



Centre for Translation Studies

**THE SUBTITLING AND DUBBING INTO CHINESE  
OF MALE HOMOSEXUAL AND *LADYBOYS*' ROLES  
IN THAI SOAP OPERAS**

Jooyin Saejang

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**Supervisors:** Prof. Jorge Díaz Cintas & Dr Claire Shih



## **Declaration**

I, Jooyin Saejang, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

Thailand, acclaimed as one of the friendliest queer paradises by international tourists, has established firm bilateral economic and cultural relations with China, whose authorities embody one of the most sexually conservative mentalities in the world. Two of the most recognised Thai queer identities, i.e. *kathoey*, also known internationally as *ladyboys*, and gay men, are widely present in Thai audiovisual media such as TV shows and soap operas. Conversely, Chinese media authorities maintain a firm control over production, distribution, and screenings of queer-themed audiovisual content. Yet, despite the state-imposed ban on queer presence in media, China has imported numerous Thai audiovisual productions, especially soap operas featuring the two aforementioned queer characters. Against a backdrop of the Chinese government crackdown on media representation of queer identities and Thailand's highly visible gay men and so-called *ladyboys* in audiovisual media, the question thus arises as to how the aforementioned queer characters are, through the practices of dubbing and cybersubtitling – fansubbing – represented to the Chinese target audience. By extrapolating Harvey's (1999) theorising of camp talk to the Thai queer speech style in the chosen corpus, this research discovers a number of linguistic and extra-linguistic changes made to the original Thai productions. In the two Chinese commercially dubbed Thai soaps, the combination of linguistic and extra-linguistic manipulation is employed to shift the representation of the queer roles in a manner that they can be understood as being straight characters. The Chinese-fansubbed productions, on the other hand, remain free from audiovisual manipulation and their queer characters are presented as such, even though their camp talk, once subtitled into Chinese, is considerably watered down.



## Impact Statement

As one of the liveliest queer cultural hubs, Thailand boasts a large number of queer populations, especially the so-called *ladyboys*, or *kathoey* in Thai, and gay men, whose presence is highly visible, making frequent appearances in media and public spaces. To date, they have been the subjects of many academic studies that investigate their self-perception and public perception. Curiously, however, few have looked into how their high visibility in the media contributes to such perceptions, considering that so much of one's views and attitudes is shaped by, indeed, the media. When Thai soap operas featuring the aforementioned queer identities enter China, a country where the expressions of such queer identities have been openly banned and suppressed in both media and public discourses, it thus raises a question that urgently needs exploring, that is, how the presence of Thai queer identities might be received and perceived by the Chinese audience. Guided by the overarching question, the thesis uncovers the linguistic and extralinguistic manipulations in the Chinese-dubbed Thai originals facilitated by dubbing, an audiovisual translation mode popularly employed as a tool for censorship. And although, in the Chinese-fansubbed products, such manipulations are not present, fansubbing still should not be taken as void of ideological interference. This research topic has charted into a territory long overlooked by academic circles, on the one hand. On the other, it hopes to alert the wider society, as everyday consumers, to the perceptual effects that media has on us, especially in the face of the expanding pro-LGBT global movement.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT) as a profession has been in existence for as long as the provenance of cinema (Díaz Cintas, 2012: 280). It was not, however, until around the end of the twentieth century that academic inquiry into the subject area finally burgeoned as a result of “the digital revolution of the 1990s and the solid establishment of translation as an academic and research subject at university level” (ibid.). Since then, numerous AVT scholars have widened the scope of research on AVT by tapping into other neighbouring disciplines, among them, Gender Studies. Bearing in mind that academic work fusing the two is still underexplored to say the least, despite some recent developments in this interdisciplinary area of scholarship, this research project hopes to add to the dearth of literature and opens up new stimulating discussions on the interplay between gender and audiovisual translation.

### 1.1 Research aim

As postulated by von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández (2018: 296), “[f]eminist theorization and activism are the precursors to gender studies”. Indeed, feminist criticism and advocacy were the stimuli which spurred the development of gender studies and have “entered translation studies from the 1980s onwards” (ibid.). At first, gender issues, especially those concerning feminism, were addressed in literary translations only. It was not until as late as the early 2000s that gender-related theories have been applied to the specific case of AVT. To the two scholars’ minds, this “progress has been slow” (ibid.), with which I strongly concur.

Almost two decades have passed since the first academic exploration of gender in audiovisual translation, but studies which join these two disciplines together are still predominantly concentrated in feminist thinking with relatively much less attention being paid to what von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández (ibid.: 299) term “non-binary gendered behaviours, identities and cultures”. According to the two scholars:



[c]urrently, there seem to be three main approaches to studying questions of gender in audiovisual products. All three derive from the critical feminist thinking of the 1970s and display a certain advocacy: the first focuses on feminist materials in Anglo-American audiovisual products and their translation into Romance languages; the second studies the differences between subtitled and dubbed versions of Anglo-American source texts; and the third looks at gay and queer source text materials and their treatment in translation. (ibid.: 300)

To date, the most developed approach is undoubtedly the first kind, which mainly “examines translated audiovisual materials for the accuracy with which they reflect feminist content and nuance” (ibid.). Chiaro (2007), Bianchi (2008), Feral (2011a, 2011b), M. De Marco (2006, 2012, 2016), A. De Marco (2013), and Yuan (2016) are among the contributors of academic studies to the gender angle on AVT. Works by some of the aforementioned scholars such as Feral (2011b) also overlap with the second approach, which looks into how the choice of either dubbing or subtitling is aimed at different groups of target audiences. In comparison with the previous two approaches, the third line of research, which focuses on “non-binary sexual orientations and their linguistic representation in/through translation” (von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández, 2018: 302), is rather underexplored. Studies such as the ones conducted by Lewis (2010), Ranzato (2012), Villanueva-Jordán (2015), and Chagnon (2016) fall into this third category.

Notably, all of the contributions previously mentioned prevalently investigate English source texts. While Lewis (2010) and Ranzato (2012) discuss how the original queer content in English is often neutralised, erased, or even rendered heteronormative in the target languages under scrutiny, namely, Spanish, Italian as well as Portuguese, Chagnon’s (2016) writing explores the accentuation of gay elements by the Canadian-French dubbing of US audiovisual productions. Only a modicum of academic interest has been put into the research of non-English audiovisual originals so far, which has resulted in studies by Asimakoulas (2012), Hiramoto (2013), and Josephy-Hernández (2017). Still, English has not been left out of the picture as the latter three contributions put under their analytical microscope non-English audiovisual source materials which have been translated *into* English. Baumgarten’s (2005) and Bosseaux’s (2008) academic articles, again, place US audiovisual productions under scrutiny even though they

do not fit in with any of the three foregoing approaches to the study of gender in audiovisual content.

Thus far, suffice it to say that academic application of gender-related theories to AVT has been rather Anglo-American-centric, with English language audiovisual productions, especially those from the US, making up most of the source texts into which the interdisciplinary research is conducted. It is therefore my wish to shift the academic focus away from Anglo-American cultural products and to extend the critical application of gender theory to the practice of audiovisual translation from such a lesser-known language as Thai to Chinese, which has inspired and given rise to the current thesis. In the face of the worldwide dominance of media entertainment hailing from Hollywood, it is all the more important to carve out a space in recognition of sociocultural multiplicity and to diversify our sociocultural awareness. In fact, Hollywood cannot be said to monopolise the cultural output anymore, especially now that the transnational flow of cultural products is no longer one-directional from Hollywood as *the* starting point to other cultures: even a streaming service giant like Netflix is now looking to produce more original shows in languages other than English (Collins, 2018). This is particularly noticeable in Asia, where the interchange of cultural goods and services has become more intracontinental.

Specifically, in the case of China, the presence of Thai audiovisual offerings has lately been quite prominent, with a number of Thai TV shows and movies gaining popularity from the Chinese viewership, thanks to the trail blazed in 2009 by a Thai soap entitled สงครามนางฟ้า [*Songkram Narng Fah: Battle of the Angels*]. The based-on-a-true-story Thai soap opera was so rapturously received by the Chinese audience that it subsequently prompted an influx of Thai soap operas into China. Notable is the fact that Thai TV productions almost invariably feature at least a *kathoey* or homosexual man, most likely because they constitute the most visible queer identities in the Southeast Asian nation. Paradoxically, though, China is vehemently opposed to queer presence in the media and the government makes no secret of its suppression and censorship of queer portrayals. This raises the overarching research question as to how the aforementioned queer characters are, through the practices of commercial

dubbing and cybersubtitling – fansubbing –, represented to the Chinese target audiences, both linguistically and extralinguistically.

As posited by Díaz Cintas (2012: 284), that “what is translated, and how it is translated, is determined by the interest and structure of the host target cultural system”, it should thus be safe to presume that, with the Chinese state-imposed ban on queer depiction in media steadfastly in place, some form of manipulation, either on a linguistic or extralinguistic level, must have taken place in the commercial dubbing – overseen by the Chinese media regulators – of the target texts. Indeed, as put forth by Lefevere (1992: 39), “on every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to win out”. Notwithstanding the scholar’s exclusive reference to literary texts, “it would seem legitimate to assume that the same state of affairs is true in the case of audiovisual materials” (Díaz Cintas, 2012: 284). In fansubbing, one of the multiple translation activities taking place in the cyberspace (Díaz Cintas, 2018), the same manipulation might also be observed, seeing that the Chinese nationwide ban on queer portrayals is not only limited to foreign audiovisual productions broadcast on Chinese TV, but it applies, too, to audiovisual content distributed and in circulation online. However, it remains to be seen whether the Chinese censorial board’s tentacles have reached into every nook and cranny of the vastness of the Internet.

It is, first and foremost, with this conviction that I initiated this research project and, secondly, with my determination to broaden the academic horizons in the crossdisciplinary field of gender studies and audiovisual translation. As I laid out above, the majority of such interdisciplinary studies mainly look into American filmic and TV originals, to which they apply a feminist reading. Few have dealt with gender issues – whether feminist or queer – in non-English audiovisual source texts. Worse still, the interdisciplinary scholarship which draws on non-English source and target texts is even fewer and farther between. This thesis, thus, was born out of my attempt to fill the gaping hole in academia.

On a final note, the questions underlying this research, which will be addressed, are as follows:

(1) how is the representation of Thai queer male identities, i.e. *kathoey* and homosexual men who appear in Thai soap operas, manipulated, both linguistically and extralinguistically, in the audiovisual productions that have been commercially dubbed and broadcast in China?

(2) Can any form of manipulation – linguistic or extralinguistic – be detected in the Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas that are available exclusively online?

(3) Between the years 2009 and 2016, has the treatment of queer characters in both the Chinese-commercially dubbed and Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas seen any change for better or for worse?

## 1.2 Scope and material

Before I outline the content of each chapter that follows, the definitions of certain terms used throughout this thesis should be provided for the purpose of mutual understanding. Most significant is the term “queer”, whose connotations have evolved quite considerably over the past centuries. Originally used pejoratively by heterosexual people to refer to homosexual people in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has since the 1980s been reclaimed by activists and homosexual collectives to establish solidarity within the queer community and to “deprive it of its negative power” (Oxford English living Dictionaries: online). At present, the term has come to “have broader connotations, relating not only to homosexuality but to any sexual orientation or gender identity not corresponding to heterosexual norms” (ibid.). “Queer”, therefore, is employed in this thesis broadly and generally in its latest sense, that is, to refer to any sexual orientation or gender identity that does not conform to heterosexual norms. It should be noted, however, that since the foci of the current research topic consist of two most visible queer identities in Thailand, namely *kathoey* and gay men, the term “queer” may, under certain circumstances, be used in a narrower sense to refer only to the two queer identities in question.

In addition to “queer”, another term or, to be more precise, initialism to look out for is LGBT. Standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the initialism

has entered mainstream usage as an umbrella term to refer to anyone who is not heterosexual, rather than exclusively to the non-heterosexual identities it nominally represents. LGBTQ, a similar initialism with the addition of queer, has likewise come to encompass a myriad of non-heteronormative identities. Owing to the fact that some scholarly works cited in the current research project adopt the formerly discussed term, while some others deploy the latter two, the three terms are hence to be used interchangeably, when their subjects are being discussed, depending on the term chosen by the author(s) of the study being referenced.

Now that the usage of the two terms has been cleared up, the attention will be paid to the structure of the thesis, including its overall scope and the material under scrutiny. To begin with, in order to answer the research questions of the thesis, it is crucial to first and foremost have a grasp of how these queer identities are originally presented in Thai media. The literature review in Chapter 2 thus traces the portrayals of *kathoey* characters on the Thai silver screens from its inception to its golden era at which point, an independent genre of its own, called *kathoey* movies, was born. The appearance of *kathoey* individuals on Thai TV is discussed to boot. Also featured in the second chapter is the review of the introduction of gay men to both the silver and small screens, which in turn warrants a brief summary of how these two gender categories are defined in the context of Thailand. In parallel with the discussion on the visibility level of queer individuals in Thai public and media, a critical overview of the queer landscape in China is also offered. In the latter section, Chinese domestic queer-themed productions are reviewed to provide a bigger picture of how, indeed, visibly queer identities are able to express themselves in Chinese media in comparison to the Thai counterparts.

At first, *kathoey* and gay men were almost exclusively featured as comic relief. In recent years, however, a new trend in the representation of these two queer identities has been noted, as they have been depicted in a more nuanced and multi-dimensional light in Thai TV products, where their queerness serves to add complexity to the plot and to move it forward. Meanwhile, in Thai cinema, portrayals of queer characters are still mostly for humorous effects, with the exception being what Ünaldi (2011: 65) terms “The Second Wave of Thai Queer

Cinema”, which refers to a series of Thai films, released between 2000 and 2007, that have approached the representation of queerness with authenticity.

On the other hand, China, notwithstanding its purported indifference towards queer collectives, has been openly opposed to queer presence in Chinese media and public spheres, with the government’s reiteration in 2015 of its 1997 broadcast guidelines banning queer representation in media across the board. In the revamped dictate-like guidelines, homosexuality has, for good measure, been lumped in together with acts of sexual immorality like sexual harassment, sexual assault, and incest. In light of the expansive reach of digital media and technology, however, it is somewhat impractical, if not impossible altogether, for the Chinese media regulators to monitor every corner of the Internet, where queer expressions seem to have flourished off the Chinese government’s radar. Thai queer-themed audiovisual productions and Chinese queer-themed documentaries have enjoyed cautious circulation online. Ironically, although China stands in stark contrast with Thailand when it comes to the freedom of queer self-expression, the two countries appear to converge in their failure to legally recognise and promote queer rights.

In Chapter 3, Thai audiovisual productions that have entered China are explored alongside the Chinese mediascape. It further traces the evolution of the Chinese television industry and its broadcast policies which have immediate, direct relevance to the importation of foreign audiovisual offerings into China. Notably, Thailand has gradually surpassed Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea as the chief provider of audiovisual productions to Chinese TV stations, despite the ubiquity of queer characters in Thai soap operas. The sudden rise to popularity of Thai soaps in China has given birth to many a Thai soap fansubbed by amateur translators and distributed exclusively online. The choice of Thai audiovisual products imported into the East Asian country is dictated by various broadcast regulations, hence the discussion of said restrictions.

While Chapter 2 gives a very broad overview of queer visibility on Thai TV, Chapter 3 goes one step further by looking into the long-standing formula that constitutes a Thai soap opera and how it has evolved over the years. Typically, a Thai soap opera consists of: (1) male protagonist; (2) female protagonist; (3)

male and/or female antagonists. Another indispensable character in a Thai soap is (4) *kathoey*, who has been diachronically featured as a humorous sidekick. Meanwhile, a gay character is usually present as a conflict provoker to the progression of the story. To better illustrate the evolution of *kathoey* and gay roles in Thai drama, a list of Thai soap operas featuring these two queer identities, and released between 2008 and 2015, is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4 delves into the two primary modes of audiovisual translation, namely dubbing and subtitling, and explores their respective evolution in China, including their official and unofficial entities, and the basis on which each mode is deployed. In recent years, new forms of dubbing have emerged as by-products of the flourishing digital age, that is, live interpreting-cum-commentary and fandubbing. The former involves a Chinese live streamer, who is in charge of interpreting and commentating on the spoken dialogue of the foreign show being live streamed, hence the name interpreting-cum-commentary. The latter, on the other hand, is brought about by, firstly, the disappointment on the viewers' part at the subpar quality of commercial dubbing and, secondly, by the fandubbers' will to voice sociopolitical criticisms in the form of entertainment. Meanwhile, due to the colossal size of China, the country has birthed a countless number of fansubbing groups who devote their time and language skills to a specific artist or media genre of their choice. Furthermore, as a result of China's innumerable linguistic variations, which accompany, again, its geographical vastness, *Putonghua* or Chinese Mandarin has been promoted by the government as the standard spoken language in the media. Consequently, the two modes of audiovisual translation are systematically utilised intralingually to 'translate' domestic filmic and TV products.

In Chapter 5, the methodological process with which the thesis is structured is chronicled, including an explanation of the criteria used in the selection of the audiovisual corpus under analysis. The corpus is comprised of two Chinese-commercially dubbed and two Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas, bringing the total number of Thai soap operas to be analysed to four. Also featured in the chapter is a detailed discussion of the methodological tool, that is discourse analysis, with which the analysis is conducted. However, since the discourse in question is a speech style unique to queer speakers, or what is termed "camp

talk” by Harvey (1998), the analysis is carried out by extrapolating the academic’s theorisation of English and French camp to Thai camp in the context of this research. Moreover, although the scholar identifies camp with “a whole range of homosexual identities” (ibid.: 295), for inclusivity purposes, the application of his camp talk in this thesis also extends to the diversity of heterosexual queerness existing in the Thai queer context. In this chapter, camp micro-level and macro-level functions as well as camp characteristics, such as the use of hyperbole, the practice of renaming and the emphatics of camp, are explained in detail.

Chapter 6 constitutes the analysis of the corpus by applying Harvey’s (1998) theorising of camp talk fleshed out in Chapter 5. The chapter begins with a brief introduction of camp talk. Then, it moves on to the analysis, individually, of the two Chinese-fansubbed soap operas, and the two-Chinese commercially dubbed soap operas, respectively. Finally, to provide a fuller picture of how, if at all, the treatment of Thai soap operas in each audiovisual translation mode has seen any change from 2009 to 2016, the chapter also presents a short comparison between the officially dubbed and fansubbed productions. The findings of the analysis are summarised in Chapter 7. It also brings previous chapters to bear on the results of the analysis and sheds some light in potential future research avenues. The thesis concludes with a bibliography that contains all the works referenced in this research project.



## Chapter 2

### Queer Identities in Audiovisual Media

As one of the most fundamental elements in audiovisual media, academic discussion about translation and gender has arrived relatively late to the scholarly scene. Works by, for instance, von Flotow (1991, 1997) and Simon (1996), among others, have been at the forefront in the development of gender issues in literary translation while the nexus between gender and media has received some attention from such researchers as Gill (2007), Gymnich et al. (2010), and Ross (2012), to name but a few. However, it was not until much later in the early 2000s that the academic vacuum left by the cross-disciplinary research on gender and audiovisual translation was spotted and has now been gradually, albeit still modestly, filled by a handful of audiovisual translation specialists like Santaemilia (2005), Feral (2011b), and De Marco (2012).

That said, none of the academic exploration has been invested in gender-related issues in the audiovisual translation of Thai productions so far. Considering that Thailand is so renowned for its spread and visibility of queer identities it seems appropriate to address such a topic from an academic perspective, since it involves and affects a large number of people in the nation. Thus, in order to fill the discursive gap, this section will provide a blanket overview of discourses surrounding LGBT/queer identities, with a specific focus on male homosexuality and transgender/transsexualism, including their presence and audiovisual representation in Thailand and China.

#### 2.1 Introduction to Thai queer identities

Before I delve into the acceptance of the queer groups in Thailand, it is worth noting that the local perception of gender diversity is as complex and inconsistent as it is with the acceptance itself. And since queerness, *kathoey* and male homosexuality in particular, constitutes the foundation of the thesis, this section delivers a concise yet self-contained glimpse into some of the most prominent queer identities to be found in Thailand. Nonetheless, in order to keep it as

relevant to the research topic as possible, special attention will be paid to *kathoey* and gay men.

First of all, Jackson's (2000; 2003; 2013) academic work, which thoroughly and extensively explores the dynamics of gender and sexual diversity in Thai society, can provide us with important insights into the matter. Jackson persistently maintains throughout his past and most recent scholarly writings that unlike the Western discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality the Thai term *phet*, whose closest English translation is possibly 'eroticized gender', incorporates the English categorization of 'sex', 'gender', and 'sexuality' all at once (Jackson, 2000: 409-414). Having spent many years in Thailand conducting anthropological fieldwork, Jackson (ibid.: 414-415) maintains that:

within this local discourse, *gay* and *kathoey* are not distinguished as a sexuality and a gender, respectively. Rather, *gay* and *kathoey*, together with 'man', 'woman', *tom* and *dee*, are collectively labelled as different varieties of *phet*.

The conceptualisation of these Thai gendered/sexed identities is contingent on blending the varying degrees of masculinity and femininity that one possesses (Jackson, 2011: 3), and it is only after one is measured against the gender continuum of being 100% masculine at one end and 100% feminine at the other that one's erotic preference can be determined (Jackson, 2000: 415). Following the aforementioned gender/sexuality assignment criteria correctly observed by Jackson, the number of existing *phet* identities known to the Thai masses was estimated to be, despite a lack of general consensus on the official figure, seven, namely: (1) ผู้ชาย [phu-chai: man], (2) เกย์คิง [gay king: sexually penetrative gay men], (3) เกย์ควีน [gay queen: sexually receptive gay men], (4) กะเทย [*kathoey*], (5) ทอม [*tom*: short for *tomboy* and refers to butch lesbians], (6) ดี [dee: short for *lady* and refers to femme lesbians] and (7) ผู้หญิง [phu-ying: woman] (ibid.: 413). As can be easily observed, the majority of Thai *phet* listed above like *gay king*, *gay queen*, *tom*, and *dee* derived their names from the English language. What is more, after an eighteen-year gap between Jackson's 2000 work evaluating the total of *phet* identities in Thailand and my current research, most of the seven types of *phet* remain largely relevant to this day as they are still in the Thai public imagination

of *phet* with the exception of *gay king* and *gay queen* being the only two *phet* that have been replaced in correlation with sexual positionings, the point of which will be expanded on below, and with the addition of bisexuality.

Strikingly, while male-to-female transgenders and transsexuals were, and still are, “called *kathoey*”, as pointed out by Jackson (2000: 410), “no colloquial expression has been coined for female-to-male transsexuals other than the awkward descriptive phrase *ying plaeng phet pen chai* (‘a woman who changes *phet* to a man’). Furthermore, Thai lesbians are confronted with a similar fate as they take pains to “coin a range of new labels that more appropriately reflects the gendered diversity of their lives” (Jackson, 2011: 4), save the lengthy *ying ruk ying* which literally means women who love women. In an effort to fill the Thai referential void, the English term *lesbian*, sometimes shortened to just ‘les’, has been adopted in common usage to identify women who are sexually attracted to women. This enduring scarcity of home-grown references to the blooming variety of queer female populations attests to the complexity of gender hierarchy on Thai soil, which in turn has ripple effects on the public’s perceived acceptability of each of these queer groups (all of which will be thoroughly explored in section 2.2). Meanwhile, to determine the position of bisexuals, called ไบ [bi: bisexual] or เสือไบ [seua bi: bi tiger] in Thai, on the seven-category gender continuum is rather problematic since their sexuality is sometimes conflated with the *phet* ‘man’ and is at other times considered separate types of *phet* (Jackson, 2000: 413), while female bisexuality has been disregarded by the general public altogether (see section 2.2).

Although bisexuality, male or female, has far too often been confounded with heterosexuality in the local discourse, to be inclusive, it will be added to the original seven *phet* to create an eight *phet* continuum. Whether it is seven or eight, it should still be noted that fundamentally each presents a fluid boundary of definition that might at times overlap with each other or be deemed entirely independent from the remainder. According to Costa and Matzner (2007, in Tan, 2014: 146), *kathoey*, for example, “can refer to one or more of the four dimensions, that of appearance (superficial crossdressing), sex (hermaphroditism), gender identity (transformation towards femaleness) and sexual desire (homosexuality)”. *Kathoey* is also frequently employed in daily conversation as a put-down of gay

men. The usage of the term *kathoey* in the Thai soap operas featured in this study aptly reflects such multi-faceted denotations.

To sum up, *kathoey* as a *phet* encompasses a wide range of heterosexual/homosexual queerness including: (1) a masculine biological male who crossdresses and uses female markers as a self-reference in speech;<sup>1</sup> (2) a biological male who wears make-up and linguistically refers to oneself as a woman but is manly clothed; (3) a biological male who does not necessarily wish to become a woman, wears men's clothing but exhibits effeminate gestures; (4) a biological male who wishes to become a woman and embraces all forms of femininity – such as taking female hormones and wearing make-up – but has not undergone sex reassignment surgery; (5) a post-operative transsexual woman. Although no English equivalent of *kathoey* has been found or invented for that matter, hitherto, the domestically coined *ladyboy* has long been in usage as a Tenglish parallel to the Thai *kathoey phet* (Tan, 2014: 147). To be emphasised, however, is the fact that “it has the connotation of involvement in the sex industry” (ibid.: 146).

Generally speaking, the category *gay* refers only to gender-normative men who are sexually attracted to men. However, like *kathoey*, this *phet*, as pointed out by Käng (2012: 478), “is polysemic in everyday use, variously referencing effeminacy, masculinity, or sexual versatility in different contexts”. Occasionally, one will come across a Thai gay man who insists that he is not gay but he is a man. In cases like this, he equates being gay with being effeminate, hence the assertion that he is not gay (ibid.). As mentioned briefly above, once branching off into the subgroups *king* and *queen*, now the *phet* ‘gay’ is broken down into three subtypes, that is รุก [rook: top] รับ [rub: bottom], and โฉม [bot: both, versatile] based on a gay man's preferred sexual position (ibid.: 477). As with the old paradigm of the *phet* gay, *gay rook* is sometimes likened with gender-normative presentation, while *gay rub* amounts to being the behaviourally effeminate party to a male same-sex relationship. In the eyes of straight outsiders, without a

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<sup>1</sup> One of the characteristics of the Thai language is that it marks the speaker as male or female by the choice of certain pronouns and ending particles.

gender-normative homosexual male partner or *gay rook*, a *gay rub* might be referred to as *kathoe*.

According to the Thai conceptions of *kathoe* and *gay* described above, it is evident that these two seemingly distinct types of *phet* are bound to overlap. Indeed, that some queer characters in the chosen Thai soap operas to be analysed in these pages are alternately marked as *kathoe* and *gay* serves to additionally and emphatically prove the point. On account of the blurry divide between *kathoe*ness and *gay*ness in the local discourse, the *phet* of each queer character will be identified in accordance with either the narrative of the story, the character's self-identification or external identification, or both factors combined.

## 2.2 Level of social visibility and acceptance in Thailand

In the eyes of the international tourist public, Thailand is hailed as the friendliest gay paradise (Jackson, 1999). Not long after the end of World War II, the emergence of various gender identities and sexualities including *gay*, *tom-dee* (the Western equivalents of butches and femmes), and *kathoe* individuals was more greatly and widely felt than ever in the history of Thailand (Jackson, 2011). A quick casual Google search for a trip to Thailand might not instantaneously turn up LGBT-targeted destinations, yet the names of some LGBT entertainment locales or events are undoubtedly familiar to many foreign visitors eyeing the nation dubbed the Land of Smiles.

This is due to the fact that travelogues and online travel guides aimed at overseas nightlifers for an escape to Thailand never fail to enumerate some of the Southeast Asian nation's biggest draws on the gay scene. Today, as claimed by Jackson (ibid.), the city of Bangkok remains unparalleled as the cultural hub of queer presence. Thai go-go bars and cabaret shows offered by *kathoe* performers are not unfamiliar to the holidaymakers and, sometimes, they are even sought after by all types of tourists. In fact, one does not have to venture into those gay nightlife venues to become aware of the ubiquity of homosexual and transgender populations in Thailand.

As a matter of normalcy, Thailand's Miss Tiffany's Universe beauty pageant, whose exclusive eligible participants have to be *kathoey*, is held every year in mid May. Gay men and *kathoey* are widely engaged in a variety of Thai TV shows, making appearances as guests, judges, or main characters, for example. Orn-napa "Ma" Krisadee, one of the best known media *kathoey* personalities in the country, played one of the three judges on *The Star*, the once most popular singing contest in Thailand, for eleven seasons in a row, not to mention that the other two judges are also not gender-normative as they are openly gay. And the model and actress Treechada "Poy" Petcharat, in the prime of her fame during the 2000s, incarnated physical attributes desired by biological women. Queer people from all walks of life mix and mingle with the wider cisgender Thai society. *Kathoey* who still bear male physical characteristics but dressed fully as women are not unusual sights in everyday life. In short, they are just as visible as their gender-normative counterparts.

Having said that, equating their high visibility with a corresponding level of social acceptance might prove to be problematic in the fight towards equal rights of these non-normative gender groups. It is true, to a certain extent, that Thai queer locals possibly enjoy greater leeway in public than their counterparts in some other corners of the world, like in China, without the need to conceal their gender identity or being banned entirely from appearing on media platforms. Their relatively high visibility in Thailand is granted, however, at the expense of the collective stereotypical imaginings of their identity, as argued by such Thai Studies academics as Winter and Udomsak (2002), Jackson (2011) and Tan (2014), among others. Since Thailand admittedly, albeit unwillingly, heavily relies its global recognition on sex tourism, most notably transgender sex entertainment, the individualistic and pluralistic identity of *kathoey* has thus oftentimes been reduced to a mere singular entity of homogenous nature, characteristics, desires and essence, by compatriots and foreigners alike.

In scrutinising the Orientalist gaze at *kathoey* by Occidental tourists, Tan (2014: 155) asserts that "although the commodification of *kathoey*'s bodies has allowed for a proliferation of transgender subjectivities", it has concomitantly agreed to "the construction of [*kathoey*] colonized subjects as fixed realities [...] that tourists can exert better control over predictable Otherness" (Bhabha, 1986, in Tan, 2014:

155). *Kathoey* performers are indeed expected to “self-orientalize in order to conform to particular touristic imageries – and in the process of doing so – perhaps deny a more authentic presentation of themselves” (Tan, 2014: 148). As a result, instead of promoting their non-normative gender authenticity and dismantling the “pre-existing stereotypes” surrounding them, as argued by some scholars like Tan (ibid: 153), the tourist-oriented assertion of their gender identity by these queer performers further deepens their pre-conceived hyper-sexualised persona in the tourist’s mind (ibid.: 153).

The promotion of their existence through Thailand’s tourism industry not only defeats its own purpose but those presupposed ideas about their identity also “serve as standards against which [the] visited culture is evaluated”, as foregrounded by Andsagar and Drzewieoka (2002: 403, in Tan, 2014: 153). Simply put, the high visibility of *kathoey* is restrictively prominent and discernible in the entertainment industry wherein they are either “typecast in popular culture as a comical caricature” or are perceived as a “hyper-(hetero)sexualized ‘second type of a woman’” (Totman, 2003, in Tan, 2014: 147).

As far as Thai popular discourses on gender performance go, non-straight individuals are still widely discriminated against in the occupational fields traditionally regarded as more societally valuable, rewarding and superior such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and legal domains, among others. This is not to gloss over the fact that some LGBT people (although merely a limited number of them) do make it into those ‘upper-class’ professional echelons and are able to sustain their career reasonably well (although, again, with a much slimmer chance of them ascending to top-level positions). However, there is no denying that the queer workers are tacitly bound to behave in such ways that fit in with the mould of culturally determined gender roles. Stereotypically, in Thailand and the world over, *kathoey* and gay men, in particular, are largely expected to thrive in the economy’s creative sectors, which they do, as affirmed by Kang (2012: 481), when he states that:

[m]any creative industries such as design and personal beautification are dominated by *kathoey* and effeminate gay, who are perceived as artistic and innovative, generating new trends in fashion, entertainment and slang.

*Kathoey* and gay men also account for a large number of freelance make-up artists for hire to ‘glam up’, for example, fresh graduates, brides-to-be, or beauty contestants prior to their graduation ceremonies, weddings, and, beauty contests respectively. It is debatable whether the vocational expectation is self-fulfilling because the majority of *kathoey* and gay men indeed possess an inherent flair for such artistic skills or because their ventures into other career paths are often met with disdain, causing them to retreat once again to their so-called ‘safe space’. Having conducted fieldwork and interviewed many a *kathoey* worker in Pattaya, Thailand’s hotspot for sex tourism, Ocha (2013: 89) arrives at the corroborative conclusion that the latter is the case or, in her own words, “[i]n Thailand, transgendered people still have limited employment prospects and find themselves channeled into entertainment and sex work”. Her *kathoey* interviewees additionally reported experiencing discrimination while applying for ‘mainstream’ jobs, with some even recounting being accused of forging their identification documents since their gender identities do not match their biological sex designated on their identification documentation (ibid.). More prevalently, they must align their gender presentation and expressions with their birth sex if they are to boost their chances of employment.

Thanks to the expansive outreach of the Internet, it is not uncommon these days to come across accounts of discrimination and prejudice displayed by human resources staff or recruiters against *kathoey* and effeminate gay applicants shared online. One such victim recounts how the HR staffer of a company, in which she (*kathoey* who self-identifies as woman) had applied for a job position, emailed her personally to ascertain whether she was indeed ‘a real woman or a *kathoey*’. Once informed that the applicant was a *kathoey*, the HR proceeded to reprimand her for having filed the application in the first place since “it is the company’s policy to not hire *kathoey*” (Khaosod, 2018: online).

For another instance, a heated debate was sparked online in April 2016, when a Facebook user called ลี สุมนต์รัตน์ [Lee Sumonrat] posted a recruitment flyer of Thailand’s largest industrial estate conglomerate Amata City Chonburi Industrial Estate along with a caption that read “Is this considered discriminatory? That *tom* and *kathoey* are not accepted” (Chaya, 2016: online, my translation). One of the required qualifications listed on the flyer reads “[being] *tom* and *sao praphet song*



[second type of women]<sup>2</sup> is not accepted” (ibid.). Although it should have been axiomatic this requirement is utterly prejudiced against *tom* and *kathoey* and the rhetorical caption should not have been warranted, it appeared that many commenters would beg to disagree, arguing to the effect that it is the company’s right to employ whomever they see fit, especially considering that *tom* and *kathoey* individuals are very irascible.

Ironically, when, in February 2017, a Facebook user who goes by the name Dulyaphat Mangkharat posted a status update lamenting her regret at being born *kathoey* and detailing how she was verbally abused by the faculty dean in the midst of a faculty meeting, which she had attended dutifully as a teacher, the status post elicited enormous outpourings of sympathy for her and outrage at the dean’s discriminatory attitudes (Post Today, 2017). As of July 2018, the status has received over 4,000 likes and 1,000 shares. Some of the jibes from which she suffered include: “Dulyaphat, you are a man, why are you dressed as a woman?”, “your name is that of a man”, “you have a dick, right? I will have your friend hold you still and I will strip off your skirt to see if you have a dick or a pussy” (ibid.: online, my translation). At the end of her post, Dulyaphat (ibid.) bemoaned that:

Since I was born, I have only met teachers that gave me love and warmth. But this time, I feel so worthless. I feel discouraged. My tears are falling as I am typing this. I’m not here to demand anything. Just sharing a side of my life that I have to face. I will call it an obstacle.

Such manifestation of cognitive dissonance, that is drastically opposing responses from strangers, evoked by two incidents of the same discriminatory nature or, in the latter case, outright transphobia, can be understood in conjunction with the structural inculcation of collective submission to higher authority and the complexities of acceptance vouchsafed to queer individuals in Thailand. In the first instance, the discriminatory ‘policy’ was issued by the company, be it parent or subsidiary, to whom well-behaved citizens of Thailand are supposed to submit for it is the rank-and-file members who need to adapt to the higher authorities, namely, their leadership, the system and the institution, not

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<sup>2</sup> The term “สาวประเภทสอง” [sao prophet song], literally meaning the second type of women, was more commonly, and occasionally is, used in reference to *kathoey*.

the other way around. The most common line of reasoning voiced by the company's sympathisers entails instructing potential applicants who are not happy with the company's 'policy' to go look for a job someplace else, where 'people like them' are welcome. Add to this the fact that those affected by the 'policy' are collective identities consisting of faceless members, instead of a flesh-and-blood individual and one would see why sympathy and understanding were not the first responses offered to the targeted victims of such prejudicial practice.

In the second case, on the other hand, the transphobic discrimination is explicitly fleshed out and affects an identifiable individual, not a mere impersonal collective group. Although, in this instance, the perpetrator similarly held a higher rank than the victim, his verbal abuse was seen as an individual act, rather than representative of the institution's stand on gender (in)equality, not to mention the fact that some of the dean's remarks were downright sexual harassment in plain sight. It also helped that Dulyaphat positioned herself as a helpless victim who 'knew' her place as a member of the minority populations, so she would not "demand anything" of the society (ibid.), certainly not any change to the way she should be treated on the grounds of her gender identity. With all these factors combined, it explains why Dulyaphat's experience of the prejudice invited much compassion and support in stark contrast to the general public's reactions to the earlier discriminatory 'policy'.

Matzner's (2001) small-scale but far-reaching writing can further shed light on the complexities of acceptance of *kathoeys* in Thailand. According to the author, the terms on which *kathoeys* are positively considered by society are not inherent. Employing in-depth individual interviews, focus group sessions and one questionnaire as methods to gauge Thai students' attitudes towards *kathoeys*, he came to the conclusion that their views on *kathoeys* are "heterogeneous and context-dependent" (ibid.: 73). In an attempt to clarify his findings, Matzner (ibid.: 77) compartmentalised his discussion into three sections based on "degrees of personal relationship: family, friend, and stranger".

Starting from kinship, every respondent uniformly expressed their regret at the prospect of having a *kathoeys* son, many of them asserted their intention to try to change their son back into a real man or, as some put it, solve "the problem" (ibid.:

79). In some real-life cases, where *kathoeys* are accepted by their parents (usually exclusively by the mothers, since fathers are more likely to just ignore their *kathoeys* child altogether as a result of immense distress and disappointment), their gender identity is nonetheless conceded with the repeatedly employed narrative of comfort, which goes along the following line: as long as their *kathoeys* offspring is a good person they will still love him/her. Sometimes, the narrative is also espoused by ambivalent onlookers who are torn between being compassionate and being 'righteous'. Other times, the self-justifying attitudes are proffered by *kathoeys* themselves.

One empirical example of such quasi-acceptance of *kathoeys* is best demonstrated by the sudden rise to stardom of Wonder Gay, a group made up of five *kathoeys* high-school students covering the choreography of the then South Korean hit song *Nobody* in 2009 (Käng, 2012: 485). Their cover video was uploaded to YouTube and garnered as many as five million views, "becoming the most popular YouTube cover song from Thailand" (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> Their out-of-the-blue fame earned them an invitation to an interview on *เจาะข่าวเด่น* [*Jor Kow Den: Breaking News in Focus*], an evening daily news talk show aired on Channel 3. In response to the widespread criticism that "they are inappropriately representing Thainess and that their popularity will encourage other boys to become sissy like them" (ibid.), individual group members insisted at different points throughout the entire interview that they were good students, they spent their down time well, they did not cause any trouble, and their dancing pastime in no way impeded their academic performances (ibid.: 485-486). As observed by Käng (ibid.), the highschool boys defend their morality through being good students and good teenagers.

The host, in an attempt to appear neutral to the issues at hand, also "establishes that they are good students" (ibid.: 485), wrapping up the show with a seemingly detached viewpoint, affirming that "[t]his group is still young. They don't look very mature like in the clip. They just get together and do what they like and now it depends on society whether to accept them or not" (ibid.: 486). As Käng (ibid.: 485) so aptly puts it, "the focus on academic performance as a measure of

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<sup>3</sup> The video was accessible (at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v.031N31B4EvM>) but has since been blocked at the request of JYP Entertainment on copyright grounds.

‘goodness’ presumes that their effeminacy is already corrupt and that what is at stake is Thai masculinity”. And, if I may add, the seemingly accepting yet subversive attitude implies, in a deeper sense, a compensatory function that *kathoey* have to fulfil in order to be considered worthy of acceptance.

In contrast to *kathoey* progeny, and considering them as a friend, the attitudes toward *kathoey* are largely positive with *kathoey*’s entertaining and funny nature cited as the main source of attraction for friendship building (Matzner, 2001). Also, to some women, it appears that *kathoey* are sometimes preferred as relationship gurus because they are considered to be possessing two minds, one of a man and the other of a woman, they thus supposedly “understand both sides of a partnership and [...] offer better counsel” (Käng, 2012: 481). On the flip side, straight women might be dismayed by the proliferation of *kathoey* as their existence is believed to cause “a shortage of ผู้ชายแท้” [puchai tae: real men] (ibid.), thereby reducing the eligible pool of potential husbands. Men, on the whole, find it less appealing to make friends with *kathoey* for they might risk getting accused of being closeted *kathoey* themselves (Matzner, 2001). This fear of being wrongly labeled *kathoey* is yet another symptom of what Käng (2012: 486) terms “Thai anxiety around lack of originality and masculinity”.

Of particular note is the mixed attitudes towards *kathoey* strangers, depending on various factors. In general, unknown *kathoey* are met with disapproval and fear since they are often seen as sexually aggressive and emotionally unstable; as a result, and according to Matzner (2001: 87), “the presumed unpredictability of *kathoey* temperaments can produce anxiety among non-*kathoey*”. Nevertheless, these negative reactions are not pertinent for “*kathoey* who met Thai standards for feminine beauty and behaviour” (ibid.: 88). In this regard, it is safe to say that there are clearly double standards at play when non-*kathoey* people, especially young Thai men, size up *kathoey*: when *kathoey* bear physical characteristics typical of men, they are held in contempt; but if *kathoey* are physically and behaviourally ladylike, they are then treated with admiration and sometimes even idolised.

On a broader societal level, typical Thais believe that *kathoey* are accepted in Thai society owing to their frequent representations in media, which, in turn,

enable their proliferation (Käng, 2012: 483). To this author, however, that *kathoey* appear regularly on TV only attests to their normalisation and not necessarily to acceptance on the part of official authorities. As a matter of fact, attempts were made by Thaksin Shinawatra's government during their term, in office from 2001 to 2006, to minimise and, at times, suppress media depictions of *kathoey* (ibid.: 480) for it was, and still occasionally is, believed that being *kathoey* was contagious and exposure to them would lead to an increase in the number of the *kathoey* population (ibid.: 480-485). Käng (ibid.: 480) reports that "since the September 2006 military coup that toppled the government of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, [...] there has been an explosion of more balanced and humane representations of *kathoey*". That being said, the transition did not automatically bring about absolute free rein on *kathoey* portrayals in media. Even to this day, "[p]opular media images that do not uphold Thai respectability or values are often suppressed by government censors", as affirmed by Käng (ibid.: 480), with *kathoey* being one of the occasional targets of the suppression.

While *kathoey* are perceived as a fixed and constant identity, being gay in Thailand is sometimes, to a certain degree, regarded as being fluid and socially introduced, as opined by a subject interviewed by Käng (2012) for his paper on Thai anxieties about male-bodied effeminacy. According to this individual:

It's easy to be gay now. Some gay people are born that way, but most are not. They are attracted to being gay. It's a glamorous lifestyle, so people want to try (Personal communication, 2009, in Käng, 2012: 482).

This viewpoint seems to resonate with a Thai gay interviewee of Jackson's (2011: 197), who averred that "I am too poor to be gay". In betraying such bitter sentiment, the northern homosexual Thai man accordingly unveiled "the consumerist lifestyle" (ibid.) usually associated with gayness. And "[s]ince being gay is easy, fun, popular, and freely-chosen, qualities that facilitate sexual re-orientation" (Käng, 2012: 482), to many Thai women, it "leaves open the hope for the possibility of converting gay into boyfriends" (ibid.), despite the fact that, similar to that of *kathoey*, the ubiquity of gay men is also viewed by some Thai maidens as detrimental to the shrinking pool of eligible bachelors.

Apart from *kathoey* and male homosexuals, Thailand is also home to an indeterminate number of lesbians and bisexuals. Unlike the former queer groups, however, the latter's relatively low public presence and underrepresentation in media have resulted in a dearth of research into social and personal acceptance of the lesbian and bisexual communities. In the case of Thai lesbians (*tom-dee*), their acceptability is inextricably linked with the rather popular yet misguided perceptions of their queerness impermanence. As Käng (2012: 491) points out, the pairing of *tom* and *dee* is "not considered threatening to normative gender in the same way that male same-sex couples do" since "at least in Bangkok, [...] they are often seen publicly holding hands as couples". In order to understand this paradoxical phenomenon, one needs to bear in mind that, first and foremost, outside a romantic relationship, *dee* are individually identified and self-identified as "ordinary women" (Sinnott, 2011: 208); it is only in relation to *tom* that the status of being a *dee*, aka a *tom*'s feminine partner, is singled out. In her contribution to *Queer Bangkok: Twenty-First-Century Markets, Media, and Rights*, Sinnott (ibid.: 209) provides quite a comprehensive description of what the identity *dee* entails:

"*dee*" is a loose term, and unlike "gay" is not a firmly established identity. Many of the women who may at times refer to themselves as *dee*, or be called *dee* by others, do not distinguish themselves from women in general. *Dee* is more of a situational and emerging category of identity that has not replaced the basic understanding of sexual desire as an extension of gender identity.

It is precisely the supposition that *dee*-ness is situational, transient, and, by extension, convertible into straightness which has rendered it easier to be accepted. In this respect, "tom-dee relationships may be tolerated only if they are seen as temporary and nonthreatening to marriage prospects" (Sinnott, 2004, in Ojanen, 2009: 13). *Tom* individually are, on the other hand, more vulnerable to bigotry and prejudice, particularly by straight men. This is again perhaps attributable to the aforementioned "Thai anxiety around lack of originality and masculinity" (Käng, 2012: 486) since the presence of *tom* likely induces in men the same fear of emasculation as being mistaken for *kathoey* does.

On the occasions *tom* are idolised, they for the most part meet Thai standards of beauty and behaviour. One of these examples is Lalana "Jeab" Kongtoranin, the

winner of Miss Thailand 2006, who was a medical student with a still feminine look when she partook in the pageant. Over the years, she has gravitated toward a more ‘tomboyish’ appearance, having her hair cut short and dressing like a man. It goes without saying that she must also be good-looking, as she was eligible for the beauty competition back in 2006. It was revealed very early on in her numerous interviews with news outlets that she wished to open a free clinic for underprivileged people; so, she entered the pageant in the hope that she would reach a wider audience who could both benefit from and join her in the charity endeavours.

Interestingly, in those same interviews, the latest of which was given as recently as July 2018 on *คุยแซ่บ Show* [*Kui Zab Show: Spicy Talk Show*],<sup>4</sup> she was invariably asked whether she was a *tom* or not, given her present boyish look. Time and again she maintained that she did not identify herself as *tom*, she was just Jeab Lalana. The 2006 pageant winner also disclosed that she had not changed her look as she had always been boyish, looks-wise, even before she took part in the competition; it was the beauty pageant which necessitated her physical and sartorial femininisation at the time. She further explained that she would date whomever she feels comfortable with, be it a man or a woman, but she admitted feeling more comfortable and open around the latter. While she could be more appropriately identified as bisexual, the general public has reached the consensus that she is a *tom*. As of August 2018, she is in a relationship with a younger woman, whom she has expressed her desire to marry. To summarise, her attractive appearance coupled with her philanthropic profile has aided her acceptability very much like how *kathoey* who conform to Thai beauty and behavioural standards are lionised.

The case of Dr Lalana “Jeab” Kongtoranin additionally epitomises the attitudes, or the lack thereof, towards bisexuals – female, in particular – in Thailand. Like homosexuality, bisexuality can be attributed to both males and females. The truism, however, is not widely known to the general Thai public, who seems to only register the presence of bisexual men, as substantiated by the labels *bi* (the Thai abbreviated form of the term bisexual), and เสือไบ [*seua bi: bi tiger*] which refer exclusively to males who engage in sexual activity with members of both

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<sup>4</sup> The episode is freely available on <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sq\\_oCpWFhY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sq_oCpWFhY)>.

sexes or various genders (Pramoj na Ayutthaya, 2008, in Ojanen, 2009: 10). In Thai, as a stand-alone word, เสือ [sua: tiger] is used metaphorically to refer to womanisers. In combination with *bi*, the metaphoric term denotes sexual promiscuity among men, which is deemed “more acceptable for males than it is for females” (Ojanen, 2009: 10), resulting in the exclusive acknowledgement of bisexual men and the collective obliviousness to bisexual women.

The widespread failure to properly recognise female bisexuality has consequently led to the absence of scholarly attention to the individuals belonging to this sexual category, save for a handful of studies carried out by Pramoj na Ayutthaya (2007, 2008), who is thought to be the pioneer of research into Thai bisexual diversity, Chonwilai (2013), and Ojanen (2009). Although none of the aforementioned academic writings deal with attitudes towards bisexual individuals, Chonwilai (2013: 178) does point out that in Thai society women who are sexually interested in both sexes and who were sexually involved with men, but are currently in a same-sex relationship, are prevalently viewed as going through a transitional phase, from straightness to homosexuality, or as externalising their situational homosexuality. Chonwilai (ibid.: 188, my translation) also highlights the fact that the designation เสือไบ [seua bi: bi tiger] is “more indicative of one’s ‘sexual behaviour’ than one’s ‘sexual orientation’ or ‘sexual identity’”. At this rate, therefore, it is probably safe to conclude that while the social acceptance of bisexuals remains uncharted territory, the common ground between bisexual men and women is that their bisexuality is mostly interpreted by outsiders as short-lived and situational, rather than a real manifestation of their sexual attraction to both sexes.

### 2.2.1 Queer activism in Thailand

On the political front, LGBT activism was initiated in the late 1980s by “small, pioneering gay and lesbian organizations” (Sanders, 2011: 230). Some of the more prominent political players included, but were not limited to, Anjaree, a pro-LGBT rights group founded by lesbian feminists in 1986, and Fraternity for AIDS Cessation in Thailand (FACT), the trailblazing organisation for gay rights founded three years later, in 1989. The broader LGBT movement was initially mobilised



by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and feminist campaigns, but “[o]nly gay-run HIV/AIDS organizations managed to secure ongoing funding, staff, and offices” (ibid.). Remarkably, 2007 has gone down in history as the most vibrant year of public LGBT activism in Thailand. As observed by Sanders (2011: 230-231):

Given the largely unorganized nature of the LGBT communities in Thailand, as compared to most Western countries, it was striking that, in 2007, a coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals and organizations became involved in public meetings and campaigns focused on the drafting of both a new national constitution and legislation to allow transsexual *kathoeys* to be identified in their post-operative sex. This coalition was called the Sexual Diversity Network (SDN), [...] and its degree of public activism was a new phenomenon in Thailand.

It is worth noting that in September 2006 a military coup overthrew Thaksin Shinawatra’s government and, soon afterwards, a Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) was formed and put in charge of reviewing the 1997 constitution (ibid.: 231). It was no coincidence that LGBT organisations’ political involvement in legislative change peaked immediately in the year after the 2006 putsch, as the military-appointed government sought to outwardly legitimise their seizure of power. As foregrounded by Sanders (ibid.), the welcoming of issues concerning LGBT groups in the national agenda was thus evidently one of the legitimising strategies to give the interim government a more progressive image.

The Sexual Diversity Network was assembled and sponsored by the National Human Rights Commission (ibid.: 240). Headed by Naiyana Suphapung, a lawyer activist, the NHRC and the SDN joined forces to lobby the CDA for LGBT causes (ibid.). The NHRC submitted their proposals for the constitutional revision to the CDA in May 2007, one of which put forward an “amendment to Section 30 of the 1997 constitution to include the words: ‘Men, women, and people of sexual diversities shall enjoy equal rights’” (ibid.). Exactly one month later, in June 2007, the proposal was rejected on the grounds of the term *sexual diversities*, which was deemed too ambiguous and elusive, as reported by Anjana Suvarnananda, founder of Anjaree, who was present at the debate before the vote was cast by the CDA membership (ibid.: 242).

Alisa Phanthusak, the managing director of Miss Tiffany’s Show in Pattaya, who was appointed to the CDA to represent Chonburi, the province whereby Pattaya

is administered, later had the proposal reconsidered by strenuously persuading one third of the CDA members to sign the appeal. This time, the proposed amendment was approved, thanks to a slight change in wording, from ความหลากหลายทางเพศ [khwam-lak-lai thang-phet: sexual diversities] to อัตลักษณ์ทางเพศ [attalak thang-phet: sexual identity] (ibid.: 242-243). The proposal to include either term in Section 30 of the 1997 Constitution, once passed, “would require the rape law to be extended to deal with the rape of males and [...] permit same-sex marriage and in this way extend inheritance rights”, stated Miew (in Sanders, 2011: 241), from the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand.

Unfortunately, as relayed by Sanders (ibid.: 243), “the rejection of the [Buddhism] state-religion proposal” on the same day reignited talks on “the ‘sexual identity’ issue”. Since “some NLA [National Legislative Assembly] members said they did not want to be seen as voting in favor of homosexuals and against Buddhism on the same day” (ibid.), a final vote was put forth to settle once and for all whether or not the term *sexual identity* should be added to Article 30 alongside the two birth *phet*, that is, male and female. The collateral damage that ensued was predictable, as the LGBT amendment was eventually defeated. The CDA later issued a document explaining the rationale behind the rejection as follows:

Difference in *phet*, in addition to meaning the differences between men and women, also denote the differences between individuals in sexual identity or gender or sexual diversity, which may be different from the *phet* in which the person was born. Consequently, the above are not specifically provided for in section 30 because the word *phet* already denotes the above meanings and the individuals within the above categories should not be discriminated against (ibid.: 244).

To summarise, “LGBT people were [already] protected by Article 30 (3) of the national constitution because the meaning of the term ‘*phet*’ cannot be interpreted as simply meaning physical sex. It is much broader” (ibid.). Although the two proposed linguistic modifications were met with repudiation, some took comfort from the fact that at least, for the first time, LGBT communities were assured of their existing legal protection against discrimination.

Another issue which came up later in the year 2007 was one which concerned the possibility for *kathoey* to change gender/title to female. In September 2007, a

number of LGBT activists consisting mostly of *kathoey* gathered at “a formal parliamentary subcommittee hearing on the female-titles issue” (ibid.: 246). The contentious discussion which arose during the meeting centred on the question of whether or not the title change should be available to all *kathoey* – pre-operative, non-operative, or post-operative. The final draft bill laying out post-operative transsexuals’ entitlement to female titles, provided by the hearing participants, was received by the Interior Ministry in October 2007 and eventually opposed. Needless to say, the female title change motion was, once again, rejected. The final verdict stands to this day; *kathoey*, or transsexuals for that matter – whether pre-, non-, or post-operative – are still unable to replace their male title with a female one. As remarked by Sanders (ibid.: 249), the flurry of LGBT-oriented political activity in 2007 was uniquely unprecedented with Naiyana Suphapung, commissioner of the NHRC, being a central figure behind the endeavours. Regrettably, however, none was effectively achieved in legal terms, seeing that no revisions were made in relation to the persistent lack of LGBT rights in the country.

In 2010, Yollada “Nok” Suanyot founded “the Trans Female Association of Thailand [สมาคมสตรีข้ามเพศแห่งประเทศไทย: samakhom satri kham-phet haeng prathet-thai],<sup>5</sup> which provides funding for gender confirmation surgery and advocates on behalf of post-operative transsexual women’s rights” (Käng, 2012: 487). Having witnessed the previously failed attempts at the push for the legal recognition of transsexual women, Nok resorted to the pathologisation of transsexualism so that those suffering from it would be entitled to medical treatment, which, in this case, referred specifically to sex reassignment surgery. By offering herself up as a case in point, since she herself is transsexual and has completed gender confirmation surgery, she contends that “she should be recognised as a complete woman” (ibid.). Following her discursive *modus operandi*, ultimately, “the right to change one’s sex would allow *kathoey* to legally marry and adopt children and facilitate international travel” (ibid.). In his private conversation with Nok on 2 March 2010, however, Käng (ibid.) was informed that “she does not believe she has a disease,

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<sup>5</sup> The foundation has since been renamed สมาคมบุคคลข้ามเพศแห่งประเทศไทย [Transsexual Association of Thailand].

but she is using therapeutic citizenship as her political strategy to get rights from the state”.

In support of her pathologisation discourse, Nok promotes the use of the term ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ [phuying kham-phet: trans female] in place of the more all-inclusive label *kathoeay*, in an attempt to “conceptually move *phuying kham-phet* from the sphere of *kathoeay* to that of women” (ibid.: 487-488). These tactics were not well received by *kathoeay* organisations, to say the least. First of all, the pathologisation of transsexualism was viewed as counterproductive to the ongoing efforts by เครือข่ายเพื่อนกะเทยไทย [khreua-khai pheuan kathoeay thai: the Thai Transgender Alliance (Thai TGA)] to have gender dysphoria removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)<sup>6</sup> and the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the *kathoeay* group regarded the introduction of *phuying kham-phet* as too narrow and potentially excluding those who have not undergone gender affirmation surgery (ibid.). As observed by Käng (ibid.: 487), “Thai TGA consciously chose the term *kathoeay* because of its broad applicability and as a means of reclaiming a positive valence for the term”.

All in all, the political stratagems seem to have done more damage than good, as summed up by Käng (ibid.: 488) as follows:

recasting transsexualism as a health condition requires Nok to create a clear boundary between transsexual and transgender, of which only the former can be helped medically. Furthermore, the rights Nok is seeking are reserved for those who are post-operative, leaving behind those transgendered individuals who do not seek surgery or those who cannot afford it (in 2011, her foundation paid for five surgeries). Re-signifying the *kathoeay* as “lady” obfuscates its negative moral valence while simultaneously supporting the modernist institutionalisation of two sexes.

One of the most recent developments in LGBT activism occurred in 2015, the year after, yet again, another Thai military coup d'état. A proposal to incorporate into a new constitution the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender

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<sup>6</sup> DMS is provided by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the latest, fifth version of which was published in 2013 and still classifies gender dysphoria as a mental illness.

<sup>7</sup> ICD is provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and is mainly used in Europe. The eleventh edition, released on 18 June 2018, still lists gender dysphoria as a mental disorder too.

identity and gender expression hit the headlines (Michaelson, 2015). This proposal is undoubtedly a natural extension of the 2007 constitution, which forbids discrimination solely on the basis of sex. In other words, it simply picked up where the 2007 (non)revised constitution left off. At last, in September 2015 the bill was passed and thus Thailand's first equality law, entitled Gender Equality Act, came into being (Salvá, 2016). More remarkably, "[i]t is the first national legislation in Southeast Asia to specifically protect against discrimination on the grounds of gender expression" (ibid.: online).

However, despite the passing of the equality law, Kathawut "Kath" Khangpi boon, transgender activist and co-founder of the Thai TGA, declared it "inconclusive", by enumerating that:

For example, section 17 says any act by the public and private sector that concerns the freedom, security, and protection of others, or in accordance with the rule of religion or national security, would not be considered an act of discrimination toward the LGBTI community (ibid.).

The clause, if implemented, can be used against LGBT people to deny them "equal access to employment [...] in virtually any circumstances, leaving the community unprotected" (ibid.). Certainly, the 'discriminatory recruitment flyer' incident detailed above would enjoy impunity from section 17 of the Act, if those discriminated against by the exclusionary qualifications were to take the case to court.

While Kath takes issue with such discrimination-exempt provisions, Michaelson is doubtful of the act's inclusion of all gender and sexual identities, arguing to the effect that this move has been misinterpreted, by Western media in particular, as being the Thai judiciary's intentional addition of legitimate generosity to the entire LGBT citizenry. To clarify, social and legal recognition of gay men and women's rights has been far greater than that of transgender people's in the United States – in contrast to Thailand where the opposite is true. As it stands, whereas the gender class of *kathoe*y has been in existence alongside Thai culture as far back into the past as the culture itself, a significant proportion of US population still do not believe transgender people really exist (Michaelson, 2015). The proposal and, by extension, the law are not purposefully directed at the LGBT

minority as a whole. Rather, it exhibits a transformative understanding of *kathoeys* “from recognized and stigmatized, to newly understood and newly protected” (ibid.).

Luckily enough, since the alteration of the constitution does not clearly enumerate the gender identities covered, the LGBTs can therefore capitalise on the loose language of the new jurisdiction to their advantage. The coincidental headway, as explained by Michaelson (ibid.), does not “necessarily translate into pro-gay policies”; gays, lesbians, and, unquestionably, bisexuals and transmen would certainly not be recognised legally any time in the near future, considering that they are newer to the gender diversity scene in Thailand. Michaelson’s observation about the Thai concentrated acknowledgement of *kathoeys* is probably best verified by the 2017 proposed amendment that “would allow Thai citizens to choose their gender, affecting their legal obligations, such as conscription” (Jotikasthira, 2017: online). Matalak Orungrote, an associate professor at the Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, believes that, if passed, the bill put forward jointly by Thammasat University’s Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Social Administration “will increase legal support for the LGBT community in Thailand” (ibid.). Upon closer inspection, however, it is clear that the only beneficiary of the proposed change is the *kathoeys* contingent, with perhaps female-to-male (FtM) transsexuals being the unintended reapers of the legislative benefits.

While it is true that in recent years Thai LGBT activists have succeeded, to a certain degree, in their efforts to push for LGBT legal protection and rights, the legal progress achieved hitherto is still far from being equal. The latest proposal is neither the ticket to the granting of other basic human rights to the entire LGBT communities, nor is it a magic formula for *kathoeys* to be instantly treated as equally human, despite being known and relatively accepted.

To simplify the complicated local perception of the gender minorities under discussion here, the gender identity of *kathoeys* is tolerated and distortedly accepted by Thai people to varying degrees, while also being better protected by law on account of their economic value and their long-standing involvement in Thai culture. On the other hand, Thai gays, lesbians, bisexuals and female-to-

male transsexuals continue to slip through the net of public and legal recognition as well as protection, with bisexuals, lesbians and female-to-male transsexuals primarily subjected to their exclusion from Thai media.

### 2.3 Level of social visibility and acceptance in China

Similar to the explosion in gender identities that took place in the 1980s Thailand, the 1990s urban China has also seen the proliferation of gender diversity. The phenomenon in China has born some resemblance to and difference from its counterpart in Thailand. While, first of all, Thailand is well aware of the existence of transpeople – especially transsexual women and the country-specific reference term *kathoey* – and, to a certain extent and under certain conditions, accepting of this gender minority's social position and identity, most of China is adamant that this gender category could not possibly be real, thereby refusing to grant them the recognition and, by extension, acceptance.

My casual communication with a handful of young Chinese nationals has steered me to this conclusion as common Chinese citizens seemed to be under the impression that biological males who cross-dress and behave effeminately are merely engaged in some sort of drag performance and this is not to be taken as indicative of their true gender identity. When asked how this line of thought would help them explain the prevalence and high visibility of transgender or transsexual women elsewhere, such as *kathoey* in Thailand, they reasoned that *kathoey* are heterosexual men who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and, in order to relieve their financial plight, assume a *kathoey* identity so that they can enter the entertainment sector in tourism in order to gain greater and easier income. This widely held misconception accurately reflects Wong's (2015: 738) assertion that:

Since China has not yet developed a full-fledged transgender community, transgender people are one of the most misunderstood minorities. Transgenders are still called *renyao* (literally, human monster) in everyday language. They are rejected by families and the larger society. Men who cross-dress are sometimes featured in shows and performances hosted in gay and lesbian bars.

This local model of misinterpreted transgenderism is further reinforced and perpetuated by the reality that Thai *kathoey* are mostly associated with the entertainment and sex tourism industry, whose prowess required to fare well in this field, to some, does not demand traditional education and laborious training, unlike ‘elite’ professions such as doctors or engineers. Even though this possibility is never dismissed and, in fact, it is affirmed by some researchers such as Brummelhuis (1999) and Aldous and Sereemongkonpol (2008), Tan (2014: 150), citing Jackson (1999), maintains that “men who cross gender boundaries purely for monetary reasons are the minority, while the majority are serious about their ‘career’ as a (second type) of woman”. The sweeping generalisation formed out of a few exceptional cases could be seen as a defence mechanism of the Chinese public in denial of the presence of its own native *kathoey* and those elsewhere. Nevertheless, however little known the existence of *kathoey* in China is, it is rapidly gaining visibility as argued in the interview carried out by Speelman (2013) with a young Chinese scholar holding a research degree in world-wide sexual orientation law, who asked to keep her identity anonymous due to her homeland’s sensitivity to the topic.

Speelman’s interviewee also revealed that employment discrimination faced by Chinese transsexuals is a serious issue insofar as their educational backgrounds are rendered useless as, for example, in the case of Jun (2010), who self-chronicled his rocky and grim life as a female-to-male transgender in China. Throughout his childhood, adolescence and adulthood, Jun experienced sexual and gender discrimination first-hand. Having been the target of bullying in school, he proceeded to go on a job hunt and failed miserably as he was rejected up front due to his counter-normative gender identity. Jun’s autobiographical essay stands in stark contrast to a seemingly progressive stance that the Chinese government claims to take on transgender rights, which is manifested in the form of their purportedly forward-thinking policies (Wong, 2015: 738). Unsurprisingly, both Jun (2010: 354) and Wong (2015: 739) are in agreement that these policies are only for illusional effects since, prior to being granted those civil rights to marry or undergo sex change surgery, transgender Chinese have to satisfy some impractical requirements first.



These implausible prerequisites demand, for instance, that the candidate has to demonstrate a persistent yearning for a sex change (Jun, 2010: 354).<sup>8</sup> For another instance, the candidate has to have lived for a minimum of five consecutive years as a member of the opposite sex and to have undertaken at least one year of mental therapy before sex change surgery can be undergone (ibid.). Interestingly enough, transgenderism in Chinese society can somehow prove much more advantageous than homosexuality in some ways, especially if the Chinese transgenders “undergo a sex change surgery and then engage in ‘regular’ heterosexual relationships” (ibid.). After all, there are a few openly transgender Chinese celebrities, whereas the number of openly gay public figures was effectively nil as of 2013 (ibid.). Indeed, it seems that being transgender is regarded as less disruptive to the systemisation of traditional binary gender roles than being homosexual.

Jin Xing is the most prominent case in point, being “the first person in China to have her transgender identity recognised by the government” (Yan, 2017a: online). She had been a famous dancer before she underwent male-to-female sex change surgery in 1995. Since 2011, she has actively engaged in the Chinese media entertainment, serving, for example, as a judge on the Chinese edition of the US dance competition franchise *So You Think You Can Dance* in 2013, and, for another instance, hosting *The Jin Xing Show* from 2015 to 2017, which became “the country’s most-watched talk show” (ibid.). Her most recent TV appearance is on a matchmaking programme called *Chinese Dating*, “which featured parents sitting beside the stage as consultants for their children when choosing partners” (ibid.). In 2017, she was chosen by the BBC to be one of the *BBC 100 Women*, a list of “100 influential and inspirational women around the world” published annually by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2017: online).

BBC’s inclusion of her name in the list has been called into question by “an independent entertainment writer and content creator for a popular public WeChat account”, who goes by her pseudonym Luo Beibei (Luo, 2017: online). Luo’s skepticism toward her suitability is partly induced by the latter’s

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<sup>8</sup> One who wants to change their birth sex is referred to as ‘the candidate’ in the clinical guidelines on sex change surgery.

controversially blatantly sexist stances on the dating show. The independent writer also accuses Jin Xing of espousing “a track record of male chauvinism” (ibid.), citing her remarks and interviews on a variety of occasions. For instance, on *The Jin Xing Show*,

In one episode broadcast in 2015, our eponymous host commented on the phenomenon of so-called leftover woman – single women in their late 20s or early 30s thought to be past the optimum marriage age. “The media always talk about leftover women as though they’re something terrible,” said Jin. “And they’re not wrong.” (ibid.)

Jin further attributes the difficulty with which women get married to the fact that “they complain too much” and encourages “older single women to yield to their marriage and male suitors” (ibid.). On another occasion in 2015, she bluntly expressed her belief that “men are superior to women” and that “one of the values I uphold is that women should not be outspoken” (ibid.). Her matchmaking programme drew similar criticisms since it oftentimes involved parents of sons spouting patriarchal attitudes and male chauvinism (Yan, 2017a: online). In her defence, Jin (ibid.) argues that:

On the surface, my programme is about matchmaking; essentially it involves social issues including family education, social values, male chauvinism or feminism. Some of these issues are taboo on my talk show *The Jin Xing Show* due to the authorities’ restrictions, so it’s not bad to have another programme – *Chinese Dating* – to touch (sic) these topics. I can’t talk directly about these issues in the talk show, but it’s fine to present them on TV and let audiences make their own judgment. In *Chinese Dating*, we allow all kinds of comments and I won’t lash out at any one on the stage, even though I don’t agree with some people’s opinions in my heart. I hope my programme can spur the public to debate issues such as discrimination against single-parent families and misogynistic standards for choosing a girlfriend. People will reflect on whether they themselves adopt similar attitudes or what they should do when facing such a circumstance.

Despite her success story in China, it is important to remember that Jin Xing’s case is more the exception than the rule since she is only one of the few transgender women who managed to have, in Yan’s (ibid.) words, “conquered Chinese TV”. After all, Jin herself admitted that she still has to cope with “negative comments regarding [her] transgender status” every day (ibid.). In a way, her ascent to the summit of social acceptance in China might have arguably been

facilitated precisely by her conservative views, as pointed out by Luo (2017: online) that:

Jin has always been something of a reluctant advocate for gender equality. With her sharp tongue, she may seem like she's breaking all the rules, but the message at the core of her barbed remarks couldn't be more conventional: Women should be subservient to their husbands, children should obey their parents, and independent thinking should be discouraged.

Quite possibly, her full physical transition coupled with her marriage to a heterosexual man and her phallocentric notions is emblematic of her adherence to the status quo. And, as a result, she is not seen as a threat to the entrenched binary gender system.

Following the differences in the two nations' general perception of *kathoey*, homosexuality is also approached from divergent points of view. In Thailand, it is a widespread belief that homosexuality, as well as transgenderism, is "karmic retribution for [the *kathoey*'s] bad deeds in a past life" (Michaelson, 2015: online). Jackson (1995: 85), in his 1995 book on male homosexuality in Thailand, argued that in Buddhist terms, since one is not in control of one's misconduct in a previous life, while still responsible for it, "there is no need for soul-wrenching guilt or atonement for one's *karma*, or the immoral deeds that caused it". This sympathetic take on others' misfortune leads to the notions that people who experience bad luck or fate, such as being *kathoey* or homosexual in the case of Thailand, supposedly as a result of *karma*, are not to blame, but rather to pity or feel sorry for (ibid.: 86).

While homosexuality in Thailand is primarily addressed from a religious point of view, with Nok's (in Käng, 2012) pathologisation of transsexualism serving as an exception, Chinese homosexuality is, however, tackled from a medical viewpoint since it was regarded by ordinary Beijing citizens, to whom Ho (2008: 498) spoke, as "an illness that should be treated". Ho (ibid.), nonetheless, points out that Chinese homosexuality is never seriously disparaged or treated as an object of hostility on its home soil. Having said that, Chinese same-sex eroticism is as yet unaccepted on many levels, both socially and politically, and this is how Thai and Chinese popular discourses on homosexuality come to converge.

Like Thailand, China's intolerance and unacceptance of homosexuality mainly lies in its centuries-old sets of "family obligations and imperative of heterosexual marriage" (Wong, 2015: 734), whereby Chinese sons are obliged to bear the burden of having children and continuing the bloodline. Accordingly, as Tang (2015: online) argues, "younger Chinese generations born after the death of Chairman Mao in mid-1970s tend to be more accepting of homosexuality and LGBT equality than generations before them". The previous statement is further backed by some online polls which, as highlighted by Speelman (2013: online), revealed that "the relatively high tolerance levels [...] are much lower when homosexuality occurs in one's own family and conflicts with expectations for grandchildren or societal status". The pressure for sons to marry is intensified by China's one-child policy (Wong, 2015: 735); where the only son has to shoulder his privileged but weighty status as his parents' only hope.

By the same token, being born as an only daughter does not make it easier to escape "marriage pressure" (Kam, 2013, in Wong, 2015: 735). If anything, women only have it worse since "their freedom to move out of the parental home before marriage or relocate to another city is more restricted in comparison to men" (Wong, 2015: 735). Also, against the backdrop of a predominantly patriarchal Chinese society, it is especially difficult for women to "gain financial independence outside marriage" (ibid.). This intense obligation has led to a number of the so-called sham or co-operative marriage instances, where straight women are (un)knowingly married to gay men or lesbians and gays marry each other on mutually agreed-upon terms to meet parental expectations (ibid.).

Dongcheng's (not his real name) story is one such example of said sham marriages (Yan, 2017b: online). In 2010, Dongcheng who hails from Shandong province, at the age of 30, married a lesbian barista from Hubei. "To his colleagues, pupils and most of his relatives, he is happily married to the woman of his dreams", whereas "to his closest friends and family members, [his] real life partner is in fact a man, a designer in his 40s, with whom he has been living for more than a decade" (ibid.). Dongcheng lives apart from his legal spouse in different provinces and the two meet up "as friends only occasionally" (ibid.). As a teacher, he is well aware that if his colleagues and students find out about his sexuality, trouble will not only befall him but also his school (ibid.).

Ruizai (also not his real name) is another gay man who has to hide his sexual orientation from his colleagues although he has not yet had to go to as extreme the lengths as Dongcheng to convince them he is straight for he is still unmarried (ibid). Moshi, a lesbian in her late 20s working at an Internet company, concurs with Ruizai that “the younger generation born after the 1980s tended to be more accepting towards LGBT people” (ibid.), since her sexuality is not a secret from her coworkers although it remains so from her executive.

It is nonetheless worth noting that many gays and lesbians, particularly those who are not politically active for LGBT causes, still consider heterosexual marriage to be the only acceptable marital norm, despite having same-sex partners themselves, which, in the words of Speelman’s (2013: online) interviewee’s, clearly demonstrates that “they have internalized the status quo”. As pointed out by Wong (2015: 735), to these LGBT individuals, legal binding of marriage is not as pressing an issue as judicial protection of equal treatment.

As far as LGBT individuals around the world are concerned, acceptance can take many shapes and forms. Looking, for example, at global patterns of the espousal and promotion of LGBT-related legislation, it is clear that “social acceptance almost always precedes legal progress” (Speelman, 2013: online). Bielinski (in Yan, 2017b: online), the founder of WorkForLGBT, a non-profit business network for LGBT employees in China, echoes a similar sentiment when he stated that: “If you look at other countries legalising same-sex marriage, there is usually a high degree of visibility of LGBT people before marriage becomes an issue that is talked about, debated and ultimately legalised”.

Within this framework, Bielinski asserts that China is still lagging behind, citing a 2016 poll conducted by his affiliation which “found that only one-fifth of its over 2,000 Chinese respondents personally knew at least one LGBT person” (ibid.). The findings are self-evident: the visibility of LGBT people is startlingly low when one takes into consideration the fact that China is the most populated country in the world. In today’s China, making legal leaps in favour of LGBT communities would be merely wishful thinking; therefore, one could only hope for a more understanding public at this point, which is what a majority of Chinese LGBT activists have been aiming for in the past decade.

Since 2009, Shanghai has been holding its own annual version of march-free pride festival inspired by the first Hong Kong pride parade (Wong, 2015: 737). In 2013, over ten Chinese cities witnessed for the first time their LGBT parade, which culminated in the arrest and detention of some of the organisers due to the Chinese government's harsh crackdown on demonstrations (ibid.). The pride parade is far from being the only LGBT campaign which has been subjected to official suppression. In as recent as May 2017, an organiser of a gay experience-sharing forum, *Speak Out*, set to take place in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, related that only hours ahead of the scheduled start time, the event was forced to be canceled and that "prior to the cancellation, [the group] had to switch venues four times after the venue owners changed their mind on leasing arrangements, giving only weak reasons for doing so" (Yan, 2017b: online). In other news, Yan (ibid.) reports that:

popular lesbian social networking app Rela, with more than 5 million registered users, was shut down after it sponsored an event in which a dozen mothers tried to help their LGBT children find a partner at the Shanghai "marriage market" at downtown People's Park. The May 20 event was aimed at raising gay rights awareness in the city.

Physical public venues are not the only platform where LGBT-related political conversation and advocacy take place. Since, as Tang (2015: online) suggests, "grassroots activism is tightly circumscribed" in China, online outlets have become the main base wherefrom social movements, support, and information are derived. On occasions, personal accounts of LGBT individual lives are shared online in the form of video clips (Speelman, 2013: online). In 2015, over the Chinese New Year, China's biggest holiday, a short LGBT-themed film called *Coming Home* was released on various video streaming sites. The film relates a fictitious story of a young gay Chinese man who, after coming out to his parents, is estranged from and disowned by them. Having participated in support groups for parents, families and friends of lesbians and gays in China, his mother finally asks him to come home for the Chinese New Year. The short film ends with a credit roll featuring "clips of real-life mothers advising LGBTQ youth to 'share your stories with your parents' and asking parents not to 'let traditional marriage norms stop your children from coming home'" (ibid.).

The clip has, unsurprisingly, received widespread acclaim from the public and, surprisingly, survived the Chinese government's stern censorship forces. The wide-ranging success of the film does not only stem from its production team's boldness but also from its titular theme *Coming Home*. In this regard, Tang (2015: online) puts it best when she explains that a new lunar year:

is a typically stressful period for young people of all sexual orientations, who often face overbearing parental expectations to date, get married, or start a family, and often have to explain to mom and dad why they might be falling short. For young Chinese who identify as LGBTQ, the pressure can be even harder to bear.

With the above context borne in mind, the concept of coming home is thus not merely a simple yearly routine visit to one's parents; it has however emerged as "an indigenous model" (Chou, 2000, in Wong, 2015: 737) for gays or lesbians to introduce their same-sex partner to the family "as a close friend, leaving the gay identity more unspoken. [While] parents may refer the partner (sic) as a second daughter or son, and the partner is integrated into the family" (Wong, 2015: 737). Speelman's (2013: online) subject of the interview, on the other hand, views it differently as she argues that parents are most likely aware of their daughter or son's homosexual identity and partner, but so long as the unspeakable remains unsaid, "no social taboos are violated" per se.

Although it might not seem outwardly or tangibly progressive, Speelman's (ibid.) interlocutor insists on the fact that parents' acceptance and welcoming of their son or daughter's so-called best friend could be deemed as a form of tolerance; meanwhile, coming out is just one of the many strategies to tackle family relations as a homosexual man or woman in China. On a more positive note, Tang (2015: online) suggests that although, on the one hand, the status as an only child might bring about "weighty parental expectations", to Chinese younger generations it could, on the other hand, afford them "unprecedented power and leverage". Simply put, even though their child does not live up to every single one of their expectations they would rather support and accept him/her as he/she is rather than run the risk of losing their only offspring.

The unintended silver lining that emerged from the cloud of the restrictive one-child policy might not however last much longer since the Chinese government announced, in October 2015, that the four-decades long birth limit was to be lifted

and a new two-child policy was to be put into effect from 2016 (BBC, 2015; Hu and Wu, 2015). As of 2018, the year in which the current thesis is being written up, the population-control turnabout has been in force for two years. It is now still too early to say for certain how the birth policy change has or, for that matter, will have impacted on the lives of LGBT individuals born after the introduction of the one-child policy but before its easing into the two-child quota.

Furthermore, the 2016 relaxation of the original family-size control measures has so far appeared unable to assuage the Chinese government's anxieties about the aging workforce and the declining population growth rate since "many couples weren't convinced that two were better than one" (Bloomberg, 2018a: online). It thus seems that the two-child policy might soon, too, be jettisoned as talks are reportedly under way to "scrap all limits on the number of children a family can have" (Bloomberg, 2018b: online). Once the plan to "end all family-size rules" (ibid.) is enacted, it is yet to be seen how it will, if at all, affect personally and structurally the pre-limitless birth era LGBT children and the oncoming post-child policy era LGBT generations.

At political level, it is generally known that "the Chinese government's official position on LGBT issues, to the extent that the government has a position at all, follows the so-called *three nots*" that are decoded as "not encouraging, not discouraging, not promoting" (OutRight Action International, 2010: online). However, while it might appear as if the Chinese ruling party mostly remains indifferent to LGBT matters, it should also be noted that the first broadcast regulation entitled 'The Film Censorship Regulation', publicised by the Radio, Television and Film Board in 1997, forbade and straitjacketed "diffusion of LGBT-related content in all sections of media" (ibid.). Additionally, as documented by Feder and Fu (2016: online), the regulation was reiterated in December 2015 by "the government-backed TV Production Committee of the China Alliance of Radio, Film and Television and a trade group called the China Television Drama Production Industry Association", to remind the public and AVT media production circles that the original directive, including other additional regulations, is still very much in place. Worse still, homosexuality is referred to in the revitalised dictate-like guidelines as an "abnormal" sexual behaviour and lumped in together with such sexual offences as "incest [...], sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual



violence, and so on” (ibid.). Given that homosexuality in all its forms is officially banned from Chinese media across the board, one should not be fooled into thinking that Chinese authorities are free of political stances when it comes to issues concerning LGBT groups.

On the legal front, a law professor at Shangdong University, Li Zhongxia (in Yan, 2017b: online), suggests that as a countermeasure against the conviction among the Chinese population that “marriage must involve a man and a woman”, China could perhaps follow in Germany’s footsteps by extending the same legal rights enjoyed by legally recognised heterosexual unions to gay and lesbian couples. Indeed, the legalisation of same-sex marriage would not see the light of the day any time soon as long as the Chinese public still holds fast to the so-called sanctity of marriage. And, with the discrimination and prejudice still on the rampage, 29-year-old Dongcheng surmises that “even if same-sex marriage was suddenly legalised there would not be many gay or lesbian couples brave enough to register their marriage” (ibid.).

In sum, transgenderism in China is still a novel concept which contributes to the extremely low visibility of Chinese transgender people in comparison with their gay and lesbian counterparts. In addition to their scarce public presence, they are also faced with everyday plight of multifaceted discrimination, be it social, legal or even personal. Meanwhile, homosexual men as well as women are more socially visible, albeit not by much. Bearing heavy burdens as a generation fostered by the previously enforced one-child policy, gays and lesbians are obliged to lead a double life; one as straight adults with a family of their own, the other as homosexuals secretly pursuing their preferred sexual life with a same-sex partner. Alternatively, they wed each other on mutually agreed-upon terms in order to fulfil their filial and societal obligations.

Over the years, however, awareness and understanding of homosexuality seem to be growing with higher acceptance becoming more common. Nonetheless, tolerance and acceptance are by no means considered prevalent since, for instance, coming out or self-admission of one’s homosexual identity by staff of any state-owned enterprises, government institutions, or government-involved units is ultimately out of bounds and detrimental to one’s career, with probably

the media savvy Jin Xing being one of the rare exceptions to the rule. As China's ruling party is consistently striving to keep all media clear of LGBT-related content, a cadre of domestic media productions is at the same time looking to undermine the status quo by injecting rebellious values into the mainstream.

## 2.4 The representation of queer identities in Thai mainstream audiovisual material

Since the eclosion of non-normative gender identities in the latter half of the twentieth-century in Thailand, described in section 2.1.2, media representations of them have grown accordingly in abundance. Therefore, this section deals precisely with how these gender minorities' lives are imagined and represented in the media, particularly in mainstream outlets. For the purpose of staying relevant to the entire thesis, the exclusive evolution of movies with the presence of *kathoey* and gays is discussed in these pages, instead of all the characters forming the term LGBT, not to mention that some of the LGBT letters such as L(esbian) and B(isexual) are still acutely underrepresented in the media, to the extent that virtually none, or at least none impactful, are recallable in living memory.

The section is divided into two parts; the first of which focuses on cinematic presentation, while the second looks at the representation on the small screen.

### 2.4.1 Mainstream Thai queer cinema

Thai transgender *kathoey* has taken up a well-established spot in the audiovisual media of Thailand since the early 1980s, in the wake of their growing day-to-day visibility (Jackson, 2002: 219), giving rise to an unprecedented film genre in its own right, namely, *kathoey* movies (Ünaldi, 2011: 64). Amongst others, a series of three Thai movies released in the mid-1980s stood out as "the first to treat the subject of transgenderism and homosexuality more sensitively", while battling their way upstream against the more common stereotypical roles assigned to *kathoey* as "screaming clowns" (ibid.). The arrival of the trio of *kathoey* movies

was referred to as “The First Wave of Thai Queer<sup>9</sup> Cinema” by Oradol Kaewprasert (2005 in Ünaldi, 2011: 64), who also remarked on the recurring motive behind the three films as one seeking mere sympathy from the general public, but not one in support of queerness, equal rights or identities.

Indeed, the sympathy-induced trend in *kathoey* movies derived from none other than the same old discourse that defines transgenders as people suffering from bad karma as a result of their misdeeds in the previous lives (Ünaldi, 2011: 64). Nonetheless, Ünaldi (ibid.) insists that these movies eventually did more good than harm to the *kathoey* and gay circles, for they marked the first public occurrences where transgender and homosexual characters were for once painted, in a multi-dimensional light, as more than just “funny fools”. For example, one of the cinematic triads, เพลงสุดท้าย [*Pleng Sud Tai: The Last Song*]<sup>10</sup>, directed by Phisan Akraseranee in 1985, portrays the life of a *kathoey* cabaret performer, Som-ying, who falls in love with a man who later leaves her for a ‘real’ woman. The incident prompts her to take her own life onstage in front of the audience watching her cabaret performance.

After the 1980s first wave of flourishing Thai queer cinema, Thai cinematic scene on the whole encountered an approximately decade-long period of stagnancy and sluggishness until the crash of the pan-Asian financial markets in 1997. The 1997 Asian financial crisis took an unexpected turn for the better, when it gave a boost to the cinematic creativity of certain directors. In the midst of the revival of Thai cinematic culture, “a genre was re-established that had its antecedents in the 1980s and whose success few had anticipated, namely, *kathoey* movies” (Ünaldi, 2011: 64).

Termed “The Second Wave of Thai Queer Cinema” (ibid.: 65), the return of *kathoey* representations to cinema begun in the final year of the twentieth century

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<sup>9</sup> From here onwards, the term ‘queer’ is used interchangeably with ‘LGBT’ since the sources of references cited in this section employ ‘queer’ as a blanket term to refer to ‘LGBT’ groups.

<sup>10</sup> Please note that the English name in brackets does not necessarily reflect the back translation of the Thai title. The name of a non-English movie or TV production is given in the following order: the original title will be provided first, followed by its English transcription and English back translation. If the audiovisual production has an accepted English title, it will be offered in lieu of an English back translation. By the same token, later references to the production will use its accepted English name. If no accepted English title is in widespread use, the English transcription of the original title will be employed throughout.

and carried on well into the twenty-first century. *The Iron Ladies* (Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, 2000) was the first of its kind to make a cinematic appearance in 2000. The movie illustrates the lives and struggles for national acceptance in the sporting arena of a group of Thai national volleyball players mostly made up of *kathoey*. The feature film could have been prematurely dismissed as another display of *kathoey* buffoonery were it not for its based-on-a-true-story value.

After the underdog team of volleyball players from the province of Lampang, in Northern Thailand, won the Thailand National Games in 1996, the Iron Ladies, as they called themselves, were bound to subsequently represent Thailand in international volleyball competitions. The international participation of the team, however, was thwarted by the Volleyball Association of Thailand (VAT) concerned that the team members would tarnish the country's reputation (Ünaldi, 2011: 65). The volleyball scandal instigated by the VAT inspired the production of the eponymously named film *สตรีเหล็ก* [*Satree Lhek: The Iron Ladies*] (Figure 2.1), which became the highest-grossing Thai film at the time, racking up “a box-office take of almost 100 million baht” (ibid.); a rare figure for Thai movies even nowadays.

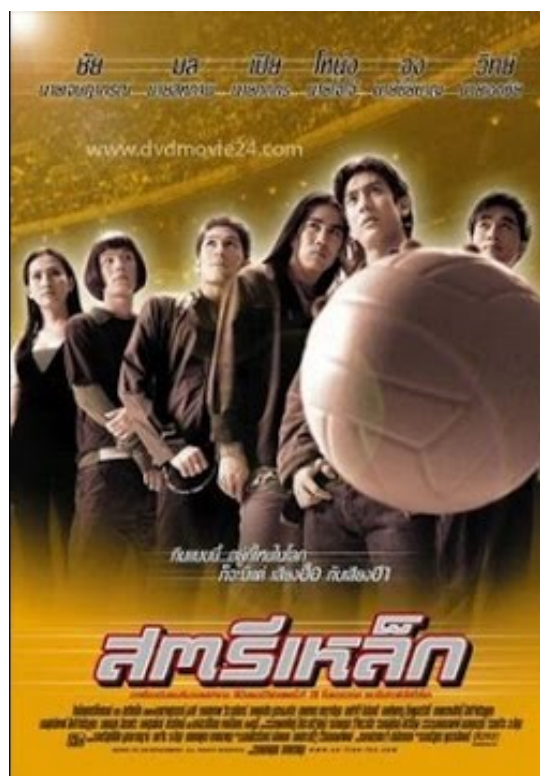


Figure 2.1: A promotional poster for *The Iron Ladies*

The movie was considered a breakthrough in multiple aspects. First, it departed from the normal course of *kathoey* antics and ventured into an uncharted sphere of *kathoey* “joining forces to fight for acceptance” (ibid.) As noted by Vitaya Saeng-Aroon (2007, personal correspondence, in Ünaldi, 2011: 66), from the independent gay media company Cyberfish Media, “*Iron Ladies* is a turning point in the history of gay-related movies in Thailand locally and internationally. It’s the very first movie that portrays positive images”. Undoubtedly, the film was first and foremost unique in that it “depicts the lives of *kathoey*s as worth living” (ibid.), as it does not contain suicide endings, while at the same time it bravely promotes group affiliation and support among *kathoey*. Additionally, its imbued social criticism, as a backlash against transphobia, is concretely demonstrated throughout the film. It was the overwhelming success of *The Iron Ladies* that brought about its own 2003 sequel, *The Iron Ladies 2*, and inspired other subsequent productions of *kathoey* movies.

In 2002, another based-on-a-true-story *kathoey* picture directed by Kittikorn Liasirikun, พรานชมพู่ เกษเขตประจัญบาน [*Praang Chompoo Kathoey Prajan Baan: Saving Private Tootsie*], was introduced to the Thai audience. The movie relays the story of a group of *kathoey* who strive to return to their homeland after surviving a plane crash in Burma. In the end, the *kathoey* survivors have no choice but to enlist the help of the transphobic Thai soldiers dispatched to rescue them. One of the *kathoey*, by sacrificing her life to save the openly hateful transphobic Sergeant from Burmese assaults, sends a message to the Thai audience that *kathoey* can be as brave and make as great a contribution as their gender-normative counterparts. Another striking feature of *Saving Private Tootsie* is its emphasis on the diversity within the discursive universe of transgenderism itself as *kathoey* characters, who already underwent gender reassignment surgery and behave femininely, “are treated more gently by the Thai soldiers” (ibid.), while the unladylike *kathoey* has to cope with verbal hostility from the otherwise chivalrous troop.

The next *kathoey* film offered to the Thai public was บิวตี้ฟูล บ็อกเซอร์ [*Beautiful Boxer*],<sup>11</sup> directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham and released in 2003, the same year

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<sup>11</sup> The Thai title is a Thai transliteration of the English phrase *Beautiful Boxer*.

that *สตรีเหล็ก 2* or *The Iron Ladies 2* hit Thai cinemas. The two movies, however, flopped at the box office and, as Ünalı (ibid.: 67) observes, the financial fiasco might have been attributable to their unconventional narrative style, which calls attention to their personal journey of self-discovery and coming to terms with their self-liberation. All in all, as noted by Ünalı (ibid.: 68), the second wave of Thai queer cinema is clearly distinguishable from its first-wave equivalent in such respects as the “self-confidence, the absence of suicide plots, and the inclusion of nationalist elements that connect the characters to mainstream society”.

In the meantime, Ünalı also offers Chris Berry’s (2001: 215, in Ünalı, 2011: 68) further insights into the Thai queer cinema’s deviation from the trope prevalent in other Asian gay movies, especially those from East Asia. While Oriental gay films mainly present homosexuality as a household concern, one of the various types of domestic issues to sort out, Thai *kathoey* counterparts tend to underline “a lack of *official* recognition” and the presence of “official suppression” as the main antagonists of being transgender (Ünalı, 2011: 68). Ultimately, the East Asian queer cinema prioritises Confucian value systems of gender and relationship roles, as expected of any family member without regard to one’s desired gender identity, whereas the Thai *kathoey* movies are inclined to conclude with *kathoey* characters resolving to follow the path of their heart’s desire. To my mind, this is the pattern that might have later served to embolden Thai gay – as opposed to *kathoey* – movies to come.

In 2006, reportedly the first Thai gay picture, *Metrosexual* (also by director of *The Iron Ladies* and *The Iron Ladies 2*, Yongyoot Thongkongtoon), or *แก๊งค์ชเนกับอีแอบ* [*Gang Chanee Gub E-Aeb: A Gang of Women and a Closeted Gay*] in Thai, came along. As its Thai title suggests, the story revolves around a ‘gang’ of female friends trying to find out whether Kong, the fiancé of one of the women in the group, is merely metrosexual or in fact a closeted homosexual. With the help of one friend’s gay brother, the female clique is equipped with a checklist of possible gay signs for the mission. Eventually, the movie reveals that Kong is, indeed, gay and the couple go their separate ways, with the ‘gang’ accomplishing the mission to pre-empt the likeliest outcome of an unhappy sham marriage.

The trend towards self-fulfilment endings in the post-2000 Thai queer cinema was interrupted by the arrival in 2007 of a *kathoey* film with a highly controversial ending, called *Me...Myself* (Figure 2.2) and directed by Pongpat Wachirabunjong (Ünaldi, 2011: 69). *Me...Myself*, or ขอให้รักจงเจริญ [*Khor Hai Ruk Jong Ja-rern: Long Live Love, May Love Prosper*], depicts a blossoming romance between a man, who is mugged and gets accidentally struck by a car while trying to run away from the robbers, and Oom, the woman driving the car that hits him. After the incidents, the man loses his identity documentation along with his personal effects and, most shockingly, his memory. Oom, therefore, takes him in out of pity and guilt and names him Tan, after the mystery name, Tan, engraved on the pendant he is wearing. Living and sticking together through thick and thin, the two grow on each other until finally they fall in love with one another and Tan tells Oom that he no longer wants to remember his past but he only wants to be with her.



Figure 2.2: A promotional poster for *Me...Myself*

However, some flashbacks still haunt him to the point that he recalls some numbers, which lead him back to the house he had visited just before he met with his double plights. By that time, the police have already managed to recover some items taken away from Tan on that fateful night and have reached out to one of his contacts on his lost phone. As it turns out, Tan is a *kathoey* cabaret performer in Phuket, who has come to Bangkok, the main setting of the film, to win back his former lover, the owner of the house he visited. Upon receiving news of their missing friend from the police, Tan's *kathoey* friends-cum-colleagues travel to Bangkok to bring him back to Phuket, where he can resume his old life as the star of the cabaret nightclub he works for.

The movie climaxes with Oom confronting Tan and asking him if he still loves her. Tan, whose pre-amnesia name is actually Tanya, delivers an answer that triggered the ensuing controversy. The censure, led mostly by gay-rights activists, centres on the movie's counterproductive takeaway message, whereby some might arrive at the misled conclusion that homosexuality or transgenderism can be cured with just a blow in the head (Ünaldi, 2011: 70). I, however, would suggest that despite the criticism an alternative interpretation of the end scene could be reached based on certain extra-cinematic elements, the point of which will be discussed later in this section, alongside the detailed breakdown of Thailand's most ground-breaking gay film, *Love of Siam*.

2007 was one of the most remarkable years in terms of Thai queer cinema, for it was not only the year in which a Thai queer film such as *Me...Myself* sparked a heated debate, but it also marked the birth of mainstream gender-normative Thai gay cinema, as the following two gay films, *Bangkok Love Story* and *Love of Siam*, became the foci of public attention immediately upon their release. In fact, said two pictures were not the first to tackle the much-shunned topic of homosexuality in its own right. According to Ünaldi (2011: 71), Thai cinematic representation of gay men emerged concurrently with the arrival of the second wave of Thai queer cinema and has remained in existence ever since. However, the showings of early Thai gay films were almost exclusively confined to certain arthouses in Bangkok, while some gay movies did not even make it to the big screen and went straight to DVD instead. In addition, a limited number of release outlets makes for a limited circle of target – gay, to be precise – audiences (ibid.). For these



reasons, the trailblazing independent gay movies fall short of what the term 'mainstream' encompasses and, as a result, are excluded from the discussion in this section.

As mentioned in passing earlier, the general currency of the Thai *kathoe*y cinematic scene might have served as a catalyst for the revolution of its gay counterpart. Nearly five months after the release of *Me...Myself* in 2007, Poj Arnon's เพื่อน ฤๅกมิ่งวะ [*Pheuan Gu Ruk Meung Wa: Bangkok Love Story*] hit Thai cinemas. The film was the first instance where a gender-normative gay film was produced by Sahamongkol Film, one of the few big Thai studios (ibid.: 75), rather than by an obscure small independent production company. The film, as summarised by Ünaldi (ibid.: 75), "is about a policeman, It, who falls in love with a hit-man, Mek, who is ordered to kill It but eventually takes him to his rooftop hideout to hide him from his employers". After a slew of conflicts, both emotional and situational, the movie concludes with Mek being shot by assassins and dying in the arms of It.

Of interest is the fact that the mere release of the movie trailer in 2006 caused quite an uproar among the National Police Office, who "feared that the film might damage its image in that It is portrayed as a gay policeman" (ibid.). Police rebukes aside, the feature film still failed to please both critics and audiences with Kong Rithdee (2007, in Ünaldi, 2011: 75-76), the most celebrated film critic in Thailand, branding:

the movie's homoeroticism 'inward-looking and self-serving', a spectacle that 'is not designed to earn respect from straight viewers in the same way [...] *Brokeback Mountain* exquisitely shifts the sensitive gender issue into the terrain of universal romance".

The cinematic disappointment was furthermore reflected on the box-office failure. It seems as if the movie did not quite live up to its pre-release hype and "the most remarkable aspect of the movie" was therefore probably "the advertising campaign" (Ünaldi, 2011: 76), not the movie in itself. As detailed by Ünaldi (ibid.), the film posters showed "Mek thrusting his fingers into the jeans of his lover", which were certainly extraordinary enough to have drawn the public attention as well as excitement. Citing Jackson (2004), Ünaldi (2011: 75) calls this advertising a total novelty as far as "the Thai regime of images" goes, commenting that never

once before had male nudity been allowed in Thai cinema until *Bangkok Love Story* came along. The film was a prime example of how this “Thai regime of images” has changed from the 1974 cinematic climate, where a movie about male prostitutes was banned due to its advertising poster showing “two nude male bodies” (ibid.).

In November 2007, two months after the nationwide premiere of *Bangkok Love Story*, รักแห่งสยาม [*Ruk Haeng Siam: Love of Siam*], directed by Chookiat Sakveerakul, reached Thai cinemas across the country. The movie was produced under the auspices of Sahamongkol Film, the same studio that backed *Bangkok Love Story*; with its “social relevance, acting skills, and a mature story line with an ambiguous ending” (ibid.: 76), including a rather misleading advertisement campaign, the movie quickly became the talk of the town. As accurately and comprehensively summed up by Farmer (2011: 89):

Publicity for *Love of Siam* appeared intent on creating an image of generic familiarity to the film, casting it effectively as an entry in the popular cycle of heterosexual teen romances that have been an industrial staple of contemporary Thai film production since the 1980s and that have recently renewed commercial vigour with a string of major box office hits.

*Love of Siam* was indeed deliberately promoted as another “coming-of-age teen pic pitched to the lucrative juvenile market” (ibid.: 87), with its trailer edited and images of two boys and two girls placed on its advertising posters in such a way that they misdirected potential viewers to a heterosexual love square as can be seen in Figure 2.3 in the ensuing page.

The story, in fact, revolves around Mew and Tong, two boyhood friends who are also next-door neighbours. Tong and his family move to Bangkok after Tong’s elder sister, Taeng, goes missing on a trip with her friends. Shortly after Tong’s relocation, Mew loses his grandmother, who also happens to be the only guardian he had left. Their coincidental reunion at Siam Square, the social haunt of Bangkok youth, serves to rekindle their subtle childhood romance, which ends up in Tong struggling to make sense of his romantic feelings for Mew, while also having to answer to his girlfriend how come he is indifferent to her, even more so after Mew reappears in his life.



Figure 2.3: A promotional poster for *Love of Siam*

The gently kissing scene between Tong and Mew elicited a variety of reactions from the audiences: some cheered them on, some felt anxious, and some could not stifle their “outright disgust” (Ünaldi, 2011: 77). The storyline stretches far beyond the romantic domain into one that involves family struggles. On the one hand, there is Tong, who is disoriented about his sexuality. On the other hand, there is Sunee, Tong’s mother, who endeavours to keep her family together, both financially and emotionally, since his father, out of guilt, only drinks himself into oblivion every day after their only daughter’s disappearance.

Having accidentally witnessed the aforementioned kissing scene between her son and Mew, Sunee is prompted to forbid Mew and Tong from seeing and contacting each other again. In one of the final scenes, where Tong and his mom are chitchatting and decorating a Christmas tree together, Sunee presents two figurines – one elf (male) and one angel (female) – to Tong, from which the latter chooses the male statuette. When Tong is hanging the toy of his choice on the Christmas tree, his mother smiles to herself in resignation. Afterwards, Tong

rushes to Siam Square to, firstly, meet up with his girlfriend on what was initially meant to be a Christmas date but turns into a Christmas breakup and, eventually, to find Mew, who had just finished his gigs onstage with his band. Tong confronts Mew, confessing to the latter that “I can’t be your boyfriend but that doesn’t mean I don’t love you”, to which Mew simply replies with a “Thank you”. The boys then go back to their respective homes. The final scene shows Mew, lonely sitting on his bed, uttering a soft “thank you”, with tears streaming down his cheeks.

Apparently, the film does not gratify its loyal viewers with a definitive happy ending as Tong’s sister is still missing, presumably dead, his father still drowns in grief and guilt, while Tong and Mew are not united as a couple. Pessimistic audiences might have railed against the movie’s seemingly sheepish finale. At the end of the day, it simply falls in the viewers’ hands to decide what to make of this somewhat ambiguous ending. To better understand its context, however, Farmer (2011) suggests taking into consideration the Thai culture of familialism. As he points out, “[f]rom the perspective of a Western-style identitarian homosexuality, this ending can be hard to understand and even harder to swallow” (ibid.: 97), although I would argue that it is equally hard to digest even from a Thai point of view, for the ending is not a customarily definite one with which Thais are familiar. Farmer (ibid.) further explains that:

[b]y telling Mew that he loves him but cannot be with him, Tong is not denying his queer desire – indeed, he is explicitly avowing it – but is effectively saying, rather, that he has ultimately decided to put family and duties as a good Thai son before his sexual and romantic desires.

Also, by picking out the Christmas tree elf ornament and opting to break up with his girlfriend, Tong is essentially asserting and articulating his homoerotic orientation. When this family-centric notion and Tong’s self-articulation are factored in, “[t]he bittersweet openness of the ending” enables queerness to remain “in definitional abeyance, open and fluid”, floating in “an inessential sphere of possibilities with no singular form or necessary outcome” (ibid.: 98). In other words, *for the time being* his family and his role as a good son are of paramount importance to Tong as he wishes his grief-stricken family, including himself, to heal first and later, when all is well for his family, he might pursue his individual happiness in his own way. Hence, as argued by Farmer (ibid.,

emphasis added), by “keeping open the question of queerness and the eroticized modes of being it engenders”, *Love of Siam* allows Thai audiences to “apprehend and process in an accessible and meaningful fashion the transformational maps of Thai erotic *modernities* and the ever-evolving *loves of Siam*”.

By the same token, similar conclusions could be drawn from the film *Me...Myself*, whose Thai title can be translated as *Long Live Love* or *May Love Prosper*. After Tan takes shelter at Oom’s house, he quickly bonds with Ohm, Oom’s deceased sister’s son, who in turn looks up to Tan as a father figure. That Tan chooses to stay with Oom, rather than re-assuming his *kathoey* self, is one of the numerous ways in which love can be realised and take shape.

The above list of films is by no means comprehensive since some Thai films, complemented by minor *kathoey* characters as pure comic relief are not covered, neither are movies with screaming *kathoey* buffoons acting overly exaggerated in the lead roles, such as *หอแต้วแตก* [*Hor Taew Taek: Haunting Me*] (Poj Arnon, 2007), *โกยเถอะเกย์* [*Goye Te Gay: Ghost Station*] (Yuthlert Sippapak, 2007), or *ต๊อดสู้ฟู้* [*Tut Soo Foot: Kung Fu Tootsie*] (Jaturong Mokjok, 2007), among others. After the likes of such inspiring *kathoey* or gay-centred movies as *The Iron Ladies* and *Love of Siam* were shown, several other *kathoey* and gay-themed feature films or drama movies featuring LGBT-related subplots followed suit.

Subjectively speaking, however, none have received such recognition and ignited as much discussion as the Second Wave of Thai Queer Cinema. This is most likely ascribable to the fact that, despite the jocular appeal of *kathoey* roles, Thai viewership has grown quite impatient with shallow *kathoey*-led comedies. On the other hand, those highly controversial *kathoey*/gay dramas such as *แมลงรักในสวนหลังบ้าน* [*Malaeng Ruk Nai Suan Lung Baan: Insect in the Backyard*] (Thanwarin Sukkapisit, 2010) and *พี่ชาย* [*Pee-chai: My Bromance*] (Nittapoom Chai-a-nan, 2014) were oftentimes either not able to elude the tight grip of the state censorship or simply not attractive enough to the wider public, which resulted in their limited distribution among small tight-knit target audiences. Some films like *ณ ขณะรัก* [*Na Ka-na Ruk: A Moment in June*] (Nattapol Wongthreenatekul, 2009), *เงื่อน* [*Cheuan: Slice*] (Wisit Sartsanatiang, 2009), and *สตรีเหล็ก ตบโลกแตก* [*Satree*

*Lhek Tob Loke Taek: The Iron Ladies 3*] (Poj Arnon, 2014), the third instalment of *The Iron Ladies* film series, that were screened in mainstream cinemas, fared moderately at best and did not capture Thailand's imagination.

#### 2.4.2 Mainstream Thai queer television

In contrast to Thai queer cinema, very little attention has been paid to Thai queer television. Despite the plethora of Thai television programmes featuring queer characters, the lack of a complete oeuvre has persisted to date. Apart from some sporadic passing mention of *kathoey* and gay roles in Thai TV media made in scholarly writing, queer representation on Thai TV, to the best of my knowledge, has been tremendously underexplored to date. It should therefore be heeded that this section is neither detailed nor comprehensive, although it is laid out with maximum rigour and effort possible to give an all-round overview of Thai queer television.

Unlike cinema, Thai soap operas are not significantly generous towards queer representation notwithstanding the frequent *kathoey* and gay presence on screen. Although *kathoey* have been the mainstay of Thai TV since the dawn of Thai TV entertainment, never once have they been brought to the fore. Similar to Thai queer cinematic expression, however, is the mutual absence of *official recognition* of LGBT on the small screen. In 2004, the Ministry of Culture demanded that Thai TV stations “reduce gay portrayals since it feared that the number of gays was increasing due to their growing media presence” (Ünaldi, 2011: 61). Needless to say that this mindset undoubtedly results in the underlying suppression of LGBT expression on TV. Furthermore, as in the case of Thai cinema in which “movies without comedic *kathoey* characters have had a hard time at the box office, which leads to a second consideration, namely, the cultural valorization of *sanuk*, playfulness, or being unserious” (ibid.: 70), Thai TV is identically predisposed to such mentalities.

*Khwam Sanuk* [ความสุข: fun, playfulness] has been utilised as the instrumental device to attract viewership in Thai media, both to cinema and TV productions alike. The enduring rhetoric circulating among Thai audiences, usually regardless of their social or economic class, sniggers at socially critical and intellectually

dense movies, accusing them of being tailored by snobbish elites for equally pretentious viewers. Indeed, it is commonly held by the majority of Thai people that any form of media entertainment should be consumed for entertainment's sake; therefore, any mainstream film marketed as serious and intellectually demanding is almost instantly guaranteed to fail at the box office, while *fun* elements of a movie are traditionally primarily flashed on conspicuous display in its trailer. Since TV channels reach a considerably larger audience than cinemas, it is only rational that TV programme production companies are even less willing to break from this entrenched hedonistic norm at the expense of their financial profits.

Simply put, while Thai societally impactful and critical LGBT feature films are hard to come by, the advent of Thai TV dramas tackling LGBT issues head-on could sometimes be considered an absolute pipedream. The unavailability of thought-provoking yet unappealing TV feeds is further rationalised by, again, a deep-rooted discourse similarly pervasive within the Thai cinematic industry that "Thai society is not ready for new artistic styles" (Ünaldi, 2011: 62), discounting collective Thais as inadequate to fully understand and appreciate *highbrow* or sophisticated arts. The lines of thought have led to a vicious circle in which the Thai public are constantly unknowingly force-fed conservative and clichéd narratives, which in turn contribute to their indifference, occasionally bordering on resistance to, stylistic and narrative changes, and Thai TV media then have to fall back on these old school entertainment (re)production policies in order to generate maximum financial returns.

Despite addressing Thailand's cinematic practices specifically, Ünaldi (ibid.) urges analysts to ponder the question, equally applicable and relevant to the television world, of "which came first, a conservative and stale cinema, or an entertainment-seeking audience indifferent to alternative plots and thought-provoking narrative styles?". In this regard, Ünaldi (ibid.) is positive that the former is the cause of the latter, and not vice versa, exemplifying his conviction with "the considerable success of the Thai social-realist films of the 1980s". As further critiqued by Ünaldi (ibid.), the rising prestige of independent directors and the emerging Thai New Wave of cinema in the 1990s, which showcased "the obvious potential for innovative, at times pioneering, cinematic approaches", but which

did not progress into the twenty-first century, could be suggestive of calculated attempts and power relations at the elite level, which eventually lead to “the ‘stupidity’ (*khvam-ngo*) so often observed in today’s Thai cinema”, even more so in the Thai TV entertainment industry.

As mentioned earlier, and perhaps already widely known, *kathoey* “are often typecast in [Thai] popular culture as a comical caricature” (Tan, 2014: 147). Their presence is essential to set the humorous tone to virtually every mainstream Thai soap opera with only a handful of exceptions, where the *kathoey* role is relatively central to the plot advancement or conflict development, such as พระจันทร์สีรุ้ง [*Prajan See Roong: Rainbow-coloured Moon*] directed by Yuttana Lorpanpaiboon in 2009), or the more recent สงครามนางงาม [*Songkram Narng-Ngarm: Beauty and the Bitches 1*] (Nipon Pween, 2015). *Kathoey* as comic relief are alternately played by real-life *kathoey* and straight actors.

It is, however, worth mentioning that sometimes these characters’ on-screen gender lines are not as clear-cut as one might think. As the discussion in section 2.1 unravels, in Thailand, gender distinction is measured against the gender continuum of being 100% masculine at one end and 100% feminine at the other. Accordingly, some of these *behaviourally feminine* male characters are regarded as *kathoey*, rather than simply effeminate gay men, in spite of their masculine sartorial style. The blurry gender lines between *kathoey* and gays are also highlighted in *Love of Siam*, where Mew, with his gentle and soft voice, is seen referred to by his neighbours as *Toot* (another, derogatory, term for *kathoey*) although he reveals next to no conclusive hints of typical *kathoey* traits, such as effeminate gait, cross-dressing taste, feminine demeanour, or exaggerated hand gestures. On the other hand, Tong, his love interest, who carries himself with an absolute traditionally masculine bearing, is questioned by his friends whether he is *gay*, instead of *kathoey*, or not.

This fuzzy divide is observable, too, in Thai TV soaps where all effeminate biological men are to be taken as *kathoey*, regardless of their sartorial taste, while gender-normative men sexually attracted to men are mostly identified as gay. In Thai soap operas where *kathoey* characters are exempted from comical use, their gender identity would then be presented as a conflict provoker to the story.



Take for instance *Prajan See Roong*, in which the *kathoey* lead, A-ruk, is a showgirl before she adopts her neighbour's abandoned toddler son, Tawan. After taking in Tawan, A-ruk decides to leave her cabaret career behind, together with her *kathoey* identity, and relocates to Chiangmai, where nobody recognises her. Once in Chiangmai, she opens a hair salon, assumes her biological male role and raises Tawan as his father. Unfortunately, her suppressed *kathoey* mannerisms do not escape her neighbours' keen eyes and it is not too long before Tawan's schoolmates start taunting him for having a *kathoey* father. Having at first dismissed the accusation, Tawan later runs away from his house after witnessing a scene which proves his father's alleged *kathoey* identity to be true.

Departing from the representational norm that favours visually perceptible masculine *kathoey*, *Beauty and the Bitches* (Nipon Pewnien, 2016), a ferocious fictional inside story of twelve beauty pageant contestants vying for the crown, foregrounds an untoward romance between the handsome wealthy organiser of the contest, Kong, and one of the contenders, Wine, who is eventually revealed to be a transgender woman, namely a man who has already undergone sex reassignment surgery (see Figure 2.4 below).



Figure 2.4: A promotional poster for *Beauty and the Bitches*. Posing on the furthest right is the transgender character called Wine

This reality show-like soap opera marked the first TV representation of a *heterosexual* couple compounded of a straight man and a transgender woman. Even though in the end they are separated and Wine is deported back to her country of origin, the reality-simulated drama ends on a positive note with Kong and Wine bidding one another farewell and promising to reunite some day, when Wine is able to return to Thailand legally.

The pro-LGBT messages implicit in the TV programme prove to be bountiful by the close of the story since it does not only portray the prospect of a successful romantic relationship between a heterosexual man and a post-operative transgender woman, but it also features a guest appearance of Yollada “Nok” Suanyot, a transsexual woman herself, who founded and chairs the TransFemale Association of Thailand, and whose activism is discussed at length above (see section 2.2). The most vocal advocate of Thai transgender rights plays a cameo role in defending Wine’s decision to take part in the pageant as well as helping bail her when she is charged with manslaughter, which she committed in self-defence and in defence of her younger sister.

More still, it further unfolds that two contestants, Deer and Look-Wha, who have been each other’s best friend prior to their participation in the competition, are romantically involved. The lesbian couple are reported in the penultimate scene to prosper from their ensuing joint-acting career. The beauty pageant drama additionally solidifies its pro-LGBT cause when the second season, starring an entirely different cast of twelve contestants, markets itself as *kathoey*-friendly since, in plot development terms, it welcomes *kathoey* participants. Indeed, one *kathoey* character, despite being played by a biological woman, does figure as one of the major competitors in the fictional universe.

However, the rather independent sequel takes a bolder stance than its predecessor by including a hearing-impaired contender, to underline the customary exclusion of marginalised groups in Thai pop culture. Even though it is uncovered later that the motive behind the progressive embrace of peripheral populations is purely commercial, not benevolent, the drama nonetheless proves critical with its satire on Thai media’s routine exploitation of the public’s inclination towards sentimentality. As if to respond to the TV drama’s avant-garde view,

Season 3 of *The Face Thailand* (Piyarat Kanjarerk, 2017), the Thai version of the US-inspired modeling-themed reality television franchise aired in October 2016, was open to *kathoey* candidates, a generous gesture unheard of in the previous seasons. This move by the organising committee for *The Face Thailand* Season 3 could undoubtedly serve as an auspicious sign for greater understanding of queer diversity, seeing that, to all intents and purposes, it takes place offstage.

Regarding representation on the small screen, gay men are comparatively luckier than their *kathoey* counterparts. Although the frequency with which they appear is not as great as that of *kathoey*, their roles tend to be more nuanced and personal. In *พรุ่งนี้ก็รักเธอ* [*Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter: Tomorrow I will still Love You*] (Nipon Pewnen, 2009), Kong and Pee are from two estranged houses; their relationship is a taboo, their sexuality is an inconvenient secret. Another soap opera, *ชิงรักหักสวาท* [*Ching Ruk Huk Sa-wart: Vying for the Love, Fighting for the Affection*] (Adul BoonButr and Suppocha Krutnark, 2014), features a similar subplot where two gay sons from two different opposing families are secretly in a relationship. More striking is the fact that the two clans are ethnically Chinese, whose Confucian values, dictating every son's mandatory task of continuing their bloodline by heterosexual reproduction, still run deep. The two soaps mainly address the issues of familial acceptance, following how these gay couples seek acceptance from within.

The aforementioned examples of gay romance-featured Thai melodramas, however unorthodox they are, might pale in comparison to the most recent LGBT-related TV franchise, *ฮอร์โมนส์ วัยว้าวุ่น* [*Hormones Wai Wawoon: Hormones the Series*],<sup>12</sup> which touches upon a battery of multifaceted hurdles facing Thai LGBT youth. The series depicts the lives of various interrelated Thai students in an urban Thai high school. One of the high schoolers, Puu, a flautist in the school's marching band, used to date a female classmate for a while but is at the moment in love with one of his male bandmates, Tee. While Tee is somewhat confident in his own identity, Puu is struggling with self-identification, especially after he falls back in love with his ex-girlfriend again. The series traces Puu's self-

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<sup>12</sup> The series comprises of three seasons, the first of which released in 2013 and was directed by Songyot Sukmak-anan. Kriangkrai Wachirathamporn and Pichaya Jaratboonpracha directed the second season, released in 2014. The third season was released in 2015 and directed by Kriangkrai Wachirathamporn, Pichaya Jaratboonpracha, and Naruebet Kuno.

discovery journey on which he has to figure out his sexuality, on the one hand, and overcome peer scrutiny, on the other.

Similarly, Dow, a dreamy eleventh grader, is devastated to discover that she is smitten with her classmate-cum-best friend, Koy, who reciprocates her love. Dow, whose conduct is under the watchful eyes of her mother, makes utmost efforts to hide their relationship from both her parents and her other provocatively inquisitive peers, who thrive on exposing their surreptitious love affair. The release of *Hormones the Series 1* (Figure 2.5 below) in 2013 took younger generations by storm, owing mainly to its refreshing quality. Unfortunately, however, the series' sole weakness lies in its poor execution of Puu's storyline, which at the time cost the teen drama some backlash and viewership. Puu's rite of passage that leads to self-identification as a bisexual man can be easily misinterpreted as sheer self-indulgent sexual obsession, which is frowned upon in Thailand.



Figure 2.5: The first season of *Hormones the Series*. The second and third figures from the left are Puu and Dow respectively

In 2016, เกย์โอเค แบงค็อก [*GayOK Bangkok*],<sup>13</sup> an adult series comparable to *Hormones the Series* and directed by Tichakorn Pukaothong, was released online on TestBKK's YouTube Channel.<sup>14</sup> The production was initiated by

<sup>13</sup> The Thai title is a Thai transliteration of the English phrase *GayOK Bangkok*.

<sup>14</sup> The channel is accessible at <<https://www.youtube.com/user/TestBKK>>.

TestBKK, “APCOM’s HIV testing campaign targeting young gay men in Bangkok” (APCOM, 2017: online), while APCOM (n.d.: online) itself consists of:

a coalition of members – governments, UN partners, non-profits and community-based organisations – from Asia and the Pacific ... [...] ... working together to advocate on, highlight and prioritise HIV issues that affect the lives of men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people, including rights, health and well-being.

The series has been hailed as remarkably relatable as it traces the lives of six adult gay men who live in the Thai capital (APCOM, 2017: online), bringing into focus a multitude of issues faced by typical male homosexual grown-ups in urban Thailand and exploring how their gay identity affects their romantic and familial relationships, career paths, and sexual health. In March 2017, the second season was released on Line TV, an online broadcast channel, and subsequently uploaded to TestBKK’s YouTube channel to boot. The collaborative project between TestBKK and Trasher Bangkok, the filmmaker, has proved to be highly successful as it resonates with audiences across the Southeast Asian region too (APCOM, 2017a: online).

Despite their increased appearance in soap operas and teen drama, gay characters never figured in sitcoms until the arrival of เสือ ชะนี เก้ง [*Seua Chanee Geng: Tiger, Gibbon, Deer*] directed by Jirasak Yojew, Seksan Sing-Urai, and Komkrit Suwanwiang in 2016. In Thai, tigers, gibbons and deer are metaphors for womanisers, women, and (effeminate) gay men respectively. Thus, the title accurately captures the nucleus of the comedy, which concentrates on the loving but rowdy friendship between three intimates consisting of, as suggested by the title, one man, one woman and one gay.

The gay character in question, Chatree, is a grown-up who has been disowned and expelled from home by his military father. Despite the series being a comedy, Chatree’s personal plight nonetheless lends societal weight to the plot, supposing that one is familiar with the military-father-versus-gay-son dictum, which discloses precisely and crucially how the news of a son being gay or *kathoey* is received wrathfully by army fathers in particular. Admittedly, learning of a son’s non-normative gender may agonise every father, irrespective of his occupation, but, in Thailand, the *kathoey*/gay son of an army officer can almost invariably be

assured his/her father's reactions will not smoothly conform to the common five stages of loss, whereas denial first takes hold, followed by anger, bargaining, depression and concluded with acceptance. Usually, all the other stages apart from denial and anger are skipped over, while the two exceptional reactions take place in reverse order, that is anger precedes denial, and cutting ties with one's son is a concrete manifestation of such denial. The sitcom, however, has broken the mould of the real-life formula and cultivated a more sanguine spirit as Chatree's father can be seen, at first, begrudgingly, and gradually warming to his gay son.

In recent years, a new genre of TV adaptations, known as *Y* series, has emerged in response to the immense popularity of its online/book novel predecessors, called *Y* fiction, which has its origin in Japan. The letter "Y" concurrently stands for the two Japanese terms *yaoi* and *yuri*. The former refers to boys' love while the latter is a reference to love stories between girls. As noted by Taesillapasathit and Wongkom (2017: 130, my translation), "although the core theme of the fiction revolves around the relationship between homosexuals, the creators as well as the consumers are mostly female". In short, *Y* fiction is created by women for women (Mizoguchi, 2003, in Taesillapasathit and Wongkom, 2017: 130) and, thus, does not reflect the lived reality of homosexuals – whether male or female. In Thailand, the *Yaoi* fiction has long overtaken its *Yuri* equivalent in market dominance, to the extent that for the most part the umbrella *Y* fiction is nowadays recognised exclusively as boys' love stories.

Despite *Y* fiction and, by extension, *Y* series' focus on homoeroticism, many scholars, including Wilson and Toku (2003), Nagaike (2003), and Taesillapasathit and Wongkom (2017), have on various occasions contested the genre's authenticity of homoerotic representation. The Thai offshoot of the Japanese *Y* literature conventionally features two same-sex protagonists, whose gender roles are rigidly assigned in accordance with the gender-normative heterosexual romantic pairing: the *me* – short for *seme* – is the masculine, penetrative role while the *ke* – short for *uke* – is the feminine, receptive role (Taesillapasathit and Wongkom, 2017: 129; Pimsak and Unthaya, 2017: 179). According to Taesillapasathit and Wongkom (2017: 133), *Y* fiction provides a safe space in which women in sexually repressive society can unleash their limitless sexual

imagination without being shamed. Drawing a comparison between Thailand and Japan, the two scholars also argue that the sustenance of the literary subculture is symptomatic of the dominant culture's overbearing patriarchal values and, consequently, a subconscious fightback against such hegemonic forces (ibid.: 143).

The first season of รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ [*Ruk Woon Wairoon Saeb*], better known by its English name as *Love Sick the Series* (Rachit Kusolkoonsiri, 2014), is believed to be the first Thai Y television series adapted from the Y novel of the same name. However, it must be noted that although the source novel is emphatically categorised as Y, its TV adaptation is regarded by many a book reader as a blatant deviation from the original material, with its numerous additions of heterosexual couples. Arguably, it was the first of its kind to be aired nationwide concurrently on two channels, namely a free-to-air analogue Modernine and a digital MCOT HD, at a time when the market for Y series remained uncertain. *Love Sick the Series* parallels its kindred contemporary, *Hormones the Series*, in a myriad of aspects as the series also centres on the interwoven lives of many Thai teenage students in adjacent schools. Two male leads, Poon and Noh, after some ups and downs, eventually agree to be lovers, albeit covertly as they know that their romantic involvement will not be approved by their peers. In season two, after they ultimately overcome peer stigmatisation of their relationship, they meet with a new challenge in the form of Poon's parents, suspicious of his relationship with Noh.

While *Love Sick the Series* could pride itself on blazing a trail for a Y series niche market, the biggest breakthrough Y series arrived on the scene in late 2016. Also adapted from an online novel, the first season of พี่ว้ากตัวร้ายกับนายปีหนึ่ง [*Pee Wark Tua Rai Gub Nai Pee Neung*], better known as *SOTUS the Series* (illustrated in the following Figure 2.6), was broadcast on the digital channel One 31. As a result of its high ratings, the series was renewed for a second season in March 2017, even though the original novel ends with the finale of the first season. The sequel premiered on One 31 on 9 December 2017 and concluded on 10 March 2018.





Figure 2.6: *SOTUS the Series*, the breakthrough Thai Y series

Apart from the two previously discussed productions, *Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey*<sup>15</sup> (Weerachit Thongjila, 2016-2017), รักออกเดิน [*Ruk Ork Dern: Make It Right*] (Rachit Kusolkoonsiri, 2016-2017), *U-Prince Series* (Chatkaew Susiwa and Kanittha Kwanyoo, 2017), *Water Boyy the Series*<sup>16</sup> (Rachit Kusolkoonsiri, 2017), เดือนเกี้ยวเดือน [*Deuan Giaw Deuan: 2Moons the Series*] (Kanjapan Meesuwat, 2017), ออกหักมารักกับผม [*Ok-huk Ma Ruk Gub Pom: Together with Me*] (Jate Boonyoprakan, 2017), จูบให้ได้ถ้านายแน่จริง [*Joob Hai Dai Ta Nai Nae Jing: Kiss Me Again*] (Weerachit Thongjila, 2018), and บังเอิญรัก [*Bung-ern Ruk: Love by Chance*] (Siwat Sawatmaneekul, 2018) are among the countless number of *Y series* aired between 2016 and 2018. Some of them such as *Make It Right*, *Kiss Me Again*, and *Love by Chance* were broadcast simultaneously on two different platforms: online and TV. Meanwhile, those deemed too sexually explicit, like *Together with Me* and ผมขอสั่งให้คุณ [*Pom Khor Sung Hai Khun: I Am Your King*] (Worarit Nilklom

<sup>15</sup> The series *Senior Secret Love* features three stand-alone stories: *My Lil Boy*, *Puppy Honey*, and *Bake Me Love*. Despite having a Thai title, its English name is far more familiar to Thai *Y* viewers.

<sup>16</sup> *U-Prince Series* and *Water Boyy the Series* do not have titles in Thai.



and Ratchaneekorn Panmanee, 2017), were oftentimes confined to online outlets only.

Finally, it should also be heeded that Thai LGBT representation is not exclusive to soap operas and TV series; other genres of TV programmes featuring *kathoey* and gay hosts have been in co-existence with their fictional counterparts just as often. TV travel shows, like *เที่ยวเที่ยวไทย* [*ThoeY Thiew Thai: Kathoey Travel (in) Thailand*] (Niti Chaichitatorn, 2011 – present), and *kathoey*-led talk shows, such as *Talk Kathoey* (Sathaporn Panitraksapong, Darapa Cheoysa-nguan and Nattapong Mongkolsawat, 2015 – present), have captivated the hearts of the nation with humour being their vital selling point. *หน้ากากนักร้อง* [*Naa Gark Nuk-rong: The Mask Singer*] (Panya Nirunkul, Prapas Cholsaranon and Chayan Chantawongsatorn, 2016 – present) and *นักร้องซ่อนแอบ* [*Nuk-rong Sorn Aeb: I Can See Your Voice*] (Workpoint Entertainment, 2016 – present) are two of the most popular singing programmes that frequently invite *kathoey* to be their guest judges. *Kathoey* and gays have simply been part of the staple diet of Thai pop culture, with their roles sometimes overshadowing those of their gender-normative peers. It also goes without saying that this means their other queer counterparts such as lesbians, bisexuals, and transmen have not been accorded the same level of visibility in the media.

## **2.5 The representation of queer identities in Chinese audiovisual material**

Unlike Thailand, China has a long history of enforcing dictate-like guidelines banning portrayals of homosexuality in audiovisual media. As explored in section 2.3, the latest broadcast regulations released in late 2015 served to reaffirm homosexuality as a sexual abnormality and reiterate the long-standing embargo on audiovisual expressions of same-sex eroticism and homosexual identities. As discussed by Shaw and Zhang (2018: 273), to this day, “[m]ost films that can be interpreted as portraying same-sex attraction and relationships in a positive light are still banned in China [and] as Internet technology has developed, so too have the regulations governing online visual media”. In addition to the 2015 reissued audiovisual programming directives, which principally target TV and film offerings,

a supplementary ban on “online context featuring same-sex relationships” was promulgated in June 2017 by “the China Netcasting Services Association” (ibid.: 271). These prohibitions on queer visibility, in both offline and online media, have undoubtedly led to a very low number of queer-themed artistic productions that have managed to elude the state censorship. Indeed, the representation of queer identities in Chinese mainstream media is so scarce that a section devoted to a detailed discussion of this topic would be unwarranted. Therefore, in contrast to its Thai counterpart, in which only mainstream queer visibility is visited, this section aims at providing a broad overview of Chinese queer mediascape irrespective of the platforms – on the small screen, silver screen, or online – and whether or not it is mainstream.

Over the period from 1993 to 2009, at least ten movies featuring gay males and females were released or in circulation in China (Zhang, 2014: 20-22). All of the ten titles, listed in Table 2.1 below, had been directed by a Chinese director and starred Chinese actors:

Table 2.1: Chinese queer-themed movies released between 1993 and 2009

Chinese title	Pinyin transliteration	English title	Director	Year
霸王别姬	<i>Bàwáng Bié Jī</i>	<i>Farewell My Concubine</i>	Chen Kaige	1993
东宫西宫	<i>Dōnggōng Xīgōng</i>	<i>East Palace, West Palace</i>	Zhang Yuan	1996
自梳	<i>Zìshū</i>	<i>Intimates</i>	Zhang Zhiliang	1997
男男女女	<i>Nánnán Nǚnǚ</i>	<i>Men and Women</i>	Liu Bingjiang	1999
夜奔	<i>Yèben</i>	<i>Fleeing by Night</i>	Xu Ligong and Yin Qi	2000
蓝宇	<i>Lán Yǔ</i>		Guan Jinpeng	2001
		<i>Saving Face</i>	Alice Wu	2004
植物园	<i>Zhíwùyuán</i>	<i>The Chinese Botanist's Daughters</i>	Dai Sijie	2006

Chinese title	Pinyin transliteration	English title	Director	Year
立春	Lìchūn	<i>And the Spring Comes</i>	Gu Changwei	2007
春风沉醉的夜晚	Chūnfēng Chénzùi de Yèwǎn	<i>Spring Fever</i>	Lou Ye	2009

Most notable are *Farewell My Concubine* and *And The Spring Comes*, which were the only two greenlit to be distributed and shown in Chinese cinemas, whereas “the other eight movies have been and are still banned in China” (ibid.: 32). *Farewell My Concubine* as shown in Figure 2.7 below was pulled from the theatres two weeks after its initial release in 1993, precisely because of its portrayal of homosexual love,<sup>17</sup> albeit unrequited.



Figure 2.7: *Farewell My Concubine*, said to be the first queer-themed film in China

The 1993 picture follows the lives of two men who have received arduous training in the art of Peking Opera. While Dieyi is assigned solely to female roles, his

<sup>17</sup> Some scholars like He (2014) might argue that the romance is heterosexual since the male protagonist who pines after the other male protagonist could be interpreted as viewing himself as a woman.

friend, Xiaolou, is trained only in male roles. In one of the traditional operas performed by the workmates, Dieyi acts the part of the concubine to the King of Chu, played by Xiaolou. Before long, the former cannot help but fall in love, offstage, with his king, after which a tangled story of love, betrayal, heartbreak, and death, against the backdrop of Japanese occupation and Cultural Revolution, ensues. The Chinese official ban on the film sparked a massive public outcry after it had been awarded the highly prized Palme d'Or at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, among other prestigious honours. Hence, the veto was lifted and a heavily altered version of *Farewell My Concubine* was finally authorised to be shown in Chinese cinemas (Zhang, 2014: 32).

*And the Spring Comes*, directed by Gu Changwei, was the only other film, of the ten aforementioned titles, which went on official release in 2007. The motion picture centres on Wang Cailing, a female music teacher, who forms an intimate friendship with Mr. Hu, a gay ballet instructor in a small town. The latter is shunned by the townspeople as they realise he is homosexual. Mr. Hu comes up with the idea that the two of them should marry but Wang Cailing declines. In desperation, the ballet dancer commits a sexual assault on a student and is consequently locked away in jail. As Zhang (ibid.: 31) posits, the movie might as well have been approved for screening because it does not “show the gay character in a homosexual relationship”.

Apart from the two gay-themed films, *Lan Yu* was eventually released on DVD after a half-decade embargo (ibid.: 32). The remaining seven titles were, according to Zhang (ibid.), “independent ‘underground’ films [that] were produced and distributed in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or other foreign countries”. In fact, it should be noted that some of these movies, like *Intimates* (1997), *Fleeing by Night* (2000), *Saving Face* (2004), and *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* (2006), are not mainland Chinese per se although Chinese Mandarin is spoken for the entirety of the films. *Intimates*, for example, was registered as a Hong Kong production while *Fleeing by Night* was produced by a Taiwanese film company.

Similar to the early Thai queer silver screen, most of the foregoing queer-featured pictures contain tragic endings. As observed by Zhang (ibid.: 58), “[t]he gay characters Lin Chong (*Fleeing by Night*), Dieyi (*Farewell My Concubine*), Lan Yu

(*Lan Yu*), and Wang Ping (*Spring Fever*) all die at the end of each movie”; Mr Hu, in *And the Spring Comes*, ends up in prison; Anan and Li, the lesbian lovers in *The Chinese Botanist’s Daughters*, are executed for manslaughter. Furthermore, while *East Palace, West Palace* concludes with one of the male protagonists questioning his (homo)sexuality, *Saving Face* and *Intimates* are the only departures from the conventionally unhappy finale, wrapping up with a successful union between the homosexual characters. To the public’s surprise, however, in 2015, *Seek McCartney* (Wang Chao), also known as *Looking for Rohmer* (see Figure 2.8 below), a film which explores “a clandestine relationship between two men – one Chinese, one from France – as they travel through Tibet” at the forefront of the story was unexpectedly authorised to be screened publicly in Chinese cinemas in 2015 (Jenkins, 2016: online).



Figure 2.8: *Seek McCartney* or *Looking for Rohmer*, one of the very few queer-themed movies authorised to be screened in public Chinese cinemas

Over the last two decades, a few directors have established a firm footing on the queer filmmaking circuit. Cui Zi'en is one such household name. Born into a Christian family, Cui is a Catholic, whose early cinematic oeuvre, consisting entirely of fiction films, is often imbued with Christian elements (Bao, 2018: 121). Some of his most recognised queer-themed films include *旧约* [*Jiùyué: The Old Testament*] (2002), *哎呀呀，去哺乳* [*Aiyāya, Qùbǔrǔ: Feeding Boys, Ayaya*] (2003), *星星相吸惜* [*Xīngxīng Xiāng Xīxī: Star Appeal*] (2004), *我如花似玉的儿子*

[*Wô Rú Huā Sì Yù de Érzi: My Fair Son*] (2005), and *副歌* [*Fùgē: Refrain*] (2006).

Pictured below is his 2002 film entitled *旧约* or *The Old Testament*.

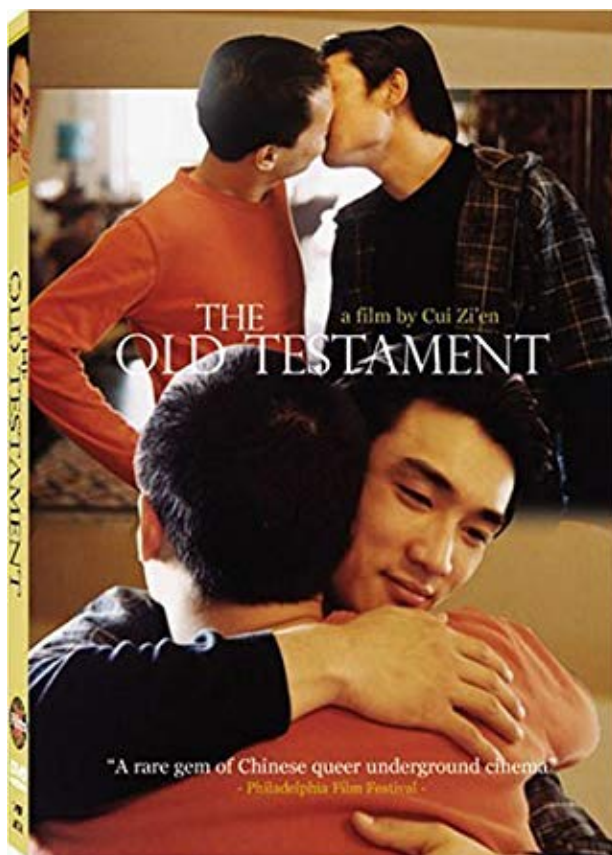


Figure 2.9: *The Old Testament*, directed by Cui Zi'en, features three stories revolving around queer couples

In later years, however, the genre of his cinematic output has shifted from fiction to documentary. Up until 2018, he has made three documentaries, namely, *夜景* [*Yèjǐng: Night Scene*] (2005), *我们是共产主义省略号* [*Wômen Shì Gōngchân Zhūyì Shēngluèhào: We Are the ... of Communism*] (2007), and *志同志* [*Zhìtóngzhì: Queer China, 'Comrade' China*] (2008). As to his filmmaking style, Bao (2018: 127) describes that:

Cui refuses to cater to the audience, contrary to what commercial filmmakers do. His early films are explicitly labelled 'queer films', and for a non-cinephile audience they can be very difficult to watch. Cui's films often seem made by an amateur filmmaker who is not familiar with film techniques. They feature incoherent storylines, monotonous narratives, long takes, hand-held cameras, and ambient sound.

While Cui Zi'en is far from an amateur filmmaker, his films are indeed low-cost independent projects "primarily funded by himself and his friends, and sometimes by international foundations and non-governmental organizations" (ibid.: 131). More intriguingly still, despite the fact that Cui holds the position of an associate professor at the Film Research Institute in the Beijing Film Academy, he is restrained from lecturing undergraduates, as a punishment for coming out as gay in 1991 (Bao, 2018: 121; Zhang, 2014: 76). On the plus side, his associate professor post at the lyceum provides him with "easy access to digital video cameras, professional actors and actresses and editing equipment, and this has certainly helped him reduce production costs" (Bao, 2018: 132). Furthermore, considering the subject matter of his filmic works, it goes without saying that they were primarily disseminated on unofficial platforms such as "underground community screenings and bootleg DVDs" (ibid.: 120).

Not only is he known for his queer filmography, Cui Zi'en is also one of the chief organisers of the Beijing Queer Film Festival, which has been in existence annually since 2001. The festival "presents feature films, documentaries and shorts, most of which are produced in China" (ibid.: 142), although sometimes queer audiovisual productions from across the globe are showcased as well. Nonetheless, as a result of the government clampdown on queer-oriented activities, the yearly event is bound to operate on a guerrilla basis: "by selecting multiple screening venues and designing contingent screening plans: when one screening venue is shut down by the police, the festival continues at another venue" (ibid.).

In the past few years, the festival has adopted some experimental approaches to increase participatory outreach by means of, for example, offering sponsorship to audiences from "small cities and remote regions in China to attend the festival" (ibid.: 143) and providing "online streaming of films and [...] screenings aboard a travelling bus or train" (ibid.: 142), the latter of which is closely akin to the China Queer Film Festival Tour organised likewise by Beijing-based queer filmmakers.

The China Queer Film Festival Tour was originated in 2008 by Fan Popo, Shitou, and Mingming, as a countermeasure against the media stipulation issued by

SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television)<sup>18</sup> in 2008, which prohibited public media representation of “homosexuality, pornography and violence” (ibid.: 156). The travelling festival screened “queer films made by themselves and other independent filmmakers” in different cities across China (ibid.). The screening venues range from local bars and clubs, to university classrooms.

One of the spearheads of the film tour, Fan Popo, is another familiar face in the circle of queer documentary filmmaking. Some of his documentary projects include: *New Beijing, New China* (2009); *Chinese Closet* (2009); *Paper House* (2009); *Be a Woman*<sup>19</sup> (2010); 彩虹伴我心 [*Cáihóng Bàn Wô Xīn: Mama Rainbow*] (2012); 幸福梦想 [*Xìngfú Mèngxiāng: Happy Dream*]; 彩虹伴我行 [*Cáihóng Bàn Wô Xíng: Papa Rainbow*] (2016). In 2014, Fan sued SAPPRFT, China’s top media regulator, in a bid to find out why *Mama Rainbow* (as shown in the following Figure 2.10), his gay-themed documentary featuring the real-life cases of six mothers who have come to embrace their gay son or daughter, suddenly disappeared from Chinese video streaming sites such as Youku, Tudou, and 56.com (Child, 2015: online). In December 2015, the verdict was delivered, ruling that SAPPRFT had not issued any document ordering the video streaming firms to remove the film from their websites (Lin, 2015). However, as reported by Lin (ibid.: online), “[w]hile the verdict still leaves it unclear who – if anyone – ordered the film to be taken offline, Mr. Fan and his supporters have hailed it as a victory”, since the implications of the ruling were such that the video could make a comeback on the websites.

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<sup>18</sup> This agency operates currently under the name of SAPPRFT, which is short for State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television. See section 3.1 for more details.

<sup>19</sup> No Chinese titles of this documentary or of the former three can be found.



# 彩虹伴我心 MAMA RAINBOW



Figure 2.10: *Mama Rainbow*, directed by Fan Popo, was once ordered to be taken offline

Another noteworthy figure behind the Chinese queer mediascape is Wei Jiangang (also known as Wei Xiaogang), a co-organiser of the Beijing Queer Film Festival alongside Cui Zi'en, a founding member of Queer Comrades [同志亦凡人 :Tóngzhì yì Fánrén], “China’s only independent and established LGBT webcast” (Shaw and Zhang, 2018: 274), and a board member of the Beijing LGBT Centre. Having been trained as an actor, Wei was previously recruited to star in a few of the queer films mentioned earlier, such as *Men and Women* (Liu Bingjiang, 1999), and *The Old Testament* directed by none other than Cui Zi'en in 2002. Being a film director himself, he has been involved in the production of more than 50 queer documentaries for the Queer Comrade webcast (Queer Comrades, n.d.). The queer film production company maintains its entity on several portals, including its own website ([www.queercomrades.com](http://www.queercomrades.com)), Sina Blog, SinaWeibo, Facebook, and YouTube. According to Shaw and Zhang (2018: 274), “[o]ver the past nine years, over 100 talk shows and documentaries have been

uploaded to its video catalogue, covering a range of topics relating to the *tongzhi* community”.<sup>20</sup>

As to Queer Comrades itself, Bao (2018: 2) describes it as “more than a community webcast that makes video programmes to represent queer lives for the communities” since:

[w]orking under the umbrella of Beijing Gender Health Education Institute (BGHEI), a Beijing-based queer NGO [...], and in collaboration with other queer NGOs, [it] also organizes political, social and cultural events such as the Queer University, China AIDS Walk, China Rainbow Award, Beijing Queer Film Festival and Chinese Queer Film Festival Tour.

From Bao’s description of the queer webcast above, it is evident that Queer Comrades has been central to the trio of directors’ queer movements. In fact, their professional trajectories have frequently intersected and overlapped, with Queer Comrades being their meeting point. For instance, as mentioned above, Cui Zi’en and Wei Xiaogang are jointly responsible for the annual organisation of the Beijing Queer Film Festival. For another instance, *Mama Rainbow*, whose removal from the three main streaming sites enraged its director, Fan Popo, was produced by Wei Xiaogang, among others. On top of the two foregoing film festivals held in the capital of China and across the country respectively, another equally impactful queer-oriented enterprise is Queer University, which works towards training and encouraging queer individuals to create their own Do-It-Yourself (DIY) films using digital video cameras (Bao, 2018: 143). Some of the filmic products born out of the DIY programme are *Brothers*<sup>21</sup> (Yao Yao, 2013) and *小岳同志* [*Xiǎoyuè Tóngzhì: Comrade Yue*] (Yue Jianbo, 2013), to name but a few. The advent of Queer University has undoubtedly served to build solidarity within the queer communities and has become a means through which queer members can explore their subjectivities (Bao, 2018: 143).

Although, from the outside, it is probably hard to pinpoint the tangible achievements of Queer Comrades and the queer activists involved, considering

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<sup>20</sup> *Tongzhi*, literally meaning “comrade”, is, as asserted by Bao (2018: 3), “one of the most popular terms to refer to sexual minorities in China today”. It is also an attempt to translate the English word “queer” into Chinese.

<sup>21</sup> No Chinese title of the DIY film can be found.

that no legal progress has been made hitherto as a result of their activities, their collective efforts should not be dismissed as unfruitful. Indeed, as remarked by Bao (2018: 143-144) on the aforementioned queer events:

In a country where both independent filmmaking and public expressions of homosexuality are considered problematic, the mushrooming of queer films and queer film festivals demonstrates the potential for the development of queer culture in China. Films and filmmaking do not have to be political, but in a social context where queer representations and sexual rights are limited, queer filmmaking can take on a political edge. Sitting together to watch a queer film becomes an important way to construct identities and to build communities; organizing a queer film screening despite the state ban may have the same political significance as organizing a pride march.

While the queer media discussed above is, to a certain extent, sociopolitically motivated, 耽美剧 [dànměijù], a separate genre of Chinese queer audiovisual programmes, catering specifically to its novel fanbase, has emerged in parallel with its Thai counterpart Y series in recent years. 耽美 [dànměi], the name of the literary and, by extension, audiovisual subculture indicates a nod to its Japanese roots. Despite being written with Chinese kanji characters, the term, pronounced *tanbi* and used to describe an object that is beautiful, vulnerable and romantic in Japanese, entered China and has since been appropriated for the so-called boys' love stories or, more commonly, known as BL in Chinese. It is not just in Thailand, however, that *Yaoi* has completely eclipsed *Yuri* to the extent that the term 耽美 itself refers exclusively to *Yaoi* fiction and series.

Most of the Chinese BL series were, similar to their Thai counterparts, adapted from online BL novels. Moreover, the BL fandom in China must be familiar with the name Chai Jidan, who authored several popular BL titles. Some of the audiovisual productions based on her most celebrated works include 上瘾 [Shàngyīn: *Addicted*] (Ding Wei, 2016), 逆袭之爱上情敌 [Nìxí zhī Ài Shàng Qíngdì: *Counterattack*] (Wang Xingcheng and An Peng, 2015) as well as 盛势 [Shèngshì: *Advance Bravely*] (2017). Meanwhile, Chen Peng is equally renowned for his direction of various successful BL series such as 你是男的我也爱 [Nǐ Shì Nán de Wǒ Yě Ài: *Like Love*] Season 1 – 3 (2014-2016), 识汝不识丁 [Shì Rǔ Búshì Dīng: *Love Is More Than a Word*] (2016), and 偷此一生 [Yú Cǐ Yì Shēng: *Till Death Tear Us Apart*] (2017). 不可抗力 [Bùkě Kànglì: *Uncontrolled Love*] (Sun

Chengzhi, 2016) is a two-part BL web movie adapted from Lan Lin's work. *灵界基友* [*Língjiè Jīyōu: Ghost Boyfriend*], likewise a BL movie, was directed by Li Yunming and released in 2016. Oftentimes, the male protagonist in the foregoing BL productions is described as straight, who just happens to fall in love with the other male character. As should be clear, these BL offerings are available exclusively online on, for example, Sina Weibo ([www.weibo.com](http://www.weibo.com)), QQLive ([live.qq.com](http://live.qq.com)), and, most notably, iQiyi ([www.iqiyi.com](http://www.iqiyi.com)), regardless of whether or not they contain explicit homoerotic scenes.

It must be noted, however, that the self-imposed banishment of the Chinese BL series to online distribution only does not necessarily prevent them from the state interference as exemplified by the case of the BL web drama *Addicted* (also known as *Addiction* and *Heroin*) as shown in Figure 2.11 below:



Figure 2.11: *Addicted*, directed by Ding Wei, was very well received but eventually censored. Its planned season 2 was shelved permanently

Adapted from Chai Jidan's BL novel 你丫上癮了? [*Nî yā Shàngyîn le: Are You Addicted?*] and premiered on 29 January 2016, *Addicted* became "the second most watched show" on iQiyi, its streaming site (Campbell, 2016: online). With all the attention the programme managed to attract, it was unsurprising that the drama was pulled from the online television portal just three episodes prior to the finale of the debut season at the behest of SAPPRFT (Lin and Chen, 2016). The production company of the BL series, Huace Film & TV, later announced that the remaining three unaired episodes would be uploaded to its YouTube channel. Ironically, though, YouTube is one of the international websites blocked in mainland China, making the show available to viewers abroad only. More still, the company posted, on its official Weibo account on 17 April 2016, a cryptic message decoded by the fans who attended the show's last fan meet as a farewell to its planned second season which was reportedly shelved for good (Shangyin wangluojū xuanchuan pingtai [The PR platform for the web series *Addicted*], 2016).

The currently much beloved genre of audiovisual entertainment has not only found its way into the Chinese's hearts but also the Thai fandom's. It perhaps would not be an overstatement to say that, inspired by the Japanese Y ACGN (Anime, Comics, Games, and Novels), both Thai and Chinese Y subcultures have grown organically and simultaneously on their respective home soils. The parallel rising popularity of the genre in Thailand and China has rendered its outflow straightforward and fast-moving. Simply put, all of the aforementioned Chinese BL series have been fansubbed into Thai and distributed online for Thai fans to enjoy. By the same token, the Thai Y productions under discussion in section 2.4.2 have been subtitled into Chinese and well received by their Chinese target audiences alike.

Despite my best attempts at laying out the Chinese queer mediascape, this section could not be considered comprehensive, given the state ban on queer representation and the vast size of the country itself. Particularly in the face of the official prohibition, it would be logical to assume that 'underground' or 'independent' queer artistic creations must have flourished under the state's radar, thanks to the numerous production and distribution opportunities opened up by technology. Those which have caught international attention – be it social

movement- or entertainment-wise – and remained traceable have been duly documented herein; those which have not will regrettably remain unexplored in this thesis. In fact, it should not escape one's notice that even all of the comparatively visible queer productions mentioned above, with the exception of two, have been accessible solely online, a sprawling space for expression whose every nook and cranny is very likely out of the government's reach.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Thai audiovisual media in China**

This chapter sets out to firstly unravel the range of Thai soap operas that have arrived in mainland China, both on Chinese television and Chinese online platforms. Secondly, the chapter aims to investigate how Thai soap operas are generally treated on Chinese alien soil by the Chinese media authorities in translational terms, which lays the basis for the empirical analysis of a corpus of Thai soap operas chosen for the purpose of this research project in the following chapters.

Before I proceed with the descriptive analysis of the status quo of audiovisual translation in China, a brief summary of the Chinese broadcast landscape, including the presence of Thai TV soap operas, will be first provided. This will serve as a point of departure for the subsequent empirical study since a solid understanding of the distribution and commercialisation of Thai soap operas is central to the comprehension of the translation analysis.

#### **3.1 Chinese broadcast landscape**

As the third largest country in the world in terms of surface and the first one in terms of population, with a diversity of 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups in addition to the Han majority, China boasts one of the highest number of television stations globally. After Deng Xiaoping's ascension to supreme statesmanship in 1978, which marked the abolition of China's long-standing closed-door policy to foreign influence and audiovisual programmes, the TV broadcasting sphere began to grow exponentially in the 1980s and early 1990s (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 86). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) loosened its grip on TV media control and sanctioned the establishment of regional municipality and county TV stations to join hands with their "national- and provincial-level counterparts to form a four-level broadcast mechanism" (ibid.). On account of the then changing Chinese mediascape, China witnessed an unprecedented rise in the total of TV stations. According to the official statistics, in 2005 Chinese national and provincial TV stations amounted to 302 coupled

with a plethora of 1,932 Chinese municipal and county-level broadcast stations (ibid.). However, considering the economic growth and the rise of telecommunications infrastructure in China in recent years, the number of TV stations in the country must have presumably multiplied accordingly over the stretch of thirteen years from 2005 to 2018. As of 2015, the total number of Chinese TV channels was estimated to amount to no lower than 3,000.

As mentioned before, Chinese TV stations can be categorised into four levels of broadcast structure. The first type encapsulates those which broadcast to the entire country and are directly under the control and supervision of 国家广播电影电视总局 [Guójiā Guāngbō Diànyīng Diànshì Zōngjú: the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT)] (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 87-88), currently known as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT)<sup>22</sup> (SAPPRFT, 2015). These channels are all under the umbrella of 中国中央电视台 [Zhōngguó Zhōngyāng Diànshìtái: China Central Television (CCTV)], the national Chinese broadcaster which, in 2010, owned 16 channels that could be watched in every part of the country (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 86). By 2015, CCTV (CCTV-China Central Television, 2017) has grown to a greater size with a reported total of 42 channels under its management. Of these, 29 are free and available to all the Chinese population, although only 24 are listed on the official CCTV website (see Table 3.1 for the list of free national channels), while 13 of them are digital channels accessible on a pay-to-watch basis (ibid.). Programmes aired by the 29 free CCTV channels cover a wide range of topics and include a mixture of entertainment, news, documentary and comedy, to name but a few. The names of these channels are prefixed by the abbreviation CCTV and are also mostly followed by a number which is indicative of the channel-specific nature of televised programmes. For instance, CCTV-8 电视剧 [CCTV-8 Drama] is known for screening solely TV series, both domestic and foreign.

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<sup>22</sup> In March 2013, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television was merged with the General Administration of Press and Publication to constitute the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT). However, the acronym SARFT will still be employed when references to pre-2013 academic literature relevant to the institution are made.



Table 3.1: List of free CCTV channels

Channel Name	Type of Broadcast Content
CCTV-1 综合 [General]	Programmes fed by this channel range over a wide variety of topics such as healthy eating and lifestyle, wildlife, humans and nature and feature stories.
CCTV-2 财经 [Finance]	Reports on global and Chinese economies, money-making techniques, finance advice, money-saving tips and the like.
CCTV-3 综艺 [Art]	Dance and performing arts shows including those with an emphasis on cultural knowledge concerning China.
CCTV-4 (亚洲) [Asia]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at overseas Chinese and foreign audiences living in Asia.
CCTV-4 (欧洲) [Europe]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at overseas Chinese and foreign audiences living in Europe.
CCTV-4 (美洲) [Americas]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at overseas Chinese and foreign audiences living in the Americas.
CCTV-5 体育 [Sport]	News coverage of sporting events, competitions and results and interviews with prominent sportspeople, including regular Oriental martial arts teaching.
CCTV-6 电影 [Film]	Screening of Chinese films and news coverage of Chinese big-screen celebrities.
CCTV-7 军事农业 [Military Affairs and Agriculture]	Updates and reports on Chinese military technology, news and training as well as on agricultural life in China.
CCTV-8 电视剧 [Dramas]	Screening of Chinese nationally-produced and imported foreign TV dramas.
CCTV-9 纪录 [Documentary]	Documentary programmes on a variety of subjects ranging from humankind to nature.
CCTV-9 纪录(英) [Documentary (English)]	Screening of the very same programmes broadcast by CCTV-9 纪录 but dubbed in English.
CCTV-10 科教 [Popular Science]	Scientific explanation of and discussion on a wide range of topics such as health issues, major historical events, natural world and the like.
CCTV-11 戏曲 [Traditional Chinese Opera]	Frequent screening of traditional Chinese operas punctuated with Chinese TV dramas and programmes of a general nature.
CCTV-12 社会与法 [Society and Laws]	Information on the legal system and reports on talk-of-the-town social issues.
CCTV-13 新闻 [News]	Coverage of the latest news from around the world, in Chinese.

CCTV-14 少儿 [Children]	Screening of cartoons for kids.
CCTV-15 音乐 [Music]	The channel airs both domestic and foreign music videos, including concerts. Native Chinese music forms part of this offer and includes songs sung in ethnic minority languages. Singing contests as well as introductory programmes to musical instruments and their origins are also featured in this channel.
CCTV-News	Coverage of the latest news from around the globe, in English.
CCTV-西语 [Spanish]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at Spanish speakers and learners of the language.
CCTV-法语 [French]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at French speakers and learners of the language.
CCTV-阿语 [Arabic]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at Arabic speakers and learners of the language.
CCTV-俄语 [Russian]	A wide range of programmes about China aimed at Russian speakers and learners of the language.
CCTV-体育赛事 [Sporting Events]	Live and recorded coverage of major sporting events around the world, such as the World Fencing Championships or the Swimming World Championships, among others.

The second type of broadcaster encompasses provincial level channels belonging to all four Chinese province-level divisions,<sup>23</sup> whose coverage spreads either nationwide (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 86) or is restricted to their respective provinces only. In a Chinese province-level division, there generally exists only one broadcaster that is in charge of running all of its own provincial level stations at the given provincial level. Despite their original mission as “a way of reaching remote audiences” (Simons and Redl, 2002: 21) by limiting themselves to province-level confined coverage, certain major provincial level channels, especially those broadcasting via satellite, had strived hard in recent years and eventually succeeded in securing official permission to broadcast in big cities (ibid.). For example, Anhui TV, the provincial level broadcaster of Anhui

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<sup>23</sup> China has four province-level divisions consisting of 22 provinces (excluding Taiwan currently classified as a disputed territory), 4 municipalities, 5 autonomous regions and 2 special administrative regions (see Figure 3.1).

province, is responsible for routine management and programme feeding of all 13 channels in its possession, available throughout the entire country.

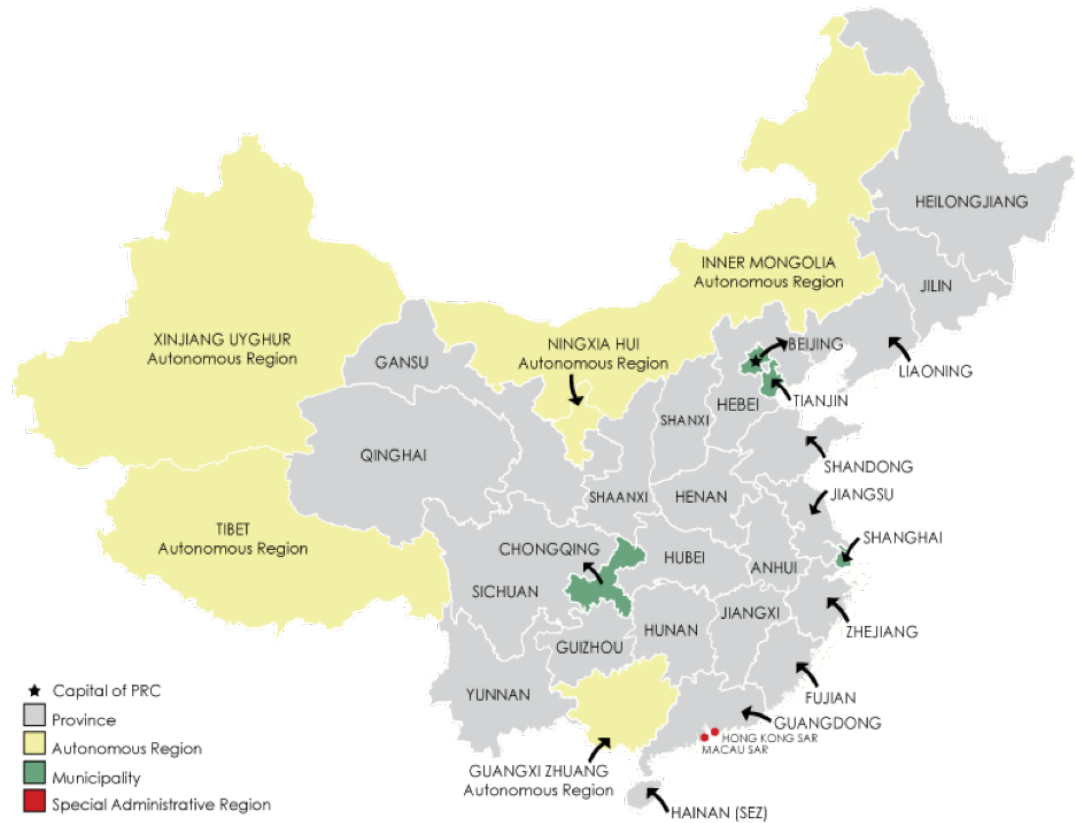


Figure 3.1: Map of China's four province-level divisions

Also, the audiovisual programming production by the four Chinese province-level municipalities (Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and Chongqing) is effectively subsumed under the provincial broadcaster of the second type, instead of the next third level broadcast mechanism which forms part of the four-level Chinese broadcast hierarchy. The reasons for such arrangement lie in the fact that the latter three of the four above-parenthesised municipalities broadcast to the entire country. Chinese provinces constitute the highest-level Chinese administrative divisions. A Chinese province led by its own provincial government can be further broken down into four official sublevels, namely prefecture, county, township and village levels. Meanwhile, a Chinese municipality is a mere city, albeit under the Chinese central government's direct control. In this regard, the Chinese municipalities are

administratively treated as provinces in their own right, hence holding the same level of administrative power as provinces. All in all, 39 provincial satellite channels operate at national level, of which 34 are strictly speaking based at province-level and only the other five channels were originally created to broadcast at national level, as shown in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2: List of Chinese provincial level satellite channels

Channel Name	Channel Name
安徽卫视 [Anhui Satellite TV]	北京卫视 [Beijing Satellite TV]
重庆卫视 [Chongqing Satellite TV]	东方卫视 [Dongfang Satellite TV]
广东卫视 [Guangdong Satellite TV]	广西卫视 [Guangxi Satellite TV]
贵州卫视 [Guizhou Satellite TV]	河北卫视 [Hebei Satellite TV]
黑龙江卫视 [Heilongjiang Satellite TV]	湖北卫视 [Hubei Satellite TV]
吉林卫视 [Jilin Satellite TV]	江苏卫视 [Jiangsu Satellite TV]
江西卫视 [Jiangxi Satellite TV]	康巴卫视 [Kangba Satellite TV]
旅游卫视 [Travel Satellite TV]	内蒙古卫视 [Inner Mongolia Satellite TV]
青海卫视 [Qinghai Satellite TV]	山东卫视 [Shangdong Satellite TV]
深圳卫视 [Shenzhen Satellite TV]	陕西卫视 [Shanxi Satellite TV]
四川卫视 [Sichuan Satellite TV]	天津卫视 [Tianjin Satellite TV]
厦门卫视 [Xiamen Satellite TV]	新疆卫视 [Xinjiang Satellite TV]
延边卫视 [Yanbian Satellite TV]	云南卫视 [Yunnan Satellite TV]
健康卫视 [Health Satellite TV]	辽宁卫视 [Liaoning Satellite TV]
兵团卫视 [Armed Forces Satellite TV]	宁夏卫视 [Ningxia Satellite TV]
东南卫视 [Dongnan Satellite TV]	山东教育台 [Shangdong Education Channel]
甘肃卫视 [Gansu Satellite TV]	山西卫视 [Shanxi Satellite TV]
河南卫视 [Henan Satellite TV]	西藏卫视 [Xizang Satellite TV]
湖南卫视 [Hunan Satellite TV]	香港卫视 [Xianggang Satellite TV]
浙江卫视 [Zhejiang Satellite TV]	

As can be seen in Table 3.2, the names of these provincial level channels are mostly infused with Chinese provincial-level division names followed by the term 卫视 [Weishi: Satellite TV]: 安徽卫视 [Anhui Satellite TV], 重庆卫视 [Chongqing Satellite TV] and 浙江卫视 [Zhejiang Satellite TV], among others. Some of the provincial-level channels broadcast in ethnic minority languages in an attempt to fulfil the needs of certain clearly specified groups of audiences. For instance, 康

巴卫视 [Kangba Satellite TV], whose programmes are produced in Tibetan, is available to the local populations that speak said language in the following five western provinces: Sichuan, Tibet, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu.

Like the first type of national level broadcaster, province-level broadcasters are, to all intents and purposes, still under an obligation to comply with the broadcast regulations issued by SARFT (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 87-88). Notwithstanding SARFT's reins on provincial level broadcasters, the provincial satellite TV stations have managed to manoeuvre their way out of the broadcast confines to some extent and create more "market-oriented and audience-friendly" (ibid.: 88) programming for their niche markets. As explicated by Hong (2002: 30), the arrival of foreign cultural products in China in the late 1970s "served as reference points for the transformation of the domestic product from a mere expression of political and cultural tendencies into popular entertainment", although the Chinese government still exercises control, albeit rather lax, over television production (ibid.: 36).

The third level of broadcasters includes those whose programmes are fed by municipal broadcasters, excluding the four province-level municipalities introduced above. With the exception of said four province-level municipal satellite channels, other Chinese municipalities or, in other words, cities produce and operate their own channels that they broadcast on the municipal level. Unlike the national and provincial-level channels, a complete list of municipal channels is, to the best of my knowledge, irretrievable as they are too numerous and, on occasions, ephemeral.

Finally, the fourth type, the county-level broadcasters, covers the Chinese counties as suggested by its name and operates TV channels exclusively to their geographic audiences. Although the number of channels at this precise level is unknown, the total of municipal and county channels was reckoned to be not fewer than 1,900 as of 2005 (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 86).

In terms of Chinese broadcast regulations on foreign TV programming, it is evident that China's unique economic and political system of authoritarian capitalism has informed every aspect of China's broadcast supervision (Hachten,

2010: 23). First utilised mainly as a propaganda mouthpiece for the Chinese government (Hu and Hong, 2008: 90), the situation of the Chinese audiovisual media changed substantially after the formation of the Ministry of Radio and Television (currently SAPPRFT) back in 1982, with its mission to “oversee the accelerating radio and television industries” (ibid.: 93). China’s accession to WTO in 2001 has also acted as a catalyst in the industry by giving the stakeholders freer rein in the production and distribution of programmes (Chin, 2003: 80). Today’s Chinese mediascape can be defined as “as free and vigorous – within limits – as most media in the world” (Scotton and Hachten, 2010: 4), resulting from China’s communist leadership’s embrace of “market reforms while continuing to restrict political freedom” (Hachten, 2010: 22), which has come to be known as the authoritarian capitalism that is so peculiar to China. In other words, as concluded by Hachten (ibid.), the Chinese media is stripped of “the right to talk politics”. While the overarching control over the media sector is in the Chinese Central government’s hands, its actual regulation and supervision are conducted by SARFT. Hu and Hong (2008: 95) summarise SARFT’s range of responsibilities as follows:

SARFT is responsible for the regulation of the development of radio, film, and television sectors nationwide and acts as a professional supervisor that examines television and film production, approves the content of radio and television programs and films, and controls foreign film imports and their subsequent broadcast in China. It is also the supervisor and director of the country’s satellite and cable networks. Divisions of SARFT provide guidance and restrictions of China’s radio, film, and television sectors.

However, since the merging in 2013 of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the General Administration of Press and Publication into the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), SARFT’s, or rather SAPPRFT’s, hands have extended to the domains of press and publication as its name suggests. SAPPRFT’s (SAPPRFT, 2013) current mission, stated on its official website, is broken down into thirteen items which essentially entail:

1. the dissemination of content in the press, publishing, radio, television, and film (PPRTF) industries;
2. the formulation and implementation of copyright laws for both domestic and foreign PPRTF products;
3. the expansion of PPRTF media into rural areas;
4. the monitoring and supervision of PPRTF content and its quality;
5. the superintendence of digital material on the Internet;
6. the overseeing of PPRTF imports;
7. the interchange of PPRTF commodities among mainland China, Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong; and
8. the eradication of pornography and illegal publications.

The rapid expansion of the Chinese TV market which started in the early 1980s led to “an ever-increasing demand for TV programs”, both national and international (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 89), on the Chinese viewership’s part. After the broadcasting of the first non-native TV drama in 1979, the embargo on foreign TV drama imports was lifted; thus, a limited number of major provincial and municipal broadcasters were granted the permission to bring in offshore TV programmes (ibid.). By 2010, every provincial- and municipal-level TV station had been authorised to import foreign TV productions, albeit restrained by an annual quota triggered by the Chinese audience’s untamable craze for foreign TV products which threatened to destabilise China’s own TV entertainment industry (ibid.). The aforementioned yearly quota together with other relevant broadcast regulations is discussed in section 3.3.1.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 Thai soap operas

โปงพวง [*Pong Parng*], which is a type of traditional Thai fish trap, became the first play-like Thai TV soap opera adapted from a stage play by King Rama VI of Thailand and was introduced to the Thai masses back in 1956. The programme was broadcast on Channel 4 Bangkhunprom, the first Thai TV channel

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<sup>24</sup> The discussion solely pertains to TV broadcast activity in China and does not encompass cinema distribution in China. For further information on cinema, please refer to Scotton and Hachten (2010) and Khoo and Metzger (2009), among others.

(Nimnetipan, 1989: 160) that has survived to this day and continues to operate under the name of Modernine TV. After seeing a period of ups and downs in terms of popularity between the late 1950s and late 1980s, the production of Thai soap operas finally established itself as a steady business in 1987, when three free analogue channels took the decision to specialise in the provision of melodramatic soaps for the public at that time. It was not long before the rating system came into existence as a milestone in the growth of the Thai TV entertainment industry. Today, free analogue channels have risen to five – namely Channel 3, Channel 5, Channel 7, Modernine TV and Thai PBS –, of which the first four are regular feeders of soap operas while Thai PBS mainly airs East Asian dramas.

Content-wise, Thai soap operas reflect, to a great degree, Thai customs and worldviews, including social values. Also, as accurately summed up by Chantasadkosol, Channel 7's head of scriptwriters, the wide range of Thai soap storylines is devised in order to first and foremost appeal to the taste of 'upcountry viewers' which make up the majority of the soap viewership across the country (in Fredrickson, 2013). As a result, most Thai soap operas are imbued with similar elements and are made to exploit "entertaining and easy-to-follow" stories (ibid.). The screening of action, suspense thrillers, fantasy and sci-fi programmes might not be as well received as the genre of mass appeal termed in Thai as น้ำเน่า [nam nao: stinking water].

Indeed, as pointed out by Suntornwiriyaikul (2008: 13 in Chirattikorn, 2016: 167), most Thai soap operas can be classified as melodrama, a subgenre of the larger category of drama, wherein heightened and exaggerated emotions are prioritised (ibid.). Overly cheesy romance scenes and tragic accidents are typical of melodramas to boot (ibid.). Unexpected plot twists are also frequently employed to move the storyline along (ibid.). Most notably, in melodrama, characters are stereotypically typecast (Gledhill, 1997: 346, in Chirattikorn, 2016: 167). Generally, the male protagonist is portrayed as handsome, gentlemanly, idealistic and the female protagonist is depicted, in a very similar fashion, as beautiful, selfless, and perfect (Suntornwiriyaikul 2008: 14 in Chirattikorn, 2016: 167).



Suntornwiriyakul's (2008) characterisation of the leading characters in Thai soaps has stood the test of time; the female lead still could be seen portrayed as extremely ungrudgingly kind and altruistic no matter how unfairly she has been treated by the antagonists. Nowadays, however, the contemporary representation of characters alternatively paints the leading lady as the diametrical opposite of the conventional image. In this new paradigm, she is exceptionally vindictive, assertive and usually has a very fashionable sartorial style. This is not to say the traditional portrayal of a 'perfect' female protagonist has completely been binned as she is still presented as beautiful and selfless. The anachronic damsel-in-distress trope has simply given way to the alpha female type who opts for a strong independent persona, usually, in order to avenge her family. The male lead, on the other hand, is less diverse than his female counterpart and he normally belongs to a higher social class. Conventionally, he would be a prince or a member of a fictional royal family. In today's soaps, he often is from a well-to-do family and a successful businessman desired by his female peers, especially the female antagonist.

Other than the main characters, there exist supporting roles which are of equal importance as they oftentimes are major contributors to the progress of the story. Similar to the lead acts, the secondary characters are also frequently portrayed in certain repetitive lights. As correctly observed by Howard (2008: 149), "Thai soap operas often feature a standard stereotypical character of a fairly crude and unintelligent servant from Isan [The northeastern region of Thailand]". Furthermore, as will be the object of analysis, queer characters, particularly homosexuals and *kathoey* in the context of this research, are often incorporated as comic relief and presented in a positive light, albeit rather stereotypical. Homosexual characters are less common in Thai soaps and they tend to be featured only once in a while. In both cases, one of the narrative roles of the queer identity characters is usually to side with the female lead, although there are some exceptions where transgender acts are antagonistic. It would seem, however, that Thai television has turned the conventional tide by adopting a more unusually accepting and revealing attitude towards the portrayal of queer identities, especially since the advent of digital TV channels. Previously, *kathoey* were unfailingly introduced into soap operas only to fulfil their designated role as

comic relief and never once was their appearance in the soap openly discussed in relation to their social value and reality (see 2.4.2 for detailed discussion).

When writing a Thai soap script, scriptwriters always proceed to do so with two indispensable fundamental characters already in mind: a protagonist and an antagonist (Sangchai, 2009: 145). In short, nearly every Thai soap follows a similar formula, in which the antagonist provokes conflicts between the goodies. Furthermore, Thai soap plots are generated on either one of these two bases: character-driven or plot-driven (*ibid.*: 146). The former stories are those whose main characters are conceptualised first and the plots are conceived later to supplement the main protagonists. On the other hand, plot-driven stories are those whose characters are secondary and complementary to the plot (*ibid.*).

With regard to themes, despite the presence of a wide range of differing diegetic settings covered in Thai soap operas, the existing plotlines can be said to be rather homogeneous and formulaic. The pivotal theme primarily entails the male and female protagonist's love story and their struggle to unite, or reunite, happily, which is invariably hindered by the female antagonist who is madly in love with the male lead and, periodically, by other secondary antagonists who are often to benefit from the split between the protagonists. In other words, most Thai soap operas feature stories about female characters cat-fighting over a man.

### **3.3 Thai soap operas on Chinese television**

Thai television was traditionally composed of only six free-to-air analogue channels, i.e. Channel 3, Channel 5, Channel 7, Modernine TV, NBT, and Thai PBS (Chirattikorn, 2016: 53) until 2014, when the first batch of Thai digital channels was launched to the public. The first four were the sole broadcasters of Thai soap operas and followed a similar pattern of broadcast timetable. Each television channel allots a selection of time slots to the screening of soap operas throughout the day (Sangchai, 2009: 142). Having said that, the most important soaps, i.e. those deemed by their production teams to be most likely to win the viewership's greatest attention, are generally aired at prime time, which is immediately after the evening news approximately from 8.30 to 10.30 pm (*ibid.*). These prospective popular Thai soaps invariably feature all-star casts or newbie

casts who are rising to fame (ibid.), while those starring lesser-known acts are televised before the news reports, i.e. from 6.30 to 7.30 pm. A Thai soap opera is typically shown in one of the following three air date slots: Monday to Tuesday, Wednesday to Thursday, or Friday to Sunday, with the last airdate arrangement naturally allotted to the supposedly most popular drama. In short, four soap operas run simultaneously on said four channels at one of the allotted times. Therefore, there are twelve series in total being shown in a week on these free-to-air analogue channels.

Nowadays, the broadcast schedule of the four soap opera feeders remains unchanged but with the addition of the 2014 newly introduced digital channels. In light of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC),<sup>25</sup> which has come into full effect since the end of 2015, Thailand's National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) proposed a digital switchover scheme in 2014, dictating the replacement of current analogue channels by digital TV channels to be completed within 2020 (NBTC, 2013: online). As a result, the five traditional analogue channels currently run parallel to their digital counterparts, since not every household has access to digital television sets and channels yet. The novel digital channels offer different content from the basic analogue channels. The current broadcasting situation in Thailand has six analogue channels supplying TV programmes, plus some additional, new 26 digital channels that started broadcasting back in April 2014 (NBTC, n.d.: online). The future looks more crowded as the ultimate number of digital channels has been decided to be 48 and to be completely in service no later than 2020, when all current analogue channels will be out of service for good (NBTC, 2013: online). Of all the new 26 digital channels presently available, seven of them – ONE 31 (previously known as ONE<sup>hd</sup>), PPTV, MONO 29, Channel 8, THV, Workpoint, and GMM 25 – primarily air Thai soap operas in the same night-time slots as the four long-running analogue channels. Apart from new soaps, repeats are customarily aired in the afternoons following midday news reports on the four analogue soap supplier channels. Due to the advent of digital channels, which provide TV stations with an unprecedentedly huge amount of airtime, repeats have become prevalent. Today's Channel 5 has gone to great lengths to rerun old soaps at

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<sup>25</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is made up of the following ten countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

prime time every Monday and Tuesday as a result of the overflow of competing melodramatic products on the market (Positioning Magazine, 2014). Even some digital channels such as ONE 31 and Channel 8 in particular broadcast reruns, although most of them still offer newly produced melodramas.

Unsurprisingly, Thailand is not the only market for Thai soap operas and the Thai audiovisual productions are also well received in certain Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos (ASTV ผู้จัดการออนไลน์, 2010). 2003 is unanimously cited as the first year in which a Thai melodrama was for the first time broadcast on Chinese TV, or the national channel CCTV-8, to be precise, although the exact title has been the bone of contention. Some claim that *ระเบียบรัก* [*Rabiang Ruk: Love Corridor*], directed by Chana Kraaprayoon, and whose Chinese title is *俏女佣* [*Pretty Maidservant*], was the inaugural Thai soap opera in China. Others like Mingsan (2016) argue that it was *สะใภ้กันครัว* [*Sapai Gon Krua: Daughter in Law in the Kitchen*] (Kitti Boonsakulsak, 2008). Pongpatcharathornthep (2012) contends that *สาวใช้หัวใจชิคาโก* [*Saochai Huajai Chicago: Chicago-hearted Maid*] directed by the quadruple of directors comprising Hiranya, Waraporn Satpitak, Pimonwan Pleonjit, and Wipa Thaisuppalak, first aired in Thailand in 2000, was the first to enter China. Of the three titles, *Saochai Huajai Chicago* is the most possible candidate since *Rabiang Ruk* and *Sapai Gon Krua* did not premiere in Thailand until 2005 and 2008, respectively.

Whatever the first Thai melodrama screened in China is, the programme drew merely a lukewarm reception and was followed by sporadic screenings of other Thai soap operas on both Chinese national and regional television channels. Some of them include *เลือดหงส์* [*Leuad Hong: Swan Blood*] (Kitti Boonsakulsak and Issariya Jarupan, 2001) aired on CCTV-1 and CCTV-8 in 2005, and *เลือดขัตติยา* [*Leuad Khattiya: Royal Blood*] (San Seekaewlor) released on Hunan Satellite TV in 2008 (Pongpatcharathornthep, 2012 in Chirattikorn, 2016: 35-36). Nonetheless, it was not until as late as 2009 that Thai soap operas started to gain ground, when a based-on-a-true-story Thai soap opera directed by Nipon Pweenen and Witsawet Buranawittayawut (2008) and named *สงครามนางฟ้า* [*Songkram Narng Fah: Battle of the Angels* and *天使之争*, in English and Chinese respectively] was

imported into the East Asian powerhouse (Pongpatcharathornthep, 2012 in Chirattikorn, 2016: 36).

### 3.3.1 Chinese importation of Thai soap operas

After the ban on importation of foreign audiovisual content was lifted by the Chinese central authorities in the late 1980s, regional and municipal TV stations were greenlighted to purchase and air foreign TV programmes (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 89). However, the opening up to the importation of non-native audiovisual products was merely timid as limitations had been put in place by means of annual quotas of foreign TV imports in order to prevent domestic programmes from competing with their overseas counterparts (Cooper-Chen and Liang, 2010: 89; Zhu, 2008: 99) pursuant to regulations issued in 1994 (Cai, 2008: 140).<sup>26</sup> These broadcast rules restrict “foreign TV drama to less than 25 per cent of a station’s total daily broadcast of TV drama and film” (ibid.). Furthermore, in a bid to ensure Chinese broadcasters’ conformity to state-issued regulations, “the ban on overseas TV drama during prime time (7-10 p.m.) without SARFT permission” was restated in the 2000 update on the broadcast regulations with an additional stipulation that offshore TV dramas are not to be concurrently shown on more than three provincial channels (ibid.).<sup>27</sup> The Chinese government’s grip on the broadcasting of TV drama transcends the matter of quantity into the boundary of thematic limitation as the airtime of foreign TV drama of certain genres such as palace dramas and martial arts dramas is curtailed to no more than 25 percent of a station’s annual ceiling of drama importation (ibid.). Despite the legal constraints on the annual volume of offshore audiovisual imports, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan managed to make inroads into the Chinese audiovisual market and became the three major wellsprings of imported

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<sup>26</sup> *The Rules for the Administration of the Import and Broadcast of Foreign Television Programs* were promulgated by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), previously known as the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (MRFT), on 3 February 1994 in a sheer attempt to safeguard the nation’s TV drama industry while also keeping external legitimacy in check (Cai, 2008: 139-140).

<sup>27</sup> The 2000 update on the broadcast regulations entitled 《关于进一步加强电视引进、合拍和播放管理的通知》 [Directives on the strengthening of the superintendence of TV drama importation, co-production and broadcasting] was issued by SARFT following a rampant breach of no-foreign-drama-at-prime-time rule on the part of multi-level broadcasters. The *Directives* came into effect on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2000 (Chen, 2011: 7).

small-screen products in 2002, according to the *China TV Drama Report (2003-2004)* (ibid.: 133).

Hong Kong TV series were able to win the hearts of the Chinese crowd immediately, especially those living in South China during the period from the 1980s to 1990s (Chow and Ma, 2008: 201). Their popularity was further heightened by the co-operative agreement for drama production between Hong Kong and China (ibid.: 207). Meanwhile, the enthusiastic reception of Taiwanese TV drama reached its peak in 1998 after *还珠格格* [*Huánzhū Gege: My Fair Princess*], directed by Shupeí Sun, was launched in China (Chen, 2008: 175). However, China's stringent and wavering broadcast laws, including the opposing ideological stances between mainland China and Taiwan, presented a major obstacle for the latter to expanding its TV media industry into China (ibid.: 185). Concurrently with the surge in popularity of Taiwanese drama, South Korean soap operas started penetrating the Chinese market in 1998 (Lee, 2008: 187). By 2002, South Korea far outstripped Taiwan in terms of TV drama sales in China (Keane, 2008: 151) and inspired the Chinese mass media's coinage of the term 韩流 [Hánliú: Korean Wave] which alludes to South Korea's unanticipated meteoric rise in cultural influence throughout Asia (Zhu et al., 2008). South Korean TV drama lost favour from the Chinese audience in 2006 shortly after seeing its highest tide in 2005 (Keane, 2008: 151). In Chen's (2011: 16) words, the downfall of *Korean Wave* was attributed to various factors: South Korean drama's overemphasis on casts and disregard for strong plotlines; a slow importation rate which leads to an overflow of reruns; and the end of the Chinese broadcasters' monopolistic favouritism towards Korean drama.

Eventually, the three chief foreign providers of TV drama were compelled to give way to Thailand as China's prime TV drama exporter, thanks to the peculiarity and popularity of the soap *Songkram Narng Fah* directed by Nipon Pewnen in 2008 and first broadcast on Chinese television in 2009. The world of Thai soap operas was suddenly thrust into the limelight and the demand for Thai dramas in China has been on the rise ever since (Hookway and Watcharasakwet, 2010). *Songkram Narng Fah* soared in the ratings to the top ten TV programme nationwide at the time and became a suggested drama to watch on the home page of Baidu Web Forum (Chen, 2011: 19).

However, as briefly discussed above, prior to *Songkram Narng Fah*, a handful of other Thai soaps had been given airtime on Chinese TV but did not elicit any significant enthusiasm from the Chinese TV viewership. At the outset, only Thai soap operas produced by the media company Exact-Scenario Co., Ltd. (now known as The One Enterprise Co., Ltd.) were exported to neighbouring countries including China for the reason that the firm itself holds the copyright to all of their in-house products whereas other TV studios surrender the copyright in their serial dramatic programming productions to the Thai television stations whose channels broadcast their soap operas (Somsee Pruttipan interviewed in Chirattikorn, 2016: 49-50). Somsee Pruttipan, the General Manager of Exact-Scenario, thus concludes that with the copyright in her company's own possession, Exact-Scenario has the decision-making authority to sell its products to any interested party while, in the other production houses' cases, they are not permitted to deal in their soap operas since they themselves are no longer the holders of copyright (in Chirattikorn, 2016: 50).

Despite the first dozens of Thai soap operas aired in China being the products of the Exact-Scenario company, Han Media Culture, a Thai media agency, is credited with successfully penetrating not only the Chinese, but also such Southeast Asian markets as Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma (Chirattikorn, 2016: 24). Han Media Culture pioneered the importation of Thai soap operas into China by debuting them at the Shanghai Film Festival (ibid.: 36). The media agency also continuously ran a booth promoting Thai soap operas at media festivals in Beijing for many consecutive years until Hunan Satellite TV agreed to televise *Leuad Khattiya*, produced by Exact-Scenario, on its channel in 2008 (ibid.: 37). Although the Thai melodrama might not have been the first to reach the Chinese audience on the small screen, it was recognised as the first soap opera that caught the attention, albeit still relatively slight, of the Chinese TV audience. Henceforth, a steady flow of Thai soap operas continued to arrive in China. According to Pongpatcharathornthep (2012 in Chirattikorn, 2016: 36), the first few Chinese channels that screened Thai melodramas consisted of Hunan Satellite TV, Anhui Satellite TV, CCTV-1, and CCTV-8. After the arrival of *Songkram Narng Fah* which led to a sharp spike in the number of imported Thai soaps in China, such regional Chinese broadcasters as Jiangsu Satellite TV, Zhejiang Satellite TV, Sichuan Satellite TV, and Yunnan Satellite TV also joined

the former four TV stations in televising Thai melodramas bought from intermediaries (ibid.).

In 2009, after *Songkram Narng Fah* was released and generated a massive public buzz in the East Asian country, an online opinion poll conducted by the Chinese media to identify the top choice of country of origin of imported soap operas indicates that Thailand came first with over 8,000 votes against South Korea and Japan's combined votes of 2,000 (Chen, 2011: 3). Successive screenings of several Thai soaps such as หัวใจช็อกโกแลต [*Huajai Chocolate: Chocolate Heart*], directed by Thakonkiat Weerawan and Chutchai Surasit and released in 2005 in Thailand, คุณนายสายลับ [*Khun Nai Sai Lub: Spy Lady*], directed by Chutchai Surasit and released in 2006, and แจ่วใจร้ายกับคุณชายเทวดา [*Jaew Jai Rai Gub Khun Chai Taewada: A Cold-Hearted Maid and a Clumsy Master*], directed by Peerapol Teecharoen and released in 2009, built a sufficiently massive following, paving the way for the subsequent influx and enthusiastic reception of Thai soap operas in China between 2010 and 2011 (ibid.: 19). Among the various Chinese regional broadcasters, Anhui Satellite TV has been the most active spearhead of Thai TV drama imports with the highest number of the Thai productions shown on its channel. The themes of Thai TV audiovisual products range from far-fetched palace dramas to a more relatable commoner's love story.

Soon afterwards, in November 2012, the then prime minister of Thailand, Mr Abhisit Vejjajiva, was invited to the opening ceremony of the 16<sup>th</sup> Asian Games in the city of Guangzhou, China, where he took the opportunity to sign an agreement with Chinese government officials, whereby Thai soap operas were to be exempted from the previously discussed yearly allowance and quota in a bid to promote them in mainland China (ibid.). This leniency towards the importation of Thai soap operas might, in part, be ascribable to the fact that China and Thailand have been on excellent terms with one another in respect of trade and political support since the late 1970s (Storey, 2007). Also, according to an online survey carried out by the department of cultural affairs affiliated with the Royal Thai Consulate in Shanghai, the reasons "why Thai soap operas impress



you” can be enumerated as spectacular scenery, attractive casts, and Qiong Yao-style plotlines which appeal to the Chinese viewership (Chen, 2011: 3).<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, many Chinese TV critics, such as Niu Nai from *大众电影* [*Dazhong Dianying: Popular Movies*], Chen Hua from *新闻世界* [*Xinwen Shijie: News World*], and Yang Xue from *商业文化* [*Shangye Wenhua: Commercial Culture*], among others, joined in a discussion on how Thai soap operas have slowly yet solidly captured the attention and imagination of the Chinese public and unanimously predicted the potential replacement of the *Korean Wave* by a newfound *Thai Wave* (ibid.: 2). Niu Nai (ibid.), a columnist for the *Dazhong Dianying* magazine, points out that the relatively great leeway given to Thailand by China has put Thai audiovisual commodities in an advantageous position, thus contributing to Thailand’s successful penetration of cultural influence into China. With regard to why Thai soap operas are excepted from China’s tight control in the first place, the answers might lie in the fact that Thai soap operas are not remarkably intellectually challenging and thought-provoking. Indeed, as Zhao and Keane put it bluntly, fans of Thai drama are placed on the lowest rung of the cultural stratification in China (2013: 733.). Hence the accessibility and easy digestibility of Thai dramas seemingly pose no likely threat to China’s socio-cultural and political stability, legitimacy and sovereignty.

Although the exact number of Thai soaps that have entered China each year since 2003 is indeterminable due to the absence of official reports on the figure, it is known to be significantly higher than that of TV audiovisual imports from other countries in recent years. As claimed by Chen (2011: 4), merely 50 to 60 Thai soaps are produced annually, while as many as nearly 20 of them have been brought into China from 2010 onwards. It has to be borne in mind that the number of Thai soap operas stated above does not yet include those distributed and circulated online. Interestingly, however, and despite robust Sino-Thai relations and the Thai entertainment industry’s innocuousness, certain Thai soap operas have been given a red light for their broadcasting in China. As revealed by

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<sup>28</sup> Qiong Yao is a prominent Chinese author and screenwriter known for coming-of-age love stories.

Wanida Boonprasertwattana, Senior Sales Manager of Han Media Culture (interviewed in Chirattikorn, 2016: 60):

[I]n China, ghosts, *kathoey*, time travel are a definite no-no. Even *Songkram Narng Fah* would not have been approved had it been brought into China earlier, since there are too many catfighting scenes. Luckily, their broadcast policy changed. As a distributor, we have to study it closely because their policy changes every year.

ข้ามเวลาหารัก [*Kham Wayla Ha Ruk: Time Travel to Find Love*] (Takonkiet Viravan, 2011) and ทวิภพ [*Tawipob: Two Worlds*] (Penlak Udomsin, 2011) are two examples of Thai soap operas, provided by Han Media Culture's senior sales manager, which failed to pass China's censor board on account of their time travel theme (ibid.: 61). Boonprasertwattana (ibid.) further explains that the concept of time travel is banned in Chinese media because "they [Chinese censors] do not want their people to envision or dream about traveling through time to alter anything". As ever-changing as the Chinese broadcast regulations might be, the suppression of media portrayals of *kathoey* and homosexual characters has remained a constant. The senior manager's affirmation of the Chinese ban on queer representation in media has a direct bearing on the selection of Thai soap operas to be distributed through state-controlled Chinese media outlets since *kathoey* and gay male characters seem to be ubiquitous in Thai soap operas and so common a plot device that there are hardly any Thai soaps in which they do not make an appearance (see Table 3.3 in section 3.4.2 for the list of Thai soap operas featuring these characters in question).

One of the main objectives of this doctoral thesis is thus precisely to gauge the ways in which the Chinese government and its officials deal with those productions in which non-heteronormative gender identities are featured. With respect to the broadcast of Thai soap operas on Chinese territory, and as noted before, the Chinese television landscape is made up of a myriad of national, provincial, municipal and county channels. As of 2011, five channels – namely CCTV 8, Anhui Satellite Channel, Hunan Satellite Channel, Zhejiang Satellite Channel, and Jiangsu Satellite Channel – were responsible for screening Thai soap operas nationwide with Anhui Satellite Channel carrying "the pioneer broadcaster of Thai soap operas" as its selling-point slogan (ibid.).

### 3.4 Thai soap operas on Chinese online platforms

The advances in the Internet infrastructure in mainland China have prompted cohorts of post 1980s and 1990s Chinese citizens to turn to online territory for their leisure pursuits (Hu, 2014: 438). Younger generations of the Chinese audienceship regard the Internet as a more desirable source of enjoyment simply because it offers a wider and more varied selection of audiovisual entertainment products as suggested by Barboza (2010, in Hu, 2014: 438), whose observation was later substantiated by Zhang's (2012: online) findings that in 2010 out of a total of some 400 million mainland Chinese Internet users "around 325 million [...] watched videos online in the second half of 2011". The growth of the online audiovisual programming industry in China has been set in motion and propelled by some few impetuses such as the shady practice of online distribution of copyrighted audiovisual material fostered by Chinese subtitling communities, the dramatic upsurge in specialisation in the ICT sphere and "the needs for global image consumption" (Hu, 2014: 438).

By the same token, these stimuli have also contributed to the emergence of "a new consumption lifestyle" which is heavily dependent on the use of computers and the Internet in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (ibid.). That is to say, streaming of audiovisual content has become the primary choice, among the Chinese multitude, of engagement in leisure activities. The cyber culture has, in turn, been reinforced by the tight-knit Chinese fansubbing and subtitling groups who work enthusiastically to sustain it by virtue of subtitling TV programmes of various nationalities, including Thai into Chinese, and feeding them into the massive Chinese corpora of video-sharing websites, regardless of whether they are legally or illegally dispensed.

#### 3.4.1 Distribution and circulation of Thai soap operas in China

The emergence of Chinese video-sharing websites such as Tudou, Youku, PPTV and the like coincided with the launch of the presently world-famous US-based YouTube in 2005. Hu (2014: 438) reports that in the prime of the Chinese video industry "there were several hundred private Chinese video websites, and most

operated without authorization". By 2012, however, the figure had been significantly diminished to "little more than 10", all of which were transformed into "large-scale businesses" (ibid.). Today, online mainland Chinese video sharing sites can be classified into three main types: peer-to-peer (P2P) broadcasting, web 2.0 video sharing, and video-on-demand downloading. The three categories of video sites are defined as follows, according to Hu (ibid.):

The first type, such as PPS and PPTV, operate like Web TV and offer various programme options. The second type, such as Youku and Tudou, emphasise online file sharing. The third type, such as Xunlei and Very CD, focus on download instead of online viewing. Xunlei, which once specialised as a download manager, later developed its own video-on-demand platform. Very CD, which used to be a popular online download database, has transformed itself into an online portal platform that directs online viewers' clicks to other major video websites, escaping the controversies of piracy as a result.

Audiovisual content found on these online video streaming platforms encompasses a large variety of films, anime, online games, TV programmes and news. In light of the staggering rise to popularity of the reality-based Thai soap operas mentioned earlier, Thai TV entertainment products began to gain momentum in China in the late 2010, leading to a vast consumption of Thai soaps by the Chinese audience and outgrowing the Chinese broadcasters' maximum airtime capacity, in spite of the privileged revocation of foreign-content quota when it comes to Thai audiovisual commodities (see section 3.3.1). Consequently, Thailand, among such countries as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea, has earned itself a country-specific subsection under the umbrella division of TV series on the best-known Chinese video streaming site Youku ([www.youku.com](http://www.youku.com)), which belongs to the web 2.0 category of video sharing sites. Other second-type video sites supplying Thai soap operas include Xiangchao Kankan ([www.kankan.com](http://www.kankan.com)), Sohu ([tv.sohu.com](http://tv.sohu.com)), and Tom365 ([www.tom365.co](http://www.tom365.co)). Some older and more recent Thai audiovisual offerings are also available on certain Web TV sites such as PPTV ([www.pptv.com](http://www.pptv.com)), PPS ([www.pps.tv](http://www.pps.tv)), UUSEE ([www.uusee.com](http://www.uusee.com)), and CBOX (by CCTV), although none of them are retrievable on the video websites of the third type, i.e. video-on-demand.

However, due to today's rapid technological advancements, the distinction between the first and second categories of video sites is no longer as clear-cut as before since nowadays both Web TV and file-sharing sites also exist in the

form of mobile apps and computer programs. The survey presented in Chen's (2011: 22) unpublished Master's thesis indicates that nearly 78 per cent of the Thai soap viewership opts for Internet as their main channel to access Thai soaps. The second most popular medium for watching Thai soap operas is television, which constitutes approximately 22 per cent of all the soap viewership. Needless to say, a vast majority of Thai soap operas thus enter the Chinese public domain through the Internet, either legally or illegally, usually shortly after their release in the home country.

Given the apparent appetite of Chinese audiences for Thai soap operas, more and more Thai soap productions are being distributed on the aforementioned alternative and ever-growing online platforms; a situation that has brought about a form of AVT practice (discussed in section 4.2) clearly distinct from the one strictly controlled by the Chinese state. The translation of many of the online Thai soap operas is carried out by a number of different amateur subtitling groups. The development and easy access of technological facilities together with the labour put in by the subtitling teams has contributed substantially to the expansion of Thai TV melodramas in China (ibid.: 16). As a result, the growth of the Thai entertainment industry is related to what could be termed *domino effect*, that is, the wide availability of subtitled Thai soaps in Chinese leads to its higher popularity which, in turns, facilitates its further expansion and consumption.

### 3.4.2 Thai soap operas featuring *kathoey* and male homosexual characters

Owing to the fact that Thai soap operas are mostly imbued with formulaic and banal plotlines, the assortment of different characters found in one soap opera is therefore predictably present in another. As a result, a Thai soap opera is primarily made up of the male protagonist, the female protagonist, the female antagonist and, more often than not, the ludic *kathoey*. As discussed in section 3.2 above, however, in more recent productions *kathoey* and homosexual characters have seen an upturn in their fictional roles as their portrayal has taken on new alternative routes. For instance, in *Hormones the Series* (Season 1-3) the stigmatisation surrounding the relationships of a gay couple and a lesbian couple

was brought in the limelight and openly discussed. For another instance, the *kathoey* gender identity of one of the female leads in beauty pageant-themed *Songkram Narng-Ngarm* [*Beauty and the Bitches*] is initially obscured and later revealed. The show raises the question of whether a trans-woman is worth considering a real woman if s/he has already undergone sex reassignment surgery. The refreshing take on the representation of queer identities has served to re-evaluate the traditional approach for which only comical effects are aimed (see section 3.4 for detailed discussion).

Table 3.3 below lists some of the most popular Thai soap operas, released between late 2008 and early 2015, with at least one *kathoey* and/or gay male character. Said queer roles must, at the very least, be featured as recurring characters, that is, they have to make sufficient appearances to affect the storyline on a regular basis; some of them are even credited as regular cast members. The provision of the table is to demonstrate the frequency with which the two queer identities under investigation are featured and, with the short summaries of their roles in each soap, to offer a longitudinal look at how they have been depicted over the course of seven years.

Table 3.3: List of Thai soap operas featuring *kathoey* and/or male homosexual characters

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	สวรรค์เบี่ยง [ <i>Sawan Biang: The Heaven Diverts</i> ]	Umpaiporn Jitmai-ngong	2008	One <i>kathoey</i> character as the female protagonist's comical underling.
Channel 3	สะใภ้ลูกทุ่ง [ <i>Sapai Look Tung: The Country Daughter-In-Law</i> ]	Krit Sukramongkon	2008	The older son of an old moneyed family is forced to marry a girl from an affluent but rural family to save his family's financial crisis. He does everything in his power to cancel the arranged marriage since he is secretly gay.
Channel 3	ใจร้าว [ <i>Jai Rao: The Cracked Heart</i> ]	Umpaiporn Jitmai-ngong	2008	The <i>kathoey</i> character is the male protagonist's personal manager.
Channel 3	พระจันทร์สีรุ้ง [ <i>Prajan See Roong: The Rainbow-coloured Moon</i> ]	Yuttana Lorpanpaiboon	2009	The male protagonist is abandoned by his mother at an early age so her neighbour, who is a <i>kathoey</i> cabaret performer takes him in and raises him as her own child, although, at first, she has to conceal her gender identity from her adopted child so as not to embarrass him in their community.
Channel 3	มาดามยี่หุบ [ <i>Madam Yeehoob: Madam Magnolia</i> ]	Kumthorn Tupkunlai	2009	The male protagonist has a <i>kathoey</i> brother who helps teach the female protagonist to glam up herself, so she can win the male protagonist's heart.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	น้ำตาลไหม้ [Namtan Mai: The Burned Sugar]	Chana Kraprayoon	2009	The female protagonist is married to Thow, one of her stepbrothers' friend, who is gay, in exchange for her brother's financial bailout while Thow wants to hide the fact that he is gay from his mother. Unbeknownst to the female protagonist, her brother is also gay and was romantically involved with Thow before.
Channel 5	พรุ่งนี้ก็รักเธอ [Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter: Tomorrow I Will Still Love You]	Takonkiet Viravan	2009	One <i>kathoey</i> character as the female protagonist's keeper. Two gay males (one is the younger brother of the female protagonist and the other one is the younger brother of the male antagonist) are secretly in a romantic relationship with each other.
Channel 3	ระบำดวงดาว [Rabum Duangdao: Star Dance]	Kritsada Techanilobol	2010	One <i>kathoey</i> character as the female antagonist's manager since the female antagonist is a famous actress herself in the soap opera.
Channel 3	ดวงใจอัคนี <sup>29</sup> [Duangjai Akkanee: Fire's Heart]	Yuttana Lorpanpaiboon	2010	One <i>kathoey</i> designer and tailor who tries to seduce the male protagonist and acts as a matchmaker pairing off the male protagonist with the female protagonist at the same time.

<sup>29</sup> The male protagonist is named *Akkanee* which is equivalent to *fire* in English. The series is preceded by *ธาราหิมาลัย* [*Thara Himalai: The Himalayan Streams*], the first instalment of the *สี่หัวใจแห่งขุนเขา* [*See Huajai Haeng Khunkhao: Four Hearts of the Mountains*] tetralogy.



Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	ปฐพีเล่ห์รัก <sup>30</sup> [Pathapee Leh Ruk: Earth's Love Trick]	Somjing Seesuparb	2010	An effeminate gay man works for the male protagonist who is the owner of a farm resort. The gay man stars as a comical underling.
Channel 3	วายุภักคมนตรา <sup>31</sup> [Wayupak Montra: Wind's Incantation]	Pongpat Wachirabanjong	2010	A <i>kathoey</i> character is the head editor of the publisher for which the female protagonist is writing. Interestingly, the <i>kathoey</i> role in this soap is superior to that of the protagonist while, traditionally, <i>kathoey</i> are always inferior.
Channel 3	เลื่อมพรายลายรัก [Leuam Prai Lai Ruk: Shiny Glossy Love]	Chanintorn Prasertprasart	2010	Two gay men from two rival families are secretly dating. Later, when the leaders of the two families find out about their relationship they are severely beaten up. Following the physical abuse, they decide to declare their independence from their families and cut ties with them.
Channel 3	ผู้ใหญ่บ้านนะยะ <sup>32</sup> [Pooyaiban Naya: I Am the Village Chief]	Unknown	2010	A cabaret <i>kathoey</i> whose father was a village chief and died so he has to come back to his village and succeed his father. After taking office, he has to prove himself as a village chief due to the village's initial opposition to his legitimacy and abilities.

<sup>30</sup> The male protagonist is named *Pathapee* which is equivalent to *earth* in English. The series is a sequel to *Duangjai Akkanee* and is the third instalment of *the Four Hearts of the Mountains* tetralogy.

<sup>31</sup> The male protagonist is named *Wayupak* which is equivalent to *wind* in English. The series is the final instalment of *the Four Hearts of the Mountains* tetralogy.

<sup>32</sup> *Naya* is a gender-specific ending particle used virtually exclusively by *kathoey*.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	มงกุฎดอกส้ม [Monggoot Dok Som: The Orange Blossom Crown]	Chotirat Rukrermwong	2010	A fifteen-year-old girl is married off by her parents to a sixty-year-old tycoon. She falls in love with her husband's eldest son, who leads her on, and finds out later that he is gay and is in a sexual relationship with her music teacher who is purported to be his friend.
Channel 7	พ่อหนูเป็นซูเปอร์สตาร์ [Por Noo Pen Superstar: My Father Is a Superstar]	Narong Punbutrda	2010	The male protagonist is a famous singer in the care of a <i>kathoey</i> manager.
Channel 3	เมียแต่ง [Mia Taeng: The Nominal Wife]	Methee Pongcharoen	2011	The female antagonist has a <i>kathoey</i> sidekick.
Channel 3	ต้มยำลำซิ่ง <sup>33</sup> [Tomyum Lumsing]	Chusak Sutheeratham	2012	The female protagonist is an apprentice singer on the rise envied by her fellow apprentice singers under the same record label, one of whom is a homosexual man who acts masculine to conceal his gender identity from the public.
Channel 3	ปัญญาชนก้นครัว [Panyachon Gon Krua: An Intellectual in the Kitchen]	Umpaiporn Jitmai-ngong	2012	The female protagonist disguises herself as a maid and works for a big family, one of whose members is <i>kathoey</i> , who takes a sexual interest in the female protagonist's male friend.

<sup>33</sup> *Tomyum* is a world-famous Thai three-flavoured soup. *Lumsing* is a traditional Thai northeast dance.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	กิ๊พ๊าว <sup>34</sup> [Kee Pao: Qipao]	Chotirat Rukrermwong	2012	The male protagonist has an older brother, who is betrothed to the daughter of their father's close friend since they were born. The gay heir is in a sexual relationship with another gay man while remaining in the closet.
Channel 3	แรงเงา [Raeng Ngao: The Revengeful Shadow]	Chanintorn Prasertprasart	2012	The female protagonist comes back to Thailand to avenge her twin sister's death. Disguised as her sister, she works in her deceased sibling's old company and has to weather a group of <i>kathoey</i> colleagues who, thinking she is her sister, strives to bring her down. A gay boy is a female antagonist's favourite son.
Channel 3	มุกเหลี่ยมเพชร <sup>35</sup> [Mook Liam Petch: The Pearl That Tames the Diamond]	Noppon Ko-maranchun	2012	The male protagonist has a best friend, who turns out to be the one who betrayed him by hiring a gang of criminals to steal the most valuable diamond that belongs to the male protagonist's company. His friend is a closeted gay man, who is secretly in love with him and plots the diamond heist to divert the male protagonist from his homosexuality.

<sup>34</sup> Qipao as a traditional Chinese dress.

<sup>35</sup> The female protagonist and male protagonist are both titular characters *Mook* and *Petch*, which are equivalent to *pearl* and *diamond* in English, respectively.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	มาดามดัน [Madam Dun: Madam Scout]	Chotirat Rukrermwong & Pawat Panangkasiri	2013	The female protagonist's rival scout is <i>kathoey</i> .
Channel 3	นางร้ายสายลับ [Nangrai Sailub: The Villainous Girl Spy]	Kathatep Thaiwanich	2013	The female protagonist has a female friend, who is dating a male model. Unbeknownst to her friend, the up-and-coming model is gay, who has a sexual relationship with an established actor. Her friend is used by the two gay men as a cover-up.
Channel 5	สายฟ้ากับสมหวัง [Saifah Gup Somwang]	Bunjerd Puttasopit	2013	The female protagonist joins the male protagonist's country band managed by a <i>kathoey</i> , who guides her to success.
GMM One (Now known as ONE <sup>HD</sup> )	ฮอร์โมนส์ วัยว้าวุ่น 1-3 [Hormones Wai Wawoon 1-3: Hormones the Series Season 1-3]	Songyot Sukmak-anan (Season 1) Kriangkrai Wachirathamporn and Pichaya Jaratboonpracha (Season 2) Kriangkrai Wachirathammaporn, Pichaya Jaratboonpracha & Naruebet Kuno (Season 3)	2013-2015	A bisexual male high school student and a male homosexual high school student have a brief romance with each other before the former dumps the latter for another female peer. A friendship between two female friends later blossoms into a surreptitious romance. The two pairs have to navigate their sexual disorientation, familial expectations, and peer scrutiny at the same time.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	มาลีเรีงระบำ [Malee Rerng Rabum: Malee Dances]	Sumruay Rukchart	2014	The female protagonist's absent father is <i>kathoey</i> who owns a karaoke restaurant and cross-dresses when (s)he is at work.
Channel 3	เพลิงฉิมพลี [Plerng Chimplee: Flame of Pussy Willow]	Noppon Ko-maranchun	2014	One <i>kathoey</i> character teaming up with another two secondary antagonists to thwart the male protagonist and female protagonist's blossoming romance.
Channel 3	รักนี้เจ้จัดให้ [Ruk Nee Jay Jud Hai: This Love I Will Procure for You]	Sekwasu Sippakornpakawatchra	2014	The female protagonist has a gay best friend, who is the male protagonist's older brother. Her gay housemate is, at first, rejected by his parents for being homosexual, but, eventually, accepted.
Channel 3	ก๊วนคานทองกับแก๊งพ้อปลาไหล [Guan Khanthong Gub Gang Por Plalai: A Group of Maidens and a Gang of Smooth Guys]	A-dul Boonbutr	2014	One of the three female leads is forced by her grandmother to marry a potential suitor, who, she suspects, is gay.
Channel 3	รักออกฤทธิ์ [Ruk Ork Rit: Love Kicks In]	Somjing Seesuparb	2014	The male protagonist is a private investigator, who is tasked with proving that his father's <i>kathoey</i> friend is innocent of the crime with which s/he is charged.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 7	พราว <sup>36</sup> [Prow]	Thongchai Prasongsanti	2014	A <i>kathoey</i> character who plays the female protagonist's manager although he often appears as her sidekick.
Modernine TV	รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ 1-2 [Ruk Roon Wairoon Saeb 1-2: Love Sick the Series Season 1-2]	Rachit Kusonkornsiri (Season 1) Danop Thaninsiraprapa (Season 2)	2014	Poon and Noh, two male leads, break up with their respective girlfriends to date each other, in secret. They have to overcome both peer and parental scrutiny.
Channel 8 Digital	ชิงรักหักสวาท [Ching Ruk Huk Sawat: Vying for Love and Contentment]	A-dul Boonbutr & Suppacha Krutnark	2014	Set in the nineteenth-century Thailand, the drama features two male homosexual characters who are secretly in love with each other but accepted by neither their family nor the society.
ONE <sup>HD</sup> (Formerly GMM One)	สงครามนางงาม <sup>37</sup> [Songkram Narng-Ngarm: Beauty and the Bitches]	Nipon Pewnen	2014	A transsexual woman who forges her own identity documentation and enters the beauty pageant for women in the hope that she will win the one-million-baht prize money and spend the sum on treating her non-biological younger sister for kidney failure.
Channel 3 HD (Digital)	แอบรักออนไลน์ [Aeb Ruk Online: Online Crush]	Umpaiporn Jitmai-ngong	2015	One <i>kathoey</i> character who acts as the female protagonist's sidekick and sets her up with the male protagonist.

<sup>36</sup> The title of the series if the name of the main character.

<sup>37</sup> The title literally translates to *the battle of the beauty pageant contestants*. However, the English title given in the square brackets is the official name denominated by its production company.

Channel	Title	Director(s)	Release Year in Thailand	Roles of queer character(s)
Channel 3	นางร้ายที่รัก [Narng Rai Tee Ruk: My Beloved Female Villain]	Sumruay Rukchart	2015	The female protagonist is a famous actor whose manager is a <i>kathoe</i> y, who is behind her success.
GMM 25	วันหนึ่งจะเป็นซูเปอร์สตาร์ <sup>38</sup> [Wannueng Ja Pen Sup'Tar: I Wanna Be Sup'Tar]	Adisorn Threesirikasem	2015	The female protagonist's close friend is a jolly gay man, who is also an occasional troublemaker.

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<sup>38</sup> Wannueng, the female protagonist's name, literally means *some day*.

## Chapter 4

### Translational Approaches:

#### Dubbing and Subtitling in China

The 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1896 marked the first screening of a motion picture in Shanghai, China, brought to the Chinese masses by a Spaniard businessman named Galen Bocca (Xiao, 1998: 4). When a North American touched down in China, bringing with him a fair number of movies, and showed the titles to Chinese audiences at several teahouse locales one year later, the reception elicited by the nouveau pastime of movie-going was nothing short of sensational (ibid.). In fact, not only did USA films make inroads into the Chinese market fairly quickly but the likes of European pictures also established a firm footing there (Yu, 2015: 498). Although early motion pictures shown in China, and elsewhere for that matter, were all silent and, hence, did not warrant dubbing or subtitling, “translation was still necessary to enable the audience to understand the film plot” (ibid.), a professional practice that is still going strong a little over a century later since the first film was screened in China.

In this regard, translation itself has borne witness to many forms and stages of development and change within the context of China; from mainland China’s early 影片说明[yīngpiàn shuōmíng: movie commentary/commentator] and 现场口译 [xiànchāng kǒuyì: on-site interpreter], or more familiarly Japan’s *benshi*, to today’s subtitler and dubbing translator. The translational evolution however is not restricted solely to the cinematic industry. Having been introduced into China in the late 1950s, television reached the country “a decade later than in most industrial nations” and in spite of the fact that “China’s television industry is a latecomer, by international standards, [...] it has become an important political and cultural apparatus” in the country (Hong, 2009: 2212). In light of the dominant, influential role that television plays in shaping viewers’ thoughts and worldviews, there is no doubt translation is also employed to perforce engage in this cognitive pull as a corollary to its chief interlingual transmission function. Accordingly, the



development and evolution of subtitling and dubbing practices in mainland China will be detailed in the next sections.

## 4.1 Dubbing in China

The history of AVT in China began with subtitling when “[i]n 1922, the Shanghai Peacock Film Company pioneered making foreign films shown with Chinese subtitles” (Yu, 2015: 498). The subtitles, so called understandably in a different spirit from the type of subtitles with which we now are familiar, were projected on slides adjacent to the foreign film being shown (ibid.). The practice of subtitling was well received by the audience insofar as it was adopted by other film companies shortly afterwards, regardless of the teeming translation inaccuracies that they used to display (Deng, 2016: 80). Dubbing, however did not come into being in mainland China until 1949 (Qian, 2009: 13), the year in which the civil war between the Chinese Communists under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek ended and the People’s Republic of China was founded by the Communist Party of China.

In 1939, the forerunner of dubbing was introduced first in the form of “simultaneous interpretation through earphones [...] attached to the seat” (Qian, 2009: 13). This early mode of live interpreting was implemented by the Grand Guangming Theatre in Guangzhou and provided at a small number of cinemas in some big cities during the primitive years of film screening (Yu, 2015: 498; Qian, 2009: 13). It was reported that those on the receiving end of the ‘simultaneous interpretation’ did not enjoy the experience due to its poor technical quality and regular occurrence of nuisances (Qian, 2009: 13). Yu (2015: 499) further elaborates that since the provision of earphones incurred an extra charge and its availability was limited, audiences were then inclined to watch foreign films with subtitles.

The Changchun Film Studio is credited with pioneering dubbing when its first dubbed film, *An Ordinary Soldier*, produced by the former Soviet Union, was released in May 1949 (Yu, 2015: 499). It is estimated that between 1949 and 1965 a total of 775 movies were dubbed into Chinese. Following the conclusion of the Chinese civil war in 1949, which led to the founding of the People’s

Republic of China by the communist party, the majority of the first Chinese-dubbed alien movies were the products of communist countries from the European Eastern bloc, Africa and Latin America (Deng, 2016: 81). Subsequently, China's soured foreign relations with its political and ideological allies caused a sudden stoppage in the distribution of Chinese-dubbed foreign films from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, until the economic reform of the early 1980s, led by Deng Xiaoping, opened up opportunities for foreign trade and consequently resumed importation of overseas motion pictures, this time, from new economic partners, i.e. capitalist countries (ibid.). According to Yu (2015: 499), "[d]ubbed films enjoyed a golden era in the 1980s", especially in the mid-1980s, when an estimated 1,300 foreign movies were dubbed into Chinese by Changchun Film Studio, in the province of Jilin, and Shanghai Film Studio (Deng, 2016: 81).

While theatrical dubbing was basking in its glory of the twentieth-century formative years, the TV industry was not left in stagnancy despite its much later arrival in China. After television was eventually introduced to China in the 1950s, cooperative agreements were soon signed between China and other countries such as the former Soviet Union and some Eastern European nations in order to bring in TV material to air (ibid.). The first-ever type of translated TV content to be broadcast in China was international news, whose initial acquisition was on the basis of gratuitous mutual exchange or mutual purchase. These video recordings of international news obtained from the partner countries would be translated, edited and later dubbed before being eventually broadcast (ibid.). The second type of TV programming to undergo translation included a wide range of TV genres such as travel documentaries, wildlife documentaries, foreign arts and culture programmes, among others (Ma, 2005: 6, in Deng, 2016: 81). In the words of Ziyang Zhang and Feng Gao (1998, in Deng, 2016: 81, my translation), "prior to 1995, most TV shows aired on CCTV International were mainly purchased from or gifted by other nations".

Apart from international news and the aforementioned miscellaneous TV programmes, the third type of dubbed TV material encompassed such entertainment productions as foreign films, teleplays and series, the first of which was a TV war drama from former Yugoslavia titled *Povratak Otpisanih*, whose Chinese name became 巧入敌后 [*Qiào Rù Dí Hòu*: *Accidentally Entering Enemy-*

*Occupied Areas*], and was first broadcast on 29 November 1977 (Deng, 2016: 82). Contradictorily, Qian (2009: 16) claims that pre-1980s films shown on Chinese TV channels were “dubbed by film studios” and not in-house by the corresponding TV stations themselves, and then comments on the same page that “there was no television translation before the 1980s”. Citing Zhao (2000), Qian (2009: 18) maintains that television dubbing was initiated by the International Department of CCTV in 1980. Back then, CCTV was the only sufficiently funded TV establishment to have been able to form its own dubbing crew consisting of “dubbing directors, dubbing actors, and translators” (ibid.). Nevertheless, considering that several Chinese-dubbed foreign teleplays also made quite a splash in the 1980s, it is not an overstatement then to herald the period as not only the golden era of dubbed pictures but also of dubbed TV productions.

The dominance of theatrical dubbing was subsequently gradually upstaged by the oncoming of the VHS (Video Home System) tape. At first, dubbed foreign films in the form of videotapes were only available at specialist videotape houses, namely, entertainment venues with a combination of teahouses and cinemas, whose movies were screened with videotapes instead of film reels as in cinemas. The era of public showing of dubbed VHS rose to its height in the mid-1990s until the affordability of VCD<sup>39</sup> and DVD players could keep viewers entertained at home and away from the videotape houses (ibid.). The advent of videotapes, VCDs and DVDs also for the first time threatened the sustainability of the film industry since it additionally gave rise to film piracy, whose practice involved the illegal recording of films in movie theatres abroad and their free distribution online, including the pre-release duplication of films (ibid.). It is reported that “from 1997 onwards, cinema all over the country plunged into an unprecedented state of inactivity, cinemas were deserted with no sign of life” (Ye, 1998, in Deng, 2016: 82, my translation). Movie bootlegging had many adverse effects on cinema as it did not merely put filmmaking business in jeopardy, profit-wise, but it also conduced to the lessened popularity of dubbing and elevated subtitling in its stead. Thus, ended was the exclusive reign of dubbing in cinema. At present, the following quartet of Chinese motion picture companies, that is, August First Film

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<sup>39</sup> VCD is the abbreviation for Video Compact Disc referring to a home video format previously prevalent in the Southeast Asian region. A compact disc can store up to 90 minutes of audio and video and is playable on VCD players, DVD players, and personal computers.

Studio, Changchun Film Group Corporation, Shanghai Film Translation Corporation, and Beijing Film Translation Corporation, are in charge of translating and dubbing imported films, whose dictated annual quota stands approximately at thirty four per year (Wang and Zhang, 2015: 175).

Contrary to the waning of dubbing for the cinema, TV dubbing was constantly on the rise. During the twenty-odd year timespan from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, the number of Chinese TV stations and, by extension, TV channels, grew to an exceptionally enormous size. Domestic production of TV programmes in Chinese could not keep up with the mushrooming TV timeslots spawned by the multitude of new TV stations and channels. Faced with ample available airtime and limited domestic productions, Chinese TV stations began an influx of foreign TV imports to fill the broadcast timeslots to their capacity, despite the state regulations at the time of limiting importation to no more than 30% (Deng, 2016: 82). Indeed, some county-level TV stations went so far as to dedicate 80% of their airtime to overseas TV and cinematic contents. As of 1996, over 400 episodes of international TV drama were aired on Chinese TV each year. The number hit an all-time high of 2,000-2,500 episodes per year by 1998 (ibid.). Undoubtedly, most of the TV imports dubbed for TV were not yet as severely afflicted by piracy and the rise of subtitling. Even *The Iron Ladies*, the groundbreaking Thai *kathoey* movie, was afforded a chance to be broadcast dubbed on a Chinese satellite channel, 星空卫视 [Xīngkōng Wèishì: Xingkong Satellite Channel], in 2008, although it was, to the best of my knowledge, the only one of its kind to have eluded the state-imposed censorship and made it to the Chinese small screen.

The situation started to shift with the onset of the Internet Age in the late 2000s, which has effected many changes to the ways in which digital goods and services flow as well as the versatility and visibility of translation. In the day and age where digital media is virtually served to consumers on a silver platter once they pick up their phones or turn on their computers, netizens are given a vast range of choices as to how and what kind of information they prefer to take in. From a translation perspective, dubbing and subtitling still co-exist and compete with each other in today's mainland China. Alongside the flourishing digital age, the two modes of audiovisual translation have, nonetheless, inevitably evolved,

mutated and transformed. For example, most notably, recently, with the integration of live streaming services into some of the best-known video streaming websites such as Bilibili ([www.bilibili.com](http://www.bilibili.com)), and Youku ([www.youku.com](http://www.youku.com)), an audiovisual translation mode of a bygone era, that is the practice of live interpreting-cum-commentary, has made a comeback.

To elaborate, the newly added function has enabled tech-savvy users to circumvent geographical locks and live stream TV programmes from countries other than China, which are being on-air, regardless of the legality of the practice. While the nascent online ‘dubbing’ is most prevalent in the live streaming of sporting fixtures on such sports-focused websites as 企鹅体育 [Qī’ē Tīyù: Penguin Sports] ([www.qie.tv.com](http://www.qie.tv.com)), it is also utilised occasionally in the real-time online broadcasting of overseas TV shows. In early 2018, a Thai period drama entitled บุพเพสันนิวาส [*Buppesannivas: Love Destiny*] garnered a record-breaking viewership episode by episode and was later confirmed to be the most watched Thai soap opera since the inception of digital TV in Thailand (Post Today, 2018).

At the same time, its massive appeal extended, too, to Chinese fans of Thai TV productions, which resulted in the live streaming of the period drama, whose Chinese title is 天生一对 [*Tiānshēng Yíduì: A Match Made in Heaven*], on Bilibili in an attempt to appease the impatient Chinese audiences, who were waiting for each new episode with bated breath. It was reported that up to 200,000 Chinese viewers tuned in live to watch the Thai production on Bilibili. The online broadcasting of the Thai soap opera in real time thus meant that some sort of live dubbing or interpreting was required to help the Chinese viewership with zero command of the Thai language to follow the story smoothly. It has to be noted, however, that this kind of live translation was provided on an ad hoc basis, therefore the interpreting was neither guaranteed to be accurate nor continuous. In most instances, it would entail the live streamer commentating on the programme, rather than actually dubbing or interpreting the spoken dialogue.

Apart from the practice of the online ‘simultaneous interpreting’, the technological sophistication of the digital epoch has additionally engendered the fandubbing phenomenon in China. According to Wang and Zhang (2015: 176), it is the disappointment at the subpar quality of commercial dubbing which has prompted

enthusiasts to assemble online and “form groups in order to perform dubbing in accordance with their own standards, or to use dubbing as a means for other purposes”. Simply put, “many fandubbers produce dubbing for the sake of getting as close as possible to the original, [meanwhile] several others adapt the original video clips to their own dubbing scripts” (ibid.: 176-177). The latter case of fandubbing activities can, as argued by Wang and Zhang (2015), be viewed as a form of online activism.

By providing snippets of fandubbed dialogues from the US sitcom revolving around four geeky scientists, *The Big Bang Theory*, Wang and Zhang (ibid.) demonstrate how fandubbing is employed by the fandubbers involved to voice their frustration with and the incredulity of the official ban on the online broadcast of the series. When the ban was eventually lifted, the overturned decision is believed to have been triggered by such online backlash manifested through the conduit of fandubbing (ibid.). In this sense, fandubbing thus serves as “a means of adaptation and entertainment to express personal opinions on a variety of socio-political issues” (ibid.: 177). Here, the secondary function of fandubbing as entertainment is significant. Thanks to its generally informal and entertaining tone, audiovisual contents fandubbed in a spirit of socio-political criticism are less likely to be subject to state censorship than written critiques posted online (ibid.: 178). To achieve the desired effects of being both critical and amusing, linguistic devices such as dialects, popular slang, sarcasm, and parody of celebrated sayings, ad slogans as well as propaganda are often utilised (ibid.: 177).

As highlighted earlier, the prevalence of digital media has knock-on effects on the workings of both AVT modes. In the case of dubbing, it has given rise to a type of ad hoc interpreting/commentary and fandubbing. One might even regard the former as the devolution of dubbing into its very primitive form, akin to the early days’ *benshi*. With regard to subtitling, the dominance of digital technology has further transformed the dynamics of the relationship between dubbing and subtitling and their respective statuses in society since the days they were born, the implications of which will be discussed further in conjunction with the practice of subtitling in China.

## 4.2 Subtitling in China

As mentioned above, the first emergence of subtitling in China can be traced back to as far as 1922, when the Shanghai Peacock Film studio blazed a trail for its showing of foreign films with subtitles. It is understandable that subtitling in China, as well as in other countries for that matter, did not gain much traction until the early 1990s, when technological developments and increased literacy rates came extensively into play (Yu, 2015: 499).

Subtitling reached its first-time height precisely when dubbed films were suffering a major setback and it is clear that in China the former was a causal factor in the declining currency of dubbing in cinema. When film piracy went on an initial rampage in the late 1990s, subtitling served as a crucial tool to ensure the saleability of such pirated movies. In order to help buyers of bootleg foreign films with little or no command of the foreign languages spoken in the pictures, English in particular since Hollywood blockbusters were the prime target for the copyright infringement, the pirated VCDs and DVDs were usually equipped with subtitles produced by amateurs rather than commercial companies (Deng, 2016: 82). Subtitling was the go-to option for film pirates apparently because the technical means needed to produce subtitles were modest and the amount of time to complete the task was very little compared to dubbing. The amateur subtitles provided by film pirates, however, differ substantially from the widespread occurrence of contemporary *fansubs*, to which non-Anglo-American film and showbiz buffs are more accustomed today. Although both types of subtitles are similarly created by what can be termed as amateur translators, the level of devotion put in the work of translation is different.

Fansubbers – the amateur translators of fansubs – are usually characterised by their pure passion for the content they translate without consideration for monetary returns. They belong to a community (or even communities) of fansubbers and fans who are comparably devoted to a specific subculture or group of artists. It can be said that fansubbing is analogous to democracy, in the sense that fansubs are made by fans for fans (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). On the contrary, the amateur subtitlers of pirated movies act out of sheer

enthusiasm for financial gains. It seems, though, that the oft-times lower quality of amateur subtitles made by film pirates, since they were not professional translators, did not hamper the continued rise of subtitling when, in 2000, a survey conducted online by Weibo revealed that “over 70.37% of people preferred subtitled films to those that are dubbed” (Deng, 2016: 82).

After the global digitisation of media entered China in 2003, the growth of TV translation was stunted briefly but was reanimated shortly after the TV industry managed to make adjustments to the new digital era. Along with it was the revitalised hobby of cinema-going, brought about by the growing awareness among Chinese citizens of copyright law, which has emerged as a by-product of the media digitisation. Although the once popular pastime has not regained its old-day peak like in the 1980s, the business has now substantially recovered from the previous doldrums (ibid.).

Also of note is the fact that the Hollywood hegemony has put an end to the diversity of international cinema being imported into China. In the 1980s, a motley selection of movies from such countries as UK, Germany, France, Italy, Thailand, India, and Brazil, to name but a few, could be found in Chinese movie theatres (ibid.). At present, not only are cinemas in China dominated by Hollywood feature films, but they are also mostly shown subtitled, rather than dubbed. This is not to say that dubbing is fading into extinction; on the contrary, dubbing is still very much needed in the nation, with an approximately 1.4 billion population, to cater for children and people of old age, who might find it hard to keep pace with the speed at which subtitles appear on screen (Yu, 2015: 509). On another practical note, as stated by Deng (2016: 83), subtitled pictures are more likely to be screened in urban Chinese theatres with a larger number of literate population, while dubbed films are more often than not offered in smaller towns, whose majority of inhabitants are not sufficiently educated yet.

Interestingly, despite Hollywood’s near monopoly on the foreign film industry in China, US TV showbiz has lost much of its clout since digital media became prevalent. Take, for example, the demise of a TV programme called *原声影视* [*Yuán Shēng Yīng Shì: Original Sound Movies and TV Series*] aired on CCTV 8, a channel dedicated to broadcasting Chinese-subtitled American TV and film



imports. The programme was so poorly received, as indicated by the bottom ratings it garnered, that it was eventually taken off the air in 2003 (Deng, 2016: 83). For another instance, the 2005 low on-air ratings of American series *Desperate Housewives* in mainland China ran unexpectedly counter to the initial online hype surrounding the show (Bao, 2009, in Deng, 2016: 83).

The waning US hegemony on the Chinese small screen did not however translate into the disappearance of all non-native TV productions; it did instead open the way for the incursion of TV content from other fellow Asian countries, most notably South Korea and Thailand, into the East Asian economic giant. At first, dubbed South Korean and Thai dramas were viewable mostly only on TV. Once they gained ground, various TV products including, but not limited to, South Korean and Thai TV soaps and serials accompanied by Chinese subtitles also started to become accessible online due to excessive demand on the part of the Chinese viewership, who now has an assortment of entertainment media at their disposal at a mere click/touch away.

It was against the background of this increasing popularity of non-Western pop culture that amateur subtitling, or better known as fansubbing, has arisen. Nowadays, a wide range of domestic and international films, including television drama and series, is available on video streaming websites such as Funshion ([www.fun.tv](http://www.fun.tv)) and Leshi ([www.le.com](http://www.le.com)). What distinguishes Chinese fansubbing communities from others is the fact that non-Chinese fansubbers usually provide only relevant subtitles in their language for community members, who have to put some effort into acquiring the corresponding audiovisual files themselves, whereas Chinese fansubbing groups often supply both the audiovisual media and the Chinese subtitles to their group membership for downloading all at once (Deng, 2016: 84). While the former manages to tactically circumvent copyright law, the latter, no doubt, raises many concerns about copyright infringement insofar as today these once illegal video sharing websites seem to have turned into business and are increasingly offering legal video-on-demand packages on a paid subscription basis, similar to the likes of Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, with the exception of some older TV shows being free to view.

Notwithstanding the rising copyright awareness in China, fansubbed videos are still ubiquitous in the online world. In the case of Thai drama, some Thai soap operas, previously aired either dubbed or subtitled on Chinese TV, are easily available online these days with fan-made subtitles. Of unusual interest is the fact that due to the Chinese government's control over media censorship, viewers of broadcast Thai soaps might not necessarily have been exposed to the same Thai TV imports as those who choose to watch them online. As explained by Wanida Boonprasertwattana (in Chirattikorn, 2016: 37), the senior sales manager of Han Media Culture Co., who acts as an agent between Thai TV production companies and Chinese TV stations, every time a Thai soap opera is exported elsewhere it must be modified or edited to conform to the cultural norm or, in the case of China, the broadcasting regulations, of the target country. Boonprasertwattana (ibid.: 38, my translation) further elaborates that:

China is considered the most difficult country to edit Thai soap operas for. We need to know how to edit the soaps to please them [the Chinese viewership] [and] to pass the censorship. Plots are very important. Sometimes we have to change plotlines which producers are rarely informed about. It totally depends on us whether or not a soap opera will make a big hit. For example, the drama *Malai Samchai*. At first, we thought it might not be greenlighted because the storyline is quite provocative, but it was as a result of good editing. We edited many things and made many changes until eventually the show received the top ratings across China.

Furthermore, according to Boonprasertwattana (ibid.: 56), complying with China's TV broadcast restrictions is no mean feat since an eclectic range of themes from period, ghost, or action to *kathoey* dramas is barred on Chinese television. In light of the many prohibitions and restrictions on media, it could be said that Internet users – or online audiences – are more likely to be exposed to entertainment offerings in their original, unexpurgated form. This assumption resonates with Boonprasertwattana's (ibid.: 61, my translation) testimony that:

when we translate the script for China we have to change it to the kind of speech deemed acceptable by the target [Chinese] audience. Obscenities or swear words have to be changed to mere 'you crazy' in order to soften the profanity. Words like 'e-toot' [derogatory term for *kathoey*] can't be included either...

With this in mind, one might wonder how overseas pastime media managed to not simply make its way but also make such a significant splash in China. Indeed,

Internet, despite its own home-grown limitations, has given much room for Chinese netizens to skirt around the state censorship and feed their leisure time with content of their choice, and therein lies the answer to the previously raised question. Since “Chinese cyberspace is home to many different users, groups, events, happenings, movements, artifacts, etc.” (Marolt and Herold, 2015: 3), it is no surprise that like-minded people would gather and form a community of their own in this online space, partly in a bid to keep as far away from the prying eye of the government as possible. In the case of Thai drama, this is precisely how its Chinese stans assemble as a force and help further popularise Thai soap operas, by translating them with freely downloadable subtitling software at their service. As a matter of fact, the cyberspace, together with the practice of fansubbing, has played a great role in gaining a number of Thai TV stars a loyal Chinese fanbase, even though the soap operas in which they starred have never been broadcast on Chinese TV (Boonprasertwattana, in Chirattikorn, 2016: 58).

Given the colossal size of Internet users in China, suffice it to say that the number of fansubbing groups must be proportionately high. Notwithstanding the indeterminable total count, some of them have established themselves as the lynchpin to the Chinese public consumption of international audiovisual entertainment online. Each of these fansubbing contingents has staked out a clearly defined territory of foreign audiovisual material for which it is responsible. For instance, BTS 字幕组 [BTS Zìmù Zǔ: BTS Subtitling Group],<sup>40</sup> one of the biggest and oldest Chinese fansubbing teams, invests its collective efforts mainly in translating Thai soap operas, although it started out with those starring Sukrit “Bie” Wisetkaew, the runner-up to the third season of Thailand’s once most popular singing contest, *The Star*, who has gone on to become a successful singer and actor. Apart from providing subtitles for such Thai soap operas featuring the singer-turned-actor as พระจันทร์สีรุ้ง [*Prajan See Roong: Rainbow-coloured Moon*], ดอกกรักริมทาง [*Dok Ruk Rim Taang: Love Flower along the Way*], and ข้ามเวลาหารัก [*Kham Wayla Ha Ruk: Time Travel to Find Love*] (Nipon Pweenen, 2010), BTS is additionally credited with fansubbing *Hormones the Series*, the groundbreaking Thai queer-themed teen drama.

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<sup>40</sup> Its official Weibo page can be found on <[https://www.weibo.com/biethestar?is\\_hot=1](https://www.weibo.com/biethestar?is_hot=1)>.

Other amateur subtitling battalions like 伊甸园字幕组 [Yīdiàn Yúan Zìmù Zǔ: Eden Garden Subtitling Group],<sup>41</sup> and 风软字幕组 [Fēngruǎn Zìmù Zǔ: Fengruan Subtitling Group],<sup>42</sup> for another instance, are chiefly recognised for their subtitling of US TV shows. Of all the countless fansubbing crews, YYeTs, known in Chinese as 人人影视, is reportedly “the largest [...] in China” (Wang, 2017: 167), specialising in the audiovisual translation of US television series. Over the years, in an effort to dodge the government dissolution of fansubbing groups, YYeTs has rendered their services to the private sector by translating “copyrighted foreign media contents [for] licensed domestic video websites” (ibid.: 168). One of its most outstanding cooperative endeavours involves, what Wang terms, “translating materials for civic education” (ibid.).

In 2010, the group was commissioned by NetEase, an Internet technology firm, to subtitle free online courses offered by Yale University (ibid.). The positive news coverage of its voluntary undertaking at the time, in conjunction with its role in improving Chinese public literacy, has subsequently served to revamp its public image. On top of the gratuitous labour for educational facilitation, in the same year, YYeTs also took on the commercial task of subtitling *Lost* (2004-2010), a US television series, for Sohu (www.sohu.com) (Wang and Zhang, 2017: 306), one of the most visited video streaming websites in China, second, perhaps, only to Youku and Tudou.

Nowadays, the fansubbing group is still in full operation with its own website accessible at [www.yyets.com](http://www.yyets.com). The site’s homepage, or only page for that matter, does not house any of its subtitled collections. Visitors are instead faced with roughly a dozen of buttons which, once clicked on, will prompt them to download its application’s installation packages for different desktop and mobile operating systems as can be seen in Figure 4.1 in the following page (an English translation of each button is provided in Figure 4.2).

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<sup>41</sup> Its official website can be found on <<http://www.ydybt.com/>>.

<sup>42</sup> Its official Weibo page is accessible at <<https://www.weibo.com/1000fr>>.



Figure 4.1: The fansubbing group YYeTs's home page



Figure 4.2: The fansubbing group YYeTs's home page with an English translation of each button

After opening the successfully installed application on the desktop, the first interface will appear as shown in Figure 4.3 below. The TV series on display are those suggested as Today's Hot Picks. Once the user clicks on a series, s/he will be directed to a new page that provides download links to every episode of every season subtitled by the fansubbing squad. The downloaded episode, with open fansubs provided by YYeTs, is watchable on the application, which serves secondarily as a video player.

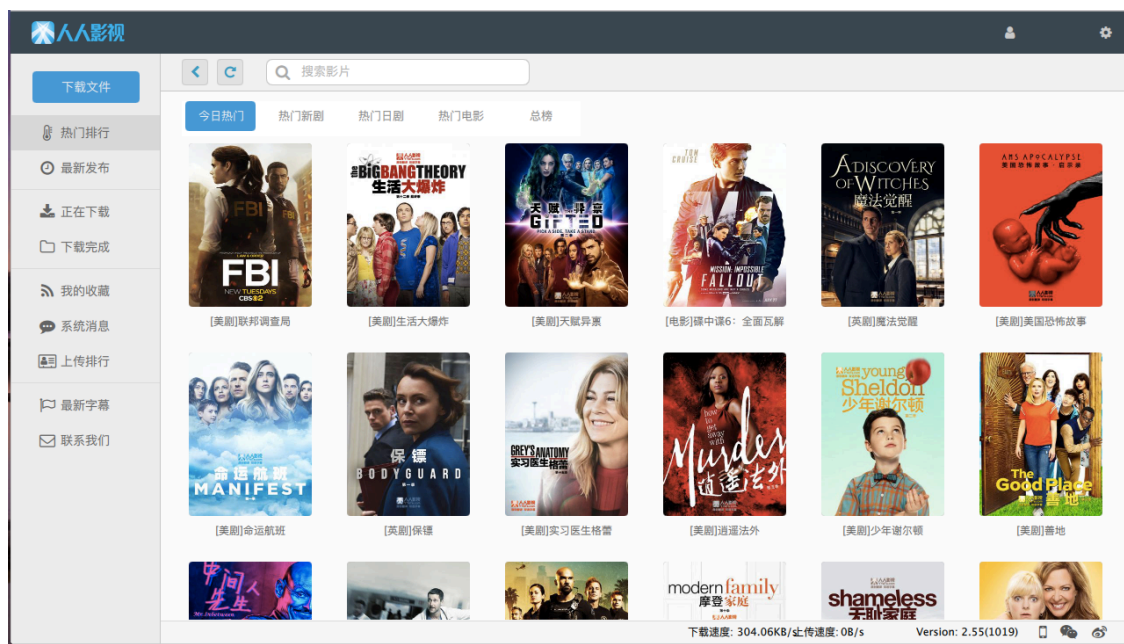


Figure 4.3: The interface of YYeTs application installed on the desktop

The sidebar on the left hand side of the home page as shown in Figure 4.3 above has a Newest Releases tab, which, as suggested by its name, directs the user to a list of newly subtitled episodes or films. Interestingly, the list not only includes those translated by YYeTs, but also comprises a variety of non-American foreign films and TV productions subtitled by other fansubbing communities such as 幻月字幕组 [Huànyuè Zìmù Zǔ: Huanyue Subtitling Group] and 甜饼字幕组 [Tiánbīng Zìmù Zǔ: Tianbing Subtitling Group], among others. Evidently, these amateur AVT contingents have formed collaborative and symbiotic relationships with each other.

Cooperation of this nature is observable, too, among Thai-targeted fansubbing groups. 天府泰剧 [Tiānfū Tàijù: Tianfu Thai Drama], self-styled ‘lovethaistar’ in English,<sup>43</sup> for instance, collaborated with such fansubbing teams as Tazz and TNJ on the subtitling of some Thai TV series and motion pictures. Primarily, ‘lovethaistar’ is recognised for its translation of Thai queer-themed and Y series, including the online production *GayOK Bangkok* and *Love Sick the Series*, the first Y series broadcast on Thai TV.<sup>44</sup> It could be said that the group started to gain recognition after it delivered the Chinese subtitles for *Love Sick the Series*. Since then, ‘lovethaistar’ has focused most of its efforts mainly on Thai Y productions. *2Moons the Series*, *SOTUS the Series*, *Make It Right*, *Together with Me*, *Kiss Me Again*, and *Love by Chance* are among the Y series mentioned in section 2.4.2 that were subtitled by ‘lovethaistar’.<sup>45</sup> The group’s other noteworthy output includes the subtitling of various Thai music videos, the Thai sitcom *Seua Chanee Geng*, titled 夏日菊花茶 [Xiàrì de Júhuāchá: Summer Chrysanthemum] in Chinese, and ไดอารี่ตุ๊ดซี่ส์ เดอะซีรีส์ [Diary Tootsies the Series], whose Chinese title is 娘娘腔的日记 [Niángniáng qiāng de Rìjì: Diary of Sissy Men].

Similar to YYeTs, ‘lovethaistar’, too, has occasionally availed itself of cooperative opportunities with the private sector. *2Moons the Series* and *Together with Me* were two such examples of its partnership with corporate entities as they were imported by 泛泰文化 [Fàntài Wénhuà] or Fun Thai Culture, a Hangzhou-based Chinese entertainment media company, whose stated goal is to promote Thai audiovisual cultural products in China. Its fansubbed collection, commercially or not, was largely distributed on Bilibili, AcFun, Youku, Tudou, and 热播网 [Rèbō Wǎng: Hot Broadcasting Web], the last of which is a central hub for South Korean and Thai pop cultural goods.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Its official Weibo page is accessible at <[https://www.weibo.com/tfthaimovie?is\\_hot=1](https://www.weibo.com/tfthaimovie?is_hot=1)>.

<sup>44</sup> The titles of *GayOK Bangkok* and *Love Sick the Series* are translated into Chinese as 曼谷基友记 [Màngū Jīyǒu Jì: Diary of Bangkok Gays] and 为爱所困 [Wèi Ài Suǒ Kùn: Sick Because of Love], respectively.

<sup>45</sup> These productions are entitled 逐月之月 [Zhú Yuè Zhī Yù: The Moon that Chases the Moon], 一年生 [Yīniánshēng: Freshman], 爱来了别错过 [Ài Lái Le Bié Cuò Guò: Love Is Here, Don't Miss It], 醉后爱上你 [Zuì Hòu Ài Shàng Nǐ: In Love With You After Drunk], 爱我你再亲亲我 [Ài Wǒ Nǐ Zài Qīnqīn Wǒ: Kiss Me Again If You Love Me], and 不期而爱 [Bùqī Ér Ài: Love by Chance], in Chinese, respectively.

<sup>46</sup> The website is accessible at <<https://y3600.com/>>.

In addition to BTS and ‘lovethaistar’, SuperM<sup>47</sup> and FirstCS<sup>48</sup> are those which play a visibly prominent role in putting their Thai language competency to extensive use in the amateur audiovisual translation of Thai soap operas. FirstCS’s most commended achievement to date is its speedy one-day delivery of Chinese subtitles for each episode of the highest-rated Thai soap opera *Buppesannivas*, aka *Love Destiny* (previously discussed in section 4.1). Of particular note is the fact that a fair number of the Thai-focused fansubbing groups were born out of their membership’s passion for and favouritism toward a specific artist. As briefly mentioned earlier, BTS, which stands for Bie The Star, as the singer-cum-actor is called in Thai, has broadened out from audiovisual works exclusively featuring the then rising star to those starring other up-and-coming as well as established actors. In the same vein, SuperM, with the letter “M” standing for Mario, was formed by the fanbase of Mario Maurer, a popular Thai actor of Chinese and German extraction.

Conventionally, official Chinese subtitles are to conform with certain technical and linguistic rules widely regarded as standard and most practical. In this sense, the subtitling norms stipulate that “double lines in Chinese are not feasible, and there should only be one line each time” (Yu, 2015: 502), in a similar way as Japanese subtitles are presented on screen. As for the length of the lines, “[t]he number of Chinese characters per line should not exceed 13” with “[s]tandardisation and simplification [being] two important techniques applied to subtitling practice in China” (ibid.). Naturally, though, exceptions to said rules, or any rule for that matter, are observed occasionally, particularly with regard to the number of lines per subtitle, since the presence of two line subtitles has become rather common on screens. Furthermore, thanks to the rising status of fansubbing, some informal features typical of fansubbing have started to pervade commercial subtitling practices (Lv and Li, 2013, in Wang and Zhang, 2017: 303).

In fansubbing, two lines of bilingual subtitles are not oddities, especially when it comes to the translation of US series. Usually, the lower line represents the

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<sup>47</sup> Its official Weibo page is accessible at <<http://bit.ly/2NbHVvk>>.

<sup>48</sup> Its official Weibo page is accessible at <<http://bit.ly/2RbqSNd>>.



English literal transcription of the dialogue, while the upper line is the Chinese translation of the English verbal exchange, as visualised in Figure 4.4 as follows:



Figure 4.4: A screenshot of *Modern Family* episode 1 season 1 subtitled by YYeTs

Indeed, in fansubbing, the anomalies tend to occur with higher frequency than in commercial practice and the text that appears on screen resorts to formal features that are shared with other practices, like the use of different colours for different speakers, that is also commonly found in subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH), or features that are unique to the sphere of fansubbing, such as the insertion of explanatory headnotes, as shown in the following Figure 4.5, where a verse from the opening credits theme song ไม่เคยดูให้ลึกลงไปข้างในหัวใจ [Have never looked deep into (each other's) hearts] is translated into Chinese as 未曾真正走进爱的心房 [Have never entered the heart of love before]:



Figure 4.5: A screenshot of a Thai soap opera with the translation of the opening credits theme song on the top right corner of the screen

Occasionally, 天府泰剧, or 'lovethaistar', the fansubbing community making a name for itself as the most prolific Thai queer-themed content translator, is spotted helping to promote its favourite Thai artists by giving out their Instagram handles as exemplified by Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 that follow:



Figure 4.6: A screenshot of *Seua Chanee Geng* during the opening theme song where the Instagram handle of one of the leading actors, Tanatat “Kangsom” Chaiyaat, is provided



Figure 4.7: A screenshot of *Seua Chanee Geng* during the opening theme song where the Instagram handle of one of the leading actors, Pongsak “Aof” Rattanaphong, is provided

Of all the Chinese fansubbing attributes, the most peculiar is arguably the introduction of 弹幕 [dàn mù], or more commonly known in English as the *bullet screen*, to fansubbed videos. *Dàn mù*, as it is called in Chinese, originated in Japan, by the name of *danmaku*, and was brought into existence by an online community/website of anime and comic fans, including gamers, called NICONICO (Tang, 2016: 7).

Written with Chinese kanji characters, the original Japanese term literally means “the barrage formed by dense bullets on a battle field” (China Pop Words, 2015: online). Its verbatim denotation has however since been appropriated by the Japanese fansubbing contingent. Nowadays, this Japanese-born special gimmick in fansubbing refers to user-generated comments which appear on screen either scrolling, from right to left, or are fixed onto the images for a very short period of time, and whose in- and out-times are customised by the user who enters the comment(s).

Perhaps the most eminent quirk of *danmu* is the fact that, similar to subtitles, once *danmu* lines are fed into a video they are stored permanently on the server of the website, i.e. as the *danmu* function, and will appear every time the video is played again in the future (ibid.: 8). As of 2016, only the two most famous fansubbing websites in China offered the *danmu* feature, namely AcFun ([www.acfun.cn](http://www.acfun.cn)) and Bilibili ([www.bilibili.com](http://www.bilibili.com)). That these two fansubbing hotspots remain extant to this day, while 111 others were shut down on the grounds of copyright infringement in 2009 (Zhang, 2015a, in Tang, 2016: 11), might be attributed to the fact that they themselves are not responsible for the uploading and sharing of the copyright videos. Instead, the copyright-protected audiovisual material readily and emphatically fansubbed by fansubbers is uploaded onto the websites by their members – as opposed to the webmasters – and the websites merely take ownership of the *danmu* input provided by viewers of the videos (Wang, 2015, in Tang, 2016: 8).

According to Tang (2016: 16), the invention of *danmu* has arguably been found to serve four main purposes, that is: (1) to provide translation of song lyrics, (2) to transliterate originally spoken words into homophones or near homophones in the local language, primarily for humorous effects, (3) to provide explanations for



source culture-specific terms or actions that are considered unfamiliar to the domestic Chinese viewers, and (4) to share one's immediate reaction to or thoughts on a specific scene. The advent of *danmu* is, on the one hand, intended to enhance overall spectatorial experience but, on the other, its drawback is all too conspicuous to be ignored. Since the number of *danmu* comments per shot is not limited, it is not that uncommon to see the entire screen filled to the full with *danmu* (Tang, 2016: 8). This "typical phenomenon of [...] *danmu* [...] taking up the entire screen" (ibid.) raises many concerns regarding its interference with the aesthetics of the programme and its impact on the enjoyment of the original programme being watched. Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 below concretely illustrate what *danmu-ed* videos look like:

Figure 4.8: A screenshot of a Chinese *danmu-ed* video taken from Bilibili

Figure 4.9: A screenshot of a Chinese *danmu*-ed video taken from Bilibili

The issue of having too much text on screen can however be easily resolved since, on top of the comment–adding function, members of the *danmu* sites are also given the options to filter out comments they deem displeasing or turn off the *danmu* function altogether. By turning to the right-hand side of a *danmu-ed* video (see Figure 4.10 below), users can easily spot a *danmu* box containing a list of all the *danmu* lines entered into the video, along with their respective timecodes, from which the aforementioned options can be located:



Figure 4.10: A screenshot of a *danmu-ed* video together with its *danmu* box

Being two of the most visited fansubbing and video-sharing platforms, AcFun and Bilibili duly provoked public outrage when, in 2017, they rid their websites of their enormous collections of foreign content (He, 2017: online). Although the two *danmu* communities are still in service, their existence is rather meaningless now since their appeal lied precisely in the overseas TV and cinematic offerings recently wiped out. Among those taken offline are an extensive selection of motion pictures and TV shows from the US, UK, Japan, South Korea and Thailand (ibid.; Liu, 2017: online). Most notably, the majority of the Thai queer-themed and *kathoe*y movies translated by amateur subtitlers and once available

on Bilibili and AcFun, among other video streaming websites, have been categorically eradicated. The likes of *Metrosexual*, *Me...Myself*, *Bangkok Love Story*, *Haunting Me*, *Kung Fu Tootsie*, *A Moment in June*, and *Slice* (discussed in section 2.4.1) have fallen victim to the recent wipeout. On the other hand, *Love of Siam* and *The Iron Ladies 2* are perhaps some of the very few that have survived the excision, although they are currently hosted on Youku instead of the two *danmu* websites.

The systemic cull was initially thought to have been prompted by “official efforts to tackle piracy” (He, 2017: online). However, the concurrent removal of copyright-protected alien audiovisual repertoires from the two sites calls into question the battle against bootlegging as the primary motive. He (ibid.) also reports that the day after the great purge a rather inadequate explanation was published on Bilibili’s Weibo account stating that “the ‘temporary’ removal of videos was due to ‘a content review of the movies and TV dramas within the site’”. At the end of the review process, “those in violation of the criteria will be pulled off permanently, while the others will be gradually restored”, though it is unclear nonetheless what the ‘criteria’ encompass (ibid.). It is further speculated that:

the sudden disappearance of vast amounts of content produced overseas from Bilibili and AcFun [...] has less to do with tackling piracy than with a desire in Beijing to tighten control of information ahead of the crucial 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Party’s national congress this autumn [in 2017], at which the next generation of leader is expected to be named. (ibid.)

Simply put, the elimination of the foreign TV and filmic stock is a symbolic gesture by the Party in the lead-up to the national congress in an attempt to exert and exhibit their full control over media and promote their own propaganda in the process. Now that most foreign TV and cinematic contents have banished, users of the two sites are left with mostly overseas “classics” such as “the now century-old Charlie Chaplin films *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (1914) and *A Jitney Elopement* (1915)” (Liu, 2017: online) and Japanese anime. On Bilibili, however, a mere handful of recent non-native movies are still streamable for viewers based in mainland China. Fan-made video mashups of foreign music and movie trailers are also among those unaffected by the latest content cleansing. Figure 4.11 and

Figure 4.12 that follow are screenshots of those alien videos still available on AcFun and Bilibili:



Figure 4.11: A screenshot of *danmu-ed* popular Japanese anime *One Piece*, retrieved from AcFun



Figure 4.12: A screenshot of a video mashup of various female leads from a motley number of overseas movies and series, musically accompanied by Fall Out Boy's *Centuries*, retrieved from Bilibili



Without Bilibili and AcFun being the main point of access to one's desired foreign audiovisual content, social media webpages and community forums of fansubbing groups can be useful starting points for Internet users in pursuit of Chinese-subtitled offshore entertainment media. Indeed, every fansubbing group in China has a virtual base in the form of either: a social media webpage on, for example, Weibo; a discussion forum on Baidu Bar; or a website; or all of the three aforementioned channels combined. On these virtual platforms, fansubbing groups are able to keep in direct contact with their audiences, i.e. the consumers of their audiovisual product. As pointed out by Wang and Zhang (2017: 311), "[s]hortly after publishing their translation output, fansubbing groups receive feedback from audiences through various channels, upon which they tend to be willing to revise and improve their translations". This, together with "[t]he technological expertise of Chinese fansubbing groups", has undoubtedly raised the technical and qualitative dimensions of their subtitling, whereas "subtitlers working for authorised media do not have the authority to review and revise their work once it has entered the public space" (ibid.).

### 4.3 Intralingual audiovisual translation in China

Apart from the interlingual subtitling and fansubbing of foreign audiovisual productions, there is another type of subtitling that is equally prevalent in China, namely the 'intralingual' audiovisual translation of Chinese dialects into Simplified Chinese Mandarin. With the gigantic size of mainland China, it is not surprising that over a hundred languages or, politically speaking, 'dialects' are spoken across the country.

It is claimed that the first dialect-speaking film emerged in China as early as 1934. Said film, directed by Xue Juexian and Gao Liheng, was called 白金龙 [*Bái Jīn Lóng: The White Golden Dragon*] and featured Cantonese dialect (Yao, 2013: 7), although one might argue that from a linguistic point of view Cantonese should

not be considered a variant of Chinese Mandarin since Cantonese and Mandarin are not mutually intelligible. While Yao (ibid.) insists that the filmic usage of dialect was not a novelty, for it appeared almost at the same time as the dawn of the Chinese film industry, Zhang (2015b: 386) contends that the first Chinese dialect film “was not produced until 1963” when Ge Chen and Dan Shen’s *抓壮丁* [*Zhuā Zhuàng Dīng*], or *The Conscription* as it is titled in English, was released by August First Film Studio. In the film, Sichuan dialect is spoken.

Perhaps the reason why *The White Golden Dragon* does not belong in the repertoire of Chinese dialect films in Zhang’s mind can be attributed to the fact that, prior to 1956, Mandarin was as yet not accorded the status as standard Chinese, which meant that Cantonese back then was of equal rank as Mandarin Chinese, so to speak, and the film had been actually made in Hong Kong. Notwithstanding the diverging views on the birth of multilingual/multidialectal films in China, it is clear that the policy to promote Mandarin, aka *Putonghua*, as the standard Chinese language, enforced in 1956 by the State Council, has significantly deterred the production of domestic dialectal movies.

From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, the motion picture industry was crippled by the Cultural Revolution, at which point dialectal films were almost left out of the picture completely (Yao, 2013: 9). The revival of the movie business in the 1980s did not translate into the widespread utilisation of Chinese dialects in films, even though many of them were set predominantly in non-Mandarin speaking rural areas in China (ibid.: 9-10). The linguistic trend shifted from the 1990s on, when dialects started to be used quite significantly in Chinese motion pictures to better resonate with the ethos of the contemporary film industry, whose main aim was to accurately portray the lives of common people (ibid.: 10). The proclivity for dialectal use in films has continued to thrive well into the twenty-first century, despite the Chinese central government’s attempt to curb the appearance of dialects and to promote the use of Chinese Mandarin as standard spoken Chinese in the media by legally enshrining it, at last, in 2001 (Zhang, 2015b: 386).

In addition, the entertainment sector has been hardly alone in championing the use of the numerous linguistic variants in existence in China, as evidenced by the mushrooming of news broadcasting in local dialects, spearheaded by provincial

TV stations (Zhang, 2015b: 389-390). With the success of the comedy 疯狂的石头 [*Fēngkuáng de Sítou: Crazy Stone*] (Hao Ning, 2006), a film featuring a variety of Chinese local dialects, the “dialect film fever” was sparked off (Zhang, 2015b: 392) and, from this point onwards, a multitude of motion pictures have followed in its footsteps by employing spoken dialects in their films too. The rise of dialect-speaking films in China thus inevitably necessitates the enlistment of audiovisual translation, be it subtitling or dubbing, meaning that the multidialectal films are, in a similar manner as international audiovisual productions, provided with subtitles in Mandarin.

With the proliferation of the dialectal audiovisual productions, one might be tempted to hasten to the conclusion that the 2009 directive on control over the usage of dialects on TV, issued by SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, currently SAPPRFT), did not yield many effective results. This is, however, not the case at all if one is aware of a profession that has been prospering alongside the booming dialect-speaking silver screen in China. The thriving vocation in question is voice acting or, to be more politically precise, intralingual voice acting. Jiang, an experienced Chinese voice artist interviewed by Nathan Jubb from the Sixth Tone (2017), enumerates the myriad reasons why the voice dubbing business has remained and will remain as brisk as ever, one of which is, indeed, SAPPRFT’s stipulation that only Mandarin Chinese, or *Putonghua*, be spoken on television.

Naturally, Chinese actors, whose first language is not Chinese Mandarin, or who speak the standard Chinese language with a thick or even slight regional accent, will be dubbed into Mandarin with “clinical enunciation void of regional imperfections” (Jiang, in Jubb, 2017: online). The multiple portrayals of the former Chinese communist revolutionary, Mao Zedong, in Chinese TV shows are the epitome of such oral intervention, as he is infamous for his strong Hunan accent, “but on TV his lines are delivered with flawless pronunciation” (ibid.). Excessive background noise on-set and compliance with the censorial board’s order to whitelist, so to speak, unapproved post-production dialogue are also adduced by Jiang (ibid.) as some of the key reasons that explain the steady demand for voice actors in the country.

## Chapter 5

### Methodology

The chapter sets out to detail the methodology of this research project, which covers three grounds. Firstly, it describes the process of literature reviews which help contextualise the research topic and lay the foundation for answering the research questions laid out in Chapter 1. The second section of this chapter accounts for the chosen corpus and the basis on which the corpus has been selected. Lastly, the theoretical framework in which the analysis of the corpus is carried out is explored in detail.

#### 5.1 Literature review

In order to answer the core research question of the thesis, that is, how, if at all, the representation of Thai queer male identities in audiovisual productions is manipulated, linguistically and extra-linguistically, once it is transposed to China, it is crucial to first and foremost have a grasp of how these identities are originally presented in Thai media. The literature review in Chapter 2 thus traces the portrayals of *kathoey* characters on the Thai silver screen from its inception to its golden era at which point a stand-alone genre of its own, called *kathoey* movies, was born. The appearance of *kathoey* individuals on Thai TV is discussed to boot. Also featured in the second chapter is the review of the introduction of gay men to both the silver and small screens, which in turn warrants a brief summary of how these two gender categories are defined in the context of Thailand. In Chapter 3, Thai audiovisual productions that have entered China are explored alongside the Chinese mediascape. The choice of Thai audiovisual products imported into the East Asian country is dictated by various broadcast regulations, hence the discussion of said restrictions. Chapter 4 delves into the two primary modes of audiovisual translation, namely dubbing and subtitling, exploring their respective evolution in China including their official and unofficial existence, and the basis on which each mode is deployed. In the subtitling section, a detailed discussion on the fansubbing practice in China is also provided.

## 5.2 Selection of corpus

Initially, the corpus selected included ten Thai soap operas which later proved to be unmanageable and redundant. For practical reasons, it was finalised at two Chinese-fansubbed and two Chinese officially dubbed Thai soap operas whose titles and round-ups are to be revealed below. The criteria by which these Thai audiovisual productions are chosen entail, firstly, the inclusion of at least one *kathoey* or gay male character in each of them. Not only are these characters included but they also have to be featured in the soap operas in which they appear, meaning that they must be regular cast members and their roles must contribute to the progression of the storylines, even though they are not protagonists. Secondly, the progressive years in which each of the selected soap operas became available in China are also taken into consideration. Since one of the research's objectives is to determine whether any change can be detected in the treatment of these queer characters over the years from 2009 to 2016, by both the dubbing translators and the fansubbing groups responsible for the translated corpus, it is imperative then that more than one such Thai soap opera of each audiovisual translation mode is tapped into. In pursuit of the aforementioned goal, four soap operas of both translational approaches, i.e. fansubbing and dubbing, released on their respective platforms in different years between 2009 and 2016 are drawn on to be analysed, both individually and comparatively.

In addition, the choices of the audiovisual translation modes are not arbitrary. As well-known and discussed at length in Chapter 3, the Chinese government keeps a very watchful eye on the inflow of overseas audiovisual productions and imposes strict censorship of queer representation on media. To be more precise, the portrayals of queer identities on TV and in cinema are officially banned. On the other hand, while the government authorities go to great lengths to ensure the prohibition is equally vigorously enforced online, a fairly large number of foreign audiovisual contents, subtitled by amateur translators, manage to evade the grip and be distributed on the Internet. The coexistence of both the commercially Chinese-dubbed and the Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas consequently begs the question as to how, if at all, the Thai audiovisual productions of two distinct translation modes might be treated differently given

that the latter is able to enjoy the relative freedom from the Chinese government's clutches afforded by the virtually boundless expanse of the cyberspace. In analysing the corpus, thus, not only are the Chinese-translated Thai soap operas released in progressive years to be compared, but the comparison is also drawn between the audiovisual productions of the two different AVT modes in an attempt to uncover any discrepancy in the treatment of queer representation by commercial dubbing translators working within the purview of the state-issued broadcast regulations and by fansubbers.

### 5.2.1 Two Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas

The two Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas which meet the criteria laid out above and have thereby been chosen for the purpose of this research are as follows: *สะใภ้ลูกทุ่ง* [*Sapai Look Tung*], and *มาดามดัน* [*Madam Dun*].

#### *Sapai Look Tung* [Country Daughter-in-Law] – 儿夫村庄

Consisting of fifteen episodes in total, *Sapai Look Tung*, directed by Krit Sukramongkon, premiered in Thailand on Channel 3 in September 2008. The soap opera is categorised as a romantic comedy drama centring on the intertwined lives of four main characters (pictured in Figure 5.1 below): Art, Artee, Mui, and Kem with Art and Artee being brothers, and Mui and Kem being sisters.



Figure 5.1: From left to right: Art, Kem, Choke, Artee, and Mui



Equally important to the plotline, though unrelated by blood to any of the two pairs of siblings, is the male character Choke (portrayed in Figure 5.2 below). In an attempt to boost her family's financial status, Jit-anong (Figure 5.3 in the following page), Art (shown in Figure 5.2 below) and Artee's mother, promises the eldest of the two, Art, to Kem who has been adopted by Buasee, her affluent childless aunt-in-law. What Jit-anong is completely oblivious to is the fact that her eldest and favourite son is gay; the character played, ironically, by a straight actor named Nithi Samutkojorn. In addition, Art is hopelessly infatuated with Choke, Mui's ex-boyfriend, whom he has been consistently bankrolling due to the latter's gambling problems.



Figure 5.2: From left to right: Art and Choke

As a result of Art's fixation with and patronage for Choke, he takes a belligerent attitude towards every woman who ever comes close to his target of desire, especially Mui, since Choke is still very much in love with her. Throughout the entire drama, Art is preoccupied with chasing Choke, who, at the same time,

attempts to win back Mui's heart while Artee, the younger of the brothers, is also busy wooing Choke's former lover.



Figure 5.3: Jit-anong, Art and Artee's mother who marries Art off to Kem

Despite Art's obsession with Choke, he agrees to marry Kem in order to inherit a part of his grandmother's massive fortune up front so that he can help Choke repay his debts. Having obtained the money needed for the debt clearance, Art then accuses Kem of cheating on him with Choke as an excuse to divorce her. Although Choke disagrees with Art's plot against his own wife, he accedes to it anyway as he reckons it would better be him, rather than someone else, who might bear a real malice towards her. After their sham marriage comes to an end, as a result of Art's successful scheme, Choke is gripped by guilt, so he tries to redeem himself by treating Kem particularly nicely until he grows on her.

Similarly, Choke is impressed with her kind-heartedness and starts to develop feelings for her. On the other hand, he takes great pains to distance himself from Art, who, consequently, immerses himself in nightlife to deflect from his anguish. On Choke and Kem's wedding day, Art, once notified of the event, barges into the ceremony with a gun and threatens to shoot everyone who he claims has schemed to separate him from his designated lover. Art fires the gun at Artee, his own brother, by accident and quickly flees the scene out of utter shock and guilt. Afterward, he sneaks into the hospital room where his younger brother is housed



to apologise and repent himself. Mui, who has also come to visit Artee, walks in on the older brother so the two bury the hatchet and are reconciled with one another. The drama concludes with Art admitting to his mother that he is gay and Jit-anong regretting causing her own sons so much pain.

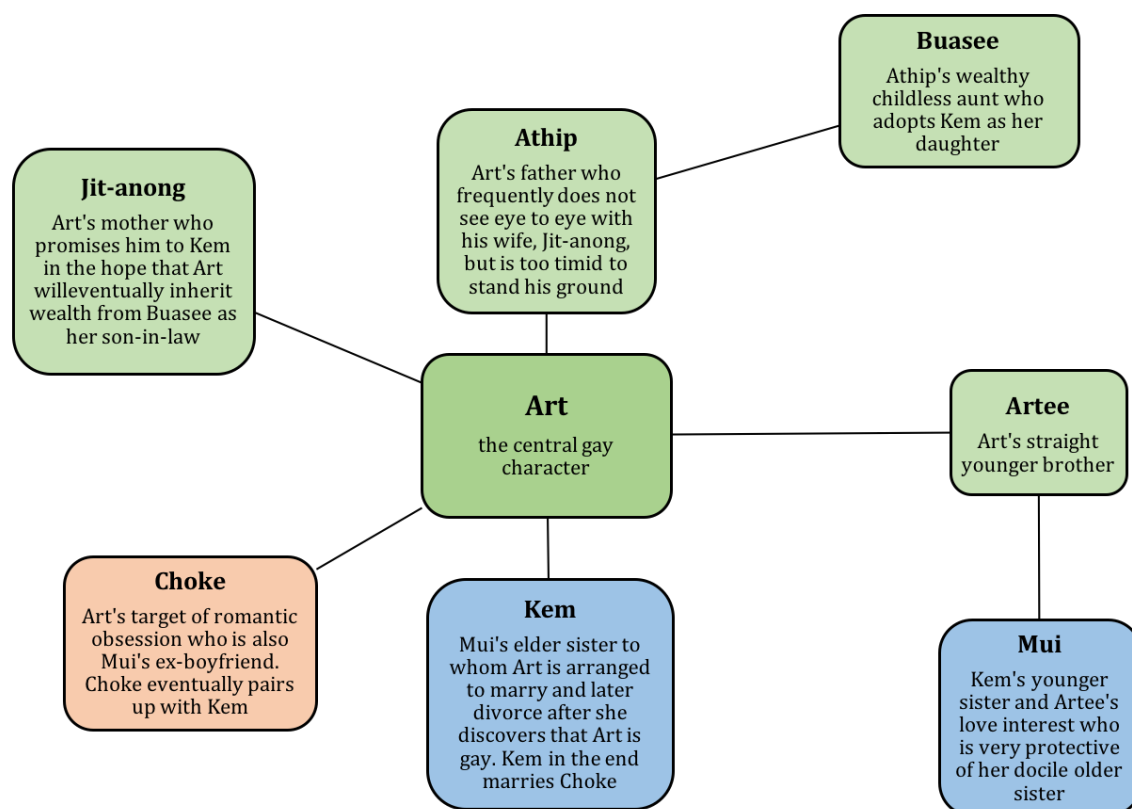


Figure 5.4: *Sapai Look Tung's* character tree

The soap opera was, as far as I am aware, never officially imported into China and, by implication, never dubbed into Chinese for commercial profit. It therefore entered China solely subtitled or, more specifically, fansubbed. The drama was rendered into Chinese by different groups of amateur translators; some episodes were translated by, for instance, *zhengyi*, and some others by a fansubbing team called 躲猫猫剧团 [Duômāomāo Jútuán: Hide and Seek Troupe], whose fansubbing activities and end products are housed at a Youku web address.<sup>49</sup> While it cannot be established whether *zhengyi* is an independent amateur subtitler, or a member of a fansubbing group, or the name of a fansubbing group itself, 躲猫猫剧团 is an amateur subtitling crew known to specialise in subtitling Thai soap operas into Chinese. The entire fansubbed drama, i.e. the actual

<sup>49</sup> See <<http://i.youku.com/i/UOTEwMjg5MTI=?spm=a2hzip.8244740.0.0>>.

footage together with the burnt subtitles, was originally hosted by Youku, a Chinese video-sharing and streaming website comparable to YouTube, and it has also been uploaded to numerous other video-sharing sites in the country such as 泰剧吧 [Tàijù Bā: Hub of Thai Soap Operas] ([www.taijuba.com](http://www.taijuba.com)), 面包网 [Miànbāo Wǎng: Bread Web] ([www.mianbao99.com](http://www.mianbao99.com)), and Bilibili ([www.bilibili.com](http://www.bilibili.com)).

Although the melodrama was first released in Thailand in 2008, the earliest upload of its Chinese-fansubbed counterpart was not until the year 2012, when it appeared on 面包网 or the Bread Web. In July 2013, it was reuploaded to 泰剧吧 [Tàijù Bā], the other aforementioned popular Chinese hub of Thai drama, from which I acquired the audiovisual files of the soap opera along with the burnt-in subtitles. Two years later, in October 2015, Bilibili was given the courtesy of hosting the soap opera to boot. As of 2018, however, the three aforementioned online depots have been rid of the soap opera as well as of many other Thai soap operas, including the other three dramas being discussed in this research. The removal of the Thai TV audiovisual productions was presumably a by-product of the mid-2017 Chinese government-imposed embargo on foreign content on Bilibili and AcFun, two of the most popular Chinese video-streaming sites famous for their *danmu*, or bullet screen, service (He, 2017; Liu, 2017).

Incidentally, the analysis of the soap opera taps into scenes from three episodes, namely, 1, 3, and 15. The first two chosen episodes illustrate how Art, the main homosexual male character, is characterised by his employment of camp talk. The use of this stylistic resource shows how his camp talk is to be given dissimilar evaluative loads depending on the addressees at which he directs his camp talk. Also exemplified by his camp talk in episodes 1 and 3 is the identification of his gender/sexual identity. Episode 15, on the other hand, is needed from a diegetic point of view as it clearly illustrates a change in his attitude, signalled by his toned-down camp talk.

### *Madam Dun [Madam Talent Scout] – 大小姐*

In November 2013, Channel 3 broadcast the first episode of the melodrama in its Tuesday evening prime time slot. The soap opera has been directed by Chotirut

Rukrermwong. The central plot of the drama, needless to say, entails the romance arc between the titular female protagonist and the boy whom she recruits to join her talent agency. In addition to the major thread running throughout the story, Madam Pushy, the eponymous character, is entangled in fierce professional and personal rivalry with Jay Miang, her *kathoey* arch nemesis. Figure 5.5 below illustrates the four main characters featured in the soap opera:



Figure 5.5: The promotional poster for *Madam Dun*. From left to right: Tinnapob, Nex, Madam Pushy, and Jay Miang

The soap opera opens with Jay Miang infuriated by Madam Pushy's newly released book taking up the frontmost bestselling spot in a bookstore. To the *kathoey* talent scout's chagrin, the publication provides a false account of his involvement in pimping actresses under his management. He consequently brings a libel charge against Madam Pushy and prevails over her. Having lost the case, Madam Pushy seeks to bounce back from the career-threatening scandal, by following a tip-off to a remote province in the country in which a teenage heartthrob is reported to live.

The desperate young talent scout wishes to see with her own eyes if the rumoured 'Prince of the Northeastern Thailand' indeed lives up to the hype around him and hopefully, if he does, to convince him to sign with her. When

Madam Pushy's impromptu trip out of town reaches Jay Miang's ears, the latter cannot help but prickle with curiosity. Coincidentally, the senior talent scout spots Geng, Madam Pushy's assistant's close friend and colleague, in the shopping mall where he takes his trainees to lunch. He then ambushes Geng to extract information on Madam Pushy's whereabouts. Like the character Art in *Sapai Look Tung*, Jay Miang is also played by a heterosexual actor, albeit a different one, named Chattayodom "Chai" Hirunyutthiti. Figure 5.6 below visualises the two central characters, Jay Miang (left) and Madam Pushy (right).



Figure 5.6: Two rival scouts, Jay Miang and Madam Pushy

One of the subplots underlying the entire story is the conflict and competition between Madam Pushy and Jay Miang. The reason why Madam Pushy is so visibly consumed with resentment toward the latter is later revealed to be involved with her deceased best friend, Anne, who was a rising star managed by, alas, her current enemy. Putsee, now known professionally as Madam Pushy, and Anne, her best friend left their small hometown for Bangkok to fulfil their ambitions: Putsee's was to find a secure promising job while Anne's was to become a

successful actor. When Jay Miang discovers Anne and successfully persuades her to sign with him, Putsee decides to ask the *kathoey* scout for a job as his assistant since she does not deem him trustworthy enough to leave her friend in his care.

Indeed, Jay Miang proved to be careless as suspected since he accidentally left Anne with Jattawa, an influential businessman notorious for sexually exploiting aspiring actresses. Anne ends up getting raped by Jattawa and thereby takes her own life before her best friend's eyes. Putsee then blames Jay Miang for her friend's suicide so she leaves the latter's talent agency and vows to bring him down. Further down the line, history almost repeats itself when Jay Miang's new trainee, Patty, is lured into Jattawa's lair. As soon as he learns of his starlet's whereabouts, Jay Miang, racked with guilt from his past blunder, resolves to rescue her but, first of all, he needs Madam Pushy's help. The two, after having cleared up the misunderstanding and having made peace with each other, rush to save Patty together and vow to cooperate in exposing Jattawa's past and present crimes.

Although *Madam Dun* was never broadcast on any Chinese TV channel, in 2016 the Chinese-fansubbed version of the thirteen episodes of the soap was uploaded to 乐看网 [Lèkèn Wǎng: Leisure Watch Web] ([www.lelekan.com](http://www.lelekan.com)) and 土豆 [Tǔdòu: Potato] ([www.tudou.com](http://www.tudou.com)), another prominent Chinese video-streaming site whose ownership was acquired by 优酷 [Yóukù: Youku], the Chinese equivalent of YouTube, in 2012, and whose new entity is now called 优酷土豆 [Yóukù Tǔdòu: Youku Tudou]. The melodrama remained available on the two websites until early 2018, after which it was removed on the grounds of copyright infringement.

At any rate, the Chinese subtitles of the soap opera were entirely provided by a fansubbing team known as Jlove. The group consists of Chinese members with a strong bias towards Warattaya "Jui" Nilakhuha, a well-known Thai TV actress. Originally, it subtitled only the established star's TV filmography. After all, the letter "J" preceding the term "Love" in the group moniker is the abbreviation for the actress' nickname, Jui. The contingent, however, has since expanded into Thai soap operas starring other personalities apart from the eponymous actress,



as evidenced by its newly stated mission to cater also to “fellow fans who are interested in Thai language, Thai actors, and Thai dramas” (Qingxin Fangxiang Baihe [The fresh fragrant lily], 2013: online, my translation) and its fansubbing undertakings in recent years. The group has its Internet forums on 百度<sup>50</sup> [Báidù: Baidu] and 优酷土豆<sup>51</sup> [Youku Tudou], where members can post questions about and updates on both old and recently released Thai TV productions.

The scenes of the soap opera discussed in the analysis have been extracted from episodes 1 and 2. While certain scenes in the first episode illustrate how most of Jay Miang’s, a *kathoey* talent agent, camp traits are masculinised in Chinese, the second episode demonstrates camp’s manifestation of face wants and ambivalent solidarity when two *kathoey* characters are engaged in a florid verbal exchange.

### 5.2.3 Two officially Chinese-dubbed Thai soap operas

While the first criterion of corpus selection is easily met as Thai soap operas featuring queer characters exist in abundance, those officially dubbed into Chinese and aired on Chinese TV are harder to come by. Thanks mainly to the popularity of certain Thai actors, their TV productions were authorised to be broadcast in China despite their portrayals of auxiliary queer roles in the widely distributed TV programmes. Below are two of the Thai soap operas featuring *kathoey* and gay characters that were officially dubbed into Chinese and greenlit to air on Chinese TV: พรุ่งนี้ก็รักเธอ [*Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*] and พระจันทร์สีรุ้ง [*Prajan See Roong*]

#### *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter* [Tomorrow I’ll Still Love you] – 明天我依然爱你

*Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, first broadcast in Thailand in November 2009 on Channel 5, a free-to-air analogue channel, is one of the very first Thai soap operas that openly portray a romantic relationship between two gay men. Earlier in 2008, the sky-high ratings of *Songkram Narng Fah* [*The Battle of Angels*] in China catapulted the male lead, played by Nawat “Pong” Kulrattanakorn, to

<sup>50</sup> See <<https://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=jlove%E5%AD%97%E5%B9%95%E7%BB%84>>

<sup>51</sup> See <<http://id.tudou.com/i/UNTkwNzM2MjQ0> or <http://i.youku.com/u/UNTkwNzM2MjQ0>>

stardom and, as a result, led to his next soap opera, namely *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, being imported into the East Asian country immediately in the same year it was released in Thailand. What is more, it was dubbed and aired concurrently on three Chinese regional channels, namely, 安徽卫视 [Ānhuī Wèishì: Anhui Satellite Channel], 上海电视剧频道 [Shànghāi Diànshìjù Píndào: Shanghai TV Drama Channel], and 江苏影视频道 [Jiāngsū Yǐngshì Píndào: Jiangsu Film and Television Channel]. The original soap opera, directed by Takonkiet Viravan, is composed of thirty episodes, which were reduced to twenty-seven when it was screened in China. Significant scenes cut from the initial release include, for example, physical expressions of homosexual love, use of violence, and sexual assaults; others that were also edited out were those probably deemed to be redundant or of little importance to the progression of the entire storyline. Figure 5.7 below illustrates relationships between all of the regular characters.

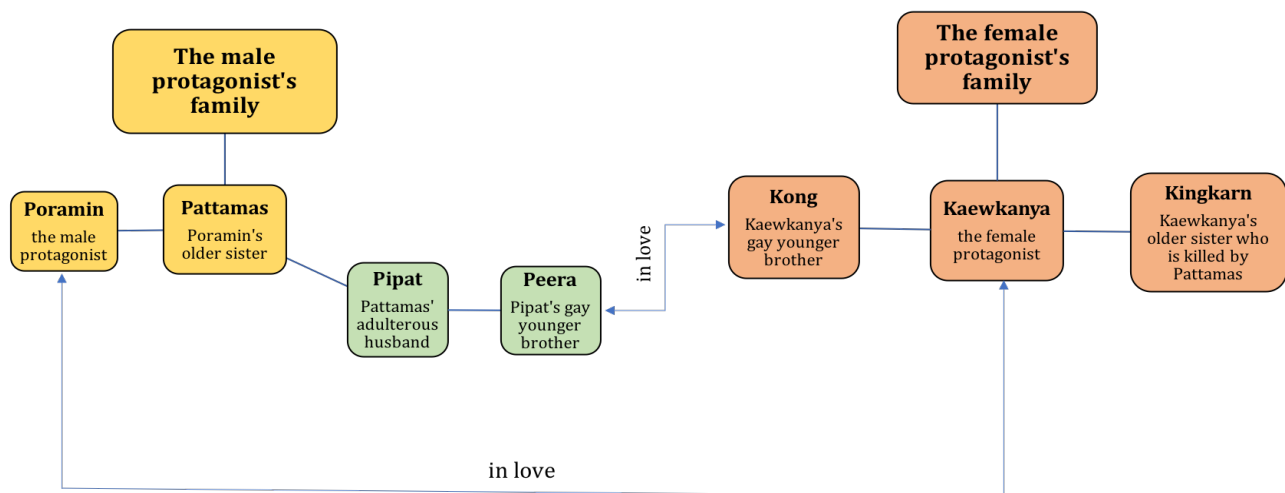


Figure 5.7: *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*'s character tree

The central plot follows the tumultuous lives of two protagonists, Poramin and Kaewkanya, the heteronormative couple of the soap opera. Meanwhile, Kong, Kaewkanya's younger brother, is involved in a secondary romance arc with Peera, Poramin's brother-in-law's younger brother. The major theme connecting every character's plot thread is the conflict between Poramin's and Kaewkanya's families. Figure 5.8 below features all of the regular characters.



Figure 5.8: Upper row from left to right: Pipat (Pattamas' husband), Pattamas (Poramin's older sister), Kaewkanya (female protagonist), and Poramin (male protagonist). Lower row from left to right: Wanna-orn (Poramin's girlfriend), Peera (Pipat's younger brother), Poramin, Kaewkanya, Nuti (Kaewkanya's colleague), Peung (Kaewkanya's close friend)



To start with, Poramin and Kaewkanya, whose names will be abbreviated to Por and Kaew from this point onwards, are in love and set to wed each other soon when a tragedy befalls them. Por's elder sister, Pattamas, is married to Pipat, a notoriously hopeless womaniser (both of them are pictured in Figure 5.9 below). Due to his regular adultery, Pattamas has grown wary and suspicious of every woman with whom her husband interacts, one of which is Kingkarn, Kaew's elder sister who was hired to babysit the rocky married couple's toddler. One night, Pipat lures his wife to a party he never intends to go. As soon as Pattamas is out of sight, he, left alone with Kingkarn, who is there to care for his daughter, drugs her water so that she will not resist when he rapes her.



Figure 5.9: From left to right: Pattamas and Pipat (the antagonistic couple who precipitates the ensuing tragedy that befalls the female protagonist and male protagonist), and Kaewkanya and her brother, Kong

While on her way to the party function her husband convinced her to attend, it suddenly occurs to Pattamas that her spouse might be plotting something fishy behind her. Without a second thought, she orders her driver to turn the car around and head back to the house. Once home, she barges into their marital bedroom only to witness a scene in which Kingkarn is lying semi-conscious on their bed, since the sedative has just begun to take effect, and Pipat is straddling her. In the heat of the moment, Pattamas takes a gun from its hiding place and fires a shot at the now heavily sedated and helpless Kingkarn, who is killed on the spot. Pipat

yanks the fatal weapon out of his wife's hand just in time before she does any more damage although it is too late to save Kingkarn's life. The scene in Figure 5.10 below portrays Pipat (left), as he attempts to use his own daughter to make sexual advances to Kingkarn (right).



Figure 5.10: From left to right: Pipat, his kid, and Kingkarn. Kingkarn is hired to babysit Pipat's kid but is, very early on, killed by Pattamas, Pipat's wife, who is consumed with jealousy

Although Por is innocent of his sister's crime and his brother-in-law's physical violation of Kaew's sister, and despite the fact that he chooses to stand by his fiancée's family throughout the legal proceedings against Pattamas, his own sister, the calamity in the end takes its toll on his relationships with Kaew and her family, who cannot stand to see him, the brother of their family member's murderer every day.

At first, Kaew strives to be the mediator to mend the rift between Por and her loved ones, before long, however, she also crumbles under pressure from her kin, especially her mother, who issues an ultimatum that she can either break off her engagement with her fiancé or cut her mother off. Heartbroken, Por leaves Thailand and their paths never cross again until five years later, when he finally returns to his home country. He is now executive director of the company for

which he is working and is dispatched to the Bangkok branch. Meanwhile, Kaew, now the breadwinner of the household and in desperate need of a financial boost to support her now old and frail mother stricken with illness, is persuaded by her closest friend to apply for a position at the company she works for which, incidentally, is the one Por is overseeing.

At around the same time of the chance reunion of the two heterosexual protagonists, Kong, Kaew's younger brother, runs into Peera, Pipat's younger brother, for the first time at the hospital at which Kong is based. On their first encounter, Kong takes his unwell mother to the hospital, where she loses her purse due to her momentary amnesia. The bag is recovered by Kong, coincidentally, near where Peera is sitting. The former then misconstrues that the latter is the culprit who pickpocketed his mother. The two have a brief quarrel which ends with Kong reluctantly apologising to Peera for wrongly accusing him, after which they part ways. They are brought together again by chance for Kong is a physiotherapist assigned to help Peera with his therapeutic treatment, as the latter is a racing driver who broke his leg during one of the races in which he took part.

When Kong arrives at his patient's door, he is duly aghast at the sight of someone who reminds him of his recent embarrassment. Conversely, the recuperating racer takes an instant interest in his physiotherapist, so he starts teasing the latter. Fed up with Peera's mockery and adding the newfound knowledge that he is Pipat's younger brother into the mix, Kong decides to ask a colleague of his to swap patients with him. When Peera finds out this change, he is so upset that he, by some mysterious means, manages to obtain Kong's phone number on which he calls incessantly to persuade its owner to resume his post.

Seeing that constantly ringing up the other does not yield his desired outcome, Peera takes it one step further by confronting Kong at the hospital. Even after the latter relays to him the bad blood between their families, of which the former was entirely unaware since he had just returned to Thailand after spending decades abroad, the racer is still insistent on pursuing Kong by reasoning with him that he himself is nothing like his brother. Eventually, Kong gives in to Peera's persistent courting and secretly dates him. Their closet relationship is discovered by Jay

Toom, a *kathoey* keeper of Kong's household (visualised in Figure 5.11 below), along with Jeng, another male keeper, when they overhear the couple's profession of love for each other by the beach.



Figure 5.11: Jay Toom, the *kathoey* keeper of Kaewkanya and Kong's family

The two well-meaning chaperones keep this romance hidden from Kong's immediate family, even without the couple's knowledge. However, as the saying goes, there is no secret that will not be revealed. Kaew is the next person and first family member to be let in on her brother's secret love life. In fact, the discovery is enabled by Peung, Kaew's closest friend, who found out that Peera is Pipat's brother. Disturbed by Peera's true identity, Kaew, intent on nipping potential trouble in the bud, goes to see Kong at the hospital, where she arrives just in time to catch a glimpse of him getting in a cab. She follows in another taxi and soon realises that she has been brought to Peera's apartment.



Figure 5.12: A fan-made collage of the scenes in which Kong and Peera appear together

Without a second thought, she reveals herself to the two lovebirds and demands that Kong stop seeing Peera. Her upset brother laments her lack of empathy since she should be the one who understands him best, considering that she was also once forced to break up with Por simply because Pattamas is his sister, and despite the fact that Por did nothing wrong in the incident that led to their eldest sister's death. Kaew, while sympathetic, cannot quite bring herself to accept her brother's (homo)sexuality yet. Nevertheless, she gives up her resolution to break them up on condition that Kong and Peera will be careful not to arouse their mother's suspicions. With her palpable reluctance to accept his sexuality, Kong loses trust in his sister and, consequently, frequents Peera's apartment to avoid her.

On one fateful day, Pipat spots his younger sibling with Kong and reaches the correct conclusion that they are romantically involved, which prompts him to chase Kong away and lock his own brother up in his apartment. When Kong comes back to set his lover free, they are spotted by Pipat, who chases the fleeing couple in his car. The homophobic womaniser tries to run them over but only manages to hit the physiotherapist since the latter pushed Peera out of harm's



way. The accident results in Kong's seemingly permanent loss of vision. Kong then breaks up with his former patient so that he will not be a burden to him. The relentless Peera, however, does not surrender himself to the impediment easily. With recourse to Kaew, he poses as a private carer hired by their family to look after Kong. When the latter finds out, they have a fight overheard by Kong's mother who, at last, is made aware of their true relationship. After all the numerous hardships their family has been put through, Kong's mother does not have the heart to interfere in her youngest child's life by snatching away probably his only source of happiness at the moment, so she simply accepts Peera as part of her family and wishes the couple well.

The analysis of the soap opera draws on several scenes from episodes 5, 7, 8, 13, 15, 18 and 30. The fifth episode marks the first occasion on which Kong and Peera, two gay characters, are introduced concurrently to the audience. The first four selected episodes extensively feature the foreshadowing of their romance arc, they are therefore chosen as part of the analytic investigation into how these romantic clues are dealt with in Chinese. In episode 15, their sexuality and relationship are mentioned for the first time, albeit tentatively, by the *kathoey* keeper of the female protagonist's family. Meanwhile, episode 18 can easily be considered the most significant episode of the drama since the two gay men's romantic involvement and sexuality are discussed at length by two straight characters together with the aforementioned *kathoey* character, whose portrayal is also relevant to the research's topic of discussion. Last but not least, a scene demonstrating a physical expression of the homosexual romance can be found in episode 30, which is the reason why it has been selected.

### *Prajan See Roong [Rainbow-coloured Moon] – 彩虹月亮*

While the drama, directed by Yuttana Lorpanpaiboon, premiered on Channel 3 Thailand in June 2009, it was not broadcast in China until 2015. Similar to *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, the ratings success of *รอยอดีตแห่งรัก [Roy Adeet Haeng Ruk: Trails of Past Love]*, thanks mostly to the popularity of the male protagonist played by Sukrit "Bie" Wisetkaew, a well-known Thai singer-turned-actor, in the East Asian powerhouse, led to the subsequent importation of Thai soap operas featuring the same actor. One of these productions is *Prajan See Roong*.

Following in the footsteps of the Chinese-dubbed *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, the drama in question, too, was aired concurrently on three Chinese regional channels, that is, 安徽卫视 [Ānhuī Wèishì: Anhui Satellite Channel], 浙江卫视 [Zhèjiāng Wèishì: Zhejiang Satellite Channel], and 江苏影视频道 [Jiāngsū Yǐngshì Píndào: Jiangsu Film and Television Channel].

The Thai version consists of sixteen episodes, lasting in the region of two hours each, which makes a total of some 32 hours. The Chinese release, however, is made up of twenty episodes in total with each one spanning approximately 45 minutes, bringing the duration of the whole soap opera to some 15 hours. The analysis of this soap opera focuses on the representation of the *kathoey* protagonist, A-ruk, in episode 1 as a showgirl. Apart from A-ruk, the inaugural episode additionally features the appearance of several queer characters such as the manager of the cabaret theatre, Por, and Jern, the latter two are A-ruk's colleagues. Naturally, camp talk, as a speech style unique to queer communities, is thus prevalent in this episode, which in turn pertains to the workings of queer characterisation and identification. Hence, the selection of the episode as the main object of the analysis. Importantly, I should note, first and foremost, the reason I use the third-person pronoun "she" to refer to A-ruk is predicated on the fact that A-ruk self-identifies as a woman in the first episode, where she can be seen dressing as a woman after work and has a boyfriend, despite her son's constant acknowledgement of her as his 'father'. Shown in Figure 5.13 that ensues are some of the regular characters:



Figure 5.13: From left to right: Por, A-ruk, an extra whose name is unknown. Por is A-ruk's best friend and colleague. They are still clothed in drag after A-ruk's performance

The soap opera revolves around four main characters, namely, A-ruk, Tawan, Plaifah, and Oradee. A-ruk is a *kathoey* showgirl working at a cabaret theatre in Pattaya alongside Por, her *kathoey* close friend and colleague. The inaugural episode opens with A-ruk getting ready to take the stage and perform a song. Her show is regrettably not received well by the audience, who boos and throws objects at her in disapproval due to her aging looks. After the performance fiasco, A-ruk is summoned to her manager's office and informed that she will from then on be demoted from the position of a headliner to that of a clown. Her long-time friend Por pleads with the manager on her behalf to change her mind, but to no avail. Resigned to the sudden turnabout, A-ruk takes comfort in the fact that at the very least today she gets to return home early to be with her boyfriend, Chatchai. Little does she know that while she is away at work, Chatchai usually uses her home as a trysting spot with his lover, Nok. Her early return that day catches the two by surprise as they are snuggling up to each other on A-ruk's bed, scheming to swindle money out of the house owner. Chatchai stealthily and quickly smuggles Nok out of their romantic tryst through the second-storey window and walks back to the front door, pretending he has just come back from an errand.



Chatchai is cajoling A-ruk into giving him all the money she has earned on the day when, suddenly, a wail can be heard from her neighbour's house. The *kathoey* showgirl rushes to the scene and sees that her pregnant neighbour, Oradee, is being harassed by two burly men set on extorting money from her that she owes them. In a generous gesture, A-ruk offers to repay them with the day's wage on her masseuse neighbour's behalf; meanwhile, Oradee promises to pay her next-door *kathoey* back as soon as possible. However, not only does she not repay her debt but, after giving birth, she also leaves her son at the hospital and runs off with a foreign man. Out of pity for the abandoned toddler, A-ruk decides to adopt and name him Tawan. Chatchai (visualised in Figure 5.14 below) then seizes this opportunity to dump her, claiming that he does not want to be dragged into rearing a child who is not of his own. Utterly heartbroken, A-ruk nearly takes her own life but the sound of Tawan crying knocks some sense back into her.



Figure 5.14: From left to right: A-ruk and Chatchai, her boyfriend

After taking in the orphan and having her hair cut short, she decides to relocate to Chiangmai and open a barber shop in order to start a new life as a straight man raising Tawan as his father. Despite her best efforts to act manly, her somewhat unshakeable effeminacy does not escape her neighbours' keen eyes. Before long, Tawan becomes the target of bullying at his elementary school for having a *kathoey* father, which translates into him being regularly involved in fights with his school mates.

At the age of ten, Tawan starts to notice his father's 'anomalous' mannerisms. His suspicion is confirmed when one day Por, A-ruk's former showgirl colleague, and a group of their *kathoey* friends pay A-ruk a visit. In their presence, A-ruk momentarily loses her masculine posture and exhibits some conspicuous *kathoey* characteristics. Tawan is so upset by the revelation that his father is indeed *kathoey* that he runs away from home and seeks shelter at his school teacher's house. When a distressed A-ruk comes looking frantically for Tawan with the help of her *kathoey* friends, she gets hit by a car and suffers minor injuries. Upon hearing the news that his father was wounded in a road accident, and together with his school teacher's persuasion, the teenage runaway comes to his senses and return to his father's side.

In an attempt to reconnect with her son, A-ruk decides to tell him about her past career and identity as well as his adoption, leaving out only the part that concerns his biological mother's profession as a masseuse lest it would tarnish the image of his mother. Although Tawan has already come to terms with his father's true gender identity, A-ruk still decides to move her child to a new school and have her female friend listed as Tawan's guardian in order to prevent him from peer mockery and bullying.

The *kathoey* father and the adopted son (as portrayed in the following Figure 5.15) live peacefully together until the latter finishes high school and is admitted to a university in Bangkok. Tawan moves to the capital city alone but keeps in close contact with his adoptive father. At university, the fresher meets Plaifah, his first love, for the first time.



Figure 5.15: A-ruk and Tawan. The latter, abandoned by Oradee, his own mother, is later adopted by A-ruk

Through Plaifah (pictured left Figure 5.16 below), Tawan is introduced to Choke, president of the record label Lovely Record, who takes an interest in his singing potential after he performs a song at Plaifah's birthday party. Tawan is signed to the record company and immediately calls his father to relay this piece of good news. Initially A-ruk is worried that she will be left behind once Tawan becomes famous. Her adopted son, however, ensures her that once he makes it big he is intent on providing an easy and comfortable life for his father.



Figure 5.16: From left to right: Plaifah, the female protagonist, and Tawan

Tawan's rise to fame catches Oradee's attention as the latter suspects the former might be her own abandoned child. Having ascertained that Tawan is indeed her son, she reappears in his life to reclaim him in a bid to capitalise on his fame and his financial fortunes. Tawan, shattered by his biological mother's true colours, rejects her and reasserts that his only parent is A-ruk, his *kathoey* father. Unfortunately, not long after the confrontation with Oradee, the coach back to Chiangmai, in which Tawan is riding, plunges off a cliff and causes him retrograde amnesia, meaning that he does not remember any details of his life before the accident.

Oradee seizes this opportunity to reinsert herself in his life and implant a false memory, whereby A-ruk is one of his crazy stans who has been following him everywhere. Since he is unable to recall his past, Tawan therefore is susceptible to everything his mother told him, including her suggestion that A-ruk be barred from seeing him. While Oradee uses her son to promote her makeup line, A-ruk can only watch from afar and hope that someday his adopted son's old memory will return to him and he will see clear again. After Tawan unknowingly cuts his former father off his life, he becomes agitated and volatile, different from his old good-natured personality.

Plaifah, his love interest, makes great efforts to jog his memory despite the fact that he does not remember her, not to mention his previous romance with her. The longer Tawan is involved with his mother, the more trouble he is put in, especially when it comes to his artistic reputation and singing career. Initially willing to step aside for Tawan's birth mother to take charge as his parent, A-ruk, who starts getting concerned over her son's erratic behaviour, decides to join Tawan's grooming team as his costume stylist. The former showgirl silently watches over her amnesia-stricken son and, in the meantime, tries to restore him to his original sunny and tender disposition. Gradually, Tawan begins to warm to his costume stylist and regain some of his old memory. Just when everything seems to be falling into place, a tumour is found in A-ruk's brain. Suddenly, everything seems to be falling apart again when Plaifah's father is accused of corruption and the only way she can save him is to marry Sasin, who promises to bail her father out using his own father's connections. Although Tawan has not

yet fully regained the memory of his past relationship with Plaifah, her upcoming wedding leaves him devastated since he is now in love with her again.

Due to some unfortunate circumstances, Tawan mistakenly blames this twist of fate on A-ruk and, accordingly, discharges her from his grooming team while oblivious to the fact that his costume stylist is on the brink of death. Plaifah finds out A-ruk's true identity, including her health problems, and is asked to keep it secret from Tawan. Meanwhile, the now unemployed and heartbroken A-ruk returns to Chiangmai to receive cancer treatment there. Plaifah, who takes pity on A-ruk, cannot help but break her promise and tell Tawan everything about his adoptive father while also urging him to visit the cancer patient. On the way to be reunited with his father, Tawan unfortunately falls victim to another road accident and is hospitalised in Bangkok. Upon hearing about the bad news, the frail and sickly A-ruk sneaks out of the hospital and hastens to the capital to visit her son. Once she is assured that Tawan is no longer on the danger list, she makes her journey back to Chiangmai again.

When Tawan finally regains his consciousness and A-ruk is not in sight, he resolves to find his father, so he sets off for Chiangmai as soon as he is well enough to do so. He arrives just in time to take his critically ill father to the hospital and has her operated on. After the surgery, it remains to be seen whether A-ruk wakes up or stays in a vegetative state forever. During the wait, Tawan has to perform at a concert where he proudly announces to his fans that he has a *kathoey* father. Miraculously, A-ruk regains her consciousness but, sadly, loses all her memory. Tawan, now reunited with Plaifah, pledges to remain by his father's side and they all live happily together.

### 5.3 Analysis of corpus

The crux of the current research rests on discourse analysis of the corpus. Importantly, the contrastive nature of the material makeup of the corpus, that is, two Chinese-subtitled and two Chinese-dubbed Thai soap operas, warrants a comparative analysis within itself, whose main goals are threefold: (1) to dissect the speech style, namely camp talk, used in the corpus and its different implicatures by drawing on Munday and Zhang's (2017) conception of discourse

analysis applied to the field of translation studies and Harvey's (1998) theorising of camp talk, (2) to trace the discrepancies, if there are any, in the speech style used in the source texts and the target texts, and, lastly, (3) to compare some of the most exemplary translation choices between the target texts themselves.

### 5.3.1 Comparative analysis – Discourse analysis

In the field of translation studies, discourse analysis approaches have been the staple of translation theory since House's 1977 publication, which draws heavily on Halliday's (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) concept of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) "as a theoretical basis for her model of translation quality assessment" (Munday, 2014: 77). In its earlier days, indeed, translation studies mostly borrowed methodology from its sister disciplines such as linguistics and applied linguistics, with SFL being the most influential as a heuristic tool for the analysis of translated texts (ibid.). Incidentally, the way in which Halliday's SFL helps with the understanding of naturally occurring language usage is closely related to what constitutes discourse. In search of one of the most comprehensive definitions of discourse, Munday and Zhang (2017), in the Introduction chapter of *Discourse Analysis in Translation Studies*, cite various academics such as House (2017), Jaworski and Coupland (1999) and Schiffrin et al. (2003), all of which have previously attempted to define discourse in one way or another. House (2017: 48), in turn, drawing on Widdowson's (2007) distinction between text and discourse, asserts that: "[T]ext is a purposeful use of language [...]; that is, texts are constructed to get messages across, express or explore ideas, get others to do things, and so on. This communicative purpose is the discourse underlying a text".

Meanwhile, Schiffrin et al. (2003: 1, in Munday and Zhang, 2017: 1) succinctly summarise discourse as "anything beyond the sentence", "language use", and "a broad range of social practices that construct power, ideology, etc.". Munday and Zhang (ibid.) also add that "discourse is all these and more besides". When all of these definitions are taken into consideration, discourse analysis is thus bound to examine not just a stand-alone text but also:



patterns of language across texts and consider(s) the relationship between language and the social and cultural context in which it is used [...]. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse. (Paltridge, 2012: 1 in Munday and Zhang, 2017: 1)

With such complexities of functions fulfilled by discourse, it is evident why Halliday's SFL is deemed highly relevant as a method for discourse analysis since it explains how each discursive semantic element is realised through the interaction of various lexicogrammatical units. According to SFL, there are three "*metafunctional modes of meaning: ideational (logical and experiential), interpersonal and textual*" (Kim and Matthiessen, 2017: 12, original emphasis). Simply put, at its core, discourse analysis "is a method that studies a discourse in its context of culture, context of situation, its structure and individual constituents" (Munday and Zhang, 2017: 3). Halliday's SFL, while greatly practical and applicable, is far from the only methodological approach by which discourse can be analysed. As a result, to remain focused on the discourse analysis tool of choice in this research, I would not delve deeper into the detailed workings of SFL. Instead, I am now turning my attention to Harvey's (1998) theorisation of camp talk within translation, as it is the method with which I have chosen to carry out the current study's discourse analysis.

### 5.3.2 Theoretical framework – Camp talk

Camp talk as a form of discourse is rich in its numerous dimensions of semantic potential. Perhaps the most prominent feature of camp is marking out the speaker's sexual/gendered identity. Sontag (1964) is one of the earliest pioneers in the observation of camp. In her 1964 essay titled *Notes on Camp*, Sontag ascribed camp to homosexuals asserting that "homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard – and the most articulate audience – of camp" (287). She also associated camp with "the love of the exaggerated" (1964: 280) and "the theatricalization of experience" (1964: 287). Building on theoretical frameworks from feminist studies and gender studies, a number of queer theorists such as Babuscio (1977/1993), Booth (1983), Ross (1989), Meyer (1993), and Cleto

(1999), among others, predominantly located camp within the fields of “cultural studies, film studies, and gay and lesbian studies” as pointed out by Harvey (1998: 303). Indeed, Harvey’s (1998) original article on literary translation of camp talk in English and French contexts marks the first occasion on which camp is discussed from a translation studies perspective. In his work, the trailblazing translation studies scholar identifies camp with “a whole range of homosexual identities” (ibid.: 295). Camp talk, in a nutshell, refers to a particular speech style adopted by gay speakers, especially gay men. In fact, it is more apt to say that the speech style has come to represent homosexuality since most of its speakers tend to share a specific sexual identity. As pointed out by Harvey (ibid.: 298), though, whether or not there is any empirical evidence for the connection is irrelevant since what really matters is the fact that certain “language features have come to stand for certain gendered and subcultural differences” (ibid.: 298). And this ultimately is the reason why camp talk is assigned to gay men in their socio-cultural representation, be it literary or audiovisual.

To be inclusive, however, camp talk in the context of this research encompasses not only the speech style employed by homosexual speakers but also queer heterosexuals. As I have explained elsewhere in this thesis (see sections 2.1 and 2.2), loosely speaking, in Thailand, the gender designation *kathoey* more often than not refers to males by birth who might be regarded or self-regarded as heterosexual, while men identified as gay, the English term which has long entered Thai vernacular of sexual labels, are exactly that, males by birth who are sexually attracted to members of the same sex. However, despite the nuances that separate the two terms, they are sometimes used interchangeably in both daily life and media. As shall be seen in Chapter 6, the rather jumbled usage of these two gendered/sexual categories is substantiated in the Thai soap operas chosen for the analysis as some of the queer characters are identified as *kathoey* at one time and gay at another. To reflect the reality of the local discursive framework of gender and sexuality, I thereby extrapolate Harvey’s (1998) conceptualisation of camp talk to encompass a variety of Thai queerness on top of the original confines of homosexuality alone proposed by the author.

In theorising camp talk, Harvey (ibid.: 296) firstly points out that it functions on two levels: micro and macro. The micro-functional dimension of camp talk can be



found in each individual fictional setting and it is at this level that camp is either “given a positive or negative evaluative load” (ibid.). For instance, in *Sapai Look Tung*, Art, the only starring homosexual character, is portrayed as selfish, narcissistic, and hostile towards women. In this case, his camp is interpreted as negative as it is symptomatic of his lust and hostility. In *Prajan See Roong*, for another instance, Por and A-ruk’s camp is presented positively as a medium of solidarity since they are both *kathoey* and close friends.

On a macro level, however, its functions vary from one social context to another, depending on a number of factors ranging from “the existence, nature and visibility of *identities*, and *communities* predicated upon same-sex object choice in the target culture [...], the existence or absence of an established gay literature in the target culture [to] the sexual identity of the translator and his or her relation to a gay subcultural group, its identities, codes and political project” (ibid.: 296). Extracting his examples from English and French gay literary repertoires, Harvey (ibid.: 311) concludes that while in the Anglo-American world English camp serves as “a typical (indeed, perhaps as the key) semiotic resource of gay men in their critique of straight society and in their attempt to carve out a space for their difference”, in French literature, homosexuality is generally treated not as a sexual identity but rather as a mere human exploration of pederastic sex. French camp, therefore, as posited by Harvey (ibid.: 312), “fails to accrue the positive values it has gained in much Anglo-American work”. By the same token, Thai camp fulfils functions that are different from its Chinese counterpart when the aforementioned factors are taken into account. For one thing, the ubiquity of Thai queer representation on the small screen deploys camp as an, or perhaps *the*, identity marker of its speaker. The lack of overt Chinese TV representation of queer identities, on the other hand, means that the macro-functional dimensions of Thai camp will not be recognised in the same vein by members of the target Chinese culture.

In addition to the aforementioned umbrella functions camp serves, Harvey also lists a number of linguistic traits that can be understood to constitute camp. Most notable is the construction of theatricalised women achieved partly through exaggerated femininity, which in turn is contrived with what he terms “emphatics of camp”, consisting of such strategies as the use of hyperbole and “‘uninvolved’

or ‘out of power’ adjectives” (ibid.: 299). The emphatics of camp originate in the stereotypical assumption that to talk in camp is to talk like a woman (Lakoff, 1975 in Harvey, 1998: 299) and, hence, the prominent usage of hyperbole and the aforementioned ‘uninvolved’ or ‘out of power’ adjectives.

With regard to the practice of renaming, Harvey (1998: 299) describes it as “the adoption of male names marked as ‘queer’” and provides examples of such queer renaming in English camp as *Denis* to *Questin* and *Rechy* to *Whorina*, which is based on “the arbitrary practice of attributing proper names” (ibid.). Furthermore, while French feminine adjectives are sometimes borrowed into English to achieve the effect of queer renaming, in Thai camp, English language is the foreign component employed to realise and emphasise queerness in the practice of renaming. For instance, A-ruk, the *kathoey* lead in *Prajan See Roong*, is styled *Rukky* by her friend and manager. Ultimately, renaming contributes to “signal[ing] the speaker’s critical distance from the processes that produce and naturalize categories of identity” (ibid.).

Another feature unique to camp is the incongruity between the level of speech formality/informality and the context in which it is spoken, exemplified best in the corpus under analysis by the conversation between Jay Miang and Geng in *Madam Dun* (see Chapter 6). This linguistic incongruity is linked in part with yet another distinguishing aspect of interactive camp, that is, ambivalent solidarity defined by Harvey (ibid.: 301) as “the mechanisms of attack and support, either of which can be covert or on-record”. To clarify, ambivalent solidarity involves the presence of two characters who are concurrently making a pretence of supporting each other while, in fact, they are attacking one another. With the focus on English camp, Harvey (ibid.: 302) specifies the type of attack as one on “the other’s sexual prowess or probity”.

In Thai camp, however, the verbal attacks launched by the speaker on the addressee are more diverse but also limited at the same time. To better understand how ambivalent solidarity is expressed through Thai camp, one has to keep in mind the fact that speaking about sex was once considered an outright taboo, especially at the time the chosen corpus of this research was first released, despite the stern attitudes toward discussion about sex having somewhat

slackened nowadays. For this reason, the verbal attacks, covert or otherwise, launched in Thai camp are oriented towards such various other aspects of Thai culture and tradition as one's politeness or adherence to seniority, for instance. The workings of ambivalent solidarity can be further elaborated by resorting to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Extrapolating it to camp talk, Harvey (1998: 302) explains the theory as follows:

All speakers have both negative and positive face-wants which they strive mutually to respect. Negative face-wants are based upon a desire not to be restricted in one's freedom of action. As a result, a speaker will mitigate the imposition implicit in the formulation of a request (the 'face threat') by the encoding of an utterance that fronts deference. Camp talk threatens an addressee's negative face-wants with its on-record requests for solidarity and support. Positive face-wants, in contrast, are based upon the desire to be appreciated and approved of. In Brown and Levinson's terms, camp can often be seen to involve threats to an addressee's positive face-wants by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's positive self-image, hence, the insults, ridicule, put-downs etc.

As it happens, all of the aforementioned English camp traits observed by Harvey are also shared by Thai camp. In the investigation that follows, the analysis of each Chinese-translated Thai soap opera begins with, first and foremost, the identification of micro- and macro-level functions of camp. Then it moves along to the identification of other camp characteristics unique to each of the dramas under scrutiny such as the emphatics of camp, the practice of renaming, the incongruity of speech formality/informality level and its context, and, last but not least, the linguistic instantiation of ambivalent solidarity.

Before I proceed with the analysis, a case needs to be made as to why I have not incorporated into my analytical chapter other more prominent and seemingly relevant theoretical frameworks such as Even-Zohar's (1990) polysystem theory and Toury's (1995, 2012) translational norms, however analytically tempting they are. Polysystem theory, defined by Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: 127) as "a theory [...] to account for the behaviour and evolution of literary systems", mainly brings into focus the competition for dominance between 'original' and 'translated' literary works in the literary system of a country. The premise of Even-Zohar's translational theory is in line with Toury's conception of translational norms as both theories advocate taking into consideration social, historical and cultural

factors when literature is studied. Despite their original application to literary texts alone, the two theories have subsequently been deployed by audiovisual translation academics, too (Díaz Cintas 2004). In the case of my thesis, however, the lack of an audiovisual system in the target culture, that is China, equivalent to that in the Thai source culture has rendered the theories inapplicable to the analysis of the chosen corpus. Simply put, in China, the prohibition of domestically produced mainstream queer-themed audiovisual offerings means the absence of their corresponding audiovisual translation norms against which the audiovisual translation into Chinese of Thai queer audiovisual contents imported into the East Asian nation can be compared. Hence my decision to exclude the seminal Descriptive Translation Studies groundwork from my analysis.

## Chapter 6

### Comparative Analysis of the Corpus: Dubbing and Subtitling

Since Thai soap operas screened on Chinese TV are usually dubbed (and subtitled following the very same dubbing script), while those distributed online are often subtitled into Chinese by fansubbers, it is crucial to conduct a translation analysis in which the Chinese-officially dubbed and Chinese-fansubbed versions of the Thai melodramas are compared. The corpus employed in this chapter consists of four Thai soap operas: two Chinese-fansubbed, *Sapai Look Tung* and *Madam Dun*, and two Chinese-dubbed, *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter* and *Prajan See Roong*. The soaps have been chosen on the basis of their inclusion of one or more *kathoey* or male homosexual characters and the progressive years, in which they became available to the Chinese general public in an additional attempt to trace the development of how the *kathoey* and male homosexual characters have been presented to the Chinese audiences from 2009 to to 2016. Any notable discrepancies in translational treatment between the official dubbing and the fansubbing will be discussed. Furthermore, owing to the fact that the subtitles in the selected fansubbed soaps have been produced by different groups of amateur subtitlers, a comparative analysis of these subtitles can also prove fruitful.

#### 6.1 Camp talk and queer identities

Camp talk and identification of queer identities are to take centre stage in the analysis of the fansubbed and dubbed episodes. Camp, defined by Oxford Dictionaries (Oxford English living Dictionaries, 2018: online) as “(of a man or his manner) ostentatiously and extravagantly effeminate”, is combined with the word ‘talk’ to label a variation of speech style used or, in gender performativity terms, *performed* by queer males. As observed by Harvey (1998: 295), “[c]amp is regularly attested in fictional representations of homosexual men’s speech in French- and English-language texts from 1940s to the present”. Referring to Kushner (1992), Harvey (ibid.) also asserts that over the decades since its

conception, camp talk has grown to encompass a multitude of “homosexual identities in French and English fiction from the marginalized transvestite [...] to [...] the politicized AIDS-aware ‘queer’”. I should add, however, that while Harvey’s camp singularly encapsulates homosexuality, camp talk in the context of this research encompasses also a range of heterosexual queerness.

As explained earlier in sections 2.1 and 2.2, the assimilation of English sexuality terms into Thai vocabulary has opened up new space for local Thais to more fluidly define their sexuality. Traditionally, males who exhibit effeminate behaviour or mannerisms have been collectively thought of as *kathoeys*. With the integration of the designation *gay*, effeminate males have since been alternatively and increasingly identified as *gay*. It also transpires that the sexual/gender divide between *kathoeys* and *gay* has become rather fuzzy as a result. Such is the case with the soap operas into which the analysis taps, where a queer male is alternately referred to as *kathoeys* at one time and *gay* at another. Camp talk as a theoretical framework activated in this thesis thus reflects the overlapping boundaries of the two terms.

According to Harvey (1998: 295), camp talk functions on two levels: micro and macro. The micro-function is described as either a positive or negative load given to camp talk by its “immediate context” (ibid.: 296). Understanding of the macro-level function, on the other hand, rests on “the wider (sub)cultural values that homosexual/gay identity has established for itself and within which the fictional text operates and develops its meanings” (ibid.). In short, camp as a literary device might serve different purposes in differing cultural settings. To recognise the macro-function of camp, one has to be aware of the following factors at play:

(a) the existence, nature and visibility of identities and communities predicated upon same-sex object choice in the target culture; (b) the existence or absence of an established gay literature in the target culture; (c) the stated gay objectives (if retrievable) inherent in the undertaking of the translation and publication of the translation ... [...] ...; (d) the sexual identity of the translator and his or her relation to a gay subcultural group, its identities, codes and political project. (ibid.)

Harvey’s theorising of camp talk, while aimed at literature, is equally applicable to audiovisual texts. Indeed, on the micro level, the readings of camp talk vary

from one source text to another. Even within the universe of a single soap opera, camp sometimes could be read differently and granted distinct meanings depending on the specific context in which it is employed. *Sapai Look Tung*, whose use of camp talk is explored in detail below, is a prime example of its kind.

On a macro-level, Thai camp is more often than not employed in a now established TV genre known as *Y* series. As discussed in section 2.4.2, the letter *Y* stands for the Japanese term *yaoi* and *yuri*, referring to stories centring on male and female same-sex couples, respectively. Due to the virtually exclusive popularity of *yaoi*, in the public's imagination, the *Y* genre has thus come to represent only the former. In essence, the *Y* genre emerged from a particular group of *Y* book readers who revel in the so-called 'boys' love. The popularity of the *Y* book genre then gave rise to the TV equivalent of the same products oftentimes adapted from their book predecessors. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that despite gay couples being the focal point of their storytelling, this oeuvre of gay representation on the small screen cannot be regarded as socio-politically motivated since, at the end of the day, these boys' love stories are imagined from a heterosexual perspective. In other words, they are in fact romantic fantasies of heterosexual love realised in the embodiment of gay men. With camp talk utilised as a tool of expression for heterosexually imagined homosexual love in this *Y* genre, the discussion of macro-level functions of camp talk in my corpus is mostly excluded from my chosen soap operas, which are by no means categorised as *Y*. The macro-function dimensions of camp are only taken into account when they are comparable to the usage popularised by the *Y* series, that is, as an identity marker.

## 6.2 *Sapai Look Tung* [Country Daughter-in-Law] – 儿夫村

庄

The soap broadcast in Thailand in 2008 was, to the best of my knowledge, never given the courtesy of being aired on any Chinese TV channel. It nonetheless managed to be discovered and translated by bands of amateur translators. For example, Episode 1 has been subtitled by *zhengyi*, whose affiliation is unknown, and distributed online for the first time in 2012. It is also unclear whether *zhengyi* is a group of fansubbers or an individual working alone since no information on

the amateur subtitler(s) can be obtained anywhere. The complete drama accompanied by fan-made subtitles, hosted by Youku, the Chinese equivalent of YouTube, is shared concurrently on various Chinese video-streaming websites; some of which include 泰剧吧 [Tàijùbā] and 面包网 [Miànbāo Wǎng].

*Sapai Look Tung* follows the tangled relationships between four main characters: Artee, Art, Mui, and Kem. To secure financial stability for her family, Jit-anong promises her eldest son, Art, to Kem, a country girl fostered by Art's childless wealthy grandmother, Buasee. Unbeknownst to his mother, Art is gay; the fact that prompts him to push his younger brother, Artee, who is in love with Kem's sister, Mui, to bear the brunt of the arranged marriage in his stead. The tables below illustrate the way in which Art is depicted.

Table 6.1: Art is catfighting with three other women over Choke in a nightclub

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
Art is idling away at a nightclub, waiting for Choke, a straight man who leeches off Art's financial means. When Choke walks in, he is hit on by a posse of three women, inciting Art's jealousy.			
1	Art (A):	นี่พวกชะนี อย่ามายุ่งกับแฟนของฉันนะยะ! [Hey, you gibbons! Don't mess with my boyfriend!]	臭丫头 他是我的男朋友 [Bad girls. He is my boyfriend]
2	Girl 1:	อ้อ ที่แท้ก็เป็นเก้งนี่เอง ถึงไม่ชอบผู้หญิง [I see. You are actually a deer. That's why you don't like women.]	噢 原来你是同性恋 怪不得讨厌女孩呢 [I see. You are actually homosexual No wonder you hate girls]

While the evaluative load of Art's camp talk is purely negative, it carries dissimilar implications on different occasions depending on the characters with whom Art interacts. For one thing, Art's camp acts as a conduit for his contempt for women when they are in his presence, regardless of whether they are acquaintances or complete strangers. For example, as shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, when he encounters a clique of three women who hit on Choke, the target of his infatuation, his camp talk embodies hostility towards them. Furthermore, this speech style is employed by Art, in the presence of Choke, to express obsession with his object



of desire. Simply put, camp in *Sapai Look Tung* is exploited as symptomatic of Art's lust. In what follows, I will elaborate on how the queer character's hostility, on the one hand, and lust, on the other, are expressed through his choice of words.

To begin, Art addresses the women as *นึ่งพวกชะนี* [nung puak chanee: you missy gibbons] (Table 6.1, Box 1B), which can be broken down into three words: *นึ่ง* [nung: missus], *พวก* [puak: group, marker of plurality for people], and *ชะนี* [chanee: gibbon]. The first constituent *นึ่ง* is a snappy pronunciation of the word *นาง* [narng: missus] while the last component *ชะนี* [chanee: gibbon] is a Thai metaphor for women, deriving from a folktale titled *Chantakorop*.

The eponymous character is a young prince of Varanasi who leaves his kingdom to embark on a journey for sorcery training. He comes across a skilled hermit under whom he eventually studies. Once he graduates, the hermit awards him a golden urn inside which, as the sage claims, lies something of his heart's deepest desire. Without divulging the specificity of the content inside, the hermit sternly warns him not to open the urn until he reaches his final destination, that is, his homeland. Chantakorop then sets off for Varanasi but, out of irresistible curiosity, he disregards his master's caution and proceeds to uncover the vessel along the way and out comes Mora, the most stunning woman he has ever seen. The two consummate their 'love' that night. The next morning, they continue their travel towards Chantakorop's kingdom.

Their journey is impeded by an encounter with a savage who is instantly captivated by Mora's beauty and decides to extort her from Chantakorop. The young prince's sword slips out of his hand during their fight, so he shouts out to Mora to toss it back to him. To the two men's surprise, she hurls the weapon in the savage's direction. With Mora's help, the wild man manages to kill the prince. Instead of taking her in, the savage, perturbed by Mora's fickle loyalties, leaves Mora to her own devices in the forest. While she is wandering alone and starved, Mora chances on an eagle nibbling at the carcass of a deer and asks for a small share of the meat to ease her hunger. The eagle agrees on condition that she become his wife. Mora caves in to his demand and enrages the wild bird since he is in fact Indra, the deity of creation in disguise. The almighty god reveals to

her that he orchestrated the survival-vs-chastity scenario in order to test her virtue. Indra condemns Mora for her promiscuity and lack of self-restraint as a woman and proceeds to curse her by turning her into a gibbon, whose vocalisation, to a Thai person's ear, bears close resemblance to the word ผัว [pua: husband] in Thai.

By analogy with the folktale, the metaphor is intended to dismiss the female sex with derogatory overtones. In its early days, the expression was used nearly exclusively by *kathoey* in a derisive manner. As of 2018, ชะนี has become the neutral byword for women, uttered by females and *kathoey* alike when the former is the object of conversation. In addressing the trio as นางสาวชะนี, a phrase rife with disdain and scorn, Art is establishing superiority over the female trio, whom he deems to be rivals for Choke's attention.

When he proceeds to order the three women to not mess with his boyfriend, the self-reflexive pronoun ชั๊น [chun: (mainly female) I, me] and the ending particle นะ [naya] that he chooses to represent himself are of significance. When discussing camp's features, Harvey (1998: 299) observes that femininity is central to the construction of camp, which, in turn, is predicated on the construction of theatricalised women. Indeed, Art's word choices are intended for such theatrical effects. Admittedly, ชั๊น might be viewed as a gender-neutral pronoun as it is used widely in Thai soap operas by both male and female characters. In real life, however, ชั๊น is strictly feminine, articulated by the female sex and, occasionally, by *kathoey* for their emphatically constructed femininity. นะ [naya], on the other hand, is undisputedly gender-specific.

In Thai, a fair number of ending particles, whose functions range from signalling politeness, affirmation, questions, irritation to dismissiveness, is in usage; some of which are gender-neutral while the others are rigidly gendered. นะ [naya] is one of the latter kind, whose target users are female. Ironically, the originally feminine dismissive tag has been appropriated by *kathoey* for so long that it has become one of their characteristic catchwords in so far as it could be said the once-feminine ending particle has now been reassigned to *kathoey*. Meanwhile, Art's obsession with his object of desire is not only manifested through his one-sided claim of ownership of Choke but also through the imperative manner in which he

expresses such claims, as conveyed with the command อย่ามายุ่งกับแฟนของฉันนะยะ! [don't mess with my boyfriend!] (Table 6.1, Box 1B) given to the three women.

All in all, the lines uttered by Art are rich in camp traits. In the Chinese subtitles, however, such camp qualities are much diluted. For instance, นังพวกชะนี is loosely translated as 臭丫头 [chòu yātóu: stinky girl] (Table 6.1, Box 1C), void of any metaphorical connotations. On the one hand, isolated from a prefix, the term 丫头 [yātóu: girl] on its own is neutral, leaning to positive. On the other, the addition of 臭 [chòu: stinky] to 丫头 contributes to a number of possible connotative interpretations as 臭丫头 could be read as imbued with either pity, affection, or irritation. Furthermore, in Chinese, Art's obsession with Choke is diminished with a mere statement of ownership 他是我的男朋友 [he is my boyfriend] (Table 6.1, Box 1C) in contrast to its Thai equivalent where Art's ownership of Choke is made tacit by the command อย่ามายุ่งกับแฟนของฉันนะยะ! [don't mess with my boyfriend!]. On a phonemic level, the ending particle นะยะ signalling dismissiveness is understandably lost in translation. Meanwhile, the Thai feminine pronoun ชั๊น is neutrally translated with 我 [wô: I, me]. It should be noted that in recent years 人家 [rénjiā: other people] has emerged as a first person pronoun used exclusively by Chinese *kathoey* individuals.

Confronted with a *kathoey*/gay man, one of the female nightlifers retorts in the same theatrical vein. Instead of identifying Art as gay, the English term that has long entered Thai vernacular and morphed into a local word, Girl 1 labels him as เก้ง [geng: a kind of deer] (Table 6.1, Box 2B), which is the metaphorical equivalent of ชะนี [chanee: gibbon] but for gay men. By dismissing Art as เก้ง, Girl 1 turns Art's own tool of humiliation, i.e. camp, to her own advantage and proceeds to redeem herself as well as her friends by defining themselves as ผู้หญิง [phuying: woman] (Table 6.1, Box 2B). In Chinese, yet again, the metaphorical term for gay men is neutralised as 同性恋 [tóngxìngliàn: homosexual] (Table 6.1, Box 2C) without its original dismissive undertones. Predictably, Art's subsequent ripostes illustrated in Table 6.2 that follows are also rife with several instances of another notable feature of camp talk, termed collectively by Harvey (1998) as *emphatics of camp*.

Table 6.2: Art is catfighting with three women over Choke, his object of obsession, when the latter walks in

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	A:	แล้วไงยะ เป็นแก๊งแล้วมันหนักหัวกบาลใครไม่ทราบ ชั๊นบอกไว้ก่อนเลยนะ อย่าให้ชั๊นเห็นหน้าแก แล้วก็เพื่อนๆ ของแกอีก ไม่อย่างนั้นล่ะก็เสียโฉมกันทั้งคณะแน่ [So, what? Who does it concern, the fact that I'm a deer? Let me warn you. Don't let me see your and your friends' faces again, otherwise your entire crew will surely be defaced.]	是又怎样 我是 gay 不关你的事 [So, what if I am? Me being gay is none of your business]  告诉你 我不想再看见你和你的朋友们 [I'm telling you. I don't want to see you and your friends again]  不然小心你们的脸 [Otherwise watch out for your face]
2	Girl 2:	ก็เอาสิวะ เกิดมาก็ไม่เคยต่อกับกะเทยเหมือนกัน ก็อยากจะรู้เหมือนกันว่าแก๊งกับชะนีใครจะมีหนักกว่ากัน [Bring it on. I have never fought with <i>kathoey</i> in my life. I also want to know who is heavier-handed between a <i>kathoey</i> and a gibbon.]	我还没有和娘娘腔的男人打过架 [I have never fought with a sissy man before]  我倒想知道谁更厉害 [I actually want to know who is stronger]
3	A:	โชคมาห้ามอาททำไมอะ ไม่อย่างนั้น อาทตบนั่งพวกนั้นปากฉีกหมดแล้ว [Why did Choke stop Art? Otherwise, Art would have slapped them bitches until their mouths rip.]	你为什么要制止我? 我还没跟她们颜色看呢 [Why did you stop me?] [I haven't taught them a lesson]

As asserted by the academic, much of camp talk is constituted by several elements of emphatics, including the use of hyperbole, exclamations, and uninvolved or ‘out of power’ adjectives. Art’s ensuing retorts are a prime example of how hyperbole is employed as a camp strategy. Although เป็นแก๊งแล้วมันหนักหัวกบาลใครไม่ทราบ (Table 6.2, Box 1B) could be back translated as “whose head does me being a deer weigh down?”, the expression “whose head does (something) weigh down?” is an exaggerated alternative to tell someone in Thai that it is not their business to mind. Art goes on to threaten the trio that if they show their faces again, เสียโฉมกันทั้งคณะแน่ [the entire crew will surely be defaced]. The former hyperbole is flattened and spelled out into Chinese as 是又怎样 我是 gay 不关你的事 [So, what if I am? Me being gay is none of your business] (Table 6.2, Box

1C). Conversely, the meaning of the latter hyperbole is coded, rather than made clear like its former counterpart. Indeed, the outright threat of being defaced in “otherwise the entire crew will surely be defaced” is only insinuated with 不然小心你们的脸 [otherwise watch out for your face] (Table 6.2, Box 1C).

Having brought the ensuing fight between Art and the three women to a halt, Choke drags Art to the toilet in order to have a word with him. Before Choke can initiate a conversation, Art bursts out whining about โชคมาห้ามอาททำไมอะ [why did Choke stop Art?], as otherwise อาทตบห้พวกนั้นปากฉีกหมดแล้ว [Art would have slapped them bitches until their mouths rip] (Table 6.2, Box 3B). Here, the construction of a theatricalised woman is, once again, achieved through the use of feminine vocatives and emphatics. Most notably, Art refers to himself as อาท [Art] and addresses Choke as โชค [Choke]; in other words, Art chooses to use his own name and Choke’s name as the first-person and second-person pronouns, respectively.

In this regard, one has to be familiar with the endless possibilities of Thai pronouns before one can come to grips with their significance. As touched upon above, one’s choice of pronouns is deeply gendered. That is, while it holds true that a wide array of first-person pronouns is available to speakers in Thai, referencing oneself with one’s name and one’s interlocutor with her/his name is relatively feminised. With the selected two pronouns, together with the repetition of the feminine vocative น้ิง [nung: missus] and the use of hyperbole ปากฉีก [ripped mouth], Art’s identity is thus accentuated. The Chinese subtitles, on the other hand, are unable to achieve the characteristics of camp to the same degree since the range of Chinese pronouns, be it first-person, second-person, or third-person, is rather limited in comparison with Thai. โชคมาห้ามอาททำไมอะ [Why did **Choke** stop **Art**?] (Table 6.2, Box 3B) is subtitled as 你为什么制止我? [Why did you stop me?] (Table 6.2, Box 3C). Furthermore, the magnified, violent expression ตบห้พวกนั้นปากฉีกหมดแล้ว [slapped them bitches until their mouths rip] is toned down to 我还没跟她们颜色看呢 [I haven’t taught them a lesson] (Table 6.2, Box 3C).

It is not only with Art’s own camp talk which establishes him as a queer character, his constructed femininity has complementarily been accented by Girl 2 as

evidenced by her response to Art in Table 6.2, Box 2B. In Thai, the phrase มือหนัก [mue nhuk: heavy hand], in ก๊วยยากจะรู้เหมือนกันว่าแก้งกับชะนีใครจะมือหนักกว่ากัน [I also want to know who is heavier-handed between a kathoey and a gibbon.], is, again, gendered. To clarify, มือหนัก is typically used in the context of physical fights between school girls which involve slapping each other with one's hand – as opposed to หมัดหนัก [mud nuk: heavy fist] which refers exclusively to men's great physical strength when engaged in a fight. In the Chinese subtitles, the femininised term has been *de-gendered* as it is translated as a generic 厉害 [lìhài: strong, fierce, sharp].

Table 6.3: Choke, embarrassed by the ruckus caused by Art, is reprimanding the latter

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	Choke (C):	คุณไม่อายเค้าบ้างเหรอครับ คุณอาท [Are you not even ashamed of yourself, Mr Art?]	你不觉得丢人吗? [Don't you feel ashamed?]
2	A:	อายทำไม คนที่ต้องอายคือพวกนางชะนีนั้น ต่างหากที่มาอยู่กับแฟนของอาท [Why ashamed? Those who must feel ashamed are the gibbons who messed with Art's boyfriend.]	为什么? [Why?]  觉得丢人的该是那些三八 居然想抢我的男朋友 [The ones who should feel ashamed are those whores who actually wanted to steal my boyfriend]
3	C:	ผมไม่ใช่แฟนคุณนะครับ คุณอาท จะต้องให้ผม บอกคุณอีกกี่ครั้งอะ คุณถึงจะเข้าใจ [I'm not your boyfriend, Mr Art. How many more times do I have to tell you for you to understand?]	我不是你的男朋友 [I'm not your boyfriend]  我要跟你说多少次你才明白? [How many times do I have to tell you for you to understand?]

Now that Art is addressing Choke directly, his camp has turned into an outlet for his obsession with the latter as his lust is manifested in the form of his lack of shame. When asked by Choke if he is ashamed of himself (คุณไม่อายเค้าบ้างเหรอครับ คุณอาท [Are you not even ashamed of yourself, Mr Art?] in Table 6.3, Box 1B),

Art's camp is employed as symptomatic of his deviance from Buddhist morals. As shown in Table 6.3, Box 2B, Art repeatedly claims ownership of Choke without the latter's consent, when he says: *อายทำไม คนที่ต้องอายคือพวกนางชะนีนั่นต่างหากที่มาอยู่กับแฟนของอาท* [Why ashamed? Those who must feel ashamed are the gibbons who messed with Art's boyfriend]. The corresponding Chinese subtitles, as laid out in Table 6.3, Box 2C, attempt to maintain the dismissive tone, seeing that *ชะนี* [chane: gibbon] has been translated as 三八 [sānbā: whore] which is a derogatory term for women. It should be noted, however, that while, in this instance, the hostile nature of Art's utterances is preserved, it is not camp with which his speech is conveyed in Chinese. Moreover, Art's use of pronouns stands in contrast to that of Choke, who is presented as masculine by referencing himself as *ผม* [pom: (male) I, me], the most neutral, widely used first-person male pronoun, and by addressing Art as *คุณ* [kun: you], the polite gender-neutral second-person pronoun (Table 6.3, Box 3B). Both pronouns are translated into Chinese with the standard gender-neutral 我 [wô: I, me] and 你 [nī: you], respectively (Table 6.3, Box 3C).

Art's lust is brought to the fore again in a scene in Episode 3 subtitled by yet another team of fansubbers named 躲猫猫剧团 [Duômāomāo Jútúan: Hide and Seek Troupe]. In the sequence of events leading up to the portrayal of Art's sexual obsession, Art pays Choke a surprise visit, but the latter is not home. While the former is lighting up candles, the doorbell rings. Art opens the door to three debt collection gangsters, whom he initially mistakes for Choke's new lovers. Vehemently, if mistakenly, Art threatens to take violent action if they do not stop messing with his 'boyfriend', with the result that he ends up being beaten up by the three hoodlums. He later staggers to the hospital, where Choke is on duty and uses a debt of gratitude as a licence to get intimate with Choke.

Table 6.4: Art laments Choke's refusal to acknowledge him as his boyfriend

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	A:	โชค อาทยอมเจ็บตัวเพื่อโชค แล้วเมื่อไรโชค จะยอมเป็นแฟนกับอาทล่ะคะ อี	我为你受了伤 [I got injured because of you]

		[Choke. Art was willing to bear the beating for Choke so when will Choke agree to be Art's boyfriend?]	你何时做我男朋友啊 [When will you be my boyfriend?]
2	C:	ผมว่าเรื่องนี้เราเอาไว้คุยกันวันหลังดีกว่าครับ [I think we should discuss this later.]	我想我们迟点再说这个吧 [I think we should discuss this later]
3	A:	ถ้าอย่างนั้นอาทขอจูบมัดจำไว้ทีหนึ่งก่อนนะ นะ [Then can Art give Choke a deposit kiss for now? Please?]	那么我来个 kiss 下订吧 [Then I should give you a deposit kiss now]

Directed at Choke, Art's camp is, once more, symptomatic of his obsession with the doctor. Similar to his previous interaction with Choke, the elements of camp talk here are exhibited through his usage of first- and second- person pronouns which are regarded as feminised. As seen in Table 6.4, Boxes 1B and 3B, Art refers to himself as อาท [Art] and addresses Choke as โชค [Choke]. Of particular interest is the injured's choice of ending particle in Table 6.4, Box 1B ค่ะ [ka], which is emphatically feminine. Predictably, such morphological traces of constructed femininity are understandably lost in the corresponding Chinese subtitles. Despite the absence of the phonemic and word-level camp traits, camp is well preserved on a sentence level, as illustrated in Table 6.4, Box 1C, when Art's clamour for Choke's consent to his ownership in Thai เมื่อไรโชคจะยอมเป็นแฟนกับอาทล่ะคะ [When will Choke agree to be Art's boyfriend?] is translated as 你何时做我男朋友啊 [When will you be my boyfriend?].

In Table 6.4, Box 3B, Art is seen attempting to get physically intimate with Choke by asking to kiss him: ถ้าอย่างนั้นอาทขอจูบมัดจำไว้ทีหนึ่งก่อนนะ นะ [then can Art give Choke a deposit kiss for now? Please? Please?]. Here, the femininity of his camp is established through the entrenched women's role of pleading. To clarify, in Thailand, women's and men's roles in a romantic relationship are intrinsically and deeply gendered. Indeed, certain acts are assigned exclusively to women while some others are to men. For example, the act of งอน [ngon], whose closest English equivalent is probably "sulking", is treated as purely feminine as only women can traditionally be said to งอน [ngon: sulk]. Likewise, ขี้งอน [kee ngon], the Thai adjective for its corresponding verb, meaning (someone is) "inclined to sulk" is also reserved for women.



It has to be borne in mind, however, that such Thai act of feminine sulking is usually said with affection by the man in the romantic equation. For the man's part, if he is sulked at by his female partner, he is socially obliged to act on it by the act of ง้อ [ngor], whose nearest English counterpart is "fawning". Although the once strictly gendered nature of the binary roles has loosened over time, with the former sometimes being attributed to men and the latter to women, their *default* actors are still very much in place. The same could not, however, be said of อ้อน [orn], which is definitely placed on the feminine end of the role spectrum. With the repetition of นะ [na], Art's utterances are tacitly interpreted from a Thai point of view as อ้อน [orn], whose meaning in English is closest to "cutesy pleading". In Chinese, Art's feigned plea is transformed into a more direct, affirmative statement 那么我来个kiss 下订吧 [then I should give a deposit kiss now] (Table 6.4, Box 3C), devoid of the pleading tone.

As I laid out in detail above, Art's camp talk in the drama is constantly used as a tool to convey his hostility towards women and, once directed at Choke, lust. The two functions of his camp are significant for his character development because, much later in the last episode of the soap, his signature speech style sees a significant change. In the final episode, after Art is informed of Choke and Kem's upcoming wedding, he goes berserk and barges into the ceremony with a gun. As he is brandishing the fatal weapon, threatening everyone who, to his mind, conspired to take Choke away from him, he accidentally shoots at Artee, his flesh-and-blood brother. The sight of his gravely wounded sibling ultimately jerks him back to conscience and, out of shame and remorse, flees from the scene. He later stealthily visits his hospitalised brother, who still lies unconscious, to apologise to him. When Mui, Artee's love interest, walks in and sees Art repenting by his brother's side, they reconcile with each other.

After this event, his camp, directed at Mui, Kem, and Choke, is clearly softened. In the subtitles of this episode, by 躲猫猫剧团, the theatricality of Art's camp talk – most notably, the 'bitchy' manner in which he speaks – is evidently reduced. Addressing Choke and Kem, Art uses ชื่น [chun] and เธอ [ter: you] to refer to himself and the couple respectively. Interestingly, the adoption of these pronouns, though tender, puts more emotional distance between Art and the newlyweds,

showing that his previously overt intimacy with Choke and hostility towards Kem are now gone. The two pronouns are similarly applied to Mui although, in this case, they serve to bring the two closer together since their forebears are the ones that suggest emotional detachment.

The Chinese subtitles, while faithfully rendered, reflect none of the changes in the lessened 'degree' of camp. In fact, it is more accurate to say that the stylistic modifications of camp are not signalled because camp traits are never made clear in the first place. In the light of the concurrence of Art's remorse and 'toned-down' camp, it can be concluded that the micro-functional dimension of camp, in the audiovisual text, is to be symptomatic of his wayward behaviour. Although one might argue that, in the fansubbed version, linguistic elements of camp are never fully reproduced, they are certainly compensated to some extent by audiovisual cues, such as Art's mannerisms and speech pitch. In this sense, Harvey's theorising of camp talk is somewhat limited in the case of AVT as it places only literary text under the microscope, thus dispensing with the communicative value of extralinguistic signifiers.

In addition to its micro-level functions, at a macro level, Art's camp is meant to serve as an identity marker. It has to be noted, first and foremost, that the identification of his sexual/gender identity is never made unanimous. For instance, in Episode 1, one of the three women rowing with Art identifies him at first as เก้ง [geng: a type of deer] (Table 6.1, Box 2B). A couple of retorts later, another one of the trio labels him a กะเทย [kathoe] (Table 6.2, Box 2B). For another instance, in Episode 3, when Art is confronted with the trio of thuggish debt collectors and mistakes them for Choke's new lovers, one of the three gangsters is enraged by his nonsensical misunderstanding and yells menaces back at him while calling him นิ่งกะเทยควาย [nung kathoe] kwai: missy giant kathoe]. Beaten to a pulp, Art makes his way to the hospital at which Choke is on duty to win the latter's compassion and display of affection. Mui, working at the same hospital, passes by her colleague's on-call room and witnesses Art's attempted courtship of the fellow doctor. She then realises that Art, who is due to marry her sister in no time, is, as she announces in horror to another colleague of hers, เกย์ [gay: gay, homosexual].

The Chinese subtitles reflect the constant shift in the identification of Art's sexual/gender identity dutifully, albeit differently from the original implications. For example, the first mention of his metaphoric identity designation เก้ง is translated as 同性恋, which is the correct definition of its figurative counterpart (since the term เก้ง singles out gay men and does not encompass *kathoey*), despite the fact that the original metaphoric value might be lost. Next, in a few short seconds later, Art is tagged as เกะเทย [*kathoey*] (Table 6.2, Box 2B), which is rendered into Chinese as 娘娘腔 [niángniángqiāng: effeminate, sissy] (Table 6.2, Box 2C). Interestingly, the Thai term เกะเทย functions as the index of a specific gender identity in and of itself, whereas 娘娘腔 is merely a descriptive word used to describe an effeminate/sissy characteristic of a man. Granted, effeminate men are more likely to self-identify as *kathoey* and, in this regard, the description 娘娘腔 could be suggestive of one's gender identity. Still, it must be borne in mind that the term 娘娘腔 itself is not a gender category in its own right.

In the meantime, the reappearance of the word เกะเทย, sandwiched between นัง [nung: missus] and ควาย [kwai: water buffalo] for pejorative purposes, is subtitled as 死人妖 [sǐ rén yāo: damn ladyboy]. Literally, 人 and 妖 in 死人妖 mean “human or person” and “devil or monster”, respectively. The Chinese compound noun 人妖 referring to so-called “ladyboys”, as they are known in China, therefore carries negative connotations with regard to *kathoey*, attaching *monsterness* to their human identity. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that 人妖 seems to have been coined in reference to Thai *kathoey* in particular. Lastly, Mui's identification of Art as เกย์ [gay] is straightforwardly translated as 同性恋 [gay, homosexual].

On the whole, while each fansubbing agency in charge of different episodes of the drama might have dealt with the various indexes of Art's sexual/gender identity uniquely, they have all shown awareness of distinctions between each of the labels. The significance of the rather faithful differentiation is two-fold: firstly, with the somewhat inadequate reproduction of camp traits, it makes up for the macro-level function of camp as an identity marker; secondly, it reveals the framework in which the local discourse on gender continuum operates, where the identities of *gay* and *kathoey* are not as clear-cut, thus explaining why the

representation of such queer characters might contribute to their misperception on the Chinese viewership's part.

### 6.3 *Madam Dun* [*Madam Talent Scout*] – 大小姐

The first episode of *Madam Dun* was aired on Channel 3, a Thai free-to-air analogue channel, in November 2013. The story features the female protagonist Putsee, alias Madam Pushy, a talent scout-cum-acting agent, whose fiercest rival is a *kathoey* named Miang. The Thai drama has, to the best of my knowledge, never been broadcast on official platforms in China. It has been nonetheless subtitled into Chinese by fansubbing group Jlove and uploaded to 乐视网 [Lèkàn Wāng: Leisure Watch Web] ([www.lelekan.com](http://www.lelekan.com)) and 土豆 [Túdòu: Potato] ([www.tudou.com](http://www.tudou.com)). Jlove was originally formed by a contingent of Chinese fans devoted to Warattaya “Jui” Nilakuha, a famous Thai actress, and the letter “J” in the group name stands for “Jui”, the actress’ nickname. Initially an exclusive club, whose members vowed to subtitle only Jui Warattaya’s works, Jlove has since lent their fansubbing endeavours to “fellow fans who are interested in Thai language, Thai actors, and Thai dramas” (Qingxin Fangxiang Baihe, 2013: online, my translation).

The underlying theme of *Madam Dun* involves the unresolved conflict between Madam Pushy and Jay Miang. The story begins as the latter chances upon a memoir written by Madam Pushy occupying the frontmost bestselling spot in a bookstore. The pocketbook contains an expose accusing Jay Miang of pimping actresses under his care. Infuriated by the allegation, Jay Miang sues Madam Pushy for libel and wins the case. Madam Pushy, in an attempt to salvage her reputation, ventures off to an upcountry province to persuade a striking teenage boy discovered by her assistant to sign with her, hoping she can turn him into a superstar. The following scene, extracted from Episode 2, portrays Jay Miang interrogating Geng, a friend of Madam Pushy’s assistant’s, about the two’s rumoured trip to the countryside:

Table 6.5: Jay Miang ambushes Geng to inquire the latter about Madam Pushy's whereabouts

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	Jay Miang (JM):	อีแก่ง อารมณ์ดีมาเชียวนะ [E' Geng what a jolly mood you are in, pfft.]	Ging [Ging]  你今天心情不错啊 [Your mood today is not bad, eh]
2	Geng (G):	ตายละ เจ๊เมี่ยง โผล่มาบังโคงะเนี่ย แก่งตกใจหมดเลยอะคะ [Oh dear! Jay Miang, how did you just pop out of nowhere! I'm so startled.]	真是的 是 Miang 姐呀 [Oh dear! It's Sister Miang]  吓死我了 [I'm almost startled to death]
3	JM:	เฮ้ย ชันเห็นหล่อนเนี่ยเดินลั่นลาไปมาไง ชันก็อยากจะมาทักทายเซย์ไฮ [Well, I saw you prancing around so I wanted to come say hi.]	我看见你到处闲逛 [I saw you ambling all over the place]  就想跟你打声招呼 Say hi [So, I wanted to say hi]

Figure 6.1 below is a screenshot of the scene in which Jay Miang (left) ambushes Geng (right).



Figure 6.1: Jay Miang (left) is interrogating Geng about Madam Pushy's whereabouts

Different from the previously analysed fansubbed soap, *Madam Dun* contains more than one character who employs camp talk. In the example given above, two *kathoey* characters, i.e. Jay Miang and Geng, can be seen interacting with each other in camp. One of the crucial features typical of interactive camp is, as asserted by Harvey (ibid.: 301), its “*ambivalent solidarity*”, which “revolves around the mechanisms of support and attack, either of which can be covert or on-record”. In an attempt to identify this functional aspect of camp talk, Harvey (ibid.) applies Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory to camp speakers. To understand how politeness theory pertains to camp, one has to, first and foremost, familiarise oneself with the notion of *face*.

Face, within this particular framework, is symbolic of one’s respectability, self-image, or social standing; to lose face then means that one’s perceived respectability, self-image, or social standing is tarnished. As per the definition of face in relation to the politeness theory, “all speakers have both negative and positive face-wants which they strive mutually to respect” (Harvey, 1998: 302). Negative face-wants are characterised by one’s freedom to act as one wishes without external imposition. Positive face-wants, on the other hand, lie in one’s desire for appreciation and approval. These two types of face-wants can be jeopardised by what Brown and Levinson (1987, in Harvey, 1998: 302) term *face-threatening acts*. Such acts, when extrapolated to camp talk, “threaten(s) an addressee’s negative face-wants with its on-record requests for solidarity and support” (ibid.). When it comes to positive face-wants, camp is known to imperil them “by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee’s positive self-image, hence, the insults, ridicule, put-downs etc.” (Harvey, 1998: 302).

In the scene given in Table 6.5, ambivalent solidarity is substantiated by the fact that both characters, Jay Miang and Geng (pictured in the following Figure 6.2), employ camp to communicate with each other. Camp, in this scenario, serves, no matter how paradoxical it may seem, as a pillar of their communal belonging as its micro-functional feature. Furthermore, as a senior, both career- and age-wise, Jay Miang is more apt to pose face threats, both negative and positive, to the junior *kathoey*. Geng, however, does not remain victimised for too long since he, as a *kathoey* character, is also able to turn the same tool of verbal attack to his advantage and mitigate the face threats posed by the senior colleague. It is

above all noteworthy that the face-threatening acts alternately launched by the two are inextricably intertwined with the emphatics of camp, which add to the construction of theatricalised women characteristic of the speech style.



Figure 6.2: Geng is surprised at Jay Miang's sudden appearance

When Jay Miang first greets Geng with อี้เก้ง อารมณ์ดีมาเชียวนะ [e' Geng what a jolly mood you are in, pfft] (Table 6.5, Box 1B), which subsequently meets with Geng's agitated shock, he continues to feign support in the guise of friendliness by responding to the latter's agitation with เอ้า ชั้เห็นหล่อนเนี่ยเดินลั่นลาไปมาไร ชั้ก็อยากจะมา ทักทายเซย์ไฮ [Well, I saw you prancing around so I wanted to come say hi] (Table 6.5, Box 3B). On the surface, the previous two utterances seem harmless and innocuous. Coupled with the speaker's tone and body language, however, they are in fact imbued with sinisteress. The menacing undercurrent evinced by Jay Miang is picked up by Geng, as will be illustrated by the latter's responses (in Table 6.6), governed by shock and suspicion, to the former's greetings.

To begin with, Jay Miang's use of the prefix อี้ [e] is considered typical of *kathoey*. In the olden days, the prefix was a neutral title added before female commoners' names (See-umpai, 2008: online). Nowadays, it has become a loaded term whose usage is diametrically opposed as it is indicative of either the speaker's closeness with or disrespect to the addressee. Indeed, *kathoey* are very much inclined to call one another by nicknames preceded by อี้ [e]. The title, on the one hand, evokes a sense of belonging, since being *kathoey*, in a way, automatically

gives them licence to bypass all formality of friendship building and treat each other with liberty, which, ultimately, results in manifestation of mutual disrespect. Such ambivalent solidarity is lost in translation as Geng's name preceded by the title is simply transferred into Chinese as "Ging", not to mention the fact that it is an inaccurate English transliteration of the Thai name.

Also, the ending particle เชื้อวานะ [chiew na] signalling mockery is translated into Chinese as 呸 [ā], whose underlying emotions range from resignation, surprise, affirmation, enthusiasm, questioning to agony, but not mockery. The Chinese subtitles thus turn camp talk rife with expressions of ambivalent solidarity into a run-of-the-mill greeting. As to Geng, the significance of his use of หนู [nu] as the first-person pronoun is twofold. First of all, หนู is conventionally used by female speakers only. On rare occasions, it is also employed by male speakers, kids in particular. Secondly, the self-referential pronominal choice of หนู is dictated by age, that is to say, the self-addressed speakers of หนู are duly aware of their juniority in relation to their addressee(s). With this understanding of the pronominal nuances in mind, it is evident that Geng's choice of first-person pronoun is not arbitrary. Instead, it is one of the camp elements employed to add to the constructed femininity of his character. And yet again, due to the limited range of Chinese pronouns, with 我 [wô: I, me] being the default first-person pronoun in Chinese, one will have to dispense with the loss of such pronominal nuances.

Similarly, when Geng responds with ตายละ เจ้เมี่ยง โผล่มา ยังไงคะเนี่ย เก้งตกใจหมดเลยอะคะ [Oh dear! Jay Miang, how did you just pop out of nowhere! I'm so startled] (Table 6.5, Box 2B), the two sentences are an attack on Jay Miang's appearance. The utterance โผล่มา ยังไงคะเนี่ย [how did you just pop out of nowhere!], in particular, is significant as it carries a double meaning of surprise caused by the senior talent scout's sudden appearance and unpleasantness caused by his mere presence. In translating solely เก้งตกใจหมดเลยอะคะ [Geng is so startled] into Chinese as 吓死我了 [I'm almost startled to death] and omitting โผล่มา ยังไงคะเนี่ย, the Chinese subtitles lose the nuance of Geng's dismay at the greeter's presence, thereby keeping only the shock at his senior's unexpected materialisation.



Jay Miang's next remark เอ้า ชันเห็นหล่อนเนี่ยเดินลั่นลาไปมาไง ชันก็อยากจะมาทักทายเชยไฮ [well, I saw you prancing around so I wanted to come say hi] is, again, thoroughly suggestive of camp's theatrical qualities. As previously described in detail, the self-referential pronoun ชัน is feminised and, I should add, so is the second-person pronoun หล่อน [lon: (female) you]. The usage of หล่อน [lon] is similar to that of the ending particle นะยะ, whose original users are restricted to women in order to address women only, but which has since been appropriated by *kathoey* to such an extent that it has, too, become one of their characteristic catchwords. Once again, the nuances of the Thai pronouns adopted by Jay Miang are untranslatable into Chinese owing to the limited range of Chinese pronouns in comparison with their Thai counterparts.

It is not only with the pronominal choices that Jay Miang's queerness is signalled, Jay Miang's use of เดินลั่นลา [dern lanla: prance] in ชันเห็นหล่อนเนี่ยเดินลั่นลาไปมาไง [I saw you prancing around] is also markedly histrionic. Individually and literally, เดิน [dern] means "to walk". ลั่นลา [lanla], on the other hand, does not possess any inherent denotation. It has, however, been used to signify a jovial mood. Together, the phrase เดินลั่นลา conjures up an image of (someone) prancing jovially while, in reality, Geng merely walks by. The hyperbolic instance has been watered down to 闲逛 [walk idly, amble, saunter] in Chinese as shown in Table 6.5, Box 3C. Nonetheless, the corresponding Chinese subtitles manage to partly re-enact the overall theatricality of Jay Miang's remarks by preserving the Thai use of English เชยไฮ [transliteration of the English phrase 'say hi'] in 就想跟你打声招呼 Say hi [So, I wanted to say hi].

Table 6.6: Geng attempts to mitigate face threats posed by Jay Miang

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	G:	เจ้าแม่ออย่างเจ้เมียงเนี่ยนะจะมาทักทาย เทยตัวเล็ก ๆ อย่างเก้งอะคะ [A queen bee like Jay Miang would come say hi to a tiny 'thoey like me?]	哎哟 像 Miang 姐这种大人物 [Oh, why would an important figure like Sister Miang]  怎么会跟我这种小角色打招呼呢 [Want to greet a small fry like me?]

2	JM:	ฉลาดนี่หล่อน กิตี๋ ชันจะได้เข้าเรื่องกับ หล่อนเลย ชันได้ยินข่าวมาว่า หึงพูชี่กับหึง หนูดอกเนี่ย มันไปอยู่ที่บึงโขงหลง แล้วชันก็ จำได้ว่าหล่อนก็มาจากที่นั่นเหมือนกัน [Smart of you! Good. I can cut to the chase with you bitch. I heard rumours that Nang Pushy and Nu' Dok are in Beung Khong Lhong. And I remember you are also from there.]	还聪明的嘛 [You are actually smart]  很好 那我就开门见山了 [Very well. Then I will just cut to the chase]  我听说 Madam Puchi 和 Nudoll 在箐陇县 [I heard that Madam Puchi and Nudoll is in Khong Lhong County]  而且我记得你也是来自那里的 [And I remember you are also from there]
3	G:	แล้วยังไงล่ะคะเจ้ [So, what, Jae?]	那又怎么样 姐 [So, what, Sister?]

As laid out in Table 6.6 above and the upcoming Table 6.7, sensing forthcoming face threats, Geng seeks to mitigate them beforehand with his blunt enquiry into Jay Miang's true intentions of greeting him while striving to maintain his respect for the senior *kathoey* at the same time, and by proclaiming the latter เจ้าแม่ [jao mae: queen bee, doyenne] (in Table 6.6, Box 1B) and referring to himself in a self-deprecating fashion. Of note is the compound noun of his choice, เจ้าแม่, since it is made up of two words: เจ้า [jao: chief, monarch] and แม่ [mae: mother]. With the word แม่ constituting the latter half of the word, it is evident that เจ้าแม่ is a feminised term – as opposed to its masculine counterpart เจ้าพ่อ [jao por: male tycoon]. While the Chinese subtitles might be able to preserve the face-saving aspect of the verbal signs with the translation of เจ้าแม่ into Chinese as 大人物 [big figure, important person] (Table 6.6, Box 1C) and เทยตัวเล็ก ๆ [tiny (*ka*)*thoey*] as 小角色 [a minor role, a small fry] (Table 6.6, Box 1C), they are devoid of the camp qualities which contribute to the construction of theatricalised femininity in these two characters.

Geng continues his face-saving efforts in the face of Jay Miang's imminent face threats, as shown by his response แล้วยังไงล่ะคะเจ้ [so, what? Jay] (Table 6.6, Box 3B). With the audiovisual features of the scene also taken into account, the self-proclaimed tiny *kathoey* is concurrently engaging in a masquerade of respect for

and an act of defiance against the older *kathoey*. The junior *kathoey*'s negative face-want is again threatened when his senior demands information from him: ชั๊น ก็อยากจะรู้ว่า มันไปทำอะไรที่นั่น [I want to know what they are doing there] (Table 6.7, Box 1B). That Geng is constantly mitigating the face threats is evidenced by his daring attitude palpable in such replies as เอ้า แล้วหนูจะไปรู้มัยละคะ หนูเป็นแมวมองฟรีแลนซ์ นะคะ ไม่ใช่คนรับใช้มาตาม [How would I know? I am a freelance scout, not Madam's servant] (Table 6.7, Box 2B).

Table 6.7: Geng and Jay Miang are engaged in a face-saving and face-threatening tug of war

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	JM:	ชั๊นก็อยากจะรู้ว่า มันไปทำอะไรที่นั่น [I want to know what they are doing there.]	我就想知道 [So, I want to know]  为什么她们会去那里 [Why they went there]
2	G:	เอ้า แล้วหนูจะไปรู้มัยละคะ หนูเป็นแมวมองฟรีแลนซ์นะคะ ไม่ใช่คนรับใช้มาตาม [How would I know? I am a freelance scout, not Madam's servant.]	哦 我怎么会知道 [Oy, how would I know?]  我有我自己要做的事 [I have my own business to mind]  可不是 Madam 的佣人 [I'm not Madam's servant]

Having his negative face threat defied yet again, Jay Miang then opts for a direct positive face threat by way of belittling the younger *kathoey* as นั้งเทยประถม [nung 'thoey prathom] (in Table 6.8 that ensues, Box 1B), which can be translated verbatim as 'missy elementary level 'thoey'. Interestingly, in the Chinese subtitles, the traces of Geng's feigned respect and subtle act of defiance are turned into a head-on insult seeing that เอ้า แล้วหนูจะไปรู้มัยละคะ หนูเป็นแมวมองฟรีแลนซ์นะคะ ไม่ใช่คนรับใช้มาตาม [How would I know? I am a freelance scout, not Madam's servant] is translated as 哦 我怎么会知道 我有我自己要做的事 可不是 Madam 的佣人 [Oy, how would I know? I have my own business to mind. I'm not Madam's servant] (Table 6.7, Box 2C). In the Thai original, Geng's response is directed at Madam

Pushy against whom he is defending himself as it implies that he does not wish to be regarded as lower in status than Jay Miang's rival; therefore, he is 'a freelance scout, not Madam's servant'. In Chinese, however, 我有我自己要做的事 [I have my own business to mind] is a direct accusation levelled against Jay Miang on account of his nosiness.

Table 6.8: Jay Miang and Geng strive to mitigate each other's face threats

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
1	JM:	นี่อย่ามาทวนประสาทฉันนะ นังเทยประถม [Don't you dare smartass me! You wet-behind-the-ears 'thoey.]	尼玛的 别以为隐瞒得了我 小屁孩 [Damn you! Don't you think you can hide [it] from me, you little brat!]
2	G:	แห่ม เทยประถมหมมมัยมอย่างเก้งไม่กล้าทวน เทยมหาลัยก้ามปูอย่างเจี๋ยหรือคะ ลาละนะคะ [Aw, elementary school 'kathoey with high school boobs like Geng won't dare smartass a university 'thoey with crab claws <sup>52</sup> like Jay. May I be excused?]	我怎么敢和你这样的大人物作对呢 [How would I dare defy an important figure like you?]  先告辞了 [I will excuse myself]
3	JM:	นี่ นังเก้ง ฉันนะตัวแม่นางพญา ส่วนหล่อนก็แค่ ลูกปลวกเท่านั้นแหละ ยังจะกล้ามาต่อปากต่อคำอีกหรือ [Nang Geng! I'm the queen bee. You are just a minnow. How dare you talk back to me!]	Ging [Ging]  我怎么样也算是你老前辈了 [I'm at least your senior]  至于你不过是小喽啰而已 [And you are just a tiny minion]  你竟敢这样回嘴 [How dare you talk back like this!]

Returning to the camp qualities in the face-threatening tug of war between Geng and Jay Miang, it does not take long for one to see that the Chinese subtitles are mostly rid of the camp traits present in the original Thai dialogue. For example, the face-threatening jibe by the *kathoey* forerunner นังเทยประถม [nung 'thoey prathom], in Table 6.8 Box 1B, is translated as 小屁孩 [you wet behind the ears]

<sup>52</sup> Crab claws being the metaphor for having big, muscular arms.

(Table 6.8, Box 1C), whose connotations of lacking experience and maturity are left intact but whose designated recipient, *kathoey*, is somehow neutralised. Other instances, เทยประถมนมมัธยมอย่างเก้ง [elementary school ‘*kathoey* with high school boobs like Geng] and เทยมหาลัยกำปูอย่างเจ้ [university ‘*thoey* with crab claws like Jay] (both in Table 6.8, Box 2B), are simplified in Chinese as merely 我 [I, me] and 你这样的大人物 [an important figure like you] (Table 6.8, Box 2C), respectively.

Furthermore, when Geng clearly proves to be a difficult target of his negative face threat, Jay Miang thus enlists positive face threats full-on with his self-proclaimed queen bee status and the degradation of the junior *kathoey*. Again, the term ตัวแม่มหาปญา [the queen bee] (Table 6.8, Box 3B) itself is inherently feminine since it is made up of such female-indicator units as แม่ [mae: mother] and นาง [narng: missus], while ลูกปลวก [look pluak: minnow] (Table 6.8, Box 3B) is a neutral insult applicable to any gender. Despite the latter being gender-neutral, the entire utterances are still viewed as richly camp when one takes into account the adoption of such gendered prefix and pronouns as นัง [nung], ชั่น [chun] and หล่อน [lon]. In Chinese, the camp face threat has become a matter of de-gendered seniority instead of social status, unlike in the original, as can be seen in the sentence 我怎么样也算是你老前辈了 [I’m at least your senior (specifically age-wise), my emphasis] (Table 6.8, Box 3C). The Chinese subtitling of ยังจะกล้ามาต่อปากต่อคำอีกหรือ [Nang Geng! I’m the queen bee. You are just a minnow. How dare you talk back to me!] into 你竟敢这样回嘴 [How dare you talk back like this!] (in Table 6.8, Box 3C) serves to reinforce the respect and adherence to seniority demanded by Jay Miang of Geng. “How dare you talk back *like this!*” (my emphasis) in Chinese implies that Jay Miang is annoyed at Geng’s *action* of failing to observe seniority rules – as opposed to the *person* showing the defiant attitude as in the Thai original “How dare *you* talk back to me”. Regardless, one could perhaps argue that the replacement of social status with seniority is a way to compensate for one of the two functions served by the self-referential pronoun หนู chosen by Geng as described earlier in this section.

Table 6.9: Jay Miang and Geng are interrupted by a security guard

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese subtitles
Jay Miang continues to coerce Geng into telling him why Madam Pushy and her assistant went to the countryside until the coercion is interrupted by a security guard.			
1	Security guard:	ไม่ทราบมีอะไรกันนี่เปล่าครับ [Is there anything going on here?]	不知道发生了什么事情了 [Mind telling me what happened?]
2	JM:	ไม่มีอะไรค่ะ คือทักทายกันตามประสาพี่น้อง ค่ะ ม้วบ ม้วบ [Nothing. Just saying hi like what siblings do. Mwah mwah.]	没什么 [Nothing]  只是姐妹之间打招呼罢了 [It's just sisters greeting each other]
The security guard repeats the question to make sure Jay Miang did not lie.			
3	JM:	ขอบคุณนะคะ อุตส่าห์เป็นห่วงกะเทย [Thank you. You even bothered to worry about <i>kathoey</i> .]	谢谢啦 都是人妖之间的语言 [Thank you. It's the language among <i>kathoey</i> ]

The verbal exchange between the two characters continues in this vein until it is interrupted by a security guard passing by and intrigued by the ruckus. Asked by the guard if there is anything wrong, Jay Miang tries to send him on his way by replying that ไม่มีอะไรค่ะ คือทักทายกันตามประสาพี่น้องค่ะ ม้วบ ม้วบ [Nothing. Just saying hi like what siblings do. Mwah mwah] (Table 6.9, Box 2B). Here, the rendering of พี่น้อง [pee nong: siblings] into Chinese as 姐妹 [jiēmèi: sisters] (Table 6.9, Box 2C) is significant for it could be seen as an attempt on the subtitler's part to compensate for the earlier absence of camp traits in Chinese.

Additionally, when Jay Miang identifies himself and Geng as *kathoey* in the response to the guard's persistent suspicion ขอบคุณนะคะ อุตส่าห์เป็นห่วงกะเทย [Thank you. You even bothered to worry about *kathoey*] in Table 6.9, Box 4B, the Chinese subtitles have gone one step further by identifying the entirety of their previous dialogue as 人妖之间的语言 [language among *kathoey*] (Table 6.9, Box 4C). While the extended coverage of the *kathoey* identification to the entire verbal exchange, and not just the identity of the two speakers, can be regarded as a compensatory measure against the near total absence of camp in the ongoing row between Geng and Jay Miang, it can, at the same time, be viewed as counterproductive to the purpose of camp since there is no earlier hint

whatsoever of the florid nature of camp talk deployed by the two *kathoey* characters.

Indeed, without the actual camp traits consistently translated into Chinese, the over-translation of กะเทย [*kathoey*] into Chinese as 人妖之间的语言 or the so-called ‘*kathoey* talk’ might be misattributed to merely *the intimidating way* in which Jay Miang addresses Geng, while disregarding the other characteristics of camp talk which serve multi-faceted functions as, for example, a point of reference for their sense of belonging, or as a tool for the construction of theatricalised women.

Before I conclude the discussion of the fansubbing of camp talk in the Thai soap opera *Madam Dun*, also known as 大小姐 in Chinese, I would like to return to the first episode of the drama where some intriguing word choices in Chinese can also be found. Early on in this episode, when Jay Miang stumbles across the memoir authored by Madam Pushy, he is enraged by the fact that the book shot to the number-one bestselling spot. In the heat of the moment, he shrieks นังพุชชี [*nung Pushy*] which is subsequently subtitled into Chinese simply as Puchi. As mentioned elsewhere, the prefix นัง [*nung*] is a snappier pronunciation of the word นาง [*narng*: missus]. Placed in this context, the term is to express Jay Miang’s indignation.

Following the angry outburst, he is urged by the entourage of his trainees to take them to lunch as planned and, it is out of annoyance at his own apprentices that he barks ค่ะ [*ka*] at them. To contextualise the morpheme, ค่ะ can serve as either an ending particle or a stand-alone word. As an ending particle, it can be found in either affirmative or negative phrases or sentences. On its own, it acts as an expression of the affirmative similar to “yes” in English. Most notably, still, is the fact that ค่ะ is feminine – as opposed to ครับ [*krub*] which is masculine. This simple affirmative expression is curiously rendered into Chinese in the form of a sentence: 老子知道了 [I(male) know!]. The decision to use 老子 [lǎozi: I(male)] is intriguing considering that its female equivalent 老娘 [lǎoniáng: I(female)] also exists.

Another point worth noting here is the fact that the female ending particles *ค่ะ* (affirmative and negative) and *คะ* (interrogative) meant to evince politeness have been widely used by Geng throughout the entire interaction. The inclusion of such feminine ending particles has no doubt been to, first of all, highlight Geng's theatricalised identity and, secondly, to feign respect for Jay Miang. In the case of the senior talent scout, the female-gendered particles have been resorted to when he is responding to the security guard's suspicion about his abuse of the smaller *kathoey*. The presence of the aforementioned ending words has been rightly lost in the Chinese subtitles due to a lack of equivalent terms in the target language.

Given the aforementioned translation decisions, whether intentional or not, it seems that the Chinese subtitles are largely masculinised, except perhaps one instance in which the name Jay Miang doubling as a vocative used by his entourage to address him is translated verbatim as Miang 姐 [Sister Miang]. The term *เจ๊* [jay] is thought to have derived precisely from the Chinese word 姐 [jiê: older sister] – as opposed to 哥 [gē: older brother] when speaking to an older male addressee. In other words, Jay Miang's femininity is signalled exclusively in Chinese by the literal translation of the term of address employed by his trainees.

To recap, most linguistic camp traits in *Madam Dun* are lost in the Chinese subtitles. As with *Sapai Look Tung*, some of them are partly the result of the innate difference between the two languages rendering the untranslatability unavoidable; some, however, are simply lost without a clear reason. Unlike the fanmade subtitles in *Sapai Look Tung*, where attempts on the fansubber's part to achieve some degree of equivalence by spelling out Thai metaphors are conspicuous, in *Madam Dun*, one could hardly detect any traces of camp through the Chinese subtitles as they are mostly *de-gendered*. It stands to reason that the Chinese viewership should be able to discern the gender identity of the *kathoey* speakers via the myriad audiovisual signifiers. What the Chinese audience might not be able to pick up, however, since indexing a specific identity is not the only function camp talk is employed to deliver, is the nuances of the power struggle as manifested through the face-threatening and face-saving tug of war between the two *kathoey* characters. All in all, while it is clear that concealment of the *kathoey* characters is not the fansubbing team's intention, it



still could be said that the fansubbers end up producing a rather inconsistent, or even misleading, representation of the two queer men within the soap itself.

#### **6.4 *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter [Tomorrow I'll Still Love You]***

##### **– 明天我依然爱你**

This soap opera was first broadcast on Channel 5 Thailand in November 2009. Thanks to the male lead's popularity in China, it was immediately released, dubbed, on 安徽卫视 [Ānhuī Wèishì: Anhui Satellite Channel], 上海电视剧频道 [Shànghaī Diànshìjù Píndào: Shanghai TV Drama Channel], and 江苏影视频道 [Jiāngsū Yǐngshì Píndào: Jiangsu Film and Television Channel] in the same year.

The primary story revolves around the turbulent relationship between the two protagonists, Poramin and Kaewkanya. Alongside Poramin and Kaewkanya's story arc, the drama also features the budding yet surreptitious romance between Kong, Kaewkanya's younger brother, and Peera, Pipat's younger brother. The two keep their relationship secret lest it is opposed by their respective families that have been entangled in an ongoing conflict with one another.

Kong is introduced for the first time in Episode 2, seemingly as a one-shot character, but then became a regular from the third episode onwards. In Episode 5, Kong finally crosses paths with Peera at the hospital where the former's mom is being treated for nausea. Their first encounter does not turn out well seeing that Kong mistakenly accuses Peera of stealing his mom's purse. The two meet again unexpectedly when Kong, assigned as the wrongly accused's personal physiotherapist, arrives at Peera's condominium to provide physiotherapy advice for the latter's broken leg. Throughout the first physiotherapeutic session, Peera keeps taunting Kong about his past misunderstanding until Kong is ready to storm out of the patient's residence in annoyance. In early episodes of the Thai soap opera, Peera's romantic advances to Kong are rather subtly presented. Yet, in the context of Thailand, these hints are hard to miss. The first example of such subtle romantic advance unfolds as follows:

Table 6.10: Kong and Peera meet by chance for the second time

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Kong:	ถ้าคุณไม่ชอบผม แล้วผมจะทำกายภาพบำบัดให้คุณได้ยังไง [If you don't like me, then how can I perform physiotherapy on you?]	如果你不愿意接受我，那我要怎么帮你做物理治疗呢 [If you are not willing to accept me, how can I help perform physiotherapy on you then?]
2	Peera:	แล้วใครบอกว่าผมไม่ชอบคุณล่ะ [But who says I don't like you?]	谁说我不接受你啊 [Who says I don't accept you?]

First of all, it needs mentioning that Kong's Chinese voice is deeper than his Thai soft-spoken counterpart. With regard to camp talk in this soap opera, it is fundamentally employed as a conduit through which they articulate their shared sexuality, albeit subtly. Table 6.10 above illustrates how their romance arc is foreshadowed. With Peera's continuous taunting of Kong's previously unfounded accusation of him being a thief, the target of the verbal harassment grows irritated and bursts out saying ถ้าคุณไม่ชอบผม แล้วผมจะทำกายภาพบำบัดให้คุณได้ยังไง [If you don't like me, then how can I perform physiotherapy on you?] (Table 6.10, Box 1B), the question being answered by Peera's rhetoric question แล้วใครบอกว่าผมไม่ชอบคุณล่ะ [But who says I don't like you?] (Table 6.10, Box 2B). On the surface, the verbal exchange could be seen as interpretable in platonic or professional terms, with Peera's dislike for Kong potentially leading to disruption to the latter's physiotherapeutic duty. If one, however, is familiar with the Thai discourse on masculinity and manhood, one would be able to recognise immediately the specificity of placing the verb ชอบ [chorb: like] in this context.

Indeed, ชอบ is not to be used lightly by straight men to address fellow straight men. When it is uttered in a verbal exchange between two men, it thus serves to hint at the two's sexuality with their eventual union being the ultimate goal. Without the aforementioned awareness of the local gender/sexuality discourse, one is likely to overlook the romantic nuances hidden in their interaction and this is precisely what is lost in the Chinese translation of Kong's question as 如果你不愿意接受我 那我要怎么帮你做物理治疗呢 [If you are not willing to accept me, how can I help perform physiotherapy on you then?] (Table 6.10, Box 1C) and

Peera's response as 谁说我不接受你啊 [Who says I don't accept you?] (Table 6.10, Box 2C). The significance of the term ชอบ is neutralised by its rendering into Chinese as 接受 [jiēshòu: accept].

Another instance of the clues about their forthcoming romance arc can be found in Episode 7, when Peera calls Kong to carry on persuading the physiotherapist to return to his post. In the sixth episode, after his first treatment session, Kong decides to ask a colleague of his to replace him to treat Peera, the act which prompts the patient to rush to the hospital where Kong works and confront the former about his substitution.

Table 6.11: Kaewkanya teases Kong about the caller whom she assumes to be his potential love interest

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Kaew (KKY):	ก้อง สาวโทรมาหะรอ [Kong, a girl called?]	小东 谁打来的 [Xiaodong, who called?]
2	Kong:	คนโรคจิตนะพี่แก้ว [Just some nutcase, Sister.]	是个神经病 [Just some nutcase]
3	KKY:	เห้ย [Riiiiight.]	是吗 [Oh, really!]

In Episode 7, Kong, annoyed by Peera's persistent persuasion, demands that the latter stop bothering him and proceeds to hang up on the nagger. As soon as Kong does so, Kaewkanya, his elder sister, asks him teasingly ก้อง สาวโทรมาหะรอ [Kong, a girl called?] (Table 6.11, Box 1B), to which the younger brother replies คนโรคจิตนะพี่แก้ว [Just some nutcase, Sister] (Table 6.11, Box 2B). Kaewkanya then smiles knowingly at Kong and responds with เห้ยยยย [riiiight]. The timing of Kaewkanya's question, immediately after the phone call, and her reaction to Kong's reply are not coincidental as they are both intended to foreshadow the romance between her brother and the caller. Even though Kaewkanya is not informed of the fact that her brother is gay, and, in fact, neither is the audience, her teasing reaction is a coded message suggesting to the audience that the interaction between Kong and Peera is not of a platonic nature. The

foreshadowing plot devices are nevertheless not transposed into the Chinese version, as shown in Table 6.11 earlier.

Firstly, the gendered question ก้อง สาวโทรมาหรือ [Kong, a girl called?] (Table 6.11, Box 1B) is somehow de-gendered into a mere 谁打来的 [who called?] (Table 6.11, Box 1C). Similarly, the teasing sound เหยย [Riiiiight] (Table 6.11, Box 3B) made by Kaewkanya is turned into a placeholder exclamation: 是吗 [Oh, really!] (Table 6.11, Box 3C). Later, in another bid to convince Kong to resume the duty as his physiotherapist, Peera shows up at the hospital again. The second hospital encounter unfolds as follows:

Table 6.12: Peera tries to persuade Kong to resume his post as his physiotherapist

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Kong:	ผมบอกคุณแล้วไง ผมเป็นแค่เจ้าหน้าที่ กายภาพบำบัด คุณจะสนใจผมทำไม [I told you. I am just a physiotherapist. Why do you care?]	我的职责是来帮你做物理治疗 没有时间跟你交朋友 [My duty is to help you do physiotherapy. I don't have time to make friends with you.]
2	Peera:	สนสิ ก็ผม... [Of course, I care. Because I...] เออ หนีได้หนีไปเลย เบอร์โทรคุณผมยังหาได้ คุณหนีผมไม่พ้นหรอก [Fine. Run from me if you can! I even found your phone number, you won't be able to get away from me]	为什么 你说啊 [Why? Tell me why] 好 要走就走吧 事实上 我也是不想跟 你做朋友 [Fine. Leave if you want. Actually, I don't want to make friends with you either]
Peera follows Kong who is walking away from him.			
3	Kong:	ถ้าผมบอกเหตุผลที่ผมไม่อยากจะยุ่งกับคุณนะ คุณ จะเลิกยุ่งกับผมไหม [If I tell you the reason why I don't want to have anything to do with you, will you stop bugging me?]	要是我告诉你为什么不想跟你做朋友 你就会停止骚扰我吗 [If I tell you why I don't want to befriend you, will you stop bothering me?]
4	Peera:	ก็แล้วแต่คำตอบของคุณว่าผมจะพอใจไหม [It depends on whether your answer is satisfactory to me.]	那你就先说说看 原因到底是什么 [You can try explaining what the reason actually is]
Kong proceeds to relate to Peera the history of their families' long-standing conflict.			
5	Kong:	หวังว่าคำตอบนี้จะทำให้คุณพอใจ แล้วก็เลิกยุ่ง กับผมซะที [I hope this answer will satisfy you. Now stop bothering me.]	希望这个答案会让你明白 为什么我不 想跟你做朋友 [I hope this answer makes you understand why I don't want to be your friend]

As can be seen in Table 6.12 above, the undercurrent of their flirting implied with Thai camp talk is somewhat *platonised* in the Chinese dubbing script, where it is presented in such a way that points to their potential friendship, instead of their budding romance. For instance, in Table 6.12, Box 1B, Kong's remarks ผมบอกคุณแล้วไง ผมเป็นแค่เจ้าหน้าที่กายภาพบำบัด คุณจะสนใจผมทำไม [I told you. I'm just a physiotherapist. Why do you care?] foreground the fact that their relation is professional, not personal, therefore it is a point of note as to why Peera should care if he quits. The Chinese translation is deflected from the original inference for คุณจะสนใจผมทำไม is dubbed as 没有时间跟你交朋友 [I don't have time to make friends with you] (Table 6.12, Box 1C). Peera's spontaneous reaction in the form of an unfinished explanation (Table 6.12, Box 2B) is also another tell-tale clue to his romantic advances to Kong. Here, the scene set by Peera is significant, especially with the word choice หนี [nee: escape, run away] (Table 6.12, Box 2B).

To elaborate, one of the most prevalent romance tropes in Thai TV love stories is for the male protagonist to chase the female counterpart while the latter is unflinching resistant to the male lead's romantic pursuit at first by 'running away' from him. Indeed, this trope can be observed in the relationship of the heterosexual couple in the soap opera currently under discussion. Poramin and Kaewkanya, the male and female protagonists of the drama, are engaged in the, for lack of a better term, sincerity test in parallel with the secondary homosexual couple. This 'test' essentially requires the 'pursuer', traditionally assigned to the male lead or, in the case of a same-sex romance, the butch man, to prove his sincerity and commitment to the 'pursued', conventionally allocated to the female lead or the effeminate man, by persistently wooing the designated passive recipient of the affection. Consistent with the translation of Kong's preceding utterances, Peera's adoption of the heterosexual romance trope is once again *platonised* as he is heard asking his former physiotherapist 为什么 你说啊 [Why? Tell me why] (Table 6.12, Box 2C) and repeating the distorted portrayal of their relation with 好 要走就走吧 事实上 我也是不想跟你做朋友 [Fine. Leave if you want. Actually, I don't want to make friends with you either].

Further down the conversation, Kong tries to satisfy Peera that he has a legitimate reason to ไม่อยากยุ่งกับคุณ [not want anything to do with you] (Table 6.12,

Box 3B) and, hopefully if his former patient is informed of their families' enduring bad blood, then the latter will เลิกยุ่งกับผมซะที [stop bothering me] (Table 6.12, Box 5B). While the act ofหนี [nee: escape, run away] is carried out by the 'pursued' in accordance with the traditional Thai romance trope, ยุ่ง [yoong: bother] is a tangible manifestation of the role the 'pursuer' has to play in this courtship equation. In line with the Chinese rendering of the previous utterances, Kong's later replies in Chinese are also rid of the romantic implicatures, as evidenced by their supposedly Chinese equivalents 要是我告诉你为什么不想跟你做朋友 你就会停止骚扰我吗 [If I tell you why I don't want to befriend you, will you stop bothering me?] (Table 6.12, Box 3C), and 希望这个答案会让你明白 为什么我不想跟你做朋友 [I hope this answer makes you understand why I don't want to be your friend] (Table 6.12, Box 5C).

The Chinese *platonisation* of such Thai romantic nuances is present once again in Episode 8, when Peera pays Kong a surprise visit at his house in an attempt to prove that he can get along with his love interest's family despite the long-standing feud. Kong, unconvinced, argues that เพราะเค้ายังไม่รู้ว่าคุณเป็นใคร เค้าถึงได้ชอบคุณ [because they (his family) don't know yet who you (Peera) are, so they like you]. Peera then retorts that งั้นก็แปลว่าก่อนที่จะคุณจะรู้ว่าผมเป็นใคร คุณก็ชอบผมนะสิ [so that means before you knew who I was, you liked me too]. In the Chinese script, the two statements are interestingly translated as 就是因为还不知道你是谁 他们才会喜欢你啊 [exactly because (they) don't know yet who you are, so they like you] and 那就说明你知道我是谁之前 你也想跟我做朋友 [then that means before you knew who I was, you also wanted to make friends with me]. To put it simply, Kong's family is allowed to be portrayed as liking Peera. Taken by Kong, however, the action ofชอบ [liking] is suddenly replaced with做朋友 [make friends, befriend].

With the abundant instances of linguistic *platonisation* found in the Chinese version, one could indeed always argue that they might have been necessitated by lip synchronisation, which is viewed by some scholars as "one of the key factors at stake in dubbing" and "consists of matching the target language translation and the articulatory and body movements of the screen actors and actresses, as well as matching the utterances and pauses in the translation and

those of the source text” (Chaume, 2006: 6). In this regard, it needs pointing out that in many cases the Chinese dubbing script is much longer than the Thai original. Take, for example, the confrontation between Kong and Peera in Table 6.10, in which while the Thai script is 19 syllables long, the Chinese translation, in rendering ถ้าคุณไม่ชอบผม แล้วผมจะทำกายภาพบำบัดให้คุณได้ยังไง into 如果你不愿意接受我 那我要怎么帮你做物理治疗呢, is three syllables longer than its original counterpart. For another instance, when Peera calls on Kong and manages to win affection from the latter’s family, Kong’s argument that เพราะเค้ายังไม่รู้ว่าคุณเป็นใคร เค้าถึงได้ชอบคุณ [because they (his family) don’t know yet who you (Peera) are, so they like you] is 15 syllables long, shorter than the Chinese equivalent 就是因为还不知道你是谁 他们才会喜欢你啊 [exactly because (they) don’t know yet who you are, so they like you] by six syllables. Given the blatant disregard for the lip synchronisation, it is therefore safe to conclude that the Chinese *platonisation* of the Thai dialogue exchanges, laden with homoerotic cues, was not motivated by rigid adherence to one of the most prevalent constraints in dubbing, namely lip synchronisation.

Still, while the examples given above might lead one to surmise that the linguistic manipulation of the scenes involving Kong and Peera is rooted in the prohibition of LGBT representation in Chinese media, it must nonetheless be noted that in later episodes the homosexual nature of their relationship has increasingly come to the fore. For instance, in Episode 13, Peera mentions a woman who has a crush on him to Kong, much to the latter’s irritation. Amused by Kong’s reaction, Peera then teases Kong that ก็ถ้าคุณเป็นผู้หญิงอะ ผมคงคิดว่าคุณนะหึงผม [well, if you were a woman, I would think you are jealous]. Curiously, the observation is faithfully rendered into Chinese as 要是你是女人的话 我会认为你在吃醋 [if you were a woman, I would think you are jealous].

For another example, in Episode 15, Jay Toom, a *kathoey* keeper of Kong’s household, upon overhearing an argument between Kong and Peera, mumbles to herself งอนกันไปงอนกันมา ทำหยิ่งกับคู่รักกันนั้นแหละ [they keep sulking at each other like they are lovers]. As explained earlier in the analysis of *Sapai Look Tung*, the act of งอน [ngon: sulk] in Thai is traditionally treated as purely feminine and used mainly in the context of a romantic relationship. While the specificity of its

definition is, to my mind, untranslatable, the term can loosely be translated into English as ‘to sulk, to be upset’. The Chinese dubbing script equates the term 吵 [chào: argue] with งอน [ngon: sulk] as Jay Toom is heard remarking 这两个人啊吵来吵去的 就像恋人一样 [these two people keep arguing back and forth just like lovers].

Despite the untranslatability of the gendered term งอน [ngon: sulk], the romantic nuances are not lost since the preservation of the original reference คู่รัก [kooruk: lovers] serve compensatory functions in their stead. The sexuality of the two gay characters is eventually fully revealed in Episode 18, when both of them are sitting side by side on the beach, implicitly professing their love for each other by promising to never let each other go. The scene unfolds under the curious eyes of Jae Toom and Jeng, another keeper of Kong’s household, both of whom look at each other and discuss what they just witnessed in bewilderment.

Table 6.13: Jay Toom and Jeng find out about Kong and Peera’s sexuality and relationship

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Jeng:	ฉันงงงเงยอะ อยู่กันมาตั้งแต่เด็ก ทำไมฉันดูไม่ออกว่าน้องก้องเค้าเป็น [I'm so puzzled. I have lived with him since he was a child, why couldn't I tell Kong is.]	我真是笨啊 从小一起长大 我怎么没有看出来小东他是…… [I'm so stupid. Growing up with him, how could I not tell Xiaodong is...]
2	Jay Toom:	จะไปดูออกได้ไงไอ้เงย ของแบบนี้มันต้องคนที่มีเรดาร์พิเศษเท่านั้นเว้ยถึงจะดูออก [How would you be able to tell, Jeng? Things like this need a special radar only to be able to recognise.]	金，你怎么看得出来啊 这样的事啊 只有像我这样聪明的人才看得出来 [Jin, how would you be able to tell? A matter like this needs a clever person like me to figure out]
3	Jeng:	เรดาร์ตุ๊ดๆ แบบเงี้นะหรอ [Radars for Toot like you?]	大姐，你这样还叫做聪明啊 [Sister, someone like you is considered clever?]

Firstly, to clarify, in Thai, the verb เป็น [pen: to be] is a shorthand for being gay. When Jeng refers to Kong as น้องก้องเค้าเป็น [Brother Kong is] (Table 6.13, Box 1B), it is therefore a complete statement in and of itself, not an ellipsis of meaning that must be picked up by contextual clues as understood by the Chinese dubbing



translator, as can be found in Box 1C. Of note is Jay Toom's response to Jeng's observation as the former claims that one needs to have เรดาร์พิเศษ [a special radar] (Table 6.13, Box 2B) to be able to recognise homosexual men, which is ultimately dubbed into Chinese as 我这样聪明的人 [clever people like me] (Table 6.13, Box 2C). Jeng then specifies the type of 'radar' Jay Toom possesses as a ตู๊ด [toot] (Table 6.13, Box 3B) radar, with ตู๊ด being another, derogatory term for *kathoey*. This, again, is translated into Chinese as 你这样还叫做聪明啊 [Someone like you is considered clever?].

Table 6.14: Thanwa, a family friend is also observing Kong and Peera

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
	Unbeknownst to Jeng and Jay Toom, Thanwa, a family friend, is standing behind them witnessing the declaration of love by Kong and Peera while also overhearing Jeng and Jay Toom's conversation.		
1	Thanwa:	น้องก้องกับน้องพีเค้าเป็น... [Kong and Peera are...]	小东跟锡钧他们是…… [Xiaodong and Xijun are...]
2	Jay Toom:	เป็นเพื่อนกันค่ะ [Friends.]	他们是朋友 [They are friends]
3	Thanwa:	แต่ที่ผมเห็นเนี่ย มันมากกว่าเพื่อนนะครับ [But what I saw, they are more than friends.]	可是我看应该不只是朋友吧 [But I think they aren't just friends]
4	Jeng:	คุณธันวาอย่าคิดมากสิครับ แค่นั่งพิงอินกัน ผมกับเจ้ตุ้มก็ทำกันอยู่บ่อยๆ [Mr Thanwa, don't think too much. It's just cuddling each other. I and Jay Toom also do that a lot.]	谭瓦先生就不要多想了只是互相靠着我跟婷姐也经常这样做 [Mr Tanwa, don't think too much. It's just leaning against each other. I and Sister Heng often do this too]
5	Jay Toom:	ใช่ค่ะ [Yes.]	是啊 [Yes]
6	Thanwa:	แต่ว่าเจ้ตุ้มก็เป็นนะครับ [But Jay Toom is also.]	但是那明显不一样啊 [But it's clearly not the same]
7	Jay Toom:	แหม ถึงตุ้มจะเป็น ก็ใช่ว่าน้องก้องกับน้องพีเค้าจะเป็นด้วยอะเมื่อไรละคะ [Well, even if I'm, it doesn't mean Kong and Peera are also like me.]	小东弟和锡钧弟他们是绝对不可能会那样的 [Xiaodong and Xijun are definitely not like that]
8	Thanwa:	แล้วเรื่องนี้คุณแก้วรู้อยู่ยังครับ [Does Miss Kaew know about this?]	那甘雅小姐知道吗 [So, does Miss Kaew know?]
9	Jay Toom:	รู้ไปก็ไม่มีประโยชน์หรอกค่ะ ไซ้ว่าจะหายเป็นอะเมื่อไร [There's no point in knowing. As if they were gonna stop being.]	知道又有什么用啊 难道有什么差别吗 [So, what's the point of knowing? Would there be any difference?]

In Table 6.14, as Thanwa insists that Kong and Peera are definitely more than just friends, Jay Toom and Jeng are trying desperately to convince him otherwise. The younger keeper reasons, albeit poorly, that men cuddling each other is not an unusual sight since he and Jay Toom also partake in such physical intimacy. Thanwa promptly points out the fact that Jay Toom ก็เป็น [kor pen: is also] (Table 6.14, Box 6B), meaning Jay Toom is also homosexual, although, admittedly, Jay Toom should be more appropriately identified as *kathoey*, due to her feminine looks, sartorial taste and speech style. The *kathoey* keeper's efforts to dissuade Thanwa from the correct conclusion are in vain when she lets slip รู้ไปก็ไม่มีประโยชน์หรอกค่ะ ใช่ว่าจะหายเป็นซะเมื่อไร [there's no point in knowing. As if they were gonna stop being] (Table 6.14, Box 9B). Thanwa's identification of Jay Toom as ก็เป็น [kor pen: is also] is reduced to a mere different case of analogy seeing that the entire utterance is dubbed into Chinese as 但是那明显不一样啊 [But it's clearly not the same] (Table 6.14, Box 6C). Similarly, when, as shown in Box 7B, Jay Toom confirms Thanwa's assertion that she 'is' indeed also, the Chinese dubbing sees only the denial of Kong and Peera's sexuality as homosexual as can be seen in Box 7C 小东弟和锡钧弟他们是绝对不可能那樣的 [Xiaodong and Xijun are definitely not like that].

Not only is the identification of Jay Toom's queer identity erased but her characteristic camp talk is also glossed over. As mentioned previously in the sections on *Sapai Look Tung* and *Madam Dun*, the Thai language contains a wide array of gendered ending particles; the emboldened terms **ค่ะ** and **คะ**, in Boxes 2B, 5B, 7B, and 9B, are among those tailored to the female sex. That Jay Toom, as a queer character, utilises these feminine politeness tags as part of the construction of femininity is typical of camp talk. It is, nonetheless, understandable, in the case of the ending particles, that they are not preserved in the Chinese dubbing for these particular linguistic features are absent in the Chinese language. Still, it is intriguing how finally Kong and Peera are openly acknowledged as gay, yet Jay Toom's gender identity is now subject to the same kind of suppression from which the two gay characters suffered earlier in the Chinese cut of the melodrama.

It might be arguable that the initial *platonisation* of Kong and Peera's interactions is caused by the dubbing translator's failure to decode the romantic nuances of their camp talk; and only after the absolute revelation of the true nature of their relationship could the dubbing translator correctly interpret the same-sex romance arc and translate it as such. At this point, it is probably safe to assume that the portrayal of the homosexual couple was not manipulated on purpose but, rather, by accident. Furthermore, despite the existence of the Chinese TV broadcast guidelines forbidding representation of homosexuality on screen, in practice, regional TV channels still have some amount of leeway in their selection of foreign audiovisual contents to air. It is also likely that the watchful eyes of the Chinese censorship authorities did not yet reach the regions in which this Thai soap opera was broadcast; it might also have been the case that back then the sole barrier between portrayals of queer characters and a Chinese audience was self-censorship exercised by regional TV stations themselves.

As the story progresses, Kong and Peera are faced with a myriad of obstacles, one of which is Pipat's, Peera's older brother, malice toward Kong. Furious at the couple's same-sex romance, Pipat intentionally runs them over. Kong is alerted to the speeding car driven by Peera's brother just in time to push his lover out of the way and suffers the impact of the crash himself. As a result, Kong loses his vision seemingly permanently at first, he therefore decides to break up with Peera so as not to burden the latter with his visual impairment. Peera proves himself dedicated to Kong and eventually earns Kong's mother's acceptance by posing as a carer hired by Kong's family to take care of him every day. When Kong ultimately finds out about this, he flies into a rage and demands that Peera leave his house immediately since he does not want to upset his mother further if she learns of their previous relationship. Peera then assures Kong that his mother is not only informed of their relationship but also accepts it, the revelation of which leads to their reunion.

In the Thai version, the scene culminates in Peera accidentally bumping his lips into Kong's as portrayed below in Figure 6.3. In the Chinese counterpart, however, this scene is removed. With the deletion of said scene, it is perhaps not an overstatement to conclude that the latitude in which homosexuality was allowed to be portrayed was not unlimited. Indeed, even if the representation of these two

characters and their relationship was at last faithfully maintained, the physical expression of their sexuality was still treated as taboo. On top of the homosexual couple, the identification of Jay Toom's gender identity as *kathoey* was also out of bounds at the time the soap opera was aired in China in 2009.



Figure 6.3: Peera and Kong kiss. The scene is removed in the Chinese version

### 6.5 *Prajan See Roong [Rainbow-coloured Moon]* – 彩虹月亮

First televised in Thailand in 2009, the melodrama was brought into China and aired on 江苏影视 [Jiāngsū Yǐngshì: Jiangsu Film and Television Channel] in 2015. The soap focuses on the intertwined lives of four protagonists, namely, A-ruk, Tawan, Oradee, and Plaifah. As a toddler, Tawan was abandoned by Oradee, his masseuse mother, and taken in by A-ruk, her *kathoey* neighbour. The Thai original opens with a close-up shot of A-ruk applying bright red lipstick, closely followed by a kerfuffle instigated by one of A-ruk's colleagues, who disparages her as being a mere has-been. A-ruk then goes on to perform onstage as slated. When her act comes to an end, a throng of spectators, discontent with how unworthy A-ruk is of their time and money, due to her unappealing aging looks, shouts abuse and throws objects at her. The Chinese version, however, begins with A-ruk clad in extravagant drag outfits being relegated by her manager from the position of the headliner to that of a clown. This scenario does not take place

until much further into the first episode of the drama. Simply put, approximately fifteen minutes' worth of sequence of events have been erased in the first episode of the Chinese dubbed version; events that heavily feature the presence of more than a handful of *kathoey* characters concurrently. Furthermore, the interactions between the three characters, A-ruk, Por (A-ruk's colleague and close friend), and their manager, are significantly manipulated as illustrated in Table 6.15 below:

Table 6.15: A-ruk is demoted by her manager from the headliner of the cabaret theatre to a clown

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Manager:	คนดูเขาอยากดูอะไรที่สบายตา เดี่ยวฉันจะหาเด็กใหม่ขึ้นมาโชว์แทน [The audience wants to see something pleasing to the eye. I will find a newbie to perform in place of you.]	观众们现在已经不接受你了 今天的状况大家都看到了 [Now the audience does not accept you anymore. Everyone already saw how the circumstances went down today.]
2	A-ruk:	คุณแม่ <sup>53</sup> [Mom]	老板 [Boss]
3	Por:	แม่ หังรักก็มันยังสวยอยู่นะคะแม่ แต่อีกคนดูพวกนี้มันตาถั่ว มันมองไม่เห็นความสวยของหังรักก็ มันก็เท่านั้นเองแหละแม่ [Mom, Nung Rukky is still beautiful. It's just that this audience is blind. They don't see Nung Rukky's beauty is all, Mom.]	老板 这么多年了大哥给我们剧院挣了不少钱 你也是知道的 大哥过去一直都是我们的剧院的花旦台柱 这些都是事实嘛 [Boss, for so many years Big Brother has made a lot of money for our theatre. You know Big Brother was always our theatre's female star. This is the truth.]
4	Manager:	แต่ฉันไม่ได้ตาถั่ว ฉันรู้ว่าคนดูเนียเขาคิดยังไง [But I am not blind. I know what the audience thinks.]	但现在的是事实观众不想看阿拉扮演美女 [But the present truth is that the audience doesn't want to see A-ruk dressed and perform as a belle.]
5	A-ruk:	แล้วโชว์ไหนล่ะคะ ที่คุณแม่บอกว่าถ้าหนูเล่นแล้วสบายตานะ [So, what show do you say would be pleasing to the eye if I perform?]	不演美女的话 那我该演什么才能够让观众们接受我呢 [If I don't act the role of a belle, then what role should I act to make the audience accept me?]
6	Manager:	ตลกหน้าม่าน [Comedic interlude.]	你去演丑角 [You play the clown.]

<sup>53</sup> In the Thai source text, the manager is addressed by her employees as คุณแม่ [kun mae], literally translated as Mom. It is a variation of the term *mama san*, used in Thailand to refer to women in charge of managing female workers in nightclubs, bars or brothels.

The encounters in Chinese are tellingly different from those in Thai, especially on the camp front. To start with, the manager is dubbed into Chinese with a distinct female voice, despite the fact that the character is played by a famed male-to-female Thai transgender actress, Ornapa “Ma” Krisadee, whose masculine voice is the sole giveaway of her birth sex. On a linguistic level, ironically, the manager is addressed by the two employees as 老板 [lǎobān: boss] (Table 6.5, Boxes 2C and 3C) rather than the original แม่ or คุณแม่ [kun mae: mom] (Table 6.15, Boxes 2B and 3B). It is arguably possible that the word choice 老板 is intended to gloss over the negative implications of their employment that their workplace – a cabaret theatre – evokes in the spectator’s mind. Additionally, the use of 老板 is in itself noteworthy.

To clarify, the manager’s femininely rendered voice is offset by the gendered address term 老板 since, strictly speaking, it covers exclusively male bosses, although it can be at times used generically to address bosses of either sex. In this case, the female equivalent of the term, 老板娘 [lǎobānniáng: female boss], might then be disregarded on the pretext that 老板 could serve as a gender-inclusive address term, while 老板娘 could not, and that 老板娘 is probably one syllable too long for its source Thai word to achieve perfect lip synchronisation in Chinese. That said, this male term of address is consistent with the choice of pronoun used to refer to the manager as 他 [tā: he]. Granted, the third person pronouns for males, females, and non-human subjects in Chinese are identically pronounced as *Ta*, in spite of the discrepancy in their respective Chinese characters. Therefore, reliance merely on auditory cues need not lead one to

such ironic findings, were it not for the Chinese subtitles shown in parallel with the ongoing dubbed voices as illustrated in Figure 6.4 below:



Figure 6.4: Por (left) is consoling A-ruk for the latter's demotion, saying that “他” (he referring to the manager) will definitely not change his mind

Still, the vocative replacement of แม่ [mae: mom] with 老板 [lǎobǎn: boss] is of additional significance when the micro-functional dimensions of camp are also taken into consideration, and this is where the theorising of camp talk by Harvey (1998) comes into the picture, especially in what concerns the evaluative load given to camp talk in a particular context. In this scene, the manager is understood by the Thai viewership as queer, despite her feminine appearance, therefore her speech style, or camp for that matter, is given a positive evaluative load as it is expressive of their mutual sense of belonging. Addressing her as 老板 [boss] instead of the original แม่ or คุณแม่ in a way shifts the relationship dynamics between the manager and her two queer employees and turns it into one that is purely professional, void of any personal identification with the other two *kathoey*.

Not only is the manager or, rather, Mom's voice tampered with, A-ruk's gender identity is also compromised through, first and foremost, the manipulation of her camp talk and the deletion of her love interest scenes. Harvey (1998: 299) observes that camp is largely characterised by exaggerated femininity or, in his own words, "the construction of theatricalized woman". The observation holds true even in the case of Thai camp although it is mainly applied to English and French camp by Harvey. Indeed, the constructed femininity for the effect of theatricalised women seems to be a universal trait of camp in a multitude of languages. Furthermore, it does not any longer matter whether a language feature in a fictional context truly reflects the real-life usage of language by the same demographic of speakers. As argued by Harvey (ibid.: 298), "[w]hat counts [...] is the fact that these language features have come to stand for certain gendered and subcultural differences", similar to how camp talk has come to represent the way in which gay men and, in the case of Thailand, *kathoey* speak. To put it simply, camp talk is one of the myriad channels through which gender performativity is executed. The manipulation of not only A-ruk but also Por's camp is as a result detrimental to the representation of their identity in several aspects, as laid out below.

To begin with, *kathoey* are known to have their own distinctive argot with the prefix นัง [nung: missus] being one of their trademark words. As a matter of fact, translating นัง as "missus" could be misleading and counterproductive in this context precisely because the legitimate, orthodox term for missus in Thai is นาง [narng]. Although the origin of the snappier pronunciation of the word is unclear, it is now characteristic of camp talk employed by Thai *kathoey*. As pointed out earlier, camp talk functions on two levels, micro and macro. On a micro level, it carries either a positive or negative evaluative load depending on the context in which it is deployed (ibid.: 296). Against the backdrop of Por and A-ruk's close friendship, camp talk here is presented positively as not only a source of belonging but also emotional support as substantiated by, for instance, Por's use of นัง [nung] to address A-ruk.

The function of the snappily pronounced variant of นาง [narng] is, however, not exclusive. As can be seen in the fansubbed Thai soap *Sapai Look Tung*, when directed at women, the vocative is symptomatic of the speaker's hostility towards



the female sex. In this dubbed drama, nonetheless, employed by one *kathoey* character to address another *kathoey* character, it is therefore expressive of Por's emotional intimacy with her colleague, A-ruk. Another camp strategy observed by Harvey (ibid.), which is also present in the way in which Por addresses A-ruk, is the practice of renaming. Unlike English camp where femininity is signalled by "the adoption of male names marked as 'queer'" (ibid.: 299), the process of renaming in Thai camp involves a selection of strategies depending on the structure of the queer owner's original name.

In A-ruk's case, her original male name is spelled as อารักษ์ [A-ruks; the final "s" is a silent letter], which ends with ษ [g, k], though the ษ sound, in Thai, allows for a reproduction of itself coupled with an addition of the letter "y", hence the name รักษ์ ัก [Rukky] (Table 6.15, Box 3B). When Por refers to A-ruk as นังรักกี้ [Nung Rukky] (Table 6.15, Box 3B), it does not thus serve only as a space where they articulate their camaraderie but also as a marker of *their kathoey* identity exhibited through Por's feminisation of A-ruk's name.

In the Chinese dubbing script, the term of address นังรักกี้ is replaced with 大哥 [dàgē: big brother], in an attempt to masculinise the *kathoey* lead and impose on her the polar opposite of her original self-identification as a woman. In similar fashion, A-ruk refers to herself as หนู [nu: (female) I, Me], a pronoun typically staked out by girls speaking to someone older or higher in rank. Again, the feminised self-referential pronoun หนู is rendered into Chinese as a mere 我 [wô: I, me], the most neutral first-person pronoun in Chinese.

Despite the fact that other 'feminine' or even 'queer-designated' first-person pronominal choices such as 姑娘 [gūniáng: literally young girl], 老娘 [lǎoniáng: literally grandmother] and 人家 [rénjiā: literally, other people] (discussed earlier in the analysis of *Madam Dun*) are available, they do not inclusively signal femaleness and juniority at the same time as the Thai original word หนู. Indeed, Thai presents a wide variety of pronouns and their choice is governed by numerous factors including, but not limited to, formality, gender, age, and level of interpersonal intimacy.

Another notable attempt at the distortion of A-ruk's identity in the Chinese-dubbed version lies in the different rationale taken by Por to defend A-ruk on her behalf. In Thai, Por argues that นังรักก็มันยังสวยอยู่นะคะแม่ แต่อีกคนดูพวกนี้มันตาอ๋ว มันมองไม่เห็นความสวยของนังรัก [Nung Rukky is still beautiful. It's just that this audience is blind. They don't see Nung Rukky's beauty is all] (Table 6.15, Box 3B). As per her reasoning, it is clear that A-ruk's beauty is deployed as a basis of her defence against the manager's decision to demote her friend. Here, beauty is another signifier of A-ruk's femininity as the physical quality is, in the context of Thailand, almost invariably ascribed to women. In other words, Por identifies A-ruk entirely as a woman by means of the use of the feminised vocative นังรักก็ [Nung Rukky], and the attribution of beauty, a female property, to her. In Chinese, conversely, Por's line of defence relies on the fact that 大哥过去一直都是我们的剧院的花旦台柱 [Big Brother was always our theatre's female star] (Table 6.15, Box 3C). On the surface, it might appear as if the Chinese Por is also acknowledging A-ruk's femininity, albeit through a different line of thought, i.e. her status as the female headliner of the theatre in place of her feminine beauty. Upon closer inspection, however, one might be able to spot the shift in the entire narrative which works toward complete masculinisation of A-ruk.

For one thing, the setting in which the three characters labour is re-established as 剧院 [jùyuàn], a theatre, or more specifically, a Peking Opera theatre. In He's (2014: 624) paper on transgender performance in contemporary Chinese films, he points out that thanks to the enduring Confucian tenets dictating the sex segregation "for the sake of patriarchal social order", in the domain of Peking Opera, "women were usually not allowed to play onstage and female impersonation was used in their place". Indeed, the term 旦 [dan] in 花旦台柱 [female star] itself is equated with female impersonation (ibid.). Although the Opera stage is no longer restricted solely to male performers owing to an effort on the Chinese government's part to keep the art alive by bringing it to schools to attract young people to the industry (Nan, 2018: online), in the public's imagination it is still remembered as an art form dominated by men.

Likewise, the four greatest Peking Opera artists in the history of modern Chinese theatre consist only of male performers, namely Mei Lanfang, Shang Xiaoyun,

Cheng Yanqiu, and Xun Huisheng, who are known exclusively for playing female roles. The quartet of female impersonators are highly acclaimed for their utterly convincing depiction of women. In 1951, Mei Lanfang attributed his successful career to the identification with women, which, to his mind, “was ‘the highest realm’ of the art of female impersonation and traditional Chinese performing art in general” (in He, 2014: 626). This, however, as asserted by He (2014: 626), does not translate into homosexuality being acceptable within the circle of Peking Opera. Simply put, a male Peking Opera actor must embody the soul of a woman on stage in order to channel femininity as convincingly as possible. Once offstage, however, he has to shed the female persona and realign himself with his innate masculinity. When A-ruk is heralded by her friend, Por, as the 花旦台柱 [huādàn táizhù: female star] (Table 6.15, Box 3C) of the theatre in the Chinese dubbing script, it is evidently imbued with the culturally specific connotations intended to rebrand A-ruk’s character from a *kathoey* performing in cabaret shows to a man impersonating women.

The reinvention of A-ruk’s identity in the Chinese version is emphasised once more in the manager’s subsequent response to Por’s argument. In Thai, the manager affirms that ฉันรู้ว่าคนดูเนี่ยเขาคิดยังไง [I know what the audience thinks] (Table 6.15, Box 4B), reiterating her previous statement that คนดูเขาอยากดูอะไรที่สบายตา [The audience wants to see something pleasing to the eye] (Table 6.15, Box 1B), at the same time refuting Por’s claim that นังรักก็มันยังสวยอยู่นะคะแม่ [Nung Rukky is still beautiful, Mom] (Table 6.15, Box 3B). In short, A-ruk’s loss of beauty resulting from her aging is flagged up as the cause of her dissipating appeal in the Thai original while her femininity and femaleness are tacitly accepted as a fact by both Por and the manager.

On the other hand, in the Chinese-dubbed version, A-ruk is dismissed as unwanted by the spectators without any apparent reason: the audiences simply do not want to see A-ruk dressed and perform as a belle (Table 6.15, Box 4C). The choice of the Chinese phrase 扮演美女 [dress and perform as a beautiful woman] is not coincidental since, individually, the Chinese character 扮 [bàn] can be defined as “disguise as, act, play the role of” and 演 [yǎn] as “act, play”. The

manager's counterargument is therefore in line with and, in fact, supplementary to Por's preceding declaration of A-ruk's duty as a female impersonator.

When A-ruk inquires what role she would be fit to play, the Thai new assignment ตลกหน้าม่าน [comic interlude] is for good measure rendered into Chinese as 丑角 [chôujué: clown]. Needless to say, 丑角 or the clown is one of the four major roles in Peking Opera. Again, by appointing A-ruk as 丑角, instead of any mere generic clown, the Chinese dubbing situates the three queer characters in the context of the Chinese Peking Opera in lieu of its original cabaret theatre setting. In the wake of the manager's suggestion for A-ruk's new responsibility, Por continues to defend her friend and to persuade the manager to change her mind until the manager declares the decision a dictum and leaves the office as laid out in Table 6.16 below. Another scuffle ensues after Jern, A-ruk's nemesis, walks in and provokes her two co-workers. Like the first fifteen minutes of the drama, this sequence of events has also been edited out.

Table 6.16: The sequent of scenes in which a handful of *kathoey* characters is present has been edited out

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Por:	แม่ แม่จะให้หนังรักมันเล่นตลกหน้าม่าน มันไม่ถนัดนะ [Mom, you will have Nung Ruk perform comedic interludes it's not Nung Ruk's strong suit.]	<b>Edited Out</b>
2	Manager:	ของอย่างนี้มันหัดกันได้ [It can be practiced.]	
3	Por:	แต่ว่า... [But...]	
4	Manager:	ไม่ต้องออกรับแทนหนังรักก็เลย ชันเป็น ผู้จัดการ ทุกคนต้องฟังคำสั่งของชัน [You don't have to speak up for Nung Ruky. I'm the manager. Everyone has to obey me.]	
5	Por:	แม่ขา แม่เปลี่ยนใจได้มัย [Mom... Mom can you change your mind?]	
6	Manager:	เธอก็รู้จักนิสัยของชัน [You know me.]	

7	After the manager leaves her office, Jern, another showgirl and A-ruk's nemesis, walks in and provokes them, thus another scuffle between Por and Jern ensues.	<b>Edited Out</b>
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the Chinese-dubbed version picks up the scene approximately one minute later, when Por is trying to comfort A-ruk following the latter's demotion.

Table 6.17: Por is trying to console A-ruk for the latter's demotion

	A	B	C
	Character	Thai original	Chinese dubbing
1	Por:	แม่อะใจแข็ง พุดยังงี้ๆ ก็ไม่ยอมเปลี่ยนใจ แต่ ฉันเชื่อว่านะ ถ้าแกเป็นตลกนะ แกก็ต้องเป็น ตลกที่เรีตที่สุดและสวยที่สุดในประเทศไทย เลยนักรัก [Mom is adamant. No matter what I said, she just wouldn't change her mind. But I believe if you play the clown, you are going to be the most fab and beautiful clown in Thailand, Nung Ruk.]	老板已经决定了 那他就不会改变心意 的 不过我相信 就算演丑角 你也一定 会演的惟妙惟肖 然后成为全国最有名 的丑角 [Boss already made the decision, so he will definitely not change his mind. But I believe even if you play the clown you will definitely play it vividly and then become the country's most famous clown.]
2	A-ruk:	ขอบใจนะป้อ ชีวิตฉันก็มีแกและก๊ชชเท่านั้นที่ จริงใจกับฉันนะ [Thank you, Por. There are only you and Chat [Chai] who are sincere with me in my life.]	谢谢你 阿波 我这辈子只有你跟我侄子 查特是真心在乎我的 [Thank you, Por. There are only you and Chatchai, my nephew, who sincerely care about me in my life.]
3	Por:	อ้อ อย่าคิดมากเลยนักรัก กลับไปพักผ่อนละ กัน แล้ววันนี้ก็คิดว่า แกโชคดีได้กลับไปหาพ่อ เร็วกว่าวันอื่น [Don't think too much, Nung Ruk. You should go back and take a rest. Just think today you are lucky you get to go back to your hubby earlier than usual.]	你就不要想太多了 你不是说查特马上 要参加职业考试 他要真考上了 你这个 叔叔以后就可以享清福了 [You shouldn't think too much. Didn't you say Chatchai is going to take a vocational test soon? If he really passes the test, you as his uncle can finally live a carefree and comfortable life.]
4	A-ruk:	อ้อมกอดอุ่นๆ ของชชคงทำให้ฉันสบายใจ ขึ้นอะเนาะ [Right. Chat's warm hugs should cheer me up.]	现在我最大的心愿 就是查特能够出人 头地 [My biggest wish now is that Chatchai can succeed.]

Further along in the first episode, as illustrated in Table 6.17 above, A-ruk introduces a new character into the narrative by mentioning for the first time the name of the new character, Chat. Por then backs it up by referring to Chat as A-

ruk's ผัว [pua: hubby] (Table 6.17, Box 3B). While ผัว can be literally translated as “hubby”, it must be noted that, beyond its immediate denotation, its usage in Thai is closer to the definition of the word “partner” with the requisite addition of the male sex, that is, the male “member of a married couple or of an established unmarried couple” (Oxford English living Dictionaries, 2017: online). Yet, in this context, when Por refers to Chatchai as ผัว [hubby], it is not to suggest that A-ruk and Chatchai are married; it simply points out the fact that they are a couple, most likely an unmarried one. When the verbal exchange between Por and A-ruk is doctored (Table 6.17, Boxes 2B, 2C, 3B, and 3C) and Chatchai is presented in Chinese by A-ruk herself as her 侄子 [zhìzi: nephew] (Table 6.17, Box 2C) in lieu of her ผัว [hubby], there is no question that A-ruk is required to be interpreted by the Chinese audience restrictively as a man who merely makes a living out of female impersonation in the Peking Opera industry.

To ensure this point is driven home, Por, in the Chinese-dubbed drama, is then heard reiterating the fact that A-ruk is a 叔叔 [shūshu: uncle] (Table 6.17, Box 3C) in relation to Chatchai, who is the topic of their discussion at the moment. Additionally, the content of their conversation is heavily manipulated to fit the replacement Chinese narrative in which Chat is A-ruk's nephew who is about to 参加职业考试 [take part in a vocational test] and the so-called ‘uncle’ is expecting to see ‘his nephew’ succeed in life so that ‘he’ can count on the younger relative for ‘a carefree and comfortable life’. The handling of subsequent scenes in the Chinese cut corroborates this newly constructed account for, after the scene changes, Chatchai is seen lying on a bed with a woman, while scheming to scam A-ruk out of her earnings. Chatchai is heard convincing Nok, his lover, that he will eventually leave A-ruk after he robs ‘that old *kathoe*y blind’, so that he can pay for Nok's dressmaking courses.

With A-ruk's surprise early return, it is revealed that the room they are snuggling up to each other is in fact A-ruk's house. A-ruk keeps calling out Chatchai to no avail since he is busy sneaking Nok and himself out of the house through the second storey window. Having succeeded in sending Nok on her way, Chatchai pretends to just come back from an errand. In the Chinese version, the scenes involving Chatchai and Nok have been predictably completely edited out and the

Chinese audience is cluelessly introduced to Chatchai right at the moment he walks back alone to the front door of the house.

The affirmation of A-ruk's identity is interfered with again in a later scene, when A-ruk hears the sound of a woman crying and wailing in distress. The *kathoey* showgirl immediately recognises the voice as belonging to her masseuse neighbour, Oradee, so she makes a beeline for the adjacent house where the clamour is taking place. Once on-site, A-ruk is quickly able to piece together the unfolding event and it appears that two men are trying to extort money Oradee owes them from her. A-ruk attempts to plead with the two gangsters not to hurt her friend on the grounds that she is pregnant. One of the two men, having insisted she repay the loan right then, turns his attention to A-ruk and questions แล้วนี่มึงเป็นใคร มึงมาอยู่อะไรด้วยเนี่ย อ้อ กะเทยอย่างมึงคงไม่ใช่ผัวมันนี่ [And who the fuck exactly are you? What are you doing poking your nose in our business? Ah, a *kathoey* like you must not be her husband]. In the original drama, the two hoodlums can instantly identify A-ruk as *kathoey* based on her look as well as speech style. The Chinese script, true to form, omits the part where one of the men acknowledges A-ruk's *kathoey* identity and reads as follows: 你又是谁 跑到这来干什么 难不成你这家伙是她的老公 [And who are you? Why are you here? Are you chap her husband?].

Toward the end of the first episode, after A-ruk decides to take Tawan, Oradee's toddler son, under her wing and raise him as her own child, she has her hair cut short in order to 'return' to her masculine appearance. Having seen A-ruk with short hair for the first time, Por exclaims หล่อมาก ถ้าไม่พูดนะ ก็ดูไม่ออกเลยว่า อดีตเคยเป็นสาว แซ่บอย่างฉันมาก่อน [So handsome! If you don't say it, nobody would be able to tell that you were such a bombshell like me in the past]. In response to her friend's surprise, A-ruk pledges that ฉันจะทำตัวให้แมนที่สุดเลยนะป้อ ฉันจะพยายามไม่ให้ลูกรู้ว่าอดีตของฉันเป็นอะไร ฉันจะทิ้งอดีตทั้งหมดไว้ที่นี่ [I will do my best to act like a man, Por. I will try not to let the child know what I was in the past. I will leave my past here]. Once more, any indicator of A-ruk's *kathoey* identity is covered up in the Chinese-dubbed version for Por's remarks are translated as 好帅啊 看 精神多了吧 短发多清爽啊 全新的你要从全新的发型开始 [So handsome. See? Much fresher now. Short haircut is just so refreshing. The new you has to start from a new haircut]. A-ruk's

responses are treated in a similar manner as they are dubbed into Chinese in a rather perplexing manner as 所以我才决定把头发给剪了的 既然我已经决定了要抚养这个孩子 就要让他过上更好的生活 [So that's why I decided to have my hair cut short. Since I already decided to raise this child, I will make sure he lives a better life].

As demonstrated by the examples given above, the Thai soap opera *Prajan See Roong* has been heavily manipulated when aired on Chinese TV, both linguistically and extralinguistically. On a linguistic level, all of the camp traits have been completely erased and doctored in an attempt to masculinise the *kathoey* characters, especially A-ruk, the leading *kathoey*. Extralinguistically, the deletion of early scenes portraying A-ruk's workplace is conducive to the subsequent change in the narrative, which is set in a Peking Opera theatre instead of the original cabaret theatre. With the change in the setting, A-ruk can thus be alternatively portrayed in the Chinese version as a male Peking Opera artist who is traditionally assigned to play female roles onstage but must embody innate masculinity offstage. In other words, A-ruk's female impersonation is treated as one of the responsibilities that 'he' is required to take on as part of 'his' job, although it does not necessarily reflect 'his' true identity.

While the analysis of the entire corpus consisting of two dubbed and two subtitled soap operas leads one to a general conclusion that the occurrence of linguistic and extralinguistic manipulation of queer portrayals in commercial dubbing is indeed prevalent, the misrepresentation of camp talk in the fansubbed content still should not be dismissed as inconsequential. Since camp talk, as theorised by Harvey (1998), serves more than to index a specific identity, the flattening of camp in fansubbing thus does more damage than simply skew the depiction of queer identities. The next chapter includes a detailed discussion of the linguistic and extralinguistic changes derived from the individual and comparative analysis of the chosen Chinese-translated soap operas.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

As the research project draws nearer to an end, this final chapter aims both to summarise the findings of the individual and comparative analyses as well as to weave them together into a coherent unit. In the first section of the chapter, to answer the overarching research question raised in Chapter 1, a brief summary of each chapter will be provided as a precursor to a detailed discussion that follows on the linguistic and extralinguistic manipulation in and between each chosen soap opera. Secondly, as a pointer to future research that could marry audiovisual translation and gender studies, suggestions for further academic contributions are put forward in the hope of bringing the largely underexplored crossdiscipline to the research community's attention and of bettering the understanding of its workings.

#### 7.1 Research findings

Although in the past decade AVT scholars have made some inroads into the crossdisciplinary arena of AVT and gender studies, the body of literature which bridges the gap between the two fields is still far from prolific, especially when it comes to such an underrepresented language combination as Thai and Chinese. In order to better understand the sociopolitical implications of the research topic, the context in which it is formulated is needed.

In Chapter 2, I have provided a compendium of queer landscapes in both Thailand and China. As discussed at length in the chapter, the visibility level of queer individuals in Thailand is considerably higher than that in the East Asian counterpart. Thailand does not only boast a large number of queer population, specifically *kathoey* and gay men, but it also allows for the frequent presence of queer identities in media. Indeed, hardly any Thai soap opera fails to feature a queer character, albeit almost exclusively for humorous effects. Over the past few years, however, a new take on queer representation in Thai media has been observed: queer identities have been portrayed in a more positive and nuanced

light in Thai TV productions such as *Beauty and the Bitches* and *Hormone the Series*, where their queerness serves as a conflict on which the stories centre. Meanwhile, in Thai cinema, depiction of queer characters still mostly revolves around their function as comic relief, with the exception being what Ünaldi (2011: 65) terms “The Second Wave of Thai Queer Cinema”, which refers to a series of Thai films, released between 2000 and 2007, that have approached queerness with authenticity.

In contrast to the high level of queer visibility on Thai soil, China, despite its officially stated indifference towards queer communities, has not been all too discreet about its suppression and censorship of queer expressions in public spaces and media. By reiterating in 2015 its old 1997 broadcast guidelines banning queer presence in media across the board, the Chinese government has emphatically held fast to its queer-intolerant policy. Homosexuality has, for good measure, been lumped in together with acts of sexual immorality like sexual harassment, sexual assault, and incest. In light of the expansive reach of digital media and technology, however, it is somewhat overambitious, if not impossible, of the Chinese media regulators to monitor every nook and cranny of the Internet, where queer expressions seem to have thrived under the Chinese government’s radar. Some examples of such queer visibility online include the distribution of Thai queer-themed audiovisual offerings with Chinese subtitles and the production of queer-themed documentaries by Queer Comrades, China’s independent queer webcast. Ironically, although China is the diametrical opposite of Thailand with regard to the freedom of queer self-expression, the two countries appear to converge in their failure to legally recognise and promote queer rights.

To further elaborate on the diverging backdrops of Thai and Chinese queer landscapes, Chapter 3 traces the evolution of the Chinese television industry and its broadcast policies that have a direct bearing on importation of foreign TV entertainment. Importantly, Thailand has slowly but gradually overtaken Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea as the primary feeder of audiovisual productions to Chinese television channels. The ubiquity of queer characters in Thai soap operas, which runs counter to the Chinese state’s ban on queer representation in media, ultimately begs the question, which will become the main point of discussion in the thesis, as to how Thai soap operas were authorised to be aired

in China to begin with. With the official censorship of queer portrayals on Chinese TV firmly in place, it is safe to assume, following the first research question, that some form of manipulation at both linguistic and extralinguistic levels must take place in the Chinese dubbing of Thai soap operas. It thus remains to be explored, not if, but how, the manipulation unfolds.

Meanwhile, the growing demand for Thai soap operas by the Chinese audience has outstripped the limited annual quota of foreign TV imports imposed by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) in China. This has led to a rise in the number of Thai soap operas, subtitled by amateur translators, in circulation exclusively online. The availability of Thai TV productions on the small screens, alongside those on the Internet, poses to the research project another relevant question as to if any linguistic and extralinguistic manipulation can be found in the Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas featuring queer characters as well. In order to critically gauge the degree of manipulation and intervention in both commercial dubbing and cybersubtitling, it is crucial to understand the practices of both AVT modes in China. Indeed, as revealed in Chapter 4, while the former is tightly controlled by the censorial board, cybersubtitling has not been subject to the matching degree of state monitoring and surveillance. In cyberspace, numerous fansubbing groups operate on a voluntary basis, subtitling TV shows gratis out of sheer passion and preference for a specific genre or actor. In order to ensure their survival, however, some of these collectives have lent the commercial sector their foreign language competency and subtitling skills.

After the presentation of the theoretical frameworks in previous chapters, Chapter 5 lays out the chosen corpus of two Chinese-commercially dubbed and two Chinese-fansubbed Thai soap operas as well as the methodological tool with which the corpus is analysed. The four audiovisual productions were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) they must feature at least one *kathoey* or gay male character, (2) their role must contribute to the progression of the storylines, and (3) the years in which they became available in China span from 2008 to 2015, so as to provide a longitudinal look into the treatment of queer characters over the years by the dubbing translators and fansubbers. Since the discourse analysis of the corpus focuses on queer identities, Harvey's (1998)

theorising of camp talk, a speech style unique to queer males, is employed as a methodological cushion against which the corpus is dissected.

In the commercially dubbed corpus, as predicted, both linguistic and extralinguistic interventions abound. In *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, released dubbed in China in 2009, camp talk is employed by Kong and Peera, the two gay men, to, first and foremost, mark their queerness and, secondly, to foreshadow their upcoming romance arc. Such romantically loaded terms like the verbs ชอบ [chorb: like] and สนใจ [sonjai: care] have been *platonised*, that is, translated in such a way which indicates that they are merely friends. For example, the former term is dubbed into Chinese as 接受 [jiēshòu: accept], and the latter as 交朋友 [jiāo péngyōu: make friends]. The two gay characters have been assigned rigidly gendered roles according to one of the most common heterosexual romance tropes in Thai soap operas, that is, Kong is assigned the role of the female, who is unfailingly ‘pursued’ by the male lead, while Peera is assigned that of the male, who is obliged to relentlessly ‘pursue’ the female lead. Their engagement in the binary gender roles is manifested through, again, the word choices of their camp talk, with expressions such as หลีก [nee: escape, run away] being dubbed *platonically* as 做朋友 [zuò péngyōu: make friends].

Midway through the show, the homoerotic nature of their relationship has increasingly surfaced. Other characters can be seen discussing their curious interactions and reaching the correct conclusion that they are, in fact, gay and a couple. In the Chinese-dubbed version, the revelatory dialogue exchanges have interestingly been manipulated not to erase the queerness of the two gay characters, but, rather, to deflect attention away from another queer character called Jay Toom, who is a *kathoey* keeper of Kong’s household, while maintaining the two gay men’s homosexual relationship intact in Chinese. It could be argued that the previous erasure of camp traits in the gay characters’ speech, which serve to hint at their forthcoming romance, was unintentionally caused by the dubbing translators’ failure to decode the romantic nuances of their camp talk. Still inexplicable, however, is the fact that Jay Toom’s queer identity has been glossed over in the two gay characters’ stead, when her identification in Thai as ตุ๊ด [toot: another, derogatory term for *kathoey*] is translated into Chinese as 聪明

[cōngmíng: clever]. As to the audiovisual presentation of the two homosexual characters, Kong has remarkably been dubbed into Chinese with a much deeper voice than his Thai soft-spoken pitch. Additionally, a scene in which physical intimacy between Kong and Peera is shown has been completely removed.

Similar to *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, the Chinese-dubbed *Prajan See Roong*, broadcast in China in 2015, has been heavily manipulated at both linguistic and extralinguistic levels, although, in the latter soap opera, the manipulation appears to be surgically targeted and intended. On a linguistical level, camp traits present in the verbal exchanges between A-ruk and other *kathoe*y characters have been extensively masculinised. For instance, นักรัก [Nung Rukky: Missus Rukky], which constitutes the practice of renaming, that is, “the adoption of male names marked as ‘queer’” (Harvey, 1998: 299), and which has been used by Por to address A-ruk, has been dubbed in Chinese as 大哥 [dàgē: big brother]. The conversation between Por and A-ruk, which revolves around A-ruk and her boyfriend, Chatchai, has been doctored, resulting in Chatchai being referred to as A-ruk’s 侄子 [zhizi: nephew] and A-ruk being his 叔叔 [shūshu: uncle]. Most notably, the complete masculinisation pivots on the scene resetting of A-ruk’s workplace. Originally a cabaret theatre, the scene has been rebranded in the Chinese version as a Peking Opera theatre, the professional domain in which female actors are not allowed, leaving female roles to be performed by male actors. The scene resetting has effected a narrative shift, whereby A-ruk is portrayed as a male Peking Opera actor, who must, onstage, externalise femininity and femaleness as convincingly as possible without succumbing to their allure offstage. In short, female impersonation is a responsibility required of A-ruk as part of his job as a Peking Opera actor, but it does not or, indeed, must not lead him astray to the gender-nonconforming path.

To recap, while linguistic and extralinguistic manipulation can be found in both of the Chinese-dubbed soaps, it is evident that, in *Prajan See Roong*, the interventions are much more strategic and calculated than those in *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*. In the latter TV broadcast, the linguistic and extralinguistic discrepancies mostly appear to be unintentionally caused by the dubbing team’s failure to recognise the coded allusions to the gay characters’ future union and translate accordingly. Once it becomes unmistakably clear that the two gay acts

are romantically involved, the Chinese dubbing script has been put back on track and followed the Thai semantic load rather faithfully. That *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter* was broadcast on regional TV channels – as opposed to national TV channels – might also explain why such queer portrayals were afforded in the face of the state-imposed prohibitions on queer representation in media, laid out in Chapter 3. This is, however, not to say that the leeway in depicting queerness allowed by the regional TV stations was limitless, since the scene in which Kong and Pee accidentally kiss each other on the lips has been edited out, not to mention that Jay Toom has not been acknowledged as *kathoey* as per the original plot. In 2015, six years after the broadcast of *Proong Nee Gor Ruk Ter*, it seems that the broadcast regulations have been more rigidly observed by the TV industry, seeing that the occurrence of linguistic and extralinguistic manipulation present in *Prajan See Roong*, despite being aired, too, on regional channels, has been surgically targeted and consistent throughout the entire show, leaving the Chinese viewers with no room to discern queer identities.

Conversely, the fansubbed soap operas have, as expected, suffered much less manipulation. Still, the linguistic discrepancies between Thai camp and its Chinese counterpart can be observed sporadically. In *Sapai Look Tung*, available online in China in 2012, camp talk as employed by Art, the central gay character, is initially given a negative load as its micro-level function, embodying his hostility towards women, on the one hand, and his lust for Choke, the object of his sexual obsession, on the other. His word choices, when directed at women whom he sees as a threat to the acquisition of Choke, are imbued with disdain and contempt. For instance, calling the women who hit on Choke ชะนี [chanee: gibbon], a metaphorical term for whorish women. In threatening to slap the women until their ปากฉีก [paak cheek: mouths rip], his camp also manifests in the form of hyperbole. Yet, when addressing Choke, Art, using camp talk, positions himself as the female role in a heterosexual romance, as evidenced, for example, by his pleading, an act deeply femininely gendered in the context of Thailand. In the Chinese subtitles, these camp characteristics have been watered down with the Thai phrase [slapping them [the women] until their mouths rip] being translated as 我还没跟她们颜色看呢 [I haven't taught them a lesson].

Art's initial use of camp as symptomatic of his hostility towards women and lust for Choke is significant, for in later episodes after he 'turns over a new leaf', his Thai camp has been toned down very notably. The Chinese subtitles, while faithful to the original, script-wise, do not do justice to the 'lessened' degree of camp in Thai. To be fairer, though, none of the camp traits have been lost in the subsequent Chinese-subtitled episodes, since it has never been clear that they exist in the first place. Despite the fact that linguistic representations of camp have not been recaptured in the Chinese version, it can be argued that they have been maintained, to a certain degree, in audiovisual signifiers like Art's mannerisms and speech tone.

In *Madam Dun*, first distributed online in China in 2016, camp utilised by two queer characters, Jay Miang and Geng, is taken to be expressive of their 'ambivalent solidarity', as they are engaged in a face-threatening and face-saving tug of war, where they are feigning respect for each other while they are, in fact, putting one another down. Additionally, their queerness is established with their exaggerated femininity, exhibited through the florid nature of their camp talk such as the terms of address เทยประถมนมมัธยมอย่างเก้ง [elementary school 'kathoey with high school boobs like Geng] and เทยมหาลัยกำมปูอย่างเจ้ [university 'thoey with crab claws like Jay]. Consistent with how camp has been handled in *Sapai Look Tung*, the instances of camp in *Madam Dun* have likewise been largely flattened as, for example, the aforementioned vocatives have been subtitled into Chinese as simply 我 [I, me] and 你这样的大人物 [an important figure like you], respectively. The attempts to compensate for the loss of camp elements by the subtitlers have not gone unnoticed as they took the liberty to translate Jay Miang's อุตส่าห์เป็นห่วงกะเทย [you even bothered to worry about kathoey] as 都是人妖之间的语言 [it's the language among kathoey]. However, without the camp elements consistently reproduced in Chinese, the over-translation of กะเทย [kathoey] into Chinese as 人妖之间的语言 or the so-called 'kathoey talk' could prove counterproductive, since it might be misattributed to merely the *intimidating way* in which Jay Miang addresses Geng, while disregarding the other characteristics of camp talk, which serve multi-faceted functions as, for example, a point of reference for their sense of belonging, or as a tool for the construction of theatricalised women.

Compared to the dubbed productions, the queer portrayals found in those subtitled by fans do not appear to have been affected by the stricter imposition of queer censorship over the years to the same degree as in commercial dubbing, seeing that none of the queer characters in the fansubbed soaps have been ostensibly masculinised or completely erased. This could indicate that the Internet does indeed provide a comparatively safer space in which queer identities can make an appearance. Still, the censorship and suppression of queer expressions in Chinese public discourse and media, which have led to the general public's nearly zero exposure to queerness, have wreaked more damage than meets the eye. Even in a relatively less censored ecosystem like the cyberspace, queer representations in the foreign productions still have oftentimes been misconstrued as a mere drag performance – as opposed to the queer individual's externalisation of their identity. This prevalent misunderstanding of queer individuals is attested by the fact that camp talk in the two fansubbed soap operas has been translated in a very similar manner, despite the translation being done by several people belonging to more than two different fansubbing groups.

In this regard, Harold's (2015) warning against the overestimation of the Internet in China should be heeded. As pointed out by the scholar in his paper on spaces and practices on the Chinese Internet, since the induction of the Internet in China, academics have tended to overplay its role as a game changer in the Chinese political arena, with some of them asserting that it would eventually lead to democracy in the East Asian nation, as substantiated by "academic studies [that] continued to study the impact the Internet *had to have* on China's politics" (ibid.: 21, original emphasis). Indeed, as illustrated above, even though fansubbing might be in a better position to elude the Chinese state's grip on freedom of expression, it hardly effects or drives any change in the queer population's favour on sociopolitical levels at all. The usage of Internet in China is ultimately best summed up by Harold (ibid.: 22, original emphasis) as follows:

Individual Internet users largely live their online lives by working *around* government strictures, not by fighting them, thus *creating their own hybrid* spaces out of a mix of online and offline settings that are largely free from government interference – not as sites of protest, but as sites for amusement that allow people to ignore (and forget) the government and its power over offline spaces



## 7.2 Future research

Since the introduction of audiovisual translation to the wider discipline of translation studies, a fair number of AVT scholars have focused their attention on the representation of gender issues through the audiovisual translation prism. For instance, certain contributions in Santaemilia's (2005) edited volume explore the manipulation of gender identities in audiovisual texts. De Marco's (2012) monograph sheds light on the depiction of gender in Hollywood and British cinema and on how audiovisual translation is complicit in carrying gender stereotypes over to the Spanish and Italian target cultures. Other works by scholars like Feral (2011a, 2011b) and Yuan (2016) uncover how the dubbing and subtitling of *Sex and the City* into their respective languages, that is, French and Chinese, reveal the extent to which certain gender values and beliefs are ingrained in the target cultures. Thus far, it should not escape one's notice that most gender-related contributions to the field of audiovisual translation work from English as the source language into other languages. In other words, too little attention has been paid to the translation of non-English audiovisual originals. Despite the worldwide dominance of Hollywood, the sociocultural impact of audiovisual productions from lesser-known cultures should not be ignored, seeing that the transnational flow of cultural products is no longer one-directional from Hollywood as *the* starting point to other locales. The popularity of Thai drama in China is a good case in point.

Thus, in an attempt to fill the academic gap, I have investigated the Chinese commercial dubbing and cybersubtitling of Thai soap operas featuring two types of queer characters, namely *kathoeys* and gay men, in this study. However, much work still needs to be done in order to further the understanding of the potential effects that each mode of audiovisual translation has on the public perception of queer identities, especially in a sociopolitical context in which queer self-expression is prohibited, like in China. Even the current research project itself can still be further expanded on by drawing on more recent Thai queer-themed productions which have increasingly portrayed queer characters in a more positive and multi-dimensional light. Also, with the growing popularity of Thai Y series in China, they would prove to be valuable research material on which to work, in addition to being highly relevant and complementary to the current thesis.

Finally, an audience reception-based study would be a most welcome addition to the dearth of academic repertoire pertinent to the manipulation of gender identities through audiovisual translation, in an attempt to gain an understanding of how the manipulation has affected the viewers' reception and perception of marginalised identities.

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