately labeled a new genre's attempt to appeal to mainstream narratives for acceptance.

2.1 Defining the Boundaries of the Boys' Love Narratives

To understand the nature of the boys' love genre in Thailand and throughout other countries in Asia, the study must first be able to clearly define the genre and draw the boundaries for its study. The boys' love genre features intimate relationships between primary protagonists who are portrayed as physically or biologically male. The primary focus is on male relationships, though the nature of those relationships can be diverse. The diversity of the genre has resulted in a number of sub-categories in an attempt to organize its vastness: "clean water" boys' love narratives are stories that focus on the emotional romance of two male protagonists, "softcore" boys' love narratives are stories that allude to or include subtle references to a sexual relationship, and "hardcore" boys' love narratives are stories that contain explicit or graphic depictions of a sexual relationship (Zhou et al., 2018). The Japanese term やおい (romanized as *yaoi*) is utilized to label the primary focus on sexual relationships in contrast to ボーイズラブ (romanized as boys' love) or

ビーエル (romanized as BL) which focuses on the psychological or emotional relationships. However, sexual relationships are commonplace in both boys' love and *yaoi*, with the differing significance being the role of sex in the overall narrative; *yaoi* utilizes sex as the ends whereas boys' love utilizes sex as a means to an end (Zanghellini, 2009). In some instances, the two categories of boys' love and *yaoi* are aggregated and portrayed as one due to their general prioritization of male-male relationships; this is often employed as part of a tactic to ostracize the genre and to label those whom engage in it as deviant (Zanghellini, 2009).

The development of boys' love began in Japan during the late 1960's and early 1970's. In this period, women began creating boys' love 漫画 (romanized as *manga*) targeted toward primarily other women (McLelland & Welker, 2015). This phenomenon continued through the rest of the twentieth century and even expanded into several sub-genres. Although women were pioneering boys' love media by challenging gender expectations and sexual norms while catering to a mostly female audience, men even began to engage in the culture as well. 薔薇 (romanized as *bara*) was a specific sub-genre that developed as a form of male media produced for a male audience while centering masculine and muscular forms (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). Around the same period of time, the Japanese government and entertainment industry sought to intentionally export Japanese media forms in order to build more positive images of Japan (Iwabuchi, 2015). Due to this push to export Japanese media, the boys' love genre was able to catch a ride on the wave and become a transnational phenomenon. The evolution of social media is a widely utilized platform which further helped to increase the outreach and impact of the boys' love genre. This particularly affected the development of queer youth counter-cultures in other

countries (Chen, 2017). However, there are arguments regarding whether or not the development of this queer youth counter-culture was really an intentional by-product of the development of the boys' love genre, or even if it is truly counter-culture at all.

When analyzing the boys' love genre, several authors have identified standard tropes that appear. One of the most noticeable trope within the BL genre is the existence and identification of the *せめ - 受け* (romanized as *seme-uke*) model (Nagaike, 2003). *Seme* and *uke* are Japanese terminologies that evolved to describe the dominant penetrator and the submissive receiver within a male-male relationship, respectively. Often times, the dominant male character is the embodiment of masculinity while the submissive male character is the stand-in for femininity within the relationship. Additionally, once the roles are identified, they are not exchangeable. In this way, the boys' love genre is both able to subvert traditional heteronormative ideologies while concurrently, and ironically, maintaining them.

Another trope is the depiction of non-consensual sexual behavior, or rape, as a symbol of overflowing love and devotion (Mizoguchi, 2003). The victim of such behavior is often the submissive and feminine *uke*, who experiences rape at the hands of the dominant and masculine *seme* or a third-party individual. There have been arguments made that claim this sort of depiction within the boys' love genre is paired with a positive and supportive atmosphere, allowing for the audience who have experienced similar traumas to address their own traumas through the boys' love genre. This ultimately provides readers with the opportunity to confront and heal from their experiences of sexual violence, abuse, and rape (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). However, this would seem to be a dubious conclusion as there is no significant evidence to make this claim. The exposure to such depictions of trauma

could, in fact, trigger an adverse reaction by resurfacing previous traumas in the audience's personal experience.

There is also a trope that depicts male-male relationships as deeply emotional, intimately open, and profoundly supportive of one another (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). These tropes imply that there is both flexibility and rigidity within male-male relationships, with the characters being able to negotiate gender roles to an extent, but with those some roles being unexchangeable. It also implies that there is some sort of greater equality or significance within relationships that appear to be more gender balanced; that is to say, the power dynamic between two men is more equal and thus more profound in its benefits. This underlying argument through the boys' love genre can be likened to the demand for women's equality, at least in the context of relationships.

That trope, though, can be and is often paired with the trope that portrays the preservation of heterosexuality regardless of the non-heterosexual narratives. The male characters may have girlfriends or female companions prior to their engagement with one another; either or both of the male characters, however, end up viewing their relationship as an exception to their strict and immutable heterosexuality, rather than imply any deviation away from heterosexuality (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). This seems to make the argument that a more power-balanced gender dynamic provides greater depth for a relationship, but not necessarily because of the presence of two men within the monogamous structure of a relationship. Heteronormativity is not the problem of relationships, but the power dynamic between the gender constructions is; if women were given the same power as their male counterparts, heteronormative relationships could too be as profound and fulfilling.

Alongside these tropes, there are elements of the boys' love genre that depict typical components of male-male relationships as well (Mizoguchi, 2003). For example, "love at first sight" is a common occurrence within the boys' love genre, wherein the male protagonists become immediately attracted to one another upon their first meeting. There is also conflict regarding the negotiation that male characters must undergo in order to align internal emotions with external expectations. This is typically manifested in the conflict of being able to come out to the friend group or the family unit regarding the relationship. As previously mentioned, the inclusion of trauma within the relationship is also a common occurrence.

Another study introduces another set of typical components within male-male relationship media forms (Zhou et al., 2018). First is the idealization of the significant other, wherein one will view the other as perfect or flawless. This is thus tied to the belief that the two are soulmates, with each being the other's one and only match in the world. Similar to the first set of components, this set too includes the age-old "love at first sight" belief. Lastly, there is the additional component of "love conquers all" in which the two male protagonists are able to overcome all obstacles presented to them due to the sheer will of their love for one another. The study lists one more component, but also notes that this is not as explicit as the other components: the two male protagonists perfectly embody the binary images of masculinity and femininity, with each occupying one or the other within the relationship. This harkens to the same tropes established in the study previously discussed in earlier paragraphs.

Although the two sets of components are not completely identical, they both point to a similar understanding of male-male relationships within media portrayal,

both in Japan and China. Often times, the male protagonists play roles that are common in and often identified with heterosexual relationships. Therefore, depictions of male-male relationships, although not heterosexual, can be quite heteronormative. What then creates the desire for the boys' love genre then if it shares so much in common with its heterosexual counterpart?

Pagliasotti lists ten motivations that may drive people to desire the boys' love genre (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). First, the boys' love genre presents a love that exists outside of gendered contexts; this allows for the conception and exploration of love that transcends beyond just male-female intimate relationships. Audience members are essentially able to ignore the often complex gender dynamics of intimate relationships. Second, is the positive portrayal of boys' love, which presents as both a forbidden type of love as well as a direct challenge to mainstream narrative of heterosexual love. Third, the boys' love genre contains a significant amount of self-reflection and introspection that not as commonly identified within heterosexual narratives. Heterosexual men in heterosexual relationships do not have to question themselves as much as heterosexual men who begin to have romantic or sexual feelings for other men. Fourth, the boys' love genre contains an element of melodrama and emotion that is entertaining or intriguing for the audience. Fifth, audiences may be drawn to the boys' love genre not because of their interest in it, but because of their boredom or disillusionment with the mainstream narrative. Sixth, the boys' love genre was intentionally created by women for women and so the conscious effort to target the female audience is a unique approach to many forms of entertainment, which are often curated by men for men. Seventh, the audience members recognize that this type of narrative is unrealistic and thus it provides a

sense of escapism for them. The eighth and ninth reasons are purely for the entertainment and the artistry or aesthetic of the boys' love genre. Lastly, audience members can achieve sexual titillation from consuming content from the boys' love genre.

The uniqueness of the boys' love narrative is not just in the nuances of its relationships, but also in the simple fact that there are two male protagonists rather than one male and one female protagonists. This inadvertently provides a soft introduction into the possibility of non-heterosexual relationships for the audience. In other words, it is a gateway into an educational opportunity that is often missing from society and institutionalized education systems (Zhou et al., 2018). This introduction leads to the possibility of shifting social and cultural norms to allow for more divergent identities and ideologies, especially with the role of social media and the digital world in modern day societies.

2.2 The General Mainstream Narrative

As stated in the previous section of this literature review, perspectives of the boys' love genre within Japan are quite conservative. The collectivization of all things related to male-male relationships, such as boys' love and *yaoi*, into a single category allows for the quick and simple denigration of the entire category (Zanghellini, 2009). Due to the depictions of erotic homosexuality and the occasional inclusion or centering of minors within the narratives, there were widespread fears that this sort of media would promote sexual violence, particularly against minors. Studies have shown, though, that a majority of the audience identifies as women and women are the identity group that are known to be least likely to engage in such

crimes or behaviors (Zanghellini, 2009). Regardless of this knowledge, the majority of the audience who enjoy the boys' love genre are still ostracized and have thus developed a strong sense of introversion, thorough defense mechanisms, and practices of introspective reflection (Zanghellini, 2009). Although this sort of social pressure and the resultant suppression of the boys' love fan community began in Japan, it is not a phenomenon unique to Japan.

China, deeply rooted in ideologies of heterosexual patriarchy due to its strong cultural ties to Confucianism, also fears the burgeoning boys' love media market and its expansive fan community. The mainstream media often portrays the fans of boys' love as psychological divergent and morally deviant (Yi, 2013). This has forced the boys' love fan community to go into hiding, developing alternative methods of reaching out to one another and accessing the media material they crave. The strict requirement for secrecy has then served as a basis for community organizing and coalition building within the secretive society of the boys' love fandom. The development of this particular system has led the Chinese fans to bond with one another over digital platforms, unafraid to connect with one another due to the safety of internet anonymity (Chen, 2017). The shared experience of suppression has also united the Chinese fans through their critiques of social problems, alongside their love for boys' love (Yi, 2013). For example, it is a common practice to place value on women based on their ability to marry into a well-off family at an early age, but those within the Chinese boys' love fandom are often noted to be unmarried well into their twenties (Yi, 2013). This is one way in which the evolution of the boys' love genre alongside social media platforms within China has led to a slow subversion of the mainstream Chinese narrative. Another example of this is noted within the way that

the media has begun to tell certain stories. Some reporters and some commercials have begun to hint at boys' love elements within their content in order to address and exploit the desires of the considerable Chinese boys' love fandom (Yi, 2013). The intentional marketing towards the Chinese boys' love fandom has begun to allow for more open discourse regarding the subversion of deeply held heteronormative narratives. However, some argue that implicit exploitation of the community is no better than explicit suppression of the community.

2.3 The Subversion of the General Mainstream Narrative

According to previous studies, there are a few driving reasons for the massive success of the boys' love genre. One such reason is the subversion of patriarchal norms (Zanghellini, 2009). Typical heterosexual media forms are deeply entrenched in heteronormative and patriarchal standards that permeate everyday life. The boys' love genre, on the other hand, grants the audience a reprieve from that by presenting an alternative narrative. However, it is noted that the simple featuring or centering of a male-male relationship alone does not subvert heteronormative standards as this relationship can still perpetuate those ideologies. Another reason for the genre's massive success is the voyeuristic aspect that it grants to the audience (Zanghellini, 2009); people are able to partake in and experience the inner workings of a non-heterosexual relationship in ways that they would normally not be able to. This can even go as far as offering experiences of sexual titillation to the audience. Furthermore, all of this is only possible due to the existence and development of social media and digital platforms (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). Increasing knowledge of the community and its media forms created a demand for access and

thus pocket communities developed in an attempt to bridge different communities and cultures.

A form of subversion of the mainstream narrative can be seen through the successful establishment of underground internet communities that focus around the boys' love genre and its consumption. Websites have been created that specifically allow for the writing, sharing, reading, and discussion of boys' love media forms (Chen, 2017). The ease of internet access also increases the ease of information sharing, allowing for individuals to quickly be connected to the community and its resources. The internet or digital community has no clear hierarchical structure as well, alluding to another form of resistance to mainstream narratives. Instead, the digital community focuses on horizontal management (Chen, 2017). Moderators vary across groups and come from different geopolitical communities, forcing cooperation on many levels in order to increase ease of communication and accessibility to the boys' love genre. The strict regulation of the digital community helped to create a clear divide between the in-group and the out-group. Those who are able to abide by the regulations of the in-group were then able to engage with the collection consciousness of the transnational boys' love fandom, which in turn would provide safety through anonymity and access to the boys' love genre media forms.

The alternative narrative to heteronormativity is definitely another alluring appeal for the audience of the boys' love genre. Prior to westernization, Japan engaged in practices that required intimacy within male-male relationships; however, the introduction of strict western heteronormativity and masculinity led to the ostracization of such practices (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). The development of the boys' love genre can thus be seen as a return to form and an informal challenge to the

western heteronormalizing of Japanese culture and gender perceptions. Some may even go as far as to say that the emergence and success of the boys' love genre can be evidence for the decolonization of societies that were forced or coerced into adopting western ideologies during the era of imperialism. As stated prior, the depiction of physical and emotional traumas within the boys' love genre provide an opportunity for audience members to reflect on their own experiences of trauma and begin to navigate processes of healing (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). These outcomes all serve as a subversion to the mainstream narrative which often ignores, or even perpetuates, critical social issues.

Furthermore, the boys' love genre provides a challenge to the conception of gender and power dynamics within a relationship. The presentation of male-male relationships itself is already a challenge to heteronormative depictions of relationships. Unlike heteronormative relationships, the male-male relationship of the boys' love genre depicts a greater power dynamic balance (Zanghellini, 2009). Although the *seme* takes on the dominant role in the relationship, the *uke* is never relegated to second-tier significance. In fact, narratives are often told from the perspective of the submissive partner, who holds the power to refuse the approaches of the dominant *seme*. Some studies note that women typically identify with the submissive *uke* but prefer the character to be bolder and less effeminate; this could be seen as a manifestation of their own frustrations regarding power imbalance on real world relationships and the constraints that are placed on women to abide by norms of femininity (Zanghellini, 2009). Even though there is a sense of masculinity and femininity that is paired with *seme* dominance and *uke* submissiveness, both

characters ultimately have to embody some semblance of masculinity in order to gain support from the female audience members.

2.4 The Failures of Subverting the General Mainstream Narrative

As the literature and previous studies have shown, the boys' love genre has been argued to present an alternative narrative to heteronormativity, but critiques claim that it reproduces much of the heteronormative narrative, just without the outward appearance of it. First and foremost, it is important to note that the simple existence of a male-male relationship within the boys' love genre does not necessarily equate to a subversion of heteronormative narratives (Zanghellini, 2009). For example, the physical embodiment of two male protagonists in a relationship is often paired with the masculinization of one and the feminization of the other, allowing the narrative to continue to employ heteronormative ideologies within a homosexual relationship (Zhou et al., 2018). Further critical analysis of the boys' love genre can provide more examples of how the counter-narrative has fallen into the trap of becoming a tool of the mainstream narrative.

As previously claimed, one of the motivations for the consumption of the boys' love genre is its ability to illustrate a relationship in which power dynamics are more balanced due to both partners being male. However, this is refuted by the simple existence of the *seme-uke* model that has been detailed extensively already. The *seme-uke* dynamic calls for a dominant partner and a submissive partner and then cementing those roles without any flexibility; the dominant role is typically masculinized while the submissive role is feminized (Zhou et al., 2018). Therefore, the argument is made that power dynamics in relationships are imbalanced due to an

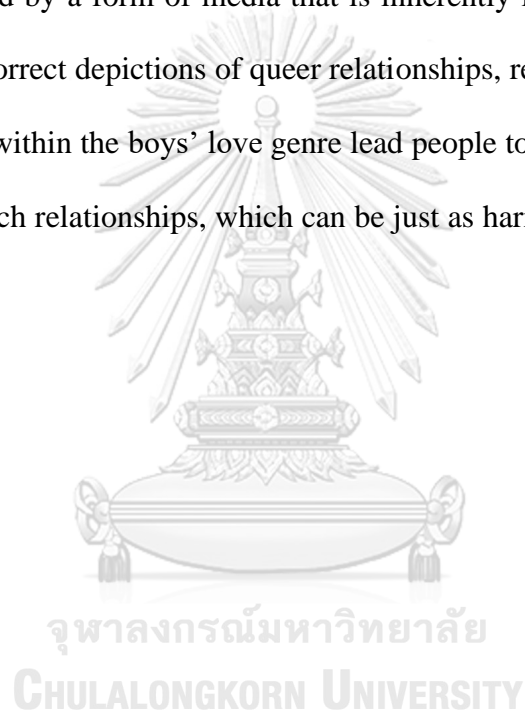
imbalance of gender perceptions. However, the *seme-uke* model recreates the same power imbalances but transplants them onto non-heterosexual relationships. It was noted that the submissive *uke* has the ability to rebuke the approaches of the dominant *seme*, but even this is not a true representation of power balance within the relationship as the submissive *uke* typically caves in to the pressure of the dominant *seme*, sometimes even becoming the victim of rape or sexual assault (Zanghellini, 2009). The boys' love genre thus does not really challenge the mainstream heteronormative standard in its depiction of non-heterosexual relationships, but further reinforces the imbalance of power that is correlated with masculinity and femininity, relegating masculinity to a position of superiority and femininity to a status of inferiority.

Another example of the failure of the boys' love community to challenge the mainstream narrative can be seen in its development into a transnational phenomenon. Japanese アニメ (romanized as *anime*), shorthand for アニメーション (romanized as animation), and *manga* were originally produced only utilizing the Japanese language, but this proved to be a problem when paired with Japan's intentional export of its commodified cultural productions. Informal communities developed in order to meet the demand of in-language materials by providing translation and subtitling services (Wood, 2013). This proved to be a problem for the major production companies as they were losing out on profits; the resultant negotiations led to a partnership from Japanese production companies and foreign distributors. Japanese *anime* and *manga* were released in Japanese first but would be quickly followed up with in-language translations and subtitles. This partnership ensured that the international fanbases

received quick and reliable services while the Japanese companies collected increased profits.

In its early development, the boys' love genre was unable to receive the same sort of treatment, relegating its translation and subtitling services to the digital fanbase communities (Wood, 2013). There was interest in ensuring that the boys' love genre did not undergo the same institutionalization as non-boys' love *anime* and *manga* because that would inadvertently expose its consumers and put them at risk for ostracization and suppression. As such, fans of the boys' love genre stepped up to provide translation and subtitle services on their own, a subtle form of queer resistance against the heteronormative media industry in Japan and abroad (Wood, 2013). However, as the general opinion of the boys' love genre has become less oppressive, there was growing interest in allowing the community to take the risk of engagement with larger production companies, albeit under the conditions of highly limited capacity as defined by the production companies. Instead of series-long animations or films, boys' love writings or *manga* would be given one short episode to tell the entirety of their complex and nuanced narratives. This ultimately led to interesting stories being simplified into primarily sex-driven videos (Wood, 2013). The crippling of the boys' love genre was further exacerbated when the Japanese companies sought to market the media form to international distributors. Increased censorship and editing of the material ensured that the alternative narratives were palatable for mainstream consumption and international distribution (Wood, 2013). Therefore, in an attempt to institutionalize its production and distribution, the boys' love genre shifted its stance to supporting the mainstream narrative rather than critiquing or opposing it.

Once again, previous studies have shown that the audience members, consumers of the boys' love genre, recognize that these narratives are removed from reality and do not represent it in any significant capacity (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). However, they also argue that it is an educational experience by introducing alternative narratives into the fold (Zhou et al., 2018). This line of thought leads to the implication that the consumers of the boys' love genre are receiving information and being educated by a form of media that is inherently incorrect and not based on reality. These incorrect depictions of queer relationships, regardless of whether or not they are positive, within the boys' love genre lead people to have false understandings of the nature of such relationships, which can be just as harmful, if not more so, to the queer community.



CHAPTER THREE: THE LANGUAGE OF เฟต (*PHET*)

In order to even begin a discussion regarding the nature of gender and sexuality within Thailand, it is important to understand how Thai culture defines gender and sexuality. This section will briefly review the evolving definitions of gender and sexuality within the context of Thailand. The chapter explores this topic by attempting to understand the evolution of these identity categories through Thai history, with special consideration given to religion and westernization. The following graphic (Table 7) helps to illustrate the way in which gender and sexuality has evolved through Thailand's recent history (Jackson, 2000).

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that this chapter will discuss in length a number of gender, sexuality, and *phet* terminologies within Thailand. However, it will not completely cover them all. As this chapter will later discuss, terminology usage within the Thai context are quite fluid, making it quite difficult to pin down every term in use at any given period of time and their specific application requirements.

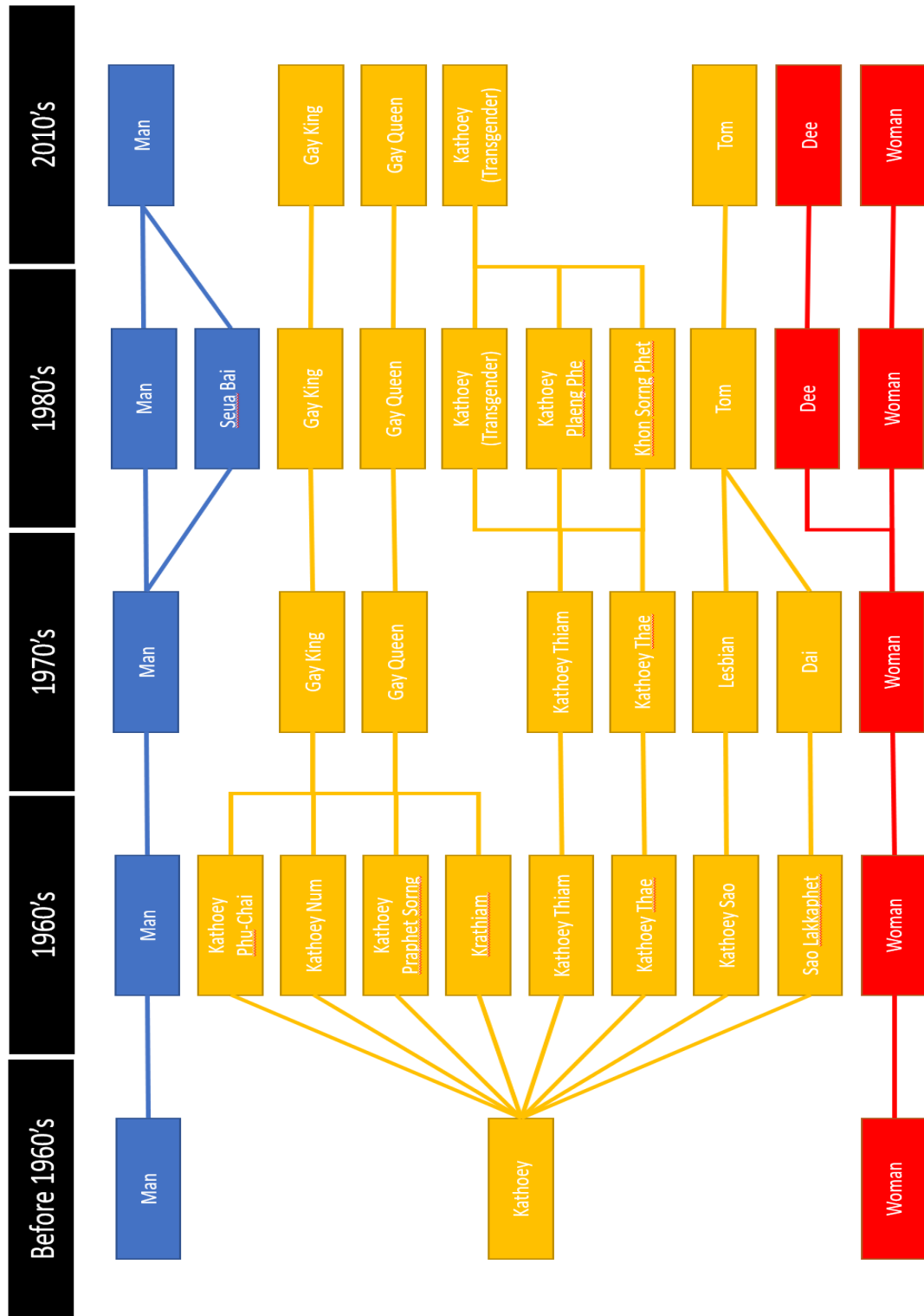


Table 7. Evolution of Phet Categories in Thai History

3.1 A Brief Glance at History

Prior to the 1960's, there were generally understood to be three genders within Thailand: male, female, and กะเทย (romanized as *kathoey*) or a third-gender (Jackson, 2000). The term *kathoey* is taken directly from the Thai language because there exists no English equivalent for the term. The *kathoey* identity originally referenced the balancing of the other two identities, male and female, within a single body. However, the 1960's marked the beginning of Thailand's development of more nuanced terminologies for the diversity of queerness that was found within the population. For example, the term "gay" was taken from western cultures to identify a cisgender homosexual male (Jackson, 2000). The term "lesbian" and other female-specific queer terminologies were adopted later on in the early 1970's (Jackson, 2000). In this period of time as well, the definition of *kathoey* began to shift. New terminologies were developed to explain varying balances between masculinity and femininity in any single individual. All identities that were not fully male or fully female were identified as *kathoey*, meaning gay and lesbian were considered variants of *kathoey*.

The significance of terminological adaptations from English comes from the critical understanding that these terms did not exist within the Thai language prior to the coming of westernization. This is not to say that westernization brought queerness into Thailand though; rather, it argues that the lack of the terminology simply meant a lack of cultural differentiation within the behaviors of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The reason for this lack of differentiation was due to the unique way in which gender and sexuality were conceived within Thai culture.

The term เฟต (romanized as *phet*), also taken directly from the Thai language, refers to any particular individual's gender identity and sexual identity at the same

time. Essentially, Thai culture does not separate gender and sexuality into two categorical identities in the same way that western cultures do; instead, it aggregates the two into a single identity. This difference introduces an obstacle to the discussion and study of the issue. Western culture, and thus the English language, is unable to unite the two into a single term or ideology; therefore, any attempt to study or discuss the issue of gender and sexuality within Thailand must be wary of how to navigate such discourses. Other aspects must be taken into consideration as well, but these two aspects take precedence; following sections will further elaborate upon these other aspects.

Based off of the above graphic, it can be seen that the 1970's and 1980's introduced more and more nuanced terminology for the identification of an individual's *phet*. These terminologies took into consideration the variation in each identity based on both gender and sexuality at the same time. For example, all women are women, but women who partner with other men are considered to be "true women," women who partner with other women are considered to be "lesbian," and women who partner with masculine or tomboy women are considered to be ^{ดีด} (romanized as *dee*). On the other hand, all men are men, but men who partner with other women are considered to be "true men," men who partner with other men are considered to be เกย์ (romanized as *gey*), and men who partner with either men or women are considered to be เสือใบ (romanized as *seua bai*), or two-way tigers. These terminologies immediately grant access to understanding of both gender and sexuality without having to separate the two. Terminologies also do not exist the same for men and women. As can be noted, there is no term for bisexual women. Basically, *phet*

can be reduced to a sliding scale, wherein the variation within one's own gender is cross-referenced with the gender of one's partner in order to define the proper terminology of identification.

However, it is important to note that since then, many of the terminologies have fallen out of use. The language and the culture have simplified understandings regarding *phet* and now only seven are used with any consistency: man, *gay* king, *gay* queen, *kathoey*, *tom*, *dee*, and woman. Man and woman are terms that represent the typical heteronormative conceptions of gender. *Gey* king and *gay* queen refer to two men in a homosexual relationship, with king being the dominant partner and queen being the submissive partner. *ทอม* (romanized as *tom*) and *dee* refer to two women in a homosexual relationship, with the *tom* being the masculine partner and *dee* being the feminine partner. *Tom* is a Thai slang term for the English equivalent "tomboy," while *dee* is a Thai slang term for the English equivalent "lady." It is of significance to acknowledge that regardless of the adoption of western terminologies into modern usage and identification systems, the recognition of the *kathoey* identity is dated to have existed long before the 1960's, showing that queerness has long existed within both Thai consciousness and Thai cultural society. The nuances of *phet* identity became a modern phenomenon upon the introduction of western separation and conceptions of gender and sexuality, causing a clash in the two systems of identity. The clash then resulted in a reinvigorated discourse regarding understanding *phet*, gender, and sexuality within Thailand and a Thai cultural context. Moving forward through this study, the Thai terminologies will be utilized in reference to the Thai understandings or conceptions of these issues, whereas English terminologies will be utilized in reference to western understandings or conceptions.

3.2 Pre-Westernization Conceptualization of Gender and Sexuality

The recorded history for Thailand's gender and sexual diversity is relatively short. Thailand has long practiced a belief of non-intervention; as such, there has been little to no legal regulation of gender and sexual identification and little to no documentation of gender and sexual expressions (Jackson, 1997a). Furthermore, Thailand does not have a clear distinction between gender and sexuality in the sense that many western cultures do. Instead, Thai culture views sexuality as an extension of gender and joins the construction of the two identity categories into a single term: *phet* (Kang, 2014). In order to understand Thai *phet*, one must look at how an individual's identity intersects along the gender binary of male-female, the sexual expression binary of masculine-feminine, and sexuality binary of heterosexual-homosexual (Jackson, 2000). Thai people, thus, are unable to separate their understandings of gender and sexuality from one another in the same manner that most western societies do (Jackson, 1996).

However, it is generally understood that prior to the coming of westernization, Thailand had organized three categories for identification of gender and sexual identity: man, *kathoey*, and woman (Jackson, 2000). Due to Thai culture's aggregation of gender and sexuality, these categories for identification are more accurately defined as masculine, feminine, and an "other" which blends both masculinity and femininity in various proportions (Jackson, 1997a). In this sense, *kathoey* was seen as the third gender of Thailand (Stange, Oyster, & Sloan, 2013).

Often times, the best way to identify an individual would be based on their public performance of gender expression. It is not easily discernable what someone's sexual orientation is; therefore, the use of Thai *phet* categories relies heavily on

perceivable behaviors (Singhakowinta, 2016). As such, homoerotic/homosexual behavior or any other deviant sexual activities were not seen as significant to shift an individual's *phet* identification by itself (Kang, 2014); it is believed that sexuality is an extension of one's gender, but does not necessarily constitute it. Therefore, any individual that engaged in cross-gender behavior, such as same-sex attraction, would be identified as *kathoey* only if said performance was public (Matzner, 2003).

There was an exception to this general public performance, however. Young boys often need to engage in sexual activities in order to earn acknowledgement of their masculinity from their peers, but this is contrasted with the societal need to protect young girls from such practices. As such, homoerotic behavior at a young age was an acceptable alternative with the condition that young boys grew out of it to eventually marry and establish their own heterosexual family unit (Jackson, 1997a). The understanding of sexuality at the time was that it did not constitute an identity category; rather, sexual behavior was merely an action. However, this was not necessarily true for everyone. *Kathoey* individuals were understood to be a blend of masculinity and femininity; therefore, deviation from normative sexual practice was a critical part of their identity. Though this was to be expected, the primary consideration for identification as *kathoey* was gender variation or deviance from gender normative practices, not sexual ones.

From this, it can be understood that societies that base sexuality around a concept of age tend to be more open to homoerotic behaviors, whereas societies that tie sexuality to gender often perceive that homoerotic behavior undermines the construction of masculinity. The transition of this age-centered perspective to a gender-centered one is prevalent in Thai society, particularly in the period after the

coming of westernization (Jackson, 1997a). Prior to westernization, heterosexuality in Thailand was not devoid of homoerotic behaviors; homoeroticism was freely explored by men (Morris, 1997). This sort of freedom to explore sexuality without having to fear the revocation of masculinity eventually led to a general belief that Thailand was a country of sexual freedom and that Thai-ness was inherently sexually liberal.

The *kathoey* identity has existed within Thai culture and society for longer than anyone can remember. Some speculate that its origins came from Hindu-Buddhist creation mythologies that saw the blending of masculinity and femininity in certain deities (Jackson, 2000). In some contexts, *kathoey* individuals were spirit mediums and crucial community members whose roles were to communicate with significant deities (Matzner, 2003). The original understanding and application of the term *kathoey* was to describe individuals with ambiguous genitalia or hermaphroditic individuals (Morris, 1997). As such, *kathoey* were not abnormalities but simply another identity that existed along the male-female binary spectrum. However, the term later evolved beyond mere physical attributes to psychological ones, defining not only those with ambiguous genitalia but also those who portrayed cross-gender behaviors as *kathoey* as well (Jackson, 1997b). In that sense, homosexual behaviors were seen as cross-gender behaviors, a mixing of masculinity and femininity in a single human being, and thus was identified as *kathoey*.

Though the identity of *kathoey* was perceived as an in-between of masculinity and femininity, it was most often conferred on men who engaged in cross-gender behaviors and activities (Jackson, 1997a). Therefore, Thai men were divided into two categories: true masculine men and *kathoey* (Jackson, 1996); women were only given

the single option of femininity as the conception of their gender was not as flexible. As such, *kathoey* were not necessarily viewed as feminine, but more as non-masculine; they were not men who transitioned to femininity, but outrightly rejected masculinity (Morris, 1997). This then reinforced the social acceptability for young men to engage in homoerotic behaviors in order to earn their masculinity whilst also maintaining the dignity of young women through their virginity or perceived sexual purity (Jackson, 1997a).

3.3 Religious Conceptualization of Gender and Sexuality

Buddhism listed four specific genders within its religious วินัยปิฎก (romanized as *Vinnaya Pitaka*) texts: male, female, บัณเฑาะ or บัณเฑาะก์ (romanized as *pandaka*), and อุโศภยัญจนก (romanized as *ubhatobyanjanaka*) (Stange et al., 2013). Though there are some who use the religious text as justification for condemnation of non-normative gender and sexual expressions, there is in fact no mention of homosexuality explicitly within the Pali canon (Jackson, 1997b). The text does mention male-male sex relations, but typically only as codes of conduct for the clergy; the conduct of the laypeople lies outside of the jurisdiction of such texts (Jackson, 1997a). Even when in reference to the clergy, the *Vinnaya Pitaka* defines any kind of sex as repugnant, with neither heterosexual nor homosexual sex as more repugnant than the other (Jackson, 1997b).

Pandaka were identified as eunuchs or men with non-normative sexual desires (Stange et al., 2013). There are several types of *pandaka*: อาสิตตบัณเฑาะก์ (romanized as *asittaka*) are those who enjoy the consumption of semen, อุกุสยบัณเฑาะก์ (romanized as

ussuya) are those who enjoy voyeurism, โอบีกกมิขบั้นเฑาะกั (romanized as *opakkamika*) are eunuchs, บั๊กขบั้นเฑาะกั (romanized as *pakkha*) are those whose libido and sexuality are tied to the moon, and นบุงสกบั้นเฑาะกั (romanized as *napumsaka*) are individuals with ambiguous genitalia (Jackson, 1997b). At some point, the term evolved to also include men who enjoy having sex with other men while imagining themselves as women. They, however, were not viewed as women; instead, they were defined as “not men” or individuals who lacked masculinity. Eventually, the term of *pandaka* began to transition to mean *gay*; the shift in terminologies highlighted the shift of focus from gender deviation to sexual deviation in Thai society (Jackson, 1997b).

The *ubhatobyanjanaka* were those who possessed attributes of both male and female genders (Stange et al., 2013). Similar to the argument of *kathoe* as discussed previously, there were arguments that claimed *ubhatobyanjanaka* referenced ambiguous genitalia while others expanded the definition to including an ambiguous psychological conception of individual gender (Jackson, 1996). Those with physical representation of both genders, ambiguous genitalia, or hermaphroditism were known as “true *kathoe*.” However, the interpretation of the term later evolved to include individuals whose body represented one gender, but whose spirit embodied another (Jackson, 1997b).

Through these definitions, it can be seen the use of both *pandaka* and *ubhatobyanjanak* as terms are meant to define types of people rather than sets of behaviors or expressions; in both cases, it is a clear example of the blending of masculinity and femininity into a single form (Jackson, 1997b). Traditional Buddhist texts state that the cause of such blending and its resulting gender and sexual deviancy

is a result of bad karma from one's previous life; one has no control over it in one's current life. In this sense, both *pandaka* and *ubhatobyanjanak* have been likened to the term of *kathoey*. Though all these terms acknowledge gender as a spectrum and not merely a binary, the term *kathoey* has no Buddhist origins and, in fact, predates it (Jackson, 1997b). Contemporary academics and translators often conflate these terms together, but to do so would be a disservice to their true meanings. The term *kathoey* is more deeply tied to cross-gender behaviors, which is not as clearly or explicitly identified in either *pandaka* or *ubhatobyanjanaka* (Jackson, 1996).

Confucian beliefs looked down and criticized these deviant identity categories as they lacked the ability or willingness to procreate and continue the family line (Matzner, 2003). Buddhism, however, argued that because these individuals are living their punishment from a previous life's karma, they deserve compassion and understanding (Jackson, 1997b). Therefore, an individual's stance regarding the treatment of gender or sexual non-conforming individuals varies depending on their belief of the source of such deviancy. If an individual follows the Confucian belief and sees these norm transgressions as willful acts, they will take an antagonistic stance whereas an individual who believes these norm transgressions are unwilling punishments from a previous life will take a more liberal stance (Jackson, 1997b).

3.4 Post-Westernization Conceptualization of Gender and Sexuality

Starting in the 1960's, westernization came full force into Thailand, deeply affecting many things including the social construction of gender and sexuality (Jackson, 2000). Fear of westernization led to the consolidation of power within the government, which sought to reorganize Thai *phet* in an attempt to appear more

civilized (Kang, 2014). As previously stated, Thailand operated off of understanding *phet* in three categories: male, *kathoey*, and female. However, the western model relied on the intersection of two binary systems of gender and sexuality: male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. The introduction of the new system did not supplant the traditional Thai system, but was transposed on top of it. This led to the Thai *phet* categorization to evolve into a conglomeration of both Thai gender construction and western sexuality construction (Jackson, 2000). Identities that were easily categorized as *kathoey* in the previous era appeared much more oppositional and apparent in contrast to the newly established and significantly narrower binary dichotomy.

As previously discussed, *phet* was often ascribed based on gender expression in the public domain. Furthermore, public displays of affections were deemed inappropriate, making it even more difficult to identify individuals that were of deviant sexual behavior (Kang, 2014). Thai society thus had no means to differentiate *kathoey* from *gay*; the two differed drastically in their public expressions, but shared in their homoerotic behaviors (Singhakowinta, 2016). It was not until the mid-1960's that the term *gay* was thrust into public discourse in relation to a murder and rising prominence of male prostitution (Jackson, 1997a). The association of this new gender and sexuality identity label in relation to murder and prostitution immediately made those who identified as *gay* subjects of social criticism (Singhakowinta, 2016).

Through the following decades, new terminologies developed in order to clarify the differences between gender and sexual identities through their various intersections (Jackson, 1996). Thai language utilized western terminology with a lens of Thai socio-cultural context in order to create new terms unique to the culture, such

as *gey king*, *gey queen*, and *gey quing* (Jackson, 1996). Though this makes it seem that westernization helped to create more nuanced identities within Thai culture in regards to gender and sexual identities, it is more accurate to say that western terminologies replaced previous Thai understandings. For example, the term *gey* eventually took the place of the term กระเทียม (romanized as *krathiam*) which had been used to identify a cis-heteronormative man who desired homosexual relations (Jackson, 2000). This is contrasted, though, with the intentional abandonment of the term lesbian for women due to Thai society's affiliation of it with pornography made for men (Matzner, 2003).

Historically, the term *kathoey* (and its variations) were utilized to define all non-normative identities, but it now generally focuses on male-to-female transgender individuals, with new terms taking on the role of identifying the many other identities (Kang, 2014). At this point, it is crucial to note that not all *kathoey* identify as male-to-female transgender, with some identifying as non-binary, gender non-conforming, and women; the inability of the term *kathoey* to be directly translated over to English is a result of differing sociocultural, political, and historical contexts between the two languages and cultures. The development of new terms is continuous, though many fade away as fast as they come. Kang proposes five “genderscapes” that serve as cores for Thai construction of gender and sexuality, with all other identities serving as spokes on those wheels: man, *gey*, *kathoey*, *tom*, and woman (Kang, 2014). The understanding of such identities requires a keen knowledge and constant negotiation with Thai culture's interpretation of behaviors and expressions.

Socio-economic class, education, and community play a crucial role in the understanding of modern-day *phet*. Urban elites had more interaction with western

ideologies and as such are more influenced by the rapid development of new gender and sexual constructions (Kang, 2014). As such, those who identified with the new term of *gay*, for example were more often those who had access to education, wealth, and influence through connections with the government or high society. Additionally, the development of *gay* as an identity in Thailand allowed many men to embrace their homoerotic desires while maintaining their masculinity (Singhakowinta, 2016). Unlike western society, this sort of double-life was an acceptable state of being, reducing pressure to “come out” and allowing those who identified as *gay* to essentially live their lives without interferences or interruptions (Jackson, 1997a). As had been briefly noted, Thai sanctions against such deviant identities was primarily non-interventionist; they sought to ignore the issue unless it was brought to the public sphere. Though the rights and visibility of non-conforming identities were not protected by the law, they were also not outrightly forbidden nor persecuted (Jackson, 1997a).

3.5 Modern Day Conceptions of Gender and Sexuality

It is generally understood that there is no set number of *phet*, though it is known that there are now more than there were before (Jackson, 2000). Thailand’s lack of strict legislation against homosexuality has led many to believe that Thailand is a sort of gay paradise, but many people still struggle with attempting to identify or clearly understand how gender and sexuality overlap (Morris, 1997). Furthermore, there are wide range of sanctions that continue to stigmatize non-conforming identities in Thailand, though they have never been consolidated into any single institution (Jackson, 1997b).

Though some say that the persistent existence of non-conforming identities in Thailand regardless of legal equality shows the growing shift for acceptance in the culture (Stange et al., 2013). In fact, it is argued that the introduction of western binaries forced the conversation of sexuality into the public domain, allowing it to seek greater acceptance in society (Jackson, 1997a). In an attempt to clarify the confusion regarding these new identities, the terms of เพศสภาพ (romanized as *phetsaphap*) to mean “gender” and เพศวิถี (romanized as *phetwithi*) to mean “sexuality” were developed in the early 2000’s (Singhakowinta, 2016).

The discussions regarding non-conforming identities in Thailand differ from their western counterpart in one significant way: they center the negotiation of the family over that of the individual (Yue, 2014). There is a belief that homosexuality and queerness is a threat to the fabric of the Thai family or society. However, counterarguments have been posited claiming that homosexuality and queerness has always existed within Thailand and are even an integral part of the sociocultural fabric (Farmer, 2011). Strict government regulations of such media representations have stunted these counterarguments in other countries, but Thailand has experienced an explosion of non-conforming representation which challenges the regimes of regulation against the community (Yue, 2014).

Another effort to localized and familiarize the community was made in the 2000’s when the term ชายรักชาย (romanized as *chai rak chai*), which means “men who love men,” emerged as a Thai equivalent to the term “gay.” It was not gender-ambiguous like the term รักร่วมเพศ (romanized as *rak ruam phet*), which means “love of the same *phet*,” ensuring that there was no confusion regarding the gender identities

of the involved individuals while also making the argument that it is possible for those of the same gender to love one another (Singhakowinta, 2016). Though, it is critical to note that these terms are not of everyday usage; they are recognized as more niche terms that are almost exclusively utilized in spaces in which discourse surrounding *phet*, gender, and sexuality are commonplace.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE RISE OF THE QUEER COMMUNITY

In order to discern the significance of the boys' love genre industry within Thai society, it is crucial to understand how Thai society perceives queerness in the first place. As previous chapters have established the notion of *phet*, gender, and sexuality within Thailand, the following chapter elaborates on how social, political, and economic aspects of Thai society have impacted the modern-day queer community, allowing for its rise to international recognition.

4.1 Through the Political Lens

In explaining the explosion and subsequent success of the Thai BL genre, this study first looks at the political climate that eventually allowed for that success. In the 1997 Constitution of Thailand, it was noted that there is no explicit mention of sexual identities (Sanders, 2011). However, there is explicit mention of women and their protection from discrimination through the constitution. The original fear of possibly including sexual identity under the non-discrimination article was that its inclusion would build up stronger opposition to the inclusion of women under the non-discrimination article. In order to ensure that the protection of women made it into the final draft of the constitution, the lawyers and politicians stated that they deliberately excluded the *kathoey* and other non-conforming identities. Non-conforming identities here are identified as those that fall outside of the male-female dichotomy. As such, *kathoey* and other marginalized identities were not guaranteed protection.

Less than a decade later, ทักษิณ ชินวัตร (romanized as Thaksin Shinawatra) took power in Thailand as the new Prime Minister. The core of his platform was the Social Order Campaign which sought to strengthen Thailand's domestic and international image by enforcing strong social and moral behavioral practices and regulations (Jackson, 2011a). This, for example, targeted the portrayal of queerness, particularly gay and boys' love male narratives, in public spaces. Additionally, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was a businessman and so his focus turned towards economic development, sidelining issues of human rights and social justice (Sanders, 2011). Not only did he not look to prioritize social justice and equality, his programs actively sought to suppress the development of the queer community from fear of the negative impact it may cause to the national image. This had a negative impact on the queer community and stunted the growth of their businesses and media platforms. In this period of time, there was strict enforcement of the policies that stifled the portrayal of queer narratives and queer bodies (Unaldi, 2011). It can be argued then that, in Thailand, queerness itself was not explicitly outlawed; only representation in public spaces was prohibited. Activities that were conducted in private were not policed, but the silencing of the public discourse and prevention of public representation was harmful to the community and resulted in its need to form coalitions to maintain itself or survive. As stated before, this was purely political: to ensure that Thailand was able to construct and maintain what was perceived to be a positive image in both the domestic and international communities.

Therefore, it is reasonable, and even expected, that Thai queerness was able to expand and thrive upon the end of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's time in office due to a military coup in 2006, as can be argued by Unaldi. The Thai queer

community that had already existed in Thailand was able to further develop itself, becoming both a regional and international phenomenon (Jackson, 2011a). However, it was not merely the removal of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from office that reinvigorated the growth and flourishing of the Thai queer movement; the new military-established government scrambled to consolidate power and legitimize itself in the eyes of the Thai people and the international community. The new government understood tolerance to be a significant marker of liberalism and democracy and thus sought to appeal to issues of tolerance in order to gain recognition and legitimacy (Unaldi, 2011). Though, the new government was willing to negotiate on the issue of queerness within Thailand, that was also in part due to their prioritization of queerness as being the least likely to threaten their otherwise conservative leadership. The military purposefully chose to push for the election of a conservative government. However, they knew that a purely conservative platform would not be welcomed by the general Thai population, whom had voted for the significantly more progressive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra only a few years before. Therefore, they were attempted to appeal to the general Thai population through the inclusion of progressive policies on their mostly conservative platform. This practice enabled them to find legitimacy while ensuring that the progressive policies never outweighed or posed a threat to their predominantly conservative platform.

It was during this period that the Sexual Diversity Network emerged as an advocacy organization in Thailand. In partnership with the United Nations Human Rights Commission, they sought to draft, propose, and pass a number of policies that would address the human rights concerns that queer people experienced within Thailand. The network was comprised of queer Thai people who hoped to take

advantage of a political regime change to push for progressive policy change that was difficult or impossible to pass under former regimes. They knew this would be possible due to the new government's need to appease the general Thai population. Another form of legitimacy that the new government sought was derived from public participation in the drafting of a new constitution; they purposefully reached out to civil society groups in order to appeal to the masses. This was where the Sexual Diversity Network and the United Nations Human Rights Commission sought to maximize their influence on the new government regime.

As introduced in the previous section, though, issues of sexual identity are difficult to address due to the nuance of language-usage and thereby sociocultural conceptions; there is no understanding of a separation between gender and sexuality, which can be noted in the language's lack of separate terminologies. Also, women had already been included in the non-discrimination article of the former 1997 constitution. Civil society groups thus sought to add to the non-discrimination article rather than challenging it and risk having it removed altogether. Therefore, new terminology was required in order to be added to the non-discrimination article. Originally, the term introduced for inclusion in the new constitution was "sexual diversity," but it was rejected on the grounds of ambiguity (Sanders, 2011). The constitution committee was unsure how to clearly interpret or understand the term and rejected it instead. Advocacy organizations then revised and sought to introduce "sexual identity." However, this too was difficult to understand and was eventually rejected from inclusion into the constitution as well. At this point, it seemed that any effort to include sexuality as an identity for protection under the non-discrimination article seemed to be doomed. However, an argument was later introduced to say that

the aggregation of gender and sexuality in Thailand into the single term *phet* meant that any discrimination on the grounds of sexuality can be thus categorized under a discrimination of gender (Sanders, 2011).

The rush to legitimize themselves that was made by the new government established in 2006 provided a rare opportunity for non-government agents to make their own attempts at revising the constitution in any way possible. As a result, a not insignificant number of policies and constitutional changes were able to be passed, but it would seem like this same occurrence may not reoccur any time in the near future (Sanders, 2011). Significant political upheaval was a prerequisite to the changes of 2007 and another similar political upheaval would be required before another set of policies would be able to make their way through the government structure in similar fashion. As such, the current political state of the queer community, or any other community for that matter, within Thailand cannot reasonably expect any more significant shifts of this nature in national policy in the near future.



4.3 Through the Economic Lens

Next, this study looks toward the economic aspects that have made a rise of the Thai queer culture possible. It is almost immediately acknowledgeable that Bangkok serves as the “gay capital” of Southeast Asia, if not for the greater Asia Pacific region (Jackson, 2011a). Bangkok has massive markets for gay services, such as night clubs, bath houses, entertainment industries, etc. However, it is critical to recognize that the economic success of the queer community does not necessarily equate to the political power of the queer community. Nor is the opposite true: any

political progress for the queer community does not immediately result in economic success for the queer community. Asian nation-states are notoriously authoritarian in political orientation yet market-oriented in economic structure (Jackson, 2011b). The political atmosphere of Asian states typically reflects a concentration of power within the government structure or among the elites of society. However, the economic systems are often market-based, focusing on capitalistic dynamics of supply and demand, import and export, as well as rise and decline. This ultimately means that the queer community in Bangkok must navigate and negotiate between being able to express itself or having itself exploited for capital gains while being oppressed by restrictive or conservative political policies.

Thailand's queer industry is recognizably resilient though. It does not exist because of western influence in Thailand, the investment of foreign capital, or the forcible adoption of foreign ideologies; it thrives today because of individual agents and their resistance against a sociopolitical structure that has sought to silence them and an economic structure that has sought to exploit them (Jackson, 2011b). There is significant demand for venues and services that cater to the queer community's needs and interests, such as safe spaces for congregation and networking between members of the queer community or provision of services and products that are relevant to the queer community. Acknowledging that the state government was not going to be pioneering the development of the industry, queer people took initiative in opening their own businesses and addressing the demands of the community. As demands from the niche market continued to persist, more and more businesses opened to address those very demands (Jackson, 2011a). The queer niche market became so successful that eventually non-queer people began to open queer business in order to

gain access to the capital profits that were available therein. These businesses would market to the queer community, provide space and services to the queer community, be operated by the queer community, but ultimately be owned or funded by non-queer individuals who would then receive the profits gained from the queer community. They recognized the power of what Jackson calls the “purple baht,” a term that is tied to the economic power of the Thai queer community, and sought to exploit it (Jackson, 2011a). Therefore, it can be understood that the explosion of the queer market in Bangkok, Thailand, Southeast Asia, and the rest of the region is due to both the involvement of the queer community and non-queer peoples.

Tourism, particularly intra-Asian tourism, became a prominent player in the success of the industry as well. Following the change of government in 2007, more and more queer businesses opened, creating a cycle of demand and supply that was engaged with by both domestic Thai queer people and international queer tourists (Jackson, 2011a). As stated earlier, Bangkok had already been acknowledged as the “gay capital” of the region; the resurgence in the expansion of the queer community once again reinvigorated the motivation for international travel and tourism to Thailand in order to engage with the prominent queer community and others that had been drawn to it.

There were some who argued, though, that international consumption of Thailand’s queer culture and community fed into their exploitation; not only were they exploited domestically by non-queer people creating queer businesses, they were also not exploited by internationally by queer people coming to partake in the culture without any significant contribution to it. However, the process of the expansion for the queer community was not solely exploitative; the Thai queer community also

found some liberation in it. Social expectations, and sometimes even political policies, are put on hold within high capacity tourist areas in order to gain profit from the tourist industry, exploiting foreign capital. Although the queer community served as a primary motivation for travel to and tourism in Thailand, the government and the state still benefited from the transnational movement of people. Therefore, the Thai state sought to ensure a positive experience for travelers in hopes of ensuring their return and financial contribution to the Thai economic market. Queer people often find a sense of liberation within these high capacity tourist zones from not having to abide by expectations and rules that are strictly enforced in all other areas of the country (Jackson, 2011b). For example, queer sex work is much more abundant in areas such as Pattaya or Phuket, where as they are not quite as prevalent in the rest of Thailand. This has significant economic impact on the queer community as well.

As stated previously, some view the use of queer people and queer bodies for the sake of economic gain as exploitative. However, some argue that it is the exact opposite – a force of liberation. When looked at from a purely economic standpoint, it is critical to have economic resources in order to exist. Financial resources grant access to other resources such as healthcare, housing, food and water, and a generally higher quality of life (Jackson, 2011b). These are immediate concerns for all people and, therefore, take precedence over political equality for queer people; political equality means little if starvation and homelessness are a daily reality. This can be understood as an adoption of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; when the physical needs are not met, the existential needs are of little significance. Economic resources provide the individual with the ability to be able to achieve physical security through housing security, food security, healthcare security, etc.; only after these are secured

is the queer community able to turn its focus toward achieving greater political equality and social justice. Furthermore, sex work is not always an oppressive system. It grants service providers the ability to actively utilize their agency for their own benefit; this is not to mention that consensual sexual experiences themselves are a form of liberation (Jackson, 2011b). Additionally, it has been noted that to live an outward queer lifestyle, there are several financial qualifications to be considered, none of which are easily affordable or accessible (Jackson, 2011b). With that being said, only those with some sort of financial resources can truly participate and engage with the queer community and the industry that it has built for itself. Finally, it is also important to note the way that financial resources grant access to acceptance, but this will be discussed in the following section.

In an overall understanding of the economic aspect and how it attributed to the rise of the queer community in Thailand, this study finds that capitalism serves as both an oppressive and liberative structure. It oppresses the queer community by exploiting their industries, their labor, and their lives for economic profit. However, some of these profits can go back towards liberating them from a sociopolitical structure that continues to oppress them.

4.3 Through the Sociocultural Lens

The social aspect is also critical to understand in examining the rise in significance of Thailand's queer community. Although Bangkok is viewed as the "gay capital" of the region, it is by no means free from homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of bigotry that targets the queer community (Jackson, 2011a). The queer community continues to face oppression and one of the sources for justification of

bigotry they face is religion. Buddhism plays a massive role in Thailand, being the dominant and official religion of the nation-state. Some have thus used Buddhist beliefs and ideologies to justify the suffering of queer people, particularly *kathoey*. *Kathoey*, as some believe, are those who had bad karma in their previous life and are currently punished for it by being trapped in the wrong body (Unaldi, 2011). Therefore, the suffering that *kathoey* face is a result of the bad karma that accumulated in their previous life; it is not the duty of other people to address and relieve that suffering as it was justly earned. However, this is not necessarily justification for their mistreatment. There are some people who believe that the identity of *kathoey* itself is punishment enough; therefore, they have a sense of admiration for *kathoey* people who are able to bear that suffering yet live their lives with pride and grace. This, as stated prior, helps to explain why queer cultures in Thailand have never been outrightly prohibited, but nor are they explicitly defended nor supported.

Another point of consideration for the social aspect is the way in which queer identities affect and interact with the family unit. The primary concern for the queer community is not acceptance by the military, the religion, or the government, but rather by the family unit (Sanders, 2011). Family is the core unit of Thai society and all decisions must be made with consideration for the family unit. Therefore, the exploration of an individual's gender or sexuality must not outpace the consideration for the family unit; nor should it impede one's ability for completion of familial obligations (Jackson, 2011a). Unlike western narratives, it is unfathomable for the queer individuals to abandon the family unit in pursuit of individual self-exploration

and self-actualization. Instead, the expectation and cultural norm is to work with the family unit to negotiate individual identity alongside the familial duties.

It is in this understanding that financial resources are a significant consideration for the family. Financial stability ensures that the individual is able to contribute to the family unit and care for the parents in their seniority (Jackson, 2011b). Should this obligation be fulfilled, attitudes towards queerness or deviations in gender or sexual identity are much easier to forgive, or even accept. Finances thus play a role in assisting the negotiations queer people have to make with the family unit. Through this understanding, the social aspect is of primary consideration for queer individuals, with the economic aspect providing support for the paving of social acceptance and the political aspect removing obstacles from the pathway to social acceptance. Furthermore, there is another definition for the family unit, that is not tied solely to biology or blood; this argument will be explored further in the next section.

4.4 The Evolution of Queer Media in Thailand

In the first iterations of queer media, there was no support from government entities. Producers received little to no support from production houses and distributors as well. Ultimately, producers were required to pull resources together on their own in order to produce any queer narratives that they were interested in. The risk of the endeavor had to be carried solely by the producer (Unaldi, 2011). This alone was discouragement enough for most producers as the risks were high with no guarantee of any significant profits afterwards. In fact, failure was a near guarantee due to the constant exposure the general public had to highly conservative policies

from the state. Another source of difficulty for producers was the source of the funding. Because there was limited domestic financial support for such endeavors, producers often had to outreach to international sources of funding (Unaldi, 2011). This resulted in the queer productions being featured more often internationally than domestically. Some productions would gain international acclaim while simultaneously being strongly disliked or even explicitly banned domestically.

The development of queer representation in media evolved alongside the political and social evolution of queer acceptance. The scholar Mitr Chaibnacha argues that the first queer representation in media appeared in the movie อินทรีทอง (romanized as *Golden Eagle*) (1970), where a cisgender, heterosexual male spy cross-dresses as a woman in order to infiltrate an enemy facility (Chaibancha, 1970; ชัยบัญชา, 2513). This is arguably not true representation of the queer community though, as it features a “true man” simply performing femininity. Over the next two decades, other queer media productions emerged, displaying more *kathoey* narratives. These films constitute what is defined as the first wave of queer media in Thailand (Unaldi, 2011). The first wave of queer media was plagued with stereotypes regarding *kathoey*. The *kathoey* characters were also often relegated to roles of comedy or inability. They were over-the-top, incapable clowns that were pranced before an audience for their enjoyment. This representation of the *kathoey* community did little beyond put them on the screen; their representation was not true to reality and did not intend to make them relatable or understandable. In fact, these forms of representation were arguably strengthening previously held stereotypes that dehumanized *kathoey*. However, the significance of the first wave of queer media was that they were even receiving any

representation at all. Although the portrayals were incorrect and even harmful, it was a step towards normalizing queer narratives in the mainstream.

The second wave of queer representation occurred in the latter half of the 1990's. These narratives were focused on less the comedic tropes and more on the humanity of the *kathoey* (Unaldi, 2011). They portrayed deeply emotional moments and explored the struggles that *kathoey* experience while living in Thailand. These narratives portrayed *kathoey* in a much more realistic and positive light; however, they most often ended in tragedy or sorrow. The second wave of queer media was thus defined by its deviation from dehumanization to humanization, but ultimately still faced the conclusion that the narratives of *kathoey* ended in tragedy. Unaldi cites สตรีเหล็ก (romanized as *Iron Ladies*) as an example of second wave representation for *kathoey* in mainstream media.

Another positive contribution of the second wave of queer representation was its shifting of the *kathoey* narrative from an individual one to a nationalistic one (Unaldi, 2011). Typical navigations of gender and sexuality within Thailand are viewed as individual journeys that must be taken in consideration of the family unit. However, they are rarely extended beyond that. The second wave of queer representation in media introduced an alternative understanding of the “family unit.” Instead of focusing primarily on the biological family unit, the second wave made the argument that the nation of Thai people themselves are a family. In this understanding, it is not the individual *kathoey* that must negotiate with their family for acceptance, but the *kathoey* community that must now work with the Thai nation to find a way to accommodate one another and live together. This sort of methodology for nationalizing the family unit is even more evident in the third wave of Thai queer

films, as will be discussed (Sakveerakhul, 2007; ศักดิ์วีระกุล, 2550). The film does not portray *kathoey* narratives but is rather the first film to introduce homosexual or gay love narratives, launching the third wave of queer media in Thailand.

The third wave of the queer representation in media began with *The Love of Siam* and was possible in part due to the military coup in 2006 (Unaldi, 2011). The revision of the constitution in 2007 also revised the pre-existing censorship laws, allowing for slightly bolder portrayals of queer narratives in public spaces. The third wave was also able to experience the introduction of the boys' love genre to Thailand's mainstream discourse. At this point in time, *gay* were still the subject of ostracization, more so than *kathoey* people. The reason behind this difference was their deviation from the socially acceptable structure of relationships. *Kathoey* people were understood to be women trapped in the bodies of men; some people explained this by citing Buddhist beliefs of karma from a previous life. However, *gay* had no such justification for their existence. Instead, they were viewed as a challenge to the predominantly heteronormative social narrative (Unaldi, 2011). The significance of the third wave of queer media then was in its featuring of *gay* and their narratives in an attempt to dispel misunderstandings regarding their experiences and plight.

In *Love of Siam*, the two main characters are both male; the film explores their relationship as friends and eventually as lovers, introducing a boys' love story to the Thai audiences for the first time. One actor, มาริโอ้ เมาเร่อ (romanized as Mario Maurer), is of half-Thai and half-German heritage, while the other actor วิชญ์วิสิฐ หิรัญวงษ์กุล (romanized as Witwisit Hiranyawongkul), portrays a half-Thai and half-Chinese character in the film. Their portrayal as people of mixed heritage creates an

interesting commentary for Thai audiences to consider: although both characters or actors are acknowledged to be of mixed heritage, they are both immediately accepted as Thai without question (Farmer, 2011). Therefore, the film presents their queer identity in much the same vein of consideration: queerness is a part of them and if the Thai national family has been able to negotiate the existence of foreignness within itself before, it is surely capable of negotiating queerness within itself now. Ultimately, the significance of the second wave of queer media argues that *kathoey* people are a part of the Thai national family and that they can be good members with good contributions, while the third wave of queer media introduces gay or homosexual men for the same consideration.

As the third wave attempts to introduce the *gay* narrative, it similarly fell into pitfalls from the first wave of queer representation in media. Some of the first iterations of *gay* in media were deeply stereotyped and frighteningly unrealistic. Often times, they were narratives that were written by heterosexual women and thus lacked the real-life experiences necessary to craft realistic narratives (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017). However, due to the sheer number of their productions, this fault was quickly adjusted. In 2007, when the third wave of queer representation in media began, there were five films that were produced and disseminated in the mainstream film industry of Thailand; ten years later in 2017, there are over seven films, three short films, and sixteen television drama series that were produced for mainstream consumption in Thailand (Appendix IV). More and more productions have begun to break from the stereotypical and unrealistic models of *gay* narratives and begun to take on more realistic tones. Similar to the second wave of queer media representation, *gay* narratives have been able to humanize the lived experiences of

Thai *gay* and have even begun to educate the greater Thai family on the significance of the *gay*'s contribution by dissolving stereotypes and challenging previously held biases.

The difference between Thailand and its East Asian counterparts, such as Japan and China, is its lack of deep roots in Confucian ideology (Unaldi, 2011). China and Japan have tied themselves to Confucian ideologies for centuries and thus find much more difficulty in overcoming the heteronormative ideologies embodied in the practice. Thailand, however, had not linked itself to Confucianism in much significance, granting it more freedom to challenge traditional heteronormative standards. Furthermore, Thailand already had a pre-existing queer community that was operating, whereas China did not. Japan, the progenitor of the boys' love genre, also had an active queer community. However, they lack the massive political shift in the modern era that Thailand experienced in 2006, which ultimately allowed it to shift on the issues of queerness quite dramatically in an incredibly short amount of time. Together, these aspects of political shift, economic reprioritization, and social progress are all unique to Thailand's case, allowing it to become the largest producer of queer media and to be internationally recognized as the "gay capital" of Asia.

Additionally, it is important to look at how globalization and capitalism have helped Thai queer media to become more successful than its other Asian counterparts. The development of technology, especially the internet, allowed for the production of queer media in Thailand to be easily transported to other countries in the region and throughout the world. The presence of social media further amplified the ability of Thai queer media to traverse the globe (Jackson, 2011a). A majority of the world still struggles with understanding and accepting queer narratives, essentially forcing those

that identify as queer and those that enjoy the consumption of queer media to anonymize themselves. The interaction between these individuals are most noticeable either online or at designated locations of queer activity. Therefore, the use of these spaces by queer people and consumers of queer media has allowed for the passing of queer media to occur near instantaneously to all relevant or interested individuals, regardless of geopolitical separation.

Finally, the globalization of Thai queer media consumption has led to some critical reconsiderations within Thailand as well. Thailand and its queer media productions have been able to present a generally Asian narrative that is not significantly influenced or shaped by western narratives. As such, it serves to challenge against the notions that modernization and globalization has to necessarily be western. Therefore, the Thai queer media productions are not only forms of resistance against traditional Thai conservatism, but also against global western hegemony. Not only that, these media productions have helped to shape an international perception of what Thai national identity is, creating expectations for Thailand and its national identity (Yue, 2014). The external pressure placed on Thailand is able to manifest itself in domestic forms as well, ultimately pushing the government and the people to be more inclined to adapt more progressive policies regarding queerness and the queer community.

4.5 Moving Forward in the Study

The study has thus outlined in detail the significance of the Thai context for engagement with topics of *phet*, gender, sexuality, and media. It is with this background that the study moves to analyze the boys' love dramas between the years

of 2014 – 2018. It is crucial, for example, to keep in mind the definition and application of *phet* within Thailand, as opposed to the widely assumed context of western gender and sexuality.

In Chapter Two, the study explores what can be defined as “boys’ love” within the context of Japan and China. Typical genre tropes were outlined in order to set a standard with which the study will compare and contrast Thailand’s boys’ love drama series. Several arguments were made to argue that Japan and China’s boys’ love productions were a subversion of heteronormative mainstream narratives; however, many other arguments claim that they merely appeal to heteronormativity for inclusion into mainstream narrative.

In Chapter Three, the study delves into the construction of Thai *phet* in order to understand the way in which Thai society approaches the topic of gender and sexuality. An analysis made with only an understanding of western masculinity would be flawed as such conceptions do not exist within the Thai sociocultural context. Therefore, Chapter Three also establishes a standard of Thai masculinity with which to operationalize for the study. With a clearer understanding of the intersections of gender, sexuality, and performance in *phet*, the study will be able to compare and contrast the behaviors of characters and actors within the genre industry in order to define how they align with conceptions of masculinity.

In Chapter Four, the study elaborates on the growth of the queer community within Thailand. Understanding this history allows for the study to do an analysis regarding queerness and its engagement with the boys’ love genre industry. The relationship between the development of the two can help to shed light on the impact the boys’ love genre industry on society’s perceptions and engagement with queerness.

It answers the question of whether or not the growth of one will result in the growth of the other.

The following two chapters, Chapter Five and Chapter Six, will make its analysis and will be able to present conclusions based on the background that has been thoroughly established in the past three chapters, Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and Chapter Four.



CHAPTER FIVE: EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE (2014–2018)

The following chapter delves into the evolution of Thailand's boys' love dramas between the years of 2014 – 2018. In an attempt to understand how the production and reception of Thailand's boys' love drama series has occurred over the five-year time period, this study looks particularly at เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ (romanized as *Love Sick the Series*) and บังเอิญรัก (romanized as *Love by Chance*). These two series were produced in July 2014 and August 2018, respectively.

5.1 Beginning with *Love Sick the Series* and Ending with *Love by Chance*

To understand why these two specific boys' love drama series were chosen as the key case studies requires much more delineation. They share many similarities, such as their pathway from web novel to published book and finally to television drama series, but also differ in ways that can illustrate how the boys' love genre has grown over the past five years; together, they perfectly bookmark the five-year time period of the study's focus.

Love Sick the Series was originally published on the website เด็กดี.คอม (romanized as dek-d.com) by the author penname INDRYTIMES, whose true name is กวาง ลติกา ชุมภู (romanized as Kwang Latika Chumphu). *Love by Chance* was also published across the same platform by the author penname MAME12938, whose true name is อรวรรณ วิชญวารณกุล (romanized as Orawan Vichayawannakul). Both authors are young Thai women. As this study has stated before, the trend of women authors for the boys' love is one that has stretched back to the very conception of the boys' love

genre in Japan. Thailand is no exception to this trend, as can be noted by all the authors of each boys' love drama series in this study.



Figure 1. INDRYTIMES or กวาง ลติกา ชุมภู (romanized as Kwang Latika Chumphu), Author of เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ (romanized as Love Sick the Series) [2015]
Retrieved from <https://pantip.com/topic/33140605>.



Figure 2. MAME12938 or อรวรรณ วิชญาวรรณกุล (romanized as Orawan Vichayawannakul), author of บังเอิญรัก (romanized as Love by Chance) [2019]
Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/FictionMame12938/>.

The fact that these two novels were written by women inherently ensures that there is a lack of authenticity in the telling of homosexual narratives within the boys' love genre; women, who themselves are not queer men, do not have the necessary lived experiences in order to speak on the issues that those in male-male relationships face with any semblance of authority. Therefore, their writings instead take on a voyeuristic aspect, centering around and featuring imaginary tales that they themselves would find to be ideal in a boys' love relationship. As noted in Chapter Two, this practice began in Japan before it was exported and adapted by various communities, including Thailand. As such, the Thai boys' love writing industry can be seen as having received influence or inspiration from their Japanese predecessors, while subsequently adding and adapting to it by utilizing their own unique Thai sociocultural lens to view the same genre. Ultimately, these narratives are purely imaginative and have no substantive standing in reality. This is connected to a few of the motivations listed by Pagliasotti: sexual titillation and escapism. The writing, publishing, and consumption of these stories feed into the demand of the audience to be able to gain insight into boys' love relationships, voyeuristically gazing at aspects that they idealize in a relationship that they have no personal stake in, but can still claim ownership over.

After completion, both web novels were subsequently printed into hard paper book copies and sold in various bookstores across Thailand. It was through their popularization as paper books that these series were recognized by major Thai production companies and made into full-fledged television drama series. Both INDRYTIMES and MAME12938 were taken on as screenwriters for their respective series as well, despite any lack of screenwriting skills prior to the production of their

own series. This practice of having the original author serve as a screenwriter ensures that the television drama series production stays true to form in regards to the vision of the author. This is not a practice that is unique to Thailand; one of the most notable examples of this practice can be seen in the inclusion of J.K. Rowling as a screenwriter and producer on a number of her works, particularly *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* and *Part 2*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, and *Fantastic Beasts and the Crimes of Grindelwald* (IMDb.com, 2019). However, the danger with including the original author in the production of the television drama series is that it inadvertently also means that the trends of voyeurism and inauthenticity in regards to boys' love is preserved and carried over from the original material into its television recreation.

The transition from web novel to printed book and finally to television drama series is an indication of consistent or growing audience demand. In line with the Uses and Gratification Theory, the web novel met the demands of a niche audience who wanted to consume boys' love narratives. Upon its completion, individual audience members received satisfaction that then fed into the cycle of creating even more. However, the demand was not necessarily for more written narrative as there were other ways that the demands for more could be met. This is seen in the printed publication of these web novels. Their success in bookstores across Thailand once again is indication that the demand was met. The Uses and Gratification Theory would thus argue that the next step would be to continue producing more. At this point, production companies acknowledged the success of these boys' love narratives and decided to invest in the next phase of production – television drama series. As per the nature of the Uses and Gratification Theory, so long as demand remains, the

products and productions will continually be produced and re-produced until they can no longer continue or until the demand no longer exists.



Figure 3. DVD Cover for เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวัน วิษณุแสน (romanized as *Love Sick the Series*) [2014]

Retrieved from <https://mydramalist.com/10872-love-sick-the-series>.

In the production of both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, similar directorship took the lead. In 2014, นิว ศิวัจน์ สวัสดิ์คิมณีกุล (romanized as New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul) served as an editor and assistant director for *Love Sick the Series*. In 2018, he served as the primary director for *Love by Chance*. The inclusion of New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul in these two productions shows a connection between the stories and the series, serving the study well as a platform to analyze the evolution of boys' love productions in Thailand over the past five years. This constant allows for a comparative analysis between both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*.



Figure 4. Promotional Poster for บึงเอ๋ยรัก (romanized as *Love by Chance*) [2018]
Retrieved from <https://www.nautiljon.com/dramas/love+by+chance.html>.

Furthermore, in 2019, New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul also reprised his role as a primary director for the short drama series *REMINDEERS* เพราะคิดถึง (romanized simply as *ReminderS*), a series that brings together the cast and characters from both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* in order to reminisce on how far they have all come in a more adult context. His continued participation on the directorship team as well as the inclusion of all the same cast and characters fully cements the connection that these boys' love drama series have to one another. Therefore, any significant shifts within the production of *Love Sick the Series* to *Love by Chance* can be seen as a result of the changing environment and times in which the series were produced.

In accordance with the Media System Dependency Theory, the shifts and changes in the production style or quality of the two boys' love drama series can be said to be indicative of the media's interaction with the society in which it is embedded in, as well as with the audience whom consume its productions. The

production staff must acknowledge and understand the society that their productions are being created within, abiding by the constraints that certain sociocultural norms may place upon their work. At the same time, they must also take into consideration the demands of the audiences for specific portrayals of characters and storylines, meeting those needs in order to ensure that the fanbase is either maintained or expanded. A boys' love production that completely stays within the social and cultural confines provided to it by its society will appear to be too safe and uninteresting to its audience – a weakness that was noted earlier in Chinese productions. By carefully navigating these relationships, the production team is able to elicit a desired reaction from the audience, which then returns to impact their society and the sociocultural norms that constrain the productions in the first place. Essentially, this cyclical relationship entails that boys' love productions stay within sociocultural bounds, but allows enough liberty for certain boundaries to be pushed. In pushing those boundaries, each production paves the way for each subsequent production to take on bolder and more daring portrayals. Media Systems Dependency Theory would argue that this process is apparent in the evolution of approach to and portrayal of boys' love drama from *Love Sick the Series* to *Love by Chance*.



Figure 5. นิว สิวจน์ สวัสดิ์มณีกุล (romanized as New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul) [2018]
Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/ilovemydirector/>.



Figure 6. บอย สมภพ (romanized as Boy Sompob) [2015]
Retrieved from <https://www.cifraclub.com.br/boy-sompob/keu-mot-hua-jai/letra/>.

New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul, though, is not the only production staff member that is a constant across the two boys' love drama series. บอย สมภพ (romanized as Boy Sompob) is a feature singer/songwriter that is present in both boys' love drama series. Boy Sompob is specifically centered as the artist who writes and performs the opening introduction for both series. In *Love Sick the Series*, he performs his song สั่น (translated as "Shake") and in *Love by Chance*, he performs his song โช (translated as

“Wish”). Additionally, he performs other songs for intermittent application through various episodes, such as รักฉัน...ไม่มีวันเปลี่ยน (translated as “My Love Will Never Change”) for *Love Sick the Series* and นานานา (translated as “Nanana”) for *Love by Chance*.

The use of Boy Sompob integrally through these two series is not a mere coincidence. Though one may be tempted to think that New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul simply relied on an artist that he was familiar with from his earlier works, Boy Sompob is actually a prominent figure of in his own regard. In fact, Boy Sompob is renowned for the use of his music and musicianship in several boys’ love drama series.

Aside from the songs listed above, Boy Sompob also provided music for the *Love Sick the Series* spinoff, titled โรงเรียนป่วน ก๊วนนักเรียนแสบ (translated as *The School*), singing his song หิมาลัย (translated as “Himalaya”) in 2015. In a 2015 movie titled รักใสใส...วัยรุ่นขอบ (romanized as *Water Boyy the Movie*), Boy Sompob provided two songs that were integral to the film: พระอาทิตย์เที่ยงคืน (translated as “Midnight Sun”) and เรื่องจริงกับความฝัน (translated as “True Story”). In the 2016 short drama series titled *The Right Man* เพราะ...ฉันรัก (translated as *The Right Man – Because I Love You*), Boy Sompob performs three songs: “Jigsaw Heart,” “Love You Right,” and เปลือก (romanized as “Exterior”). *What the Duck* รักเลนดิ่ง (translated as simply *What the Duck*) was produced in 2018 and featured Boy Sompob again, singing รักไม่ได้ (translated as “I Can’t Love You”) and คือหมดหัวใจ (translated as “It’s All My Heart”). In fact, Boy Sompob has been called upon to perform his song ช้อน (translated as “Flashback”) for

a new boys' love drama series that is being released at the end of 2019: *The Effect* โลกออนไลน์ (translated simply as *The Effect*).

The use of Boy Sompob's artistry and musicianship in boys' love dramas has become somewhat of a consistent practice. His inclusion on the original soundtrack of any drama series can be utilized as an indicator that the drama series contains boys' love narratives; the distinct sound that is brought by Boy Sompob can be traced throughout all his works and helps to immediately identify a boys' love drama series.

In the context of *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, the use of Boy Sompob alongside the continued directorship of New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul evokes a sense of nostalgia from fans. Those who watched and love *Love Sick the Series* will immediately recognize the same voice of Boy Sompob throughout *Love by Chance*. Not only does it evoke nostalgia, the similar application of Boy Sompob's musicianship points to consistent directorship from New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul. New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul is not reinventing the wheel when it comes to boys' love drama series; the method of production for *Love by Chance* is not departure from previous practices, but rather an improvement. New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul is carrying on lessons learned from his previous participation in the production of *Love Sick the Series* and is adapting it to the shift in the sociocultural environment that the five years since has allowed. The consistency in directorship further strengthens the ability of this study to comparatively analyze the two productions of *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* to glean an understanding of how boys' love drama series productions have evolved since 2014.

Once again, Media System Dependency Theory would make the argument that the repeated use of Boy Sompob in this manner is an intentional decision by the

industry, the individual production teams, and the artist himself. The repeated application of Boy Sompob allows for an appeal to the sense of nostalgia that is easily evoked once an audience member identifies the unique sound of Boy Sompob with boys' love drama series. With each and every boys' love drama series that Boy Sompob is included in, the likelihood for this outcome to be successful increases. Through this, the cyclical relationship of continually building upon previous iterations of boys' love drama series can be said to follow the outline established by Media System Dependency Theory.

5.2 Analyzing *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*

In 2014, *Love Sick the Series* was produced by Mr. Big Picture Co., Ltd., a Thai production house. At the time, it was only able to be broadcasted on MCOT 9, a public state-owned television channel, making it largely only accessible to Thai audiences. Even if international audiences were able to overcome the struggle to access the boys' love drama series, they were often unable to understand as the drama series was broadcasted in Thai language with no subtitling translation options. However, by 2018, *Love by Chance* was able to be produced by Wabi-Sabi Studio Co., Ltd. and broadcasted on GMM 25, a private corporate-owned television channel. *Love by Chance* was also aired on YouTube and LINETV concurrently, making it available through online media to an international audience. It also was helped by a staff of translators and interpreters whom provided subtitles in over sixteen languages: Thai, English, Korean, Indonesian, Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Japanese, Turkish, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, French, Persian, and Khmer. No longer

were issues of language and accessibility obstacles that hindered international audiences from consuming and participating in Thailand's boys' love culture.

From just looking at these two factors, it can be noted that the shift in Thailand's boys' love genre in the past five years has been a dramatic one. The transition of boys' love drama series from being broadcasted on public state-owned channels to being broadcasted on private corporate-owned channels could serve as an indicator to say that corporations began recognizing the increasing profitability of Thailand's boys' love industry. *Love Sick the Series* was the very first boys' love drama series to be produced in Thailand; therefore, it can be assumed that private corporate entities were unwilling to take the risk in sponsoring a boys' love drama series at such an early point in the development of the boys' love genre industry. As this study has noted before, queer businesses in Thailand do not necessarily thrive; the engagement with explicit homosexuality has been noted to increase scrutiny of business and organizations in the eyes of the public. Therefore, the only option for *Love Sick the Series* was to go through the public state-owned television channel.

Yet, five years later in 2018, GMM, the largest entertainment corporation in Thailand, has become one of the foremost producers and broadcasters of boys' love drama series. Once profitability of the genre had been confirmed, the largest entertainment companies and production houses in Thailand took advantage of the new opportunity to maximize their revenue by jumping into the genre as well. Beginning in 2014, GMM began to produce television drama series that featured primarily heterosexual relationships, but still hinted at or mentioned boys' love relationships on the far, distant background. This can be noted in ซีรีส์ของคนเหงาๆ (translated as *Room Alone 401-410*), produced in 2014. The following year in 2015,

GMM produced its sequel, ซีรีส์ของคนเหงาๆ (translated as *Room Alone 2: The Series*). In 2016, the same practice of including boys' love as side stories continued in รักต้องจูบ (translated as *Kiss the Series*), รุ่นพี่ Secret Love เรื่อง Puppy Honey (translated simply as *Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey*), and *U-Prince the Series*. The slow introduction of boys' love relationships into major GMM productions allowed the corporation to test the waters and ensure profitability while minimizing potential fallback.

Through the lens of the Uses and Gratification Theory as well as the Media Systems Dependency Theory, this study could make the argument that this slow progression of increasingly visible boys' love narratives is a result of a repeated cycle of interaction between the media, its audience, and the society in which the narratives are being produced. As major entertainment corporations and production companies continue to build confidence in the boys' love genre industry and seek to gain profits from said industry, the quality and quantity of boys' love narratives in mainstream drama series will continue to grow. Eventually, this would even result in a growing quality and quantity of boys' love drama series themselves.

Beginning in 2016, GMM would do exactly that; they would transition to producing full-fledged boys' love drama series that centered around the boys' love relationship, rather than relegating the boys' love relationships as merely side plots or background stories. This began with *SOTUS* พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง (translated simply as *SOTUS*) and its 2017 sequel, *SOTUS S the Series*. 2017 also saw the production of *Water Boyy the Series* and ติดตาม *My Dear Loser* รักไม่เอาถ่าน ตอน *Edge of 17* (translated simply as *My Dear Loser: Edge of 17*). In 2018, GMM produced a sequel to *Kiss the Series*, จูบให้ได้ถ้านายแน่จริง (translated as *Kiss Me Again*) in which the boys' love

relationship, which was once a side story, was promoted to being an equally primary relationship in the plot as its heterosexual counterpart. GMM also produced a new standalone boys' love series titled *อาต๋องคอม* (translated as *Cause You're My Boy*). It was also in 2018 when GMM decided to combine a number of their boys' love relationships into a single mini-series to give fans a glance at what their lives are like past the end of their own respective series; it was titled *OUR SKYY* *อยากเห็นท้องฟ้าเป็นอย่างวันนั้น* (translated simply as *OUR SKYY*).

In 2019, GMM appears to be continuing on this trend of maximizing their profitability off of boys' love drama series by producing a new standalone drama series, *ทฤษฎีจีบเธอ* (translated as *Theory of Love*), and another sequel to *Kiss the Series* and *Kiss Me Again*, *Dark Blue Kiss* *รักไม่ระบุสถานะ* (translated simply as *Dark Blue Kiss*). It can be expected for GMM to continue to produce more and more boys' love drama series in order to capitalize off of their successes.

As GMM had fulfilled its expectations in regards to the increased production in quantity and quality of boys' love drama series, it can be argued that GMM will continue along this pathway in alignment with the predicted outcomes of the Uses and Gratification Theory and the Media Systems Dependency Theory. Until demand begins to decline and are overshadowed by the costs for production, it does not appear that GMM will experience a stagnation in their boys' love drama series productions any time soon.

LINETV is another private corporate-owned entity that provides streaming services for several drama series, including boys' love ones. *Love by Chance* was aired on this platform as it was broadcasted on Thai television, becoming available to

an international audience concurrently. At the beginning of this study in 2018, *Love Sick the Series* was not available on the same platform. However, now in the end of 2019, the series has made its appearance on LINETV and is now available for streaming. Similar to YouTube, LINETV is not an explicit producer of boys' love drama series and therefore does not need to necessarily concern itself with its engagement in the genre; it does not take on similar risks as GMM does, but also does not take on similar profits.

When looking at the scheduling for production and broadcasting of both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, there are notable similarities. *Love Sick the Series* premiered on 6 July 2014 and concluded on 21 September 2014; *Love by Chance* debuted on 3 August 2018 and ended on 11 November 2018. Both series made their appearance around July to August and concluded around September – November, setting their timelines in close proximity to one another. *Love Sick the Series* spanned across twelve episodes in its first season, lasting for a total of sixteen weeks. *Love by Chance* spanned across fourteen episodes that lasted a total of fifteen weeks. Each episode of *Love Sick the Series* ranged from thirty-six to forty-eight minutes in duration, an estimate of forty-two minutes per episode. *Love by Chance*, on the other hand, ranged from forty-six to fifty-seven minutes in duration, an estimate of fifty-two minutes per episode; this, however, does not take into consideration the season/series finale which ran for a grand total of seventy-two minutes.

In the five years between *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, several small shifts can be noted. For example, *Love by Chance* is comprised of more episodes, with each episode lasting an approximate ten minutes longer than those of

Love Sick the Series. Furthermore, *Love by Chance* was given a season/series finale special that allowed it to surpass the designated time duration that typically restricted many television drama series productions. Additionally, there were fewer time gaps during the broadcasting of the boys' love drama series. *Love by Chance* was able to be broadcast an episode each week, missing only one week; however, *Love Sick the Series* required four of such broadcasting breaks. This shows a trend for growing consistency in production, episode lengths, and season lengths. This could be resultant of several factors. For example, in the five years between each series, society may have become more open to the production and consumption of boys' love narratives, allowing them greater fan followings, greater sponsorship and funding, and greater general support, which could help to ensure more episodes, longer episodes, and fewer necessary breaks.

The application of the Uses and Gratification Theory, as well as the Media System Dependency Theory, would suggest that these developments are possible due to audience demand. As consumers or audience members continually support the production of these boys' love drama series by consuming and contributing to their success, production and management companies are incentivized to continually invest in the development of boys' love drama series in order to maximize profitability.

Though *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* evidently have much in common, there is also much that they differ on. For example, the actors that are cast for prominent roles in both boys' love drama series are sourced from different management companies. Moving forward, actor and character names will be listed in their romanized forms. Because romanization of Thai language is not consistent, please reference Appendix VI, Appendix VII, and Appendix VIII for the proper Thai

or non-romanized spelling of the names. *Love Sick the Series* features White Nawat Phumphothingam as the protagonist Phun and Captain Chonlathorn Kongyingyong as the protagonist Noh. White Nawat Phumphothingam is an actor that is signed to and managed by GMM whereas Captain Chonlathorn Kongyingyong is signed to and managed by Nadao Bangkok. In *Love by Chance*, Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan is casted as the protagonist Ae and Saint Suppapong Udomkaewkanjana is casted as the protagonist Pete. Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan is signed to and managed by Attractor Co., Ltd. whereas Saint Suppapong Udomkaewkanjana is signed to and managed by Idol Factory Co., Ltd.

The practice of sourcing an acting cast from various management agencies is not an uncommon practice, but it is something that often avoided when possible. This can be noted in many GMM productions, wherein the main cast are all sourced internally from GMM's own talent management department. The sourcing of actors from various management companies does not immediately cause any issue or harm for the production of drama series, let alone boys' love drama series. *Love Sick the Series* experienced no major concerns in regards to the management of their acting cast. However, *Love by Chance* was mired with conflict due to the clashing of management teams for the primary acting cast.

The conflict that began during the production of *Love by Chance* can be noted in the promotional works of the acting cast following the conclusion of the boys' love drama series. Due to the conflict between the managerial teams of Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan and Saint Suppapong Udomkaewkanjana, the two no longer collaborate on promotional efforts, let alone new drama series production efforts. This is noted in the 2019 commercial for Cathy Doll cosmetics; all the other boys'

love couples from *Love by Chance* were given short films in which their stories were expanded and intertwined with product presentation. However, Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan's role was relegated to that of a side character. He is even casted in a scene in which he loudly proclaims “อยากมีแฟนเว้ย!” (translated as “I want a boyfriend too!”) while Saint Suppamong Udomkaewkanjana is nowhere to be seen (BlueHeart, 2019).

Problems between management teams of acting cast is not unique to *Love by Chance* as this incident similarly occurred in the production of other boys' love dramas, such as เดือนเกี้ยวเดือน (romanized as *2Moons the Series*). In *2 Moons the Series*, the two main protagonists are God Itthipat Thanit as Pha Phana Kongthanin and Bas Suradet Piniwat as Yo Wayo Panitchayasawad. Similarly to *Love by Chance*, the two actors are sourced from differing management companies: God Itthipat Thanit is signed to and managed by a private manager whereas Bas Suradet Piniwat is signed to and managed by Starhunter Studio. Due to conflicts between their management teams, God Itthipat Thanit was excluded from promotional events and productions after the conclusion of *2Moons the Series*. Bas Suradet Piniwat and the two other boys' love couples from *2Moons the Series* would carry on their achieved fame and form the music boy group SBFIVE without God Itthipat Thanit.

In both cases, *2Moons the Series* and *Love by Chance* garnered enough success in their initial broadcasting that they were slated to continue on to develop a second and potentially a third season to the series. This can be noted in the way the plot of the boys' love drama series was paced. In *2Moons the Series*, the series slowly set up two other boys' love relationships on the side, but focused mostly on the development of Pha Phana Kongthanin and Yo Wayo Panitchayasawad's relationship;

the other two relationships received no clear conclusion, but it was setup to allow their development in subsequent seasons.



Figure 7. Boys' love couples of *2Moons the Series* [2017]
Retrieved from <https://www.tvtime.com/en/show/327671>.



Figure 8. Members of the boy group *SBFIVE* [2018]
Retrieved from <http://www.prsociety.net/225515/>.

The same can be noted in *Love by Chance*; the three boys' love relationships that occur around the primary relationship of *Ae* and *Pete* were left with cliffhangers, hinting at their possible resolution in following seasons. Director New Siwaj Sawatmaneeikul explicitly stated that the second season of *Love by Chance* would not

be produced if the same acting cast was not maintained in an interview with Dara Daily. Evidently, the management teams of Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan and Saint Suppamong Udomkaewkankanjana were unable to resolve their quarrels and the second season of *Love by Chance* was cancelled indefinitely.

ถ้าถามว่าน้อยดีไหมกับเรื่องราวเหล่านี้ ถ้าบอกว่าไม่น้อยดีมันคือโกหก คือเราสร้างซีรีส์เรื่องนี้มา ถ้าออกงานคู่ กระแสมันจะดีกว่านี้แน่นอน ตัวเองไม่โอเคกับสิ่งที่เกิดขึ้น แต่ด้วยความที่เราก็กพยายามห่างๆ ออกมาแล้ว ก็เคยพูดไปแล้วทำอะไรรออย่าให้กระทบซีรีส์มันจะไม่โอเค

ส่วนซีรีส์ภาค 2 นั้นตนเองยังไม่มองถึงตอนนั้น ยังไม่มีแพลนอะไรไว้ขนาดนั้น ในเรื่องการเปลี่ยนตัวนั้นแสดงตนเองไม่เปลี่ยนแน่นอน

Figure 9. Dara Daily Interview with คุณนิเว ศิวจันทร์ สวัสดิ์มีณีกุล (romanized as New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul) [2019

Retrieved from

<https://www.daradaily.com/news/75835/read?fbclid=IwAR0WAeWUBINhOX5BzzqIFQYdMX344KsVI39RKh7uWPhFvcBvQHhMkWMFX8Q>.

Text Translation:

If I were to be asked whether or not I am annoyed about this issue, it would be a lie for me to say I am not annoyed. We created this series together. If we provided events for the couples, it is guaranteed to do better than this. Personally, I am not okay with what has occurred, but have not been directly involved. I have already said that we should not do anything that will negatively affect the series. That would not be okay.

As for season 2, I have not taken that into consideration. I have not planned that far yet. In regards to the changing of the cast, I will definitely not change them.

These instances of conflict between various management teams for the acting cast is avoided in GMM productions because all of their primary acting cast are hired internally; GMM manages their own acting cast and thus ensures that management issues do not occur. This can also be noted in how several GMM productions often feature the same actors appearing across one another in various roles and relations. The consistent roles and relations, though, often are the boys' love couples, which are able to build and maintain long-term fan bases. As stated earlier, this is clearly seen

through the boys' love mini drama series *Our Skyy* and its attempt to maximize profits on five different boys' love couples, each with their own fully established boys' love drama series, by bringing them together to explore their lives after the conclusion of their respective drama series.



Figure 10. Promotional Poster for *Our Skyy* [2018]
Retrieved from <https://mydramalist.com/31121-our-skyy>.

5.3 The Five-Year Shift in Thai Boys' Love Genre Industry

Further digging into the differences between *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, the study acknowledges the background context in which each of these boys' love relationships are embedded. *Love Sick the Series* focuses on high school students whereas *Love by Chance* turns its focus to university students. The general trend of the boys' love genre in Thailand has been to slowly shift away from high school-age relationships in order to focus on university-age relationships or newly graduated-age relationships. This can be noted in most of the series that come after *Love Sick the Series*. Though adult themes are not exclusive to university-aged and newly

graduated-age narratives, it is significantly more difficult to broach adult issues with high school-aged characters.

รัยว้าวุ่น (romanized as *Hormones*) is a high-school aged television drama series that was produced in 2013 and concluded in 2015; the television drama series emphasizes adult issues that modern Thai teenagers face, such as bullying, violence, drug and alcohol consumption, sex and sexually transmitted illnesses, pregnancy and abortion, etc. At the time, there was much controversy regarding whether or not the portrayal of these issues with teenagers was appropriate for public consumption. The use of a university setting helps to offset the shock value and minimize the controversy with which the discussion of these topics is often met.

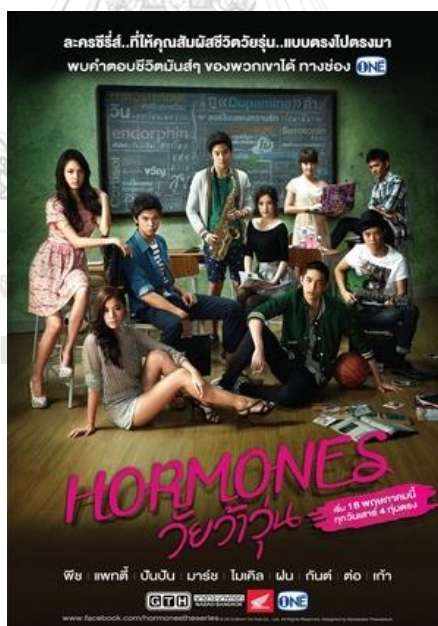


Figure 11. Promotional Poster for รัยว้าวุ่น (romanized as *Hormones*) [2013]
Retrieved from <https://mydramalist.com/10032-hormones>.

Production-wise, these two boys' love drama series are also shot very differently. *Love Sick the Series* focuses its camera mostly on widescreen scenes,

capturing full backgrounds will little emphasis on individuals or explicit intimacy. However, *Love by Chance* is full of scenes that linger on minute details, such as slight physical contact or exposed body images. The camera spends much of its time panning over scenes that depict explicit intimacy and even engagement with sexuality. It goes so far to even portray the early stages of sexual activity, only omitting the explicit sexual intercourse which would have easily pushed the genre from boys' love to pornography. Unlike *Love Sick the Series*, *Love by Chance* is not shy to state that its protagonists have engaged in sexually explicit behavior, only shying away from depicting it. Another detail that can be analyzed is the lighting; *Love Sick the Series* portrays its kiss scene in a much dimmer atmosphere than *Love by Chance*, which highlights the moment with bright yet soft lighting. Both types of lighting evoke a different kind of emotion: whereas *Love Sick the Series* feels like it's trying to hide a secret, *Love by Chance* immerses the audience in feelings of bliss and sensuality.



Figure 12. เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ (romanized as *Love Sick the Series*) Episode 5 [2014]

Retrieved from <https://forums.soompi.com/topic/343599-thailand-drama-2014-love-sick-the-series/>.



Figure 13. *บังเอิญรัก* (romanized as *Love by Chance*) Episode 7 [2018]
Retrieved from https://aminoapps.com/c/bl drama/page/blog/love-by-chance-kiss-scene-in-pictures/JzDV_z5iduPMK1wpgPLO2QeXdg8ZY21zJB.

The shift of camera focus is significant between *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, which can be attributed to the development of directorship but also on the ability of the directorship team to be increasingly more daring with portrayals of boys' love relationships. The shift in societal expectations for boys' love drama series productions over the past five years has also gradually allowed production teams to take on riskier and increasingly risqué depictions and portrayals.

Love Sick the Series features only one on-screen kiss between the two male protagonists, *Phun* and *Noh*. However, *Love by Chance* features at least fifteen instances in which two male protagonists share an explicit on-screen kiss, not including instances of cheek kisses, forehead kisses, or hand kisses. The increased depiction of on-screen kisses is another indicator that the directorship teams are becoming bolder in their portrayals of boys' love relationships. However, it is not simply the quantity but the quality of kisses as well. The one kiss portrayed in *Love Sick the Series* was a soft, brushing kiss that last a few seconds. However, the kisses displayed in *Love by Chance* vary in passion and aggression; some are similar to the

one kiss in *Love Sick the Series* in that they focused on the softness of the act, but others express much more aggressive passion and explicit sensuality.

Increasing boldness in the method for approaching boys' love relationships was not limited to just kisses though. *Love by Chance* contains a greater number of scenes in which bare skin was exhibited and explicitly sexualized. The shyness that limited *Love Sick the Series* from depicting too much bare skin has dissipated and paved way for a boldness that is expressed in the fetishizing of skinship and sexualizing of physical contact. If anything, major production companies now jump at the opportunity to exploit the sensational popularity of the boys' love genre in order to garner greater profitability, as can be noted in the increased number of boys' love drama series, commercials, and product promotions.

As argued earlier, the more daring portrayal of sensuality between two male characters is only possible due to the repeated iterations of boys' love drama series pushing the envelope over the past five years. By reading the response of both audience members and society as a whole, production companies found that such explicit depictions were not only permissible, they were profitable. This is noted through the Media Systems Dependency Theory which requires a consultation between the media industry, the audience, and the society in order to ensure that demands are being met while abiding by sociocultural constraints.

In addition to this, the sheer number of boys' love relationships in any given drama series significantly increased as well. In *Love Sick the Series*, the entire drama series spends its entire time focusing on the development of and the obstacles facing the primary boys' love relationship of Phun and Noh. *Love Sick the Series* spends considerable runtime navigating the complexities of heterosexual relationships that

both characters share with their respective side-character girlfriends while also attempt to develop and maintain their own boys' love relationship. In this regard, *Love Sick the Series* focuses on four heterosexual relationships: Phun and Aim (portrayed by Prim Primrose Chindavanich), Noh and Yuri (portrayed by Pineare Pannin Charnmanoon), Khom (portrayed by Pleum Nontapan Cheunwarin) and Jeed (portrayed by Gale Nungira Hanwutinanon), and Moan (portrayed by Mark Patcharawat Wongtossawatdi) and Taengmo (portrayed by Puyfah Sita Maharavidejakorn). The only other semblance of a boys' love relationship outside of the primary pair is noted in the character of Earn (portrayed by Ngern Anupart Luangsodsai), whose character fosters a secret crush for the primary male protagonist Noh. However, Earn's storyline gains little traction and does not even explicitly state his crush for Noh beyond lingering glances and hesitating interactions.

Many of these relationships focus on the typical difficulties of communication and maintain intimacy at a young age. However, the relationships of Aim and Yuri center around how their respective boyfriends, Phun and Noh, are falling in love for one another; the four of them must navigate how to handle their relationships in light of a burgeoning boys' love relationship while attempting to maintain respect and decency for the already extant heterosexual relationships.

Love by Chance, on the other hand, squeezes four boys' love relationships into a single drama series, emphasizing two of them over the other two. Ae and Pete are given the most screen time to develop their relationship with little interference from any heterosexual narratives. Chompoo (portrayed by Bua Mudchima Pluempitviriyavaj) is a female character that falls in love with Ae because he

provides her assistance by happenstance. However, her story line is ended easily and abruptly when Ae announces that he does not care for her and cares only for Pete.

Tin (portrayed by Mean Phiravich Attachitsataporn) and Can (portrayed by Plan Rathavit Kijworluk) are also given ample time to develop their relationship, though the drama series does not complete their story arc. Tin and Can are not given any potential heterosexual relationship as an obstacle; in fact, most of their story plot is spent with them struggling to even be friends.

The other two remaining couples, Kengkla (portrayed by Mark Siwat Jumlongkul) and Techno (portrayed by Gun Napat Na Ranong), as well as Tum (portrayed by Title Kirati Puangmalee) and Tar (portrayed by Earth Katsamonnat Namwirote), were not given significant to develop their relationships. However, in the time they did appear on-screen, they were not given any potential heterosexual relationship as an obstacle either.

In the whole of *Love by Chance*, there is only one heterosexual relationship that is portrayed: Pond and ChaAim, portrayed by Yacht Surat Permpoonsavat and Cherreen Nachjaree Horvejkul respectively. Unlike most other drama series, their relationship is developed quickly and without any clear obstacles; theirs was the simplest relationship in the entire drama series.

The use of only a single boys' love relationships as the focal point for *Love Sick the Series* starkly contrasts the use of four boys' love relationships in *Love by Chance*. In prioritizing a single relationship, *Love Sick the Series* ensures that the primary relationship focus is still keenly on boys' love. The ample inclusion of heterosexual relationships in the drama series can serve to be a safety net for the series. As the first boys' love drama series in Thailand, the safety net ensured that the

boys' love genre did not leave too strong of an impression on the audience, who were given several opportunities to instead turn their focus to typical heterosexual relationship narratives. Essentially, this practice served to slowly and gradually introduce the concept of boys' love into mainstream Thai media. Audience members can still enjoy a typical teenage drama series that would otherwise be marketed and promoted like any other drama series; the only difference was the inclusion of limited boys' love depictions.

Through the Media System Dependency Theory lens, the study posits the argument that the increased quantity of boys' love relationships is also a product of the cyclical relationship described prior. In much the same way in which production companies have become emboldened in the portrayal of sensuality between male characters, they have also been incentivized to put as many eggs in as many baskets as possible by simply increasing the number of boys' love relationships. Both quality and quantity have increased due to shifting audience demands and expanding sociocultural constraints.

Five years later, the significant shift to the inclusion and highlighting of four different boys' love relationships in a single drama series is a clear example to show how Thai production companies no longer fear a hesitation or weariness from potential audience members towards the open and public depiction of boys' love. In fact, the use of just one heterosexual relationship in *Love by Chance* could be seen as an attempt to provide audience members with a respite or hiatus from the dominance of boys' love relationships in the overall narrative.

When analyzing the obstacles that are presented to boys' love relationships in each drama series, there is a significant shift in the source and nature of these conflicts.

The obstacle established in *Love Sick the Series* is that Phun must overcome his stagnant heterosexual relationship with Aim in order to be with Noh, who himself needs to overcome his one-sided heterosexual love with Yuri to be with Phun. This narrative portrays the heterosexual relationships as hindrances to Phun and Noh's true love, happiness, and fulfillment. To further hammer this meaning in for the audience members, Phun's relationship with Aim is constantly juxtaposed to his relationship with Noh. Noh is presented to be much more considerate and caring whereas Aim is shown to be self-centered and materialistic. This calls upon the trope that was introduced by Mizoguchi in which boys' love relationships are deemed to be more significant and meaningful than heterosexual relationships due to their deeper connections, greater care, and significantly more profound love. As the season ends, the two characters must come to grips with the reality that no matter how much they care for one another, their relationship can never develop into something more. Not only are they held back by their current heterosexual relationships, they also acknowledge the societal constraint in regards to developing a boys' love relationship.

These same obstacles, however, are glaringly absent in *Love by Chance*. The most heterosexual conflict that can be seen is noted in the character of Chompoo who falls in love with Ae after he helps her prevent her bag from falling into a lake. Pete even encourages Ae to develop a relationship with Chompoo instead of himself because a heterosexual relationship is more "normal" than a boys' love one. However, Ae immediately rejects the offer and is furious at the thought of Pete pushing him to be with someone else. The conflict is resolved in the moment that it is discussed openly. Instead, the conflicts that Ae and Pete face most throughout the drama series are ones that any other relationship may face, heterosexual or boys' love. In this

sense, heterosexuality is not utilized as a tool with which to introduce obstacles for the characters. The source of conflict has shifted, allowing for the drama series to normalize boys' love relationships; no longer do they face issues of simply wanting to be together, but now they face problems that most other relationships do. This can be acknowledged as progress for the industry through a queer theory lens; typical tropes and stereotypes are challenged and undone in order to provide an opportunity for non-normative narratives to showcase themselves as normative.

Another common practice that can be noted in both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* is the presence of a younger sister who is an obsessive fan of boys' love narratives. In *Love Sick the Series*, Phun's sister Pang (portrayed by Puaen Veerakaarn Nuchanart) is a young fan girl whose obsessions with boys' love narratives serves as the McGuffin for the story. Phun already has a girlfriend but will be put into an arranged relationship with the daughter of a businessman whom their father knows. The only means of escape from this arranged relationship is to have his younger sister, whom their father adores, help him convince their father to break off the engagement. Phun assumes that Pang will only help if he can convince her that his current relationship is a boys' love one. Phun thus enlists Noh to help convince Pang that they are in a relationship together.

In *Love by Chance*, Can's younger sister Lemon (portrayed by Praeploy Oree) is also an obsessive fan girl of boys' love narratives. However, her role and obsession are not central to the story or to the development of Tin and Can's relationships. In fact, she accuses her brother Can of serving as an obstacle to what she imagines to be the blossoming of love between Tin and Pete. This is a stark contrast to the role of both Pang and her obsession in *Love Sick the Series*. The inclusion of boys' love

fanatics serves as a medium with which the audience can project themselves. The fact that these fanatics are women works in alignment with the fact that the author is a woman herself, whose aim is to write a story for the consumption of primarily other women. It is thus appropriate for these fanatic characters to be women themselves. In this way, the audience is not only able to voyeuristically gaze upon the development of boys' love relationships, they are also able to project themselves directly onto a character and into the story in order to engage with the boys and their relationships as well.

As discussed previously, discourses regarding individual identity, particularly in regards to gender in sexuality, are limited within Thai society. Often times, such discourses are reserved to those of higher socioeconomic background, as they do not face obstacles for basic survive that the lower socioeconomic classes do; their wealth and privilege protect them from the challenges of basic necessity, allowing them more time and freedom to openly explore individual identity issues. This is prevalent for the context of boys' love drama series as well. Many of the characters from both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* come from well-to-do families or wealthy backgrounds.

In *Love Sick the Series*, both Phun and Noh's families hire staff to work and serve in the home setting. Phun's family employs a general housemaid and a driver, whom both appear often in the series in order to serve Phun and his family. Noh's family also employs two housemaids who work and live in his family home, often portrayed serving his mother and him. Additionally, the series states that they both attend *Friday College*, a school that is repeatedly stated to be only accessible to

students from wealthy backgrounds. Khom is the one exception as he is a scholarship student due to his athletic capabilities.

Though this depiction of wealth is also present in *Love by Chance*, it is not equally applied there. Pete and Tin both study within the international program for their university, an aspect with which Tin utilizes to identify the wealthy from the poor. Utilizing this indicator of social class, Tin purposefully distances himself from those who study Thai programs, such as Ae and Can. However, *Love by Chance* differs from *Love Sick the Series* in that some of its primary characters are not from well-to-do families. Ae is stated to come from the countryside, where his family runs a restaurant out of the ground floor of their home. Despite their disparity in wealth, Ae and Pete are able to explore issues of identity together, ultimately culminating in the blossoming of their relationship.

Due to the financial stability of their families, the characters of both boys' love drama series were able to explore and express divergent gender and sexual identities. However, the shift that is noted in *Love by Chance* can serve as an indicator that Thai society is gradually opening up for youth to be able to challenge traditional gender and sexual conceptions without being barred by socioeconomic obstacles. Therefore, in the five years between *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, it can be implied that these socioeconomic gate-keeping barriers have shifted and allowed for greater expression of individual identity, regardless of personal or familial socioeconomic status.

Social constructivism is applied here in order to make the argument that these characters, and to an extent, the audience, are blithely unaware of the privilege they have in being able to explore these issues of gender, sexuality, and individual identity.

Referencing the previous chapter of this study, financial stability is essential before one is able to truly reflect and introspect on the challenges of identity. Little to no thought is given by these characters to the needs of the family unit, nor are there any considerations for the socioeconomic conditions into which they were born. These very socioeconomic conditions act as a safety net that allows these characters the luxury of exploration in regards to self-identity. Even in *Love by Chance*, wherein socioeconomic backgrounds vary, the discourse regarding their wealth is never made in relation to their ability for exploration of self-identity.

Other indicators of Thai society gradually opening up to explorations and expressions of gender and sexuality could also be noted in the pacing of both boys' love drama series. *Love Sick the Series* spends the entirety of its twelve-episode season dealing with internal conflicts as the two main male leads attempt to understand their feelings for one another while also negotiating how to exist and navigate within the confines of their society. However, *Love by Chance* jumps directly into the thick of things, having the two main male leads share an on-screen kiss by the fourth episode. The following ten episodes dedicate the entirety of their time to the portrayal of the continued growth of Ae and Pete's relationship as well as the progression of the three other boys' love relationships.

The much faster pacing of the primary relationship in each boys' love drama series indicates a shift in what can be identified as significant within the drama series. In *Love Sick the Series*, the significant source of drama was placed firmly around the topic of self-discovery and exploration of sexuality as well as societal perception of queerness. However, in *Love by Chance*, the characters move past that period of self-reflection relatively quickly in order to focus the series around drama that stems from

being in a significant relationship. Ae quickly dismisses any conflict around societal perceptions regarding queerness with a single quote in the first episodes: “เกย์แล้วไงวะ? เกย์ไม่ใช่คนอะ? เกย์ไม่ใช่โรคติดต่ออะเว้ย!” (translated as “What about being gay? Are gays not people? Being gay isn’t some contagious disease!”)

The much more progressive approach that can be seen in *Love by Chance* is only possible because the media industry referenced the demands of the audiences alongside the expanded understanding of society. There is no longer a demand for topics that are deemed simple or uninteresting because they have already been addressed and overcome in previous boys’ love drama series. By building upon its predecessors, *Love by Chance* must push beyond these issues in order to tackle topics that are more relevant to the modern-day social and cultural discourse, providing a more thrilling and captivating drama for audience members. Again, this is the cyclical relationship that was established by the Media Systems Dependency Theory at work.

As indicated by the applied theories, the progressive stance can be a reflection of the society and the times during which these drama series were produced: in 2014, the primary discourse regarding boys’ love in media looked at how boys, who were otherwise heterosexual, would come to terms with their growing romantic and sexual feelings for one another; whereas in 2018, the discourse within media had changed to center around how relationships in general were being managed by youth, regardless of the gender or sexual identities of those involved. In refocusing the source of drama in these drama series around the building of a relationship, *Love by Chance* shows how boys’ love relationships have become more normalized in societal perception in

juxtaposition to those very same boys' love relationships in *Love Sick the Series* five years prior.

With that in mind, this study turns to the depiction of masculinity and how it is defined by each boys' love drama series. In both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, the characters are given various opportunities to express their masculinity in spite of the development of their boys' love relationship. In *Love Sick the Series*, Phun holds a position on the student council, which is dominated by and comprised solely of men. Noh is president of his school band club, which is also comprised of only other men. These positions of power and authority, aside from being aligned with only other men, helps to reinforce the masculinity and identity of both characters as men. In addition to this, there are several instances throughout the series in which Noh expresses violence towards Phun or his other male friends; the violence is utilized as a means with which to remind the audience members that Noh, despite being identified canonically as the submissive uke receiver in his boys' love relationship with Phun, is still a man and is still very masculine.

In *Love by Chance*, violence is similarly applied as a means with which to prop up the masculinity of its boys' love characters. Ae and Can are noted to act on violence in several occasions throughout the series, whether it's for the purpose of defending their friends or themselves from others that they view as credible threats. However, their masculinity is also emphasized specifically through their studies. Because *Love Sick the Series* was based in high school, this option was not available for it. However, *Love by Chance* utilizes the characters' faculty of study as a method to show that, despite their boys' love relationship, these characters are still masculine men. Ae, for example, studies engineering, a faculty and field of study that is

perceived to be highly masculine within Thai society. Other significant characters, such as Can, Techno, and Type (portrayed by Earth Pirapat Watthanasetsiri) are all stated to study in the faculty of sports science, which is also deemed as a masculine field of study within Thai society.

The identification of these characters with roles and positions often associated with masculinity is an intentional practice that has become a common trend across the genre. In fact, the trend is so rampant that countless fans from around the world have commented on online forums that they believe the best-looking men who are most likely to be in boys' love relationships are male students who study engineering. The explicit listing of these faculties of study pulls on societal perceptions of masculinity in order to reinforce the notion that these characters are still masculine men who just happen to love one another. As the women authors intentionally utilize markers of masculinity to define their characters, the audience is once again reminded that these productions are fantasies of the women's voyeuristic desire, rather than real queer narratives. The authors are intentionally creating characters that are ideal forms of masculinity with the single exception of their love interest, which is often painted as the exception to their larger ideal type, rather than the model.

Through a lens of queer theory, it can thus be argued that these cisgender heterosexual women writers have a very particular perception of what it means to be ผู้ชาย (translated as *phuuchai*) or a real man. They believe that in order for their stories to be successful, these definitions of men and masculinity must be defended. Social constructivism would further posit that these cisgender heterosexual women writers are not the originators of such ideologies, but rather pull from previous social

constructions of men and masculinity in order to establish these particular perceptions of their ideal man.

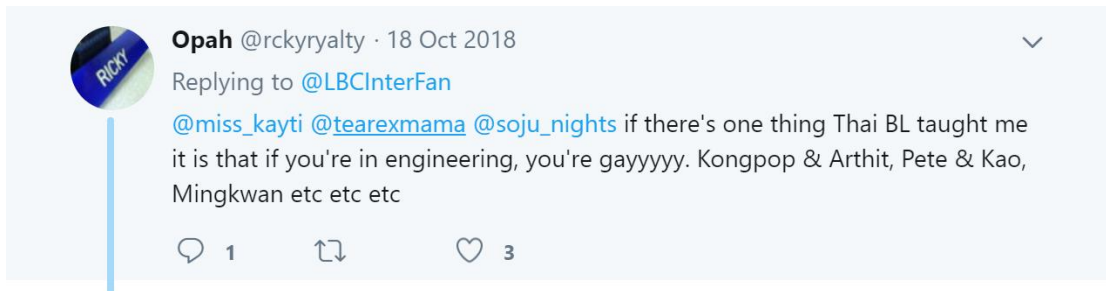


Figure 14. Twitter comment [2018]

Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/lbcinterfan/status/1052776583642210304?lang=en>.

With this in mind, the study questions whether or not the progressive portrayal of boys' love relationships in *Love by Chance*, in comparison to *Love Sick the Series*, actually means that there is social progress in regards to better understanding and acceptance of male queerness in Thai society. Queer theory would assert that it does not; these depictions of men in boys' love relationships do very little in the way to actually challenge, let alone change, the mainstream heteronormative ideologies; no new social constructions of men and masculinity are offered up as an alternative for the current system in place. Transgressions against heteronormative expectations seem to be allowed in instances wherein the transgressor has been able to fully prove their masculinity in all other regards. Even then, their transgression cannot be a general one, such as explicit homosexuality, but must be a restrained one, such as loving only one man as the exception to their otherwise heterosexual nature. In other words, social constructions of men and masculinity are largely maintained with the single exception of the boys' love relationship itself, which, through these drama

series, are argued to not even be in violation of heteronormative standards. Instead of challenging heteronormative ideologies, these boys' love drama series instead appeal to heteronormativity in hopes of being accepted into the system that had once and, in some regard, still do ostracize it. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Finally, this study turns to the tropes identified by Mizoguchi's study as well as Zhou, Sherman, and Paul's study. As an aside, these "tropes" are in fact the defining traits of a social construct. Like anything else, the genre of boys' love is socially constructed. In the construction of its bounds, homosexual or *gay* narratives are explicitly excluded. Therefore, the forthcoming discussion regarding tropes is essentially analyzing Thai boys' love drama series to identify whether they abide by the previously established social construction of boys' love drama series or whether they provide a challenge to the established social construction in order to put forth their own bounds on the genre.

Both *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* engage in a number of boys' love tropes that were identified in these two studies. In both series, the *seme-uke* model of a relationship is well maintained in all relationships. Furthermore, once these roles were established in the early episodes of their respective drama series, they were immutable and unchanging. Aside from those two tropes though, *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* diverge from their application of the tropes.

In *Love Sick the Series*, Mizoguchi's tropes are more fully applied. Both of the primary male leads have had and still do have significant heterosexual relationships: *Phun* with *Aim* and *Noh* with *Yuri*. Despite both acknowledging their feelings for one another, they reject the identification of *gay* and maintain that they

both are still 100% masculine men. In addition to that, the narrative paints how the heterosexual relationships that they each have stifles their happiness and self-fulfillment, qualities which are depicted to be more attainable if they were to engage in a boys' love relationship with one another. As such, boys' love relationships are shown to be more significant than heterosexual ones in nearly every way. These tropes are ones that are not seen in *Love by Chance*, however. *Love by Chance*, instead, portrays the trope of rape as a form of overflowing and uncontrollable love in the relationship between Kengkla and Techno in the season/series finale.

In regards to the work of Zhou, Sherman, and Paul, both series reject the use of the soulmates trope, the love at first sight trope, and the love conquers all trope. The closest they get to embodying any of Zhou, Sherman, and Paul's tropes is through the idealization of the partner in *Love by Chance*. After being rescued and protected by Ae repeatedly, Pete begins to identify Ae as his personal hero. Though this is not to the degree with which Zhou, Sherman, and Paul defined the description of the trope, it is still a semblance of partner idealization of Ae in the eyes of Pete.

In recognizing that *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* both engage in Mizoguchi's tropes, it can be said that they continue on the tradition established by earlier boys' love genre industries in Japan and China. However, they do not fully corroborate with those experiences, as seen in their departure from the tropes identified by Zhou, Sherman, and Paul. The Thai boy's love genre industry can thus be said to take note from their predecessors but have ultimately built up their own approach to the genre based on social, cultural, political, and historical context of Thai society. In other words, they have taken what had previously existed and adapted it to the unique sociocultural context of Thai society.

The Media System Dependency Theory would support that argument, claiming that Thai boys' love drama series were able to reference their own society which operates significantly different from other nations due to the existence of the *phet* identity system in coordination with the gender and sexuality identity system. As such, the Thai entertainment industry is able to enter the cycle described by the Media System Dependency Theory by building on foreign predecessors while concurrently adding their own social constructions of *phet* in to better cater to their domestic audiences, exploiting the flexibility of a non-binary identity system.



CHAPTER SIX: SCHISM WITHIN INDUSTRY

In 2016 and 2017, Thailand's boys' love genre industry faced a significant schism: two potential pathways for the continued development of the genre emerged and competed for dominance of the industry's future. However, the schism would be quickly resolved and only one pathway would win out in the end. In order to understand the schism and explain its outcome, this study looks at two boys' love drama series: *SOTUS the Series* ที่รักตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง (translated simply as *SOTUS the Series*) and *อกหักมารักกับผม* (translated as *Together with Me*). The chapter will analyze the two drama series productions, follow their development, and acknowledge the varying levels of success between the two. In conclusion, the sides of the schism will be laid bare, with a single decisive victor emerging from the other side.

6.1 The Significance of *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me*

In audience ratings of their first season, *SOTUS the Series* scored an average of 8.9 and *Together with Me* scored an average score of 8.8. Of all the audience members who confirmed that they viewed the series, 67.8% of *SOTUS the Series*' audience participated in rating the series while 63.3% of *Together with Me*'s audience participated. The data sourced from MyDramaList essentially shows significant similarity between the two boys' love drama series. However, LINETV reports that *SOTUS the Series* was able to garner a significantly larger following than *Together with Me* based on the number of subscribers to their respective channels: *SOTUS the Series* managed to hold 159,625 subscribers while *Together with Me* managed to hold 82,585 subscribers. It must be noted, though, that *Together with Me* shares its

channel with its second season, *Together with Me: The Next Chapter*, allowing it to consolidate the number of subscribers from both its first and second season into one group. However, *SOTUS the Series* has a separate channel from its second season, *SOTUS S the Series*, which, on its own, was able to pull another 95,029 subscribers. This study cannot therefore identify how many unique subscribers each season of *SOTUS the Series* has due to the possibility that many of them subscribe to both channels while only some of them subscribe to either one or the other. Furthermore, *SOTUS the Series* was able to garner more than twice the viewership for its pilot episode than *Together with Me* was able to: *SOTUS the Series* had a staggering viewership count of 4,123,641 views while *Together with Me* recorded 2,017,833 views.

Producer	Year	Title	Rating *	Review % *	Subscriber**	First Eps**	Most Views**
GMM	2016	SOTUS The Series	8.9	67.8%	159,704	4,125,892	4,662,236
GMM	2017	SOTUS S The Series	8.8	61.0%	95,123	5,093,980	5,164,377
TV Thunder	2017	Together with Me	8.8	63.3%	82,632	2,019,700	5,009,985
TV Thunder	2018	Together with Me: The Next Chapter	7.6	40.1%	82,632	2,921,867	3,444,602

Table 8. Comparison of SOTUS the Series and Together with Me

*Data sourced from MyDramaList

**Data sourced from LINETV

Data sourced on 11 October 2019

Due to their relative levels of success, both boys' love drama series were granted a sequel or second season the year after their debut. *SOTUS S the Series* performed approximately as well as its predecessor, receiving an 8.8 rating from 61.0% of its viewership base. Its pilot episode raked in a viewership of 5,087,185 as well,

nearly a million more views than its first season. This displays a semblance of consistency within the production of the boys' love drama series as well as a dedication within its audience membership. *Together with Me: The Next Chapter* received about the same level of viewership, but was rated significantly lower at 7.9 with only a response rate of 40.1% from its audience. The first episode managed to pull in 2,915,091 views, which is also approximately one million more views than its first season, but still significantly less than that of *SOTUS the Series* and *SOTUS S the Series*.

Another example of the success of *SOTUS the Series* over *Together with Me* can be seen in the quantity of fan meetings that each set up as well as the quantity of merchandise produced for sale. *Together with Me* has had a few fan meetings, but no merchandise production. However, *SOTUS the Series* prides itself on capitalizing off of the success of its primary boys' love relationship. Fan meetings not only abound in Thailand, but have also achieved international reach throughout Asia: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China, Viet Nam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, etc. They also have a significant number of merchandises that is constantly produced for sale.



Figure 15. Promotional Poster for *อกหักมารักกับผม* (romanized as *Together with Me*) Fan Meeting in Taiwan [2018]

Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/nuiclub/status/1072123484220735496>.



Figure 16. Promotional Poster for ออกหักมารักกับผม (romanized as Together with Me) Fan Meeting in China [2017]
Retrieved from <https://pantip.com/topic/37068540>.



Figure 17. Promotional Poster for พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง (romanized as SOTUS the Series) Official Merchandise [2018]
Retrieved from
<https://www.facebook.com/gmmtvofficial/photos/pcb.10156101474706224/10156101464831224/?type=3&theater>.



Figure 18. Promotional Posters for *พี่วีกตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง* (romanized as *SOTUS the Series*) Fan Meeting in Various Countries [2019]
Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BOK1NpAAfpE/>.

Both series were produced and broadcasted around a similar time, approximately in the middle of the time period for this study. They also have similar ratings with a similar percentage of viewer responses. Because of these similarities, the two boys' love drama series are good candidates as case studies to analyze and explain the defining schism within the boys' love genre industry. The resultant success of these series helps the study to define how the schism occurred and it was

resolved, acknowledging which pathway become the dominant narrative within the boys' love genre industry and identifying which pathway faded into obscurity. Based on the evidence above, it can be clearly stated that *SOTUS the Series* and *SOTUS S the Series* emerged from the schism as the new standard for the boys' love genre industry whereas *Together with Me* and *Together with Me: The Next Chapter* found itself fading into the background. What then were the two defining sides of the schism?

To acknowledge their differences in order to define their successes and failures, the study first acknowledges their similarities. Much like other boys' love drama series, both *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me* were originally penned as web novels by heterosexual women on the Thai website *dek-d.com*. These web novels were eventually printed as paper book novels and then remade as drama series. *SOTUS the Series* was written by the author online pseudonym BITTERSWEET or Ploy Ploybut Sara Patarapornpisit, while *Together with Me* was written by the author online pseudonym ++saisioo++ or Dem Thanutnun Vitsivakul. Once again, all names will be presented in their romanized forms; as Thai transliteration has no unified system of romanization, please refer to Appendix VI, Appendix VII, or Appendix VIII for the more accurate Thai script spelling of relevant names. Because these authors are both heterosexual women, they and their works fall into the same pattern of behavior that other boys' love drama series do, as discussed earlier in regards to *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*.

Social constructivism would find these two authors to be relying on previous constructions of masculinity, rather than providing their own or challenging previous iterations, much the same as the other two authors previously discussed,

INDRYTIMES and MAME12938. Therefore, queer theory would again argue that there is nothing inherently subversive or revolutionary about their works; in fact, they do the opposite by reinforcing heteronormativity rather than challenging it for representation of greater diversity in queerness. However, the lack of reality in regards to the portrayal of these boys' love relationships is intentional; it provides a sense of escapism as the boys' love relationship narratives are removed from their immediate reality, allowing for the voyeuristic imaginations of the authors, and arguably the audience, to shape what masculinity is to their desire.



Figure 19. BITTERSWEET or พลอย พลอยบุษรา กัทรพรพิสิฐ (romanized as Ploy Ploybut Sara Patarapornpisit), Author of พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง (romanized as SOTUS the Series) [2017] Retrieved from <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/799121>.



Figure 20. ++saisioo++ or เต็ม ธนัตนันทน์ วิษย์ศิวักุล (romanized as Dem Thanutnun Vitsivakul), Author of ออกหักมารักกับผม (romanized as Together with Me) [2015]
Retrieved from <http://student-weekly.com/090215/090215-happen03.html#.XZx3rkYzbD4>.

Both *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me* were produced and broadcasted by private corporations, GMM and TV Thunder, respectively. They both are available for streaming on LINETV as well; however, *SOTUS the Series* was also publicly broadcasted on GMM's own channel, One31. Furthermore, all the major characters from both boys' love drama series were casted internally from the production company's own talent management division. From *SOTUS the Series*, Kongpob (portrayed by Singto Prachaya Ruangroj) and Arthit (portrayed by Krist Perawat Sangpotirat) were both acting artists who were signed to, trained under, and managed by GMM themselves. From *Together with Me*, Korn (portrayed by Max Nattapol Dilokonawarit) and Knock (portrayed by Tul Pakorn Thanasrivannitchai) were both also signed to, trained under, and managed by TV Thunder themselves.

At this point in time, private companies were now willing to invest their own capital into the production of boy's love drama series in order to gain profits. This is

noted in how most boys' love productions are now produced and broadcasted through private corporations rather than public state-owned ones. Furthermore, production companies have learned to take advantage of their own in-house talent pools. The recruiting, training, and casting of their own in-house actors ensures that management issues are kept to a minimum; issues seen in instances such as *2Moons the Series* or *Love by Chance* will not be an occurrence for these productions. Additionally, the scouting of talent from within the agency allows companies to develop the relationship of the boys' love couple before, during, and after production with little to no scheduling or management conflict. As such, production companies are able to profit off of events, such as fan meetings, because all of the participants are managed internally.

Similar to *Love by Chance*, the setting of both narratives are comfortably nestled within a university, once again allowing for more mature content to be discussed without hesitation or caution from the audience. Regarding the content of the writing, all the main characters study in the same faculty; Kongpob and Arthit from *SOTUS the Series* as well as Korn and Knock from *Together with Me* all study in the hyper-masculine field of engineering. Once again, it can be seen that the masculinity of these male protagonists is bolstered by their focus of study. The authors rely on the previously existing socially constructed belief of masculinity being embedded in certain faculties of study. The reliance upon and application of such social constructions ensures that the final products do not challenge or subvert heteronormativity, but rather cave in to it. On that note, both *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me* abide by the same set of tropes outlined by the two studies of Mizoguchi and Zhou, Sherman, and Paul.

Mizoguchi's tropes are fully administered in both boys' love drama series. In both *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me*, the *seme-uke* relationship model is established relatively early and is made immutable henceforth. At least one of the main male protagonists either currently or previous had a heterosexual love interest; in *SOTUS the Series*, Arthit spends most of the season pining over his one-sided crush with an old female friend and in *Together with Me*, Knock spends most of the season in a relationship with his girlfriend. Even though they both would move onto a boys' love relationship with the other main male protagonist, the narrative constantly portrayed these women as indifferent, uncaring, or outrightly wicked, feeding into the trope that boys' love relationships are of greater significance than heterosexual relationships. In fact, Arthit and Knock are only able to find happiness in a relationship once they let go of their female loves and solidified their relationship with the other main male protagonists. Regardless of the nature of their relationships with either men or women, the main male protagonists all reject the explicit identity of *gay*. The one exception was Korn, who openly admitted and accepted his identity as *gay*.

There is one of Mizoguchi's tropes that is not fully applied. In *Together with Me*, the first episode begins with an explicit and sensual depiction of Korn and Knock engaging in sexual intimacy with one another, hinting at sexual intercourse as well. However, both of them were drunk during the interaction and Knock comes to regret his drunken activities the morning after. As such, this is a portrayal of rape as a type of overflowing and uncontrollable love from Korn for Knock. However, this trope is absent in *SOTUS the Series*, wherein the relationship that they develop is mostly emotional rather than sexual.

Zhou, Sherman, and Paul's tropes are equally practiced in both boys' love drama series as well. Both *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me* mention or allude to the trope of soulmates; the main male protagonists were meant to be with one another despite all the obstacles that hindered the progress of their relationship. Additionally, the love conquers all trope was fully practiced in that all four main male protagonists constantly fought and overcame obstacles because they believed that their love for each other was enough to fuel their motivations. However, neither series displayed any sense of partner idealization nor love at first sight. In fact, both series focused on how the relationship of the two main male protagonists were merely friendly if not outrightly antagonistic before the development of their romance.

Once again, it can be noted that these two boys' love drama series build upon the foundation established by their Japanese and Chinese predecessors, similarly to other Thai boys' love drama series. These two series, actually, commit more to the tropes established by Mizoguchi and Zhou, Sherman, and Paul's study more so than *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*. In this sense, the socially constructed notion of what can be determined to be a boys' love genre production was matched by these two Thai drama series productions, rather than challenged or subverted.

6.2 The Two Sides of the Thai Boys' Love Schism

Though there is much in common between *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me*, they do share a number of differences as well. *SOTUS the Series* centers on only one boys' love relationship and supplements that with a single side story that centers on a heterosexual relationship. *Together with Me*, on the other hand, focuses on two boys' love relationships and one heterosexual relationship; though, this is

further complicated by including three additional women who cause each of these relationships to become love triangles.

On that note, a not insignificant number of women are portrayed as villains in these two series. In *SOTUS the Series*, there are two women who are introduced to be obstacles for the burgeoning boys' love relationship between Arthit and Kongpob. Namtan (portrayed by Alice Tsoi) acts as Arthit's past crush who fell in love with his best friend; he must overcome his love with her in order to come to terms with his love for Kongpob. Also, May (portrayed by Neen Suwanamas) plays as a girl who is infatuated with Kongpob, who must find a way to kindly reject her in order to focus his efforts on developing a relationship with Arthit. In this context, they may not explicitly be villains, but they are painted as obstacles that must be overcome for both Arthit and Kongpob to find happiness and fulfillment with each other.

In *Together with Me*, women are portrayed much more explicitly as villains. Plern Pleng (portrayed by Aim Satida Pinsinchai) begins the drama series as Knock's girlfriend. However, throughout the rest of the drama series, she is shown to be manipulative, unfaithful, self-centered, and pretentious. She organizes a group of women in order for them to collaborate in their revenge against men they felt have slighted them. Nuea Prae (portrayed by Janis Janistar Phomphadungcheep) begins the drama series as the self-proclaimed girlfriend of Farm (portrayed by C'Game Supawit Tantimaporn). However, as Farm begins to fall in love with another man, Nuea Prae joins Plern Pleng in order to drug Farm and force him into a situation of sexual intimacy. Miki (portrayed by Prae Ploy Chalida Suttitasatham) also begins the drama series as the girlfriend of Phubet (portrayed by Tem Khamphree Noomnoi). When Phubet breaks up with her and eventually moves on to date another woman, Miki

joins Plern Pleng in hopes of sabotaging Phubet's new relationship. The three women meet often in secret in order to plot their revenge or to sabotage new relationships in order to punish and reclaim the men they view as their own.

The portrayal of women as obstacles in *SOTUS the Series* and as explicit maniacal villains in *Together with Me* is also a common practice that stems from earlier works of boys' love storytelling, including in China and Japan. The women authors sometimes focus their works on boys' love because they feel that women are too emotional, too fussy, or too complicated; the centering of only men goes to show how clear and simple communication can often lead to positive and lasting relationships. This mentality is reflected in the way that they write their women characters, leading the audience to develop a hatred for the women characters. This also contributes to the trope that claims boys' love relationships are of greater significance than heterosexual relationships. Through this depiction of women, social constructivism would critique these works of boys' love as abhorrently reductionist in regards to queer theory. Socially constructed stereotypes that place a rigid box around what behaviors can be determined to be "feminine" are reinforced in their depiction as hot-tempered, conniving, menacing, self-interested, vain villains. Queer theory challenges this flat, one-dimensional depiction of women and of femininity. Together, the two theories would pointedly identify and highlight the internalized misogyny of these authors through their harmful perception and portrayal of women. The fact that these boys' love drama series are written by women and are largely consumed by women further indicates the danger with which misogyny is perpetuated through the industry by women themselves.

“Female characters in romance novels are usually **fussy** and weak, and they overreact to misunderstandings, which can be really annoying,” Dem said. “But male characters in homoerotic novels hardly ever cry, and if they get into a fight, they fight back. They’re stronger than female characters.”

Figure 21. ++saisioo++ or เต็ม ธนัตนันทน์ วิทย์ศิวัชกุล (romanized as Dem Thanutnun Vitsivakul), Author of ออกหักมารักกับผม (romanized as *Together with Me*) interview [2015] Retrieved from <http://student-weekly.com/090215/090215-happen03.html#.XaBvGkYzbD4>.

The last and arguably most significant difference between *SOTUS the Series* and *Together with Me* is their depiction and engagement with masculinity. As shown through *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance*, the topic of masculinity is a prevalent one within the boys’ love genre industry. There is a constant need for the reaffirmation of masculinity to ensure that the main male characters are masculine men and not feminine men. However, this is also the source of the schism within Thailand’s boys’ love genre industry. A significant portion of this study has been dedicated to identifying and understanding the concept of masculinity within a Thai context; this schism lays out two of these concepts and inadvertently pits them against one another.

In *SOTUS the Series*, the depiction of the main male protagonists focuses on what queer theory calls soft masculinity. Men are shown to be kind and caring, not only towards one another, but towards everyone around them. Even when they act out in frustration, they are often later shown to have a redeeming moment that justifies their emotions and allows them to address their previous behavior. This is noted, for example, in *SOTUS the Series* when Arthit meets with his friends to discuss how to handle their anger when challenged by their underclassmen. Arthit admits his own wrongdoing when he acted out in frustration and apologizes, urging his friends and peers to do better than him.

This is a stark contrast to *Together with Me*, which places heavy emphasis on the opposite of this soft masculinity: what queer theory calls hard masculinity. This type of masculinity is portrayed through physical sports, active violence, muscularity, untampered passion, and even explicit, intense sexuality. This is easily noticed in the very first few minutes of the very first episode; the camera zooms and pans over Korn and Knock as they engage in passionate sexual intimacy, highlighting their muscular bodies and laying it bare for audience members to consume. Where *SOTUS the Series* often highlights how men attempt to navigate emotional issues through communication, *Together with Me* places focus on violence as a means to perpetuate and resolve conflict.

Through Arthit's admission of fault and advocacy for better treatment of their underclassmen, he engages in a practice that is essential to queer theory's soft masculinity – empathy. Where hard masculinity advocates for a tough appearance, soft masculinity prioritizes a gentle demeanor. In the practice of soft masculinity, *SOTUS the Series* allows its male characters to interact with one another without fear of needing to justify their interactions through stereotypically masculine counteractions. Because there is no display of overt hard masculinity to compensate for any displays of kindness or softness, *SOTUS the Series* sends the message that its male characters are comfortable within their own gender and sexual identities.



Figure 22. *SOTUS the Series* ที่รักตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง (translated simply as *SOTUS the Series*) Episode 2 [2016]
Retrieved from LINE TV.



Figure 23. *ออทท์มารักกับผม* (translated as *Together with Me*) Episode 1 [2017]
Retrieved from LINE TV.

Through the lens of queer theory and social constructivism, engagement in homosexual or gay sexual intimacy itself has no particular significance. However, the significance is given to it by the social and cultural context in which the act is conducted in. In that sense, the anger that Knock feels towards Korn can be cited as one that stems from his own socially constructed understanding of what is required for one to be able to identify as *phuuchai* or 100% man. Knock spends much of the

first season of *Together with Me* attempting to deconstruct this understanding of gender and sexuality in order to reconcile his feelings for Korn, social expectations of what it is to be *phuuchai*, and his self-identified *phet* as *phuuchai*. In the end, he manages to deconstruct and remove his love for Korn from his own definition of masculinity, successfully applying social constructivism to rationalize his feelings with his sociocultural context. However, he fails queer theory in that he still places significant value on his identity as *phuuchai* and refuses to part with it, despite Korn's own personal identification as and comfort with *gay*. In that sense, he still feels the societal constraints in regards to fully exploring and expressing his gender and sexuality outside of the masculinity of *phuuchai*. This echoes earlier discussions around tropes wherein male characters within boys' love relationship often maintain that they are still 100% *phuuchai* despite their relationship with another man, instead identifying their significant love interest as an exception to their identity rather than as integral to it. Queer theory reiterates that this is another appeal to heteronormativity to include *gay* into the mainstream narrative, rather than challenging heteronormativity by providing alternatives of queerness.

Though *Together with Me* has a greater variety in the number and types of relationships that are displayed, this does not necessarily result in success for the boys' love drama series. If anything, *Together with Me* is unable to fully flesh out its characters and instead baits the audiences with explicit sexuality and muscularity, hoping to compensate for depth of the relationships therein. Conversely, *SOTUS the Series* hones in on one relationship and explores its nuance, arguably feeding into the desire for the audience to voyeuristically gaze at and participate in a boys' love relationship. This goes to show that quantity may not necessarily be enough for

audiences; the quality of the relationship serves as a stronger motivation for consumption.

The schism in the Thai boys' love genre industry can thus be noted here in the battle between soft masculinity and hard masculinity. Now that Thailand's media has been opened up to the boys' love genre and the discourse of non-normative relationships, the schism aims to define how the continued growth of the genre will proceed through the extent with which it challenges normative descriptions of masculinity: is masculinity a soft, respectful, caring aspect of men or is it a tough, violent, and fiercely passionate experience?

Queer theory and social constructivism do not inherently indicate that either pathway is better than the other. However, queer theory does look to challenge normative narratives by questioning whether or not they are as "normal" as they claim to be. Social constructivism would recommend a retrospective analysis of how Thailand has come to view masculinity in the way it currently does. As similarly addressed in the previous chapters of this study, *phet* categorizations were generally fluid and lenient with their application up until the introduction of westernization. Therefore, the question regarding soft masculinity and hard masculinity actually boils down to a question of traditional *phet* constructions and modern gender and sexuality constructions. Essentially, do the modern audiences of boys' love drama series identify more clearly with a traditional understanding of fluid *phet* identity or more clearly with strong distinct labels of gender and sexual identity.

Even before the production of *Together with Me*, this can be seen to be a difficult question for the boys' love genre industry to answer. *Together with Me* was not created as a standalone boys' love drama series. In fact, it was created as a

prequel to another series: รักร้อนออนไลน์ เดอะ ซีรีส์ (romanized as *Bad Romance the Series*).

In *Bad Romance the Series*, Korn and Knock's relationship as boyfriends had already developed and they served merely as a side story to the primary heterosexual relationship. However, their presence in the drama series drew significant attention and allowed them a sizable fanbase. It was only a year later that the production company decided to grant Korn and Knock a prequel series wherein their story and relationship were centered. This hesitation can be interpreted as the industry understanding the risks of posing the question about masculinity.

All in all, the final solution to the question of masculinity in Thai boys' love drama series was answered in the subsequent years. *SOTUS the Series* and *SOTUS S the Series* continued towards massive success, spawning dozens of fan meeting events across all of Asia and countless merchandise and products that continually sell to an international audience. *Together with Me*, however, began to decrease in popularity. Its second season failed to do any better than its first and was still unable to challenge the success of *SOTUS the Series*. Though fan meeting events do occur, they are few and far in between. No official merchandising was ever conducted either. The final nail in the coffin for the discourse between soft masculinity and hard masculinity can be noted in the success of *Love by Chance*. In *Love by Chance*, the boys' love drama series successfully applied both quantity and quality of boys' love relationships, utilizing the depiction of soft masculinity as its selling point. Like *SOTUS the Series*, *Love by Chance* focuses on the depth of a boys' love relationship with displays of kindness, softness, and deep respect for individual autonomy and consent. However, *Love by Chance* also took after *Together with Me* in that it squeezes multiple boys' love relationships into a single drama series while providing scenes that are intimate

and sensual. Yet, these sensual scenes still embody a sense of softness through the lack of muscularity, the bright lighting, and the gentle music.

With that, the study can come to the conclusion that modern audiences of Thai boy's love drama series prefer a traditional, fluid *phet* categorization system that allow for the more subversive soft masculinity to be centered. Men in these boys' love drama series do not need to justify or compensate for their actions through violence, aggression, or physical muscularity. For queer theory, this can be viewed as a surprising turn of events for non-normative narratives. The consistency with which hard masculinity was utilized prior to this watershed moment in order to compensate for any challenge to normative constructions of masculinity is now being challenged. As depictions of soft masculinity continue to gain popularity and generate profit, it could be argued that the Thai boys' love genre industry will shift in accordance, allowing for the portrayal of men in ways that can often be judged as feminine without explicitly causing their individual identity to come under scrutiny. The love of men itself may no longer be relegated only to women and femininity, nor will the need for violence continually appear in order to justify one's identity as a man.

6.3 Boys' Love is Not Gay/Gey

Towards the end of Chapter Five, the study was able to acknowledge the possibility that *Love Sick the Series* and *Love by Chance* were not challenges to the larger heteronormative mainstream narrative. In fact, they seemed to appeal to it, hoping to be included alongside heteronormativity. This is not a trait that is unique to just these two drama series though. It is a common trend within the boys' love genre industry; there is a clear and vast distinction between boys' love and *gey* drama series.

At first glance, one may be tempted to assume that the two categories are one and the same, but queer theory and social constructivism sheds light on how the two are fundamentally opposed. As discussed, boys' love dramas are often the imaginings of heterosexual women created for the consumption by other heterosexual women. Therefore, boys' love drama series are often idealized and voyeuristic narratives into heterosexual men and the relationship they have with one another. Homosexual or *gay* drama series, on the other hand, emphasize the queerness of its main male characters without worrying about having to supplement their masculinity in other areas. In fact, these narratives are often truer to queer male experiences within a Thai sociocultural context. However, they often do not fare as well as their boys' love counterparts in the Thai entertainment industry nor in the international entertainment industry. Where boys' love drama series hope to appeal to heteronormative standards in order to gain acceptance, homosexual or *gay* drama series care very little for such standards and instead hope to humanize their characters by presenting the realities of queerness in modern-day Thai society. This can be noted in the comparison of data between *SOTUS the Series* and *Gay OK Bangkok*, both produced in 2016.



Figure 24. Promotional Poster for *Gay OK Bangkok* [2016]
Retrieved from <https://mydramalist.com/17083-gay-ok-bangkok>.

The queer theory lens is useful in distinguishing between homosexual or gay narratives and boys' love narratives, as illustrated in previous paragraphs. *Gay OK Bangkok* addresses the real-life issues that *gay* face in Thailand. In that sense, they are able to capture a more accurate depiction of what it means to be *gay* in modern-day Bangkok, Thailand. It does not rely on social constructions of masculinity in order to justify the identity or experiences of its main male characters. Though it may not be as successful as *SOTUS the Series* in regards to audience rating, response rates, quantity of subscribers, or quantity of views, both queer theory and social constructivism would argue that *Gay OK Bangkok* is the more subversive of the two in a Thai sociocultural context. However, because of this stark difference between their narrative approaches, *Gay OK Bangkok* is not identified as a boys' love drama series; it simply does not meet the socially accepted definition of what boys' love should be. It is also interesting to note that *Gay OK Bangkok* is given a higher age

restriction than *SOTUS the Series*, which most likely is due to its unabashed deep-dive into the lives of actual queer men in Thailand.

Title	Age Restriction*	Audience Rating*	Response %*	Subscribers**	Most Views**
Gay OK Bangkok	18+ Restricted	8.1	33.1%	16,897	297,451
SOTUS the Series	15+	8.9	67.8%	159,689	4,662,133

Table 9. Comparison of Gay Drama Series and Boy's Love Drama Series

*Data sourced from MyDramaList

**Data sourced from LINETV

All data sourced on 11 October 2019

With this in mind, any of the other series within this study can be more clearly aligned with boys' love narratives rather than *gay* narratives. *Love Sick the Series*, *Together with Me*, and *Love by Chance* all approach the topic of queerness in great similarity to *SOTUS the Series*. The experiences and issues of the main characters all center around what heterosexual women authors think they would be. However, as stated before, these heterosexual women authors lack the lived experiences of queer Thai men in order to properly pen a story that would hold any semblance of significance to queer Thai men. Instead, their fabrications are voyeuristic imaginings. This stark distinction between the two genres ensures that they remain separate.

As *gay* narratives are more closely aligned with actual queer communities in Thailand, especially *gay* communities in Thailand, their separation from the success of boys' love drama series productions ensures that there is no positive reinforcement for the development of the community. In other words, as boys' love drama series gain popularity and generate significant revenue, little is given back to the *gay* community, or even the queer community, because of their disconnect from the genre that actually portrays them and their lived experiences accurately.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The study has laid out the evolution of Thai boys' love development over the five-year time span between 2014 and 2018. The use of *Love Sick the Series* as the beginning of the study allowed it to acknowledge the differences that were achieved by *Love by Chance*, which marked the end of the study. During 2016 and 2017, a significant schism occurred in the boys' love genre industry, forcing production companies to choose either the application of soft masculinity or hard masculinity. The study of *SOTUS the Series* in juxtaposition with *Together with Me* served the purpose of highlighting the two competing narratives and ultimately defining which one emerged victorious.

The study thus concludes by first outlining the pipeline for the boys' love genre industry: inspired authors pen their web novels via online forums, web novels become published books after attracting a significant following, and drama series are produced when commercial viability is established through book sales. The plethora of written works with which the boys' love genre industry can pull from allows production companies significant flexibility in choosing narratives that they expect to be profitable.

With that in mind, the study then outlines the evolution of Thai boys' love depictions within the Thai entertainment industry through several factors. First, the main conflict of boys' love narratives has shifted away from issues that are specific to divergent identities within society. Main characters spend significantly less time battling their confusion over their love for another man. Instead, the main conflict now focuses on conflicts that are typical of any relationship, such as communication,

jealousy, and trust. Second, depictions of boys' love in these drama series productions have grown increasingly bold. Where intimacy used to be few and far in between, they can now occur repeatedly with increasing sensuality throughout the first few episodes.

Much of this is only possible because Thai boys' love drama series build upon the progress established by their predecessors. *Love by Chance*, for example, is influenced by much of what was laid out by *Love Sick the Series*. However, newer productions do not enslave themselves to the design and foundations established prior. Instead, the study acknowledges that newer productions, in fact, have begun to peel away from the typical tropes established in Japan and China, replacing them with traits that are more inherent within a Thai sociocultural context, such as understandings of fluid *phet* identification categories. Moreover, the study notes a significant growth in both quantity and quality of Thai boys' love drama series productions.

This growing boldness within the boys' love genre industry can be attributed to a cyclical relationship that was outlined earlier in the study. The Uses and Gratification Theory outlines a positive feedback loop, which enabled more and more boys' love drama series to be produced due to consistent and growing demand from audience members. Media System Dependency Theory further affirms that repetitive relationship by detailing how the entertainment industry, the audience, and the society all give and take from one another. This continuous loop allowed production teams to become bolder in their depictions as audience members increasingly demanded greater quality and quantity of content. All the while, society slowly began to reflect

such shifts through the commercial success and capitalistic profitability of the boys' love genre industry.

In regards to the schism that emerged in 2016 – 2017, two opposing pathways were provided for the industry to consider: soft masculinity and hard masculinity. Where hard masculinity promoted a heteronormative approach to masculinity through violence, muscularity, unfiltered passion, and explicit sexuality, soft masculinity delved into a more nuanced practice of masculinity through respect, humility, consideration, kindness, and tenderness. In analyzing *Together with Me* and *SOTUS the Series*, the study concludes that Thailand's boys' love genre industry soundly chose the latter. This is noted in *Love by Chance*, wherein the relationship between Ae and Pete emphasizes their constant practice of clear communication, mutual affirmation, unrelenting consideration, and loving tenderness.

The untimely failure of hard masculinity in light of soft masculinity led to a shift in the way that boys' love depictions would continue in the following years. The victory of soft masculinity was only possible through the response of audience members in the form of viewership, merchandise purchase, ratings, reviews, and general support of the drama series and its respective cast members. It can thus be argued that Thailand's boys' love drama series take their cue from the audience members that consume and contribute to their success; the cyclical relationship established by the Uses and Gratification Theory in concert with the Media System Dependency Theory not only outlined the evolution of the genre industry, but also illustrated how soft masculinity came to win out over hard masculinity. Should this relationship continue, the pathway that the boys' love genre industry in Thailand will

take is one of continued development and evolution, peeling further away from typical tropes while expanding upon what is deemed acceptable through masculinity.

However, queer theory and social constructivism, when applied throughout this study, argues though, that this is not enough. The narratives of boys' love that are presented and portrayed in these drama series do not serve as subversive alternatives or critical critiques of the larger mainstream heteronormative narrative. Though soft masculinity did challenge hard masculinity, it does not seek to supplant heteronormativity for the sake of diversifying queer narratives. Instead social constructions are maintained and boys' love narratives merely appeal to heteronormativity in order to be included in the mainstream. Because of this, diversity of queerness within the Thai entertainment industry will not take root. Depictions of boys' love relationships will continue to increase in quantity and quality, but will ultimately remain constrained by socially constructed perceptions of gender, sexuality, and *phet*. This can also be noted in the glaring lack of representation for queer female narratives, such as *tom*, *dee*, etc. in the mainstream entertainment industry.

On that note, the study reiterates that the presentation of boys' love narratives within the entertainment industry itself is not even truly considered as queer representation. Not only is it a product of cisgender heterosexual women author's voyeuristic imaginings into the world of cisgender heterosexual men loving one another, it actively seeks to distance itself from the more real *gay* productions by explicitly rejecting the term *gay* for its main characters. This disconnect ultimately means that any progress or shift that is made by the boys' love genre industry will ultimately not shift societal perceptions of actually *gay* or queer community members.

In short, Thai society operates on a fluid *phet* identification system that takes several factors into consideration. Because boys' love narratives inherently challenge *phet* labeling of *phuuchai* through male-male-intimacy, the boys' love genre industry must justify the masculinity of its main characters in order to be categorized as a production of boys' love and not a production of *gay* narratives. This is often seen through the practice of hard masculinity. However, the schism soundly establishes that Thai perceptions of masculinity is not limited to just hard masculinity, with soft masculinity serving as another potential avenue for the justification of manliness. Therefore, boys' love genre industry argues that the *phet* of a *phuuchai* does not necessarily change due to his intimacy with another *phuuchai*, creating a new possibility of existence that would have formerly been identified simply as *gay*. This is all possible only due to the existence and operationalization of the unique Thai *phet* identification system; a similar approach would be and has been impossible in a western binary gender and sexuality identity system.

Another critique of this study lies in its utilization of the term "Thai society" or "society." Its application throughout the study is reductionist as it references the society as a whole. However, this is problematic in that it does not take into consideration that media engagement with "society" may actually only be a limited engagement through a niche portion of the greater national narrative of "society." That is to say, even if the boys' love genre industry could muster any social change, such changes would be restricted to just the audience community, ensuring that such changes do not ripple outward towards the whole of society. As such, the study cannot say definitively that the shift in Thai boys' love drama series productions is a direct result of or has had a direct impact on Thai society as a whole.

What can be said is that the increasingly bold and daring approach to boys' love drama series and their production cannot have been possible without significant capital gains, audience member support, and at least a lukewarm acceptance from the greater Thai society. Though, this too is problematic because it relies upon a capitalistic framework to measure success and popularity. The study, however, is unable to make conclusions outside of such constraints due to the nature of boys' love genre industry being so tightly intertwined with capitalism. Furthermore, separating such conclusions from capitalism would be inadvisable as it removes the considerable economic context that shades queer narratives within Thailand, as was discussed earlier in the study.

Future studies may want to focus on what aspects of society actually engage with this portion of the Thai entertainment industry. Additionally, this study does not take into significant consideration how the Thai entertainment industry responds to international audience members and their appeals. Though it was outlined that Thai boys' love drama series have a significant international fanbase, the very fact that those audience members do not have an innate understanding of the Thai social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of boys' love can serve as a hindrance to the way in which Thai production companies can respond to them. Finally, an in-depth analysis at the gap between homosexual or *gay* drama series and boys' love drama series may grant insight into exactly how fantastical and unrealistic the boys' love narratives are; this will help to define the gap between Thai society in modern-day reality and Thai society as it can be in the future with regards to their perception of queerness in all of its diversity.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I – Thai Terminology

TERMINOLOGY	
Romanization	Thai Script
chai rak chai	ชายรักชาย
dee	ดี
dek-d.com	เด็กดี.คอม
gey	เกย์
kathoey	กะเทย
krathiam	กระเทียม
pandaka	บันเดาะ
pandaka	บันเฑาะก์
asittaka pandaka	อาสิตตบันเฑาะก์
napumsaka pandaka	นปุงสกบันเฑาะก์
opakkamika pandaka	โอปักกมียบันเฑาะก์
pakkha pandaka	ปักขบันเฑาะก์
ussuya pandaka	อุสุยบันเฑาะก์
phet	เพศ
pethwithi	เพศวิถี
phetsaphap	เพศสภาพ
phuuchai	ผู้ชาย
rak ruam phet	รักร่วมเพศ
seua bai	เสื่อใบ
tom	ทอม
ubhatobyanjanaka	อุภโตพยัญชนก
Vinnaya Pitaka	วินัยปิฎก

APPENDIX II – Japanese Terminology

TERMINOLOGY	
Romanization	Japanese Script
Animation	アニメーション
Anime	アニメ
Bara	薔薇
BL	ビーエル
boys' love	ボーイズラブ
Manga	漫画
seme – uke	せめ - 受け
yaoi	やおい

APPENDIX III – Thai Song Titles

SONGS TITLES	
Romanization	Thai Script
"Exterior"	เปลือก
"Flashback"	ย้อน
"Himalaya"	หิมาลัย
"I Can't Love You"	รักไม่ได้
"It's All My Heart"	คือหมดหัวใจ
"Midnight Sun"	พระอาทิตย์เที่ยงคืน
"True Story"	เรื่องจริงกับความฝัน

APPENDIX IV – Non-Exhaustive List of Thai Boys' Love Media Productions (2007 – 2018) [Made February 2019]

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Title</i>
2007	Movie	Bangkok Love Story	2016	Series	SOTUS the Series
2007	Movie	Ghost Station	2016	Series	The Extra
2007	Movie	Haunting Me	2016	Series	The Rain Stories
2007	Movie	Kung Fu Tootsie	2016	Series	War of High School
2007	Movie	Love of Siam	2016	Short	Club Friday
2009	Movie	Boring Love	2016	Short	Grey Rainbow
2010	Movie	Yes or No	2016	Short	One Night Standing Til It Over
2012	Short	Club Friday	2016	Short	Sense... Love
2013	Movie	Love Next Door	2017	Movie	Driver
2013	Movie	Me, My Familiar People	2017	Short	Fah Mee Tah
2013	Movie	Timeline	2017	Movie	Malila: Farewell Flower
2013	Series	Hormones	2017	Movie	Playboy and the Gang of Cherry
2014	Movie	Bittersweet Chocolate	2017	Movie	Present Perfect
2014	Movie	Dangerous Boys	2017	Movie	Waterboy the Movie
2014	Movie	Love's Coming	2017	Series	2Moons the Series
2014	Movie	My Bromance	2017	Series	Bangkok G Story
2014	Movie	Summer to Winter	2017	Series	Diary Tootsie 2 the Series
2014	Movie	Teacher and Student	2017	Series	Gay OK Bangkok 2
2014	Series	Hormones 2	2017	Series	I Am Your King the Series
2014	Series	Love Sick the Series	2017	Series	Make It Right 2
2014	Series	Room Alone the Series	2017	Series	My Dear Loser: Edge of 17
2014	Short	Change	2017	Series	Onli(n)e the Series
2014	Short	Club Friday	2017	Series	Sanaaha Diary Series
2014	Short	Morning Boy	2017	Series	Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey
2014	Short	Never Again	2017	Series	Slam Dance
2014	Short	Love Behind One's Back	2017	Series	SOTUS S the Series
2015	Movie	How to Win at Checkers	2017	Series	The Underwear
2015	Movie	Love Love You	2017	Series	Together With Me
2015	Movie	Love Next Door 2	2017	Series	U-Prince
2015	Movie	Red Wine in the Dark of Night	2017	Series	Waterboy the Series
2015	Movie	The Blue Hour	2017	Short	Choose
2015	Series	Drag Race Thailand	2017	Short	Friend Day
2015	Series	Love Sick the Series 2	2017	Short	He Says To Me
2015	Series	Part of Love	2018	Movie	The Right One
2015	Series	Room Alone the Series 2	2018	Series	Kiss Me Again
2015	Short	Same Same is Not the Same	2018	Series	Love By Chance
2015	Short	Wifi Society: Gray Secret	2018	Series	Sapai Ka Fak
2016	Movie	Fathers	2018	Series	Soulmates the Series
2016	Movie	Feel Good to Say Goodbye	2018	Series	Together With Me Next Chapter
2016	Movie	Gray	2018	Series	My Dream the Series
2016	Movie	Sweet Boy	2018	Series	Cause You're My Boy
2016	Movie	The Right Man	2018	Series	What the Duck the Series
2016	Series	Bad Romance the Series	2018	Short	Our Skyy
2016	Series	Bangrak Soi 9/1	2019	Series	My Engineer
2016	Series	Diary Tootsie the Series	2019	Series	Our Last Day
2016	Series	Gay OK Bangkok	2019	Series	Dark Blue Kiss
2016	Series	Kiss: The Series	2019	Series	My Bromance: 5 Years Later
2016	Series	Make It Right	2019	Series	War of High School 2 Reborn
2016	Series	My Bromance the Series	2019	Series	2Moons 2 The Series
2016	Series	Parttime the Series	2019	Series	What the Duck 2 the Series

APPENDIX V – Titles of Relevant Boys’ Love Drama Series

DRAMA SERIES TITLES	
Romanization	Thai Script
2Moons the Series	เดือนเกี้ยวเดือน
Bad Romance the Series	รักร้อนออนไลน์ เดอะ ซีรีส์
Cause You're My Boy	อาทิตย์ของผม
Dark Blue Kiss	<i>Dark Blue Kiss</i> รักไม่ระบุสถานะ
Golden Eagle	อินทรีทอง
Hormones	วัยว้าวุ่น
Iron Ladies	สตรีเหล็ก
Kiss Me Again	จูบให้ได้ถ้านายแน่จริง
Kiss the Series	รักต้องจูบ
Love by Chance	บังเอิญรัก
Love of Siam	รักแห่งสยาม
Love Sick the Series	เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ
My Dear Loser: Edge of 17	ติดตาม <i>My Dear Loser</i> รักไม่เอาถ่าน ตอน <i>Edge of 17</i>
OUR SKYY	<i>OUR SKYY</i> อยากเห็นท้องฟ้าเป็นอย่างวันนั้น
ReminderS	<i>REMINDEERS</i> เพราะคิดถึง
Room Alone 2: The Series	ซีรีส์ของคนเหงาๆ
Room Alone 401-410	ซีรีส์ของคนเหงาๆ
Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey	รุ่นพี่ <i>Secret Love</i> เรื่อง <i>Puppy Honey</i>
SOTUS	<i>SOTUS</i> พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง
The Effect	<i>The Effect</i> โลกออนร้าย
The Right Man – Because I Love You	<i>The Right Man</i> เพราะ...ฉันรัก
The School	โรงเรียนป่วน ก๊วนนักเรียนแสบ
Theory of Love	ทฤษฎีจีบเธอ
Together with Me	อกหักมารักกับผม
Water Boyy the Movie	รักใสใส...วัยรุ่นชอบ
What the Duck	<i>What the Duck</i> รักแลนด์

APPENDIX VI – Relevant Actor and Character Names in Roman and Thai Script

DRAMA SERIES ACTORS AND CHARACTERS			
Actor [Roman]	Actor [Thai]	Character [Roman]	Character [Thai]
เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ LOVE SICK THE SERIES			
White Nawat Phumphothingam	ไวท์ ณวัชร พุ่มโพธิงาม	Phun	ปุ่น
Captain Chonlathorn Kongyingyong	กัปตัน ชลธร คงยิ่งยง	Noh	โน้
Prim Primrose Chindavanich	พริม พริมโรส จินดาวนิช	Aim	เอม
Pineare Pannin Charnmanoon	พายอาร์ พันฉิน ชาญมณูญ	Yuri	ยูริ
Pleum Nontapan Cheunwarin	ปลื้ม นนทพัทธ์ ชื่นวาริน	Khom	คม
Gale Nungira Hanwutinanon	เกล นันณัฐิรา หาญวุดินานนท์	Jeed	จี๊ด
Mark Patcharawat Wongtossawatdi	มาร์ค พชรวัฒน์ ว่องทสวัตดี	Moan	โมน
Puyfah Sita Maharavidejakorn	ปวยฟ้า ศิตา มหารวิเดชากร	Taengmo	แตงโม
Ngern Anupart Luangsodsai	เงิน อนุภาส เหลืองสดไส	Earn	เอิร์น
Puaen Veerakaarn Nuchanart	เพ็ญ วีรกานต์ นุชนารถ	Pang	แป๋ง
บังเอิญรัก LOVE BY CHANCE			
Perth Tanapon Sukumpantanasan	เพิร์ธ ธนพนธ์ สุขุมพันธานาสาร	Ae	เอ๋
Saint Suppamong Udomkaewkanjana	เซนต์ สุภพงษ์ อุดมแก้วกาญจนา	Pete	พีท
Bua Mudchima Pluempitiviriyavaj	บัว มัชฌิมา ปลื้มปิติวิริยะเวช	Chompoo	ชมพู่
Mean Phiravich Attachitsatoporn	มีน พีรวิชญ์ อรรถชิตสถาพร	Tin	ติณณ์
Plan Rathavit Kijworulak	แปลน รัฐวิทย์ กิจวรุลักษณ์	Can	แคน
Mark Siwat Jumlongkul	มาร์ค ศิวัช จำลองกุล	Kengkla	เก่งกล้า
Gun Napat Na Ranong	กัน ณภัทร ณ ระนอง	Techno	เทคโน
Title Kirati Puangmalee	ไต้เคิ้ล กิรติ พวงมาลี	Tum	ตุ้ม
Earth Katsamonnat Namwirete	เอิร์ธ กัษมณณ์ญ์ นามวิโรจน์	Tar	ตาร์
Yacht Surat Permpoonsavat	สุดยอด สุรัตน์ เพิ่มพูลสวัสดิ์	Pond	ปอนด์
Cherreen Nachjaree Horvejkul	เชอรีน ณัฐจารี หรเวชกุล	ChaAim	ชะเอม
Praeploy Oree	แพรพลอย โอรี	Lemon	เลมอน
Earth Pirapat Watthanaset Siri	เอิร์ท ไพรพัฒน์ วัฒนเศรษฐศิริ	Type	ไทป์
SOTUS พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง SOTUS THE SERIES			
Singto Prachaya Ruangroj	สิงโต ปราชญา เรืองโรจน์	Kongpob	ก้องภพ
Krist Perawat Sangpotirat	คริส พีรวัสส แสงโพธิรัตน์	Arthit	อาทิตย์
Alice Tsoi	อลิส อลิสนุญาณ์ ทอย	Namtan	น้ำตาล
Neen Suwanamas	นีร์ สุวรรณมาศ	May	เมย์

ออกหักมารักกับผม TOGETHER WITH ME			
Max Nattapol Dilokonawarit	แม็กซ์ ฌัฐพล ดิลกนาถฤทธิ์	Korn	กร
Tul Pakorn Thanasrivinitchai	ตุล ภากร ธนศรีวินิชชัย	Knock	น็อก
Aim Satida Pinsinchai	เอม สาธิตา ปิ่นสินชัย	Plern Pleng	เพลินเพลง
Janis Janistar Phomphadungcheep	เจนิส เจนิสตา พรหมผดุงชีพ	Nuea Prae	นื้อแพร
C'Game Supawit Tantimaporn	ซีเกมส์ สุภวิชญ์ ดันติมากรณ์	Farm	ฟาร์ม
Prae Ploy Chalida Suttitasatham	แพรพลอย ชลิดา สุทธิทศธรรม	Miki	มิกิ
Tem Khamphree Noomnoi	เต็ม คัมภีร์ นุ่มน้อย	Phubet	ภูเบศร์

APPENDIX VII – Other Actor and Character Names in Roman and Thai Script

DRAMA SERIES ACTORS AND CHARACTERS			
Actor [Roman]	Actor [Thai]	Character [Roman]	Character [Thai]
รักแห่งสยาม LOVE OF SIAM			
Mario Maurer	มาริโอ้ เมาเร่อ	Tong	โต้ง
Witwisit Hiranyawongkul	วิชญ์วิชิต หารัษฎ์กุล	Mew	มีว
เดือนเกี้ยวเดือน 2MOONS THE SERIES			
God Itthipat Thanit	ก็อต อธิพัทธ์ ฐานิตย์	Pha Phana Kongthanin	ป่า พนา ก้องธานีรินทร์
Bas Suradet Piniwat	บาส สุระเดช พิณีวัตร์	Yo Wayo Panitchayasawad	โย วาโย พาณิชยสวัสดิ์

APPENDIX VIII – Relevant Staff and Production Names in Roman and Thai Script

DRAMA SERIES PRODUCTION STAFF				
Drama Series Title	Staff [Roman]	Staff [Thai]	Role	Other Name
เลิฟซิก เดอะซีรีส์ รักอุ่น วยุ่นแสบ [Love Sick the Series]	Kwang Latika Chumphu	กวาง ลติกา ชุมภู	Author	INDRYTIMES
	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul	นิว ศิวัจน์ สวัสดิ์มณีกุล	Asst. Director	
	Boy Sompob	บอย สมภพ	Singer	
บิ่งเอิญรัก [Love by Chance]	Orawan Vichayawannakul	อรวรรณ วิชญวรรณกุล	Author	MAME12938
	New Siwaj Sawatmaneekul	นิว ศิวัจน์ สวัสดิ์มณีกุล	Director	
	Boy Sompob	บอย สมภพ	Singer	
SOTUS พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปี หนึ่ง [SOTUS the Series]	Ploy Ploybutsara Patarapornpisit	พลอย พลอยบุษรา ภัทรพร พิสิฐ	Author	BITTERSWEET
อกหักมารักกับผม [Together with Me]	Dem Thanutnun Vitsivakul	เต็ม ธนัตนันทน์ วิทย์วิระกุล	Author	++saisoo++

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