

Chapter 3

Transnational Media Products from Thailand and the Philippines to Vietnam

This chapter analyzes factors that facilitate the transnational flows of Thai and Filipino soap operas to Vietnam. The first element is policy established by the governments of Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam which support media development. The second is the changing cultural context of Vietnam, with the Korean Wave in ebb and Vietnamese dramas not yet satisfying Vietnamese audiences' taste. These situations lead to competition between different TV channels in Vietnam in searching for and exploiting more foreign series to satisfy the entertainment demand of audiences. The flows of Thai and Filipino soap operas to Vietnam magnify the regional market for culture, and increase regional circulation for cultural commodities, which contribute to the promotion of regional integration in the economy of the coming of AEC.

3.1 Cultural Industries in Thailand and the Philippines

3.1.1 Thailand

As mentioned above, Thai cultural industry basically serves its domestic demand. According to Siriyuvasak (2010), the Thai government has not paid attention on the export of cultural products; and therefore there has not been much coherent public policy supporting this area. The Thai government established three departments which take responsibility for promoting the film industry (Siriyuvasak 2010). Firstly, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports is in charge of making a venue for international film screening and marketing, and for promoting tourism through destination filming in Thailand. Secondly, the Ministry of Commerce is responsible for promoting the export of Thai film and deals with the issue of intellectual right and property. Thirdly, the Department of Contemporary Arts and Culture, Ministry of Culture is tasked with distributing funds to support independent directors and the production of documentary film (NECTEC 2008). Moreover, media content is politically controlled by the

government, and media independence is deeply affected when it is monopolized either by big corporations and the state or controlled under a state sponsor (Siriyuvasak 2010).

Nevertheless, since the 2000s when Thai movies started to become internationally recognized at international film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Hong Kong, Busan, and Singapore, the government awakened to a new economic opportunity and hence began export film and television dramas. This led to the enactment of a new law in 2008, the Film and Video Act by the National Legislative Assembly (Siriyuvasak 2010). This new legislation detached the Film Commission which is responsible for regulating and providing license for film companies from the Police Department and moved it to the Ministry of Culture. In order to promote the export of cultural products, the Thai government attempted to lay out many strategies on capacity improvement and built an international production center under the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (Siriyuvasak 2010).

The turn of the 21st century marked restructuring of media in Thailand when legal framework supporting this area improved along with the process of privatizing and commercializing the media (Siriyuvasak 2010). Specifically, the passing of the new Frequency Allocation Act of 2000 contributed to the liberalization of the broadcasting and telecommunications industries, and made these two fields to be the focus of government policies since 2001. Media organizations began to privatize in 2003 under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. For instance, the Communications Authority of Thailand and the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand become public companies in the stock market; however the government still possesses major shares in these organizations (Siriyuvasak 2010). In addition, the commercialization of state television was further implemented. As an example, in 1997 the prime-time slot on Channel 5 owned and operated by the Royal Thai Army was opened to private concession (Siriyuvasak 2010).

Notably, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra also started policies for the development of creative industries by establishing some organizations responsible for knowledge management and creative economy such as: Thailand Creative and Design Center (TCDC), and Thailand Knowledge Park (TKpark) (Siriyuvasak 2010). This direction was reinforced and improved by the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva in 2009 (Siriyuvasak 2010). His government announced the “Creative

Thailand” policy to cope with the recession of the domestic and global economies (Siriyuvasak 2010). The target of the policy is to develop the creative economy in six areas: “cultural heritage and bio-diversity, arts and culture, handicraft, media and entertainment industries and software, design and product innovation, promotion and support of the creative economy” (Siriyuvasak 2010: 17).

As a result of the policies supporting cultural industry, Thai cultural products have been prevalent in intra-Asia flows of popular culture. While Thai movies have gained recognition of East Asian and global audiences since the 2000s Thai soap operas have entered the intra-Asia flows very recently. However, Thai soap operas have remarkably gained some success in the market of Southeast Asia and mainland China because of a demand for alternative tastes (www.mthai.com 2015). Thai TV series have been improved in many aspects which contribute to win Thai audiences’ hearts and can now make a stand in Asian audiences’ mind (www.mthai.com 2015). The export of Thai TV series is mainly conducted by Exact and Scenario drama production, two of GMM-Grammy¹’s subsidiaries (Siriyuvasak 2010). The companies own the copyright of TV dramas; therefore they can sell the right and reproduce the TV series for local and regional consumption.

According to Amporn (2008), the broadcast pattern that Thai TV series is like Latin telenovelas, in that they usually run for about three months, compared to American series which can last for years. Thai *lakorns* are usually broadcasted every night at prime time which begins around 8.30 after the news. For details, Amporn (2008) indicates that there are six free-to-air channels² in Thailand, but just three channels among them show prime time series: channel 3, 5 and 7. Channel 5 broadcasts an hour-long episode; while the other two channels show two-hours episodes including commercials. Channels 3 and 7 air two or three episodes usually scheduled on Monday-Tuesday, Wednesday-Thursday, and Friday-Sunday. Notably, they premier three series

¹ GMM-Grammy is “a leader in fully integrated unique entertainment platform in Thailand comprised of music, media, movie, broadcasting and other biz who can produce and deliver high quality local contents in Thailand and expand into the region with full commitment to social development support”. The GMM Phenomena, (Online) <http://www.gmmgrammy.com/new2014/en/index.html> (Accessed 2014, Dec 31).

² Six free TV channels in Thailand are channel 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and TITV. Channel 9 and 11 are controlled by government. Channel 3 and 7 are given licenses to private companies by the government. Channel 5 is owned and operated by the Royal Thai Army. The sixth channel TITV has recently been turned to become state property. Channel 9 and 11 hardly broadcast dramas “perhaps because they are under the control of the government which subsidizes the channels for education”. Amporn Jirattikorn (2008). “Pirated” transnational broadcasting: The consumption of Thai soap operas among Shan communities in Burma, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 23 (1), pp. 30-62

simultaneously at any given time. Dramas on Channel 7 are known as market-oriented, which can be exemplified as “full of ‘cat fighting’ scenes, and present a visual grammar of lavish and luxurious settings, over-exaggerated acting, and melodramatic plots”; whereas the soaps in Channel 3 are assessed as more “realistic”, and “the acting and settings are more ‘natural’; and dramas aired on Channel 5 are seen as more “educated” to middle-class audience” (Amporn 2008: 44). Nowadays, as the Thai government promotes a transition from analog television broadcasting to digital television there are more paid channels being established and given licenses such as CH1, CH8 or GTH. Those channels also produce and broadcast *lakorn*.

It is shown that Thai soap operas have major distinctive characteristics. Firstly, according to Amporn (2008), stories in Thai *lakorns* are mostly about a romantic relationship between a poor girl and a rich boy; and the evil ex-girlfriend of the rich guy or a detractor who is usually the rich guy’s elder sister intervenes in their path to happiness. Thai dramas also deal with issues of social change and social conflict in accordance with the lives of audiences in an urban area. Some dramas have plots which tell stories of how the new middle class in urban areas copes and deals with the struggle to gain success in life and love while retaining their souls. Others depict the changing role of women as lovers, mothers and businesswomen. Additionally, many Thai series also deal with historical themes. Nowadays the plots which portray the lives and loves of younger people in urban settings have increased popularity in many Thai dramas. Secondly, Thai TV series often portray the upper-class of Thai society which is shown through male lead characters. They are always obviously wealthy, but it is often vague for the audience to see how they make money (www.mthai.com 2015). Notably, most leading actors are from affluent families. They usually own luxurious houses, expensive automobiles, and fancy décor, and also hold high ranks in companies (Amporn 2008, www.mthai.com 2015). It is must that the leading male characters are always the most handsome in the series, and intelligent with a high level of education. All of these features make the leading male actors highly attractive. They are involved in situations leading to love, hate, and murder and so on which contribute to create interesting stories and get more viewers (www.mthai.com 2015). For leading female characters in Thai *lakorns*, they are very beautiful and sweet, but often in trouble and have poor lives (www.mthai.com 2015). Thirdly, there are not many love scenes in Thai soap operas.

Kissing scenes and sex scenes are limited unless the couple in the series get married (Amporn 2008). Lastly, Thai series usually refers to the Buddhist morality where good always wins over evil, which can be exemplified by looking at the endings where cruel people or those who do bad things are punished or forgiven and the heroes are let to live a happy life (Amporn 2008).

3.1.2 The Philippines

As written previously, Pasadilla and Lantin Jr. (2005) indicate that there are three government regulatory bodies facilitating the cultural industry in the Philippines, including: The Department of Telecommunications and Communications (DOTC); The National Telecommunications Commission (NTC); and the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB). These bodies implement different tasks to support the industry. First, the DOTC is the main government agency responsible for the supervision and regulation of the industry. This department establishes policies and plans for the development of the industry. They also have the right to grant franchises, grants, licenses, permits and certificates to TV or radio stations. Second, the NTC has functions involving policy implementation and regularly control in three areas: telecommunications, broadcast undertakings and radio spectrum. Within this agency there is a Broadcast Department which is directly attached to the duty of the development of the TV and radio industries. This department includes two divisions which are the Program Division and the Technical Division. The Program Division is responsible for implementing guidelines and directions which are instituted by the NTC in order to regulate radio and TV broadcasting programs. Program development, market studies and strategies to promote public interest have been given to the division. The Technical Division is tasked with the implementation of guidelines and directs the NTC on the technical operations of radio and TV stations. Furthermore, this division also does developmental and improvement research, and recommends standards and services which contribute to the strengthening of the technical capabilities of radio and TV stations. Third, the MTRCB is entrusted to examine all motion pictures and TV programs, manage production and distribution of motion pictures and TV programs, and categorize all of them.

In accordance with the mentioned statement, in the Philippines, the competition in the cultural industry, especially in the television broadcasting sector lies on capturing

a wide base of TV watchers; and among 21 local TV stations and five major broadcasting firms, two local companies ABS-CBN and GMA capture most TV viewers (Pasadilla and Lantin Jr. 2005). In order to compete in attracting more TV watchers, Filipino broadcasting companies who have their own channels are very active in expanding the market around the world for their TV programs. This creates advantages for Filipino soap operas be exported transnationally. The broader the areas their TV programs cover, the more competitive strength the TV companies gain. It is their way to consolidate viability and attract advertising agencies (Pasadilla and Lantin Jr. 2005).

Filipino television series is locally called as “Teleserye”, “Teledrama”, or “Pinoy drama”. It is defined as a kind of melodramatic serialized fiction (www.worldlibrary.org 2015, www.poklat.com 2015). In the Philippines, soap operas are broadcasted in prime-time five days a week, and usually replay during weekends (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). They last from three months to a year, or even longer, depending on their ratings (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). They fascinate a large of audience which crosses age and gender lines in Philippines, and also get the highest advertising rates on Filipino television (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). Characteristically, Filipino dramas usually portray love stories happening between a Cinderella and her Prince charming – two different people from opposite worlds; and it will have the presence of third parties which challenge the main couple’s love (www.poklat.com 2015). While compelling love stories, Filipino dramas stay true to core family values by depicting emotions and behaviors between family members (www.interaksyon.com 2013).

In the Philippines, *teleseryes* are produced mostly by ABS-CBN, GMA network and TV5 (tinviet.net.vn). Some of them are produced by Tape Inc., Dreamscape Entertainment Television, VIVA Entertainment, and Star Cinema (www.pinoyexchange.com 2015). ABS-CBN is considered as a “pioneer” in exporting Filipino dramas to the international market. From the early 2000s, this network exported the series “*Pangako Sa’yo*” (*The Promise*) to Singapore, Indonesia, Cambodia, and China and also to some African countries (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). According to the writing on the website www.tuldvnhloc.wordpress.com (2010), *The Promise* was very popular in Cambodia, and at the time was aired, created the interesting effect of many Cambodian male children being given the name of male lead character in the

series, *Angelo*. Notably, when the drama was broadcasted in Zambia, it became a daily chatting topic between families, friends, and even neighbors. The success of *The Promise* motivated ABS-CBN to invest into the website of ABS-CBN International Sales which facilitates the promotion of Filipino series before exporting them abroad (tinviet.net.vn 2014). *Lobo* (*She – Wolf: The Last Sentinel*), *Tayong Dalawa* (*The Two of Us*), *Dahil May Isang Ikaw* (*Destined Hearts*), or *Walang Hanggan* (*My Eternal*) are some dramas which successfully attracted a large number of international audiences after being exported by ABS-CBN (tinviet.net.vn 2014). GMA network started exporting the drama *Boys Next Door* to South Korea, and then broadened their market to Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Hawaii, USA (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). Habang *Kapiling Ka* (*While I'm with you*), *Impostora* (*The Impostor*) and *Dyesebel* are some series which GMA exports and has achieved reputation with abroad (tinviet.net.vn 2014). TV5 began to export their dramas later than ABS-CBN and GMA, and they have recently promoted the export of their series abroad. TV5 series have been aired in several countries across the globe. Their hit primetime dramas: *Babaeng Hampaslupa* (*The Poor Heiress*), *MgaNagbabagang Bulaklak* (*Roses and Thorns*), and *Glamorosa* have been their top series which broadcast on free-television in Cambodia, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and Nigeria (www.interaksyon.com 2013). Filipino dramas are often dubbed into other languages, and sometimes have English or other foreign subtitles when imported to different markets (www.worldlibrary.org 2015).

Filipino soap operas have achieved international recognition from international award-giving bodies (www.worldlibrary.org 2015). Filipino TV companies use international awards as a “lever” to conveniently export their dramas to other countries (tinviet.net.vn). ABS-CBN has gained the most of awards and nominations. Their success started with *Lobo*, which won the category for the best television series in the 30th BANFF World Television Festival (tinviet.net.vn 2014). Several dramas produced by ABS-CBN were also nominated in the International Emmy for television soap opera category, including *Dahil May Isang Ikaw* (*Destined Hearts*) and *Kahit Isang Saglit* (*A Time For Us*); and recently, ABS-CBN's soap opera *Magkaribal* (*Rivals*) was nominated at the 2011 New York Festival TV and Film Award (tinviet.net.vn 2014).

3.2 The Media and Cultural Industry in Vietnam

In Vietnam, all forms of the media are under the control of the government. According to the Law on Media dated 28 December 1989 which was amended by Law 12-1999-QH10 passed by Legislature X of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at its 5th Session on 12 June 1999, the Vietnamese mass media includes printed media (newspaper, magazines, current affair news, new bulletins from new agencies); audio media (radio programs); visual media (television programs, audio and visual programs made by various technical means); and electronic media (the computer information network). Notably, the law emphasizes important responsibilities that media in Vietnam need to follow. Besides providing information on domestic and world current affairs with the interests of the country and its citizens, media is also responsible for satisfying wholesome cultural demands of people and widening mutual understanding between countries and their people (Vietnamese National Assembly 1999).

As this study focuses on visual dramas, it mainly looks at visual media - television and electronic media – and the internet which makes it advantages for Vietnamese audiences consume foreign cultural products. The International Telecommunication Union's statistic (2002) indicates that approximately ten million TV households, which accounts for 80 per cent of Vietnamese homes, own a television set; and the density is higher in urban areas, with 96 per cent of households owning TVs. TV penetration of households is counted at 96 per cent in Hanoi and 92 per cent in Ho Chi Minh City. Moreover, besides free TV channels in Vietnam people can easily watch many pay-TV channels through cable, satellite and terrestrial digital signals. As the statistic of the Ministry of Information and Communication shows, the number of pay-TV subscribers notably went up from 2.5 million in 2010 to 3.7 million in 2011 (www.thanhniennews.com 2013). The annual revenue of this sector recorded in 2011 was US\$2 billion and is forecasted by the US Commercial Service in Vietnam to gain an annual growth rate of 17 per cent through 2015 (www.eurotvguild.com 2015). The Ministry of Information and Communication found that Vietnam had 26 cable television service providers by October 2013, which between them serve 13.5 per cent of all households with cable TV (www.eurotvguild.com 2015). It can be seen that pay-TV

channels have become popular in Vietnam, which brings a good environment for a large number of people to be able to consume diverse TV programs.

The largest television network in the country is the national broadcaster Vietnam Television (VTV), which transmits the free-to-air channels of VTV1 – VTV9 (no VTV7, VTV8), and available internationally via satellite. VTV also operates the largest cable network VCTV (now known as VTVcab) and a DTH (Direct to Home) satellite service. This network, followed by Ho Chi Minh City Television (HTV), Hanoi TV (HCTV) and Saigon Tourist Cable Service (SCTV), carries free-to-air channels, and offers 16 Vietnamese subscription channels and about 45 local and international channels covering many fields of science, entertainment and sport (www.eurotvguild.com 2015). Another important pay-TV platform is operated by Vietnam Multimedia Corporation (VTC). It is a Vietnamese state-owned corporation under the Ministry of Post and Telematics. On 2 June 2015 VTC was transferred to be under the management of The Radio Voice of Vietnam – a national radio broadcaster (english.mic.gov.vn. 2015). VTC also provides a DTH satellite service and is the only provider of digital terrestrial television (DTT) in Vietnam.

In terms of the Internet, a policy for internet development has been implemented by the Vietnamese government since 1986 to put the country on the path of economic reform and social transformation with the recognition of the crucial role of science and technology (Boymal, Martin and Dieu Lam 2007). Bezanson (1999) reviewed that information technology (IT), biotechnology, new materials, and automation were the four important high-technology programs chosen by the government to sustain the economic development of the nation. Among these four national programs, Vietnam paid the greatest attention to the IT program (Boymal, Martin and Dieu Lam 2007). Therefore the Vietnamese telecommunication sector experienced rapid modernization and development which contributed to the popularization of internet usage in the country (Boymal, Martin and Dieu Lam 2007). The country has seen a steady increase in internet users and the number of domestically produced websites, and the technical resources which provide internet connections have also been expanded (Cimigo 2011).

The Vietnam Internet Network Information Center (VNNIC) indicates that the rate of internet penetration in Vietnam was 25.7 per cent by the end of 2009, which is higher than Asia's average of 20 per cent (Quinn and Kierans 2010). These two authors

emphasize that internet penetration in Vietnam is similar to countries like China, the Philippines and Thailand, but it has undergone a faster growth than most other countries in the region. The number of internet user density is higher in the two biggest cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City compared to smaller cities. The statistic provided by the World Bank shows that out of a population of 88.6 million in 2008, Vietnam had around 20 million internet users (Quinn and Kierans 2010). A year later in 2009 the number of users went up to 22.7 million, according to the Internet World Statistic (Quinn and Kierans 2010). There is a difference for internet usage by age in Vietnam. For young people (15-24 years old), the percentage of internet usage is nearly universal at 95% (Cimigo 2011). For 25-34 year olds, two thirds use the internet, whereas for older age groups, internet usage is lower (Cimigo 2011). It is indicated that entertainment is a “key field of internet usage in Vietnam” with nearly half of internet users spending time watching movies and series online (Cimigo 2011: 23). The availability of internet, especially in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City facilitates people who live in those two huge urban areas to diversify the sources from which they consume foreign media products.

Looking at cultural industry (TV series production) in Vietnam, it is shown that there are 600 governmental and private studios which are given license to produce TV drama; and among the 600 studios there are 40 studios directly co-operating with the two biggest governmental studios, VFC-VTV³ and TFS-HTV⁴ (www.vhttdlkv3.gov.vn 2010). In fact, the number of series produced by private studios has recently increased, accounting for 80 per-cent of air time on most popular TV channels (www.sggp.org.vn 2015). According to a calculation shown in an article posted on an online version of Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper (2015), in 2014 Ho Chi Minh City Television (HTV) broadcasted more than 1,000 TV drama episodes, but their own studio TFS produced only 180 episodes and the remaining ones were produced by private studios. Also in this year, VFC produced 300 TV series episodes while private studios produced 800 episodes which were broadcasted on two channels, VTV1 and VTV3. The article reveals that nowadays in Vietnam the two private studios whose dramas have regular

³ VFC stands for Vietnam Television Center which belongs to Vietnam Television (VTV). VFC.com.vn (1997). “Giới thiệu VFC (Introduction about VFC)”, (Online) vfc.vtv.vn/gioi-thieu-vfc. (Accessed 2015, May 20)

⁴ TFS is an abbreviation for Ho Chi Minh City Television Film Studios attached to Ho Chi Minh City Television (HTV). HTV is managed by the People’s Committees of Ho Chi Minh City. TFS.com.vn (nd). “Giới thiệu về TFS (Introduction about TFS)”, (Online) <http://tfs.com.vn/index.php/gioi-thieu>. (Accessed 2015, May 20)

show times on some popular channels are Song Vang Company and M & T Pictures. In 2014, Song Vang Company produced 600 TV series episodes shown on VTV, HTV and THVL⁵; and this year the company expects to produce an additional 100 drama episodes to be broadcasted on HTV7⁶ (www.sggp.org.vn 2015). M & T Pictures produced 600 episodes aired on SCTV14⁷, HTV and THVL in 2014; and this year they will also increase the number of episodes because of more show time given on HTV7 (www.sggp.org.vn 2015) .

The participation of both governmental and emerging private studios in producing series contributes to implementation of the scheme given in Decree No. 54/2010/ND-CP announced on May 21, 2010 which states that Vietnamese series can cover at least 30% of total dramas to be broadcast on television (www.sggp.org.vn 2015). As such the solution to cover the remaining air time for series on television in Vietnam is to exploit the source of foreign TV dramas. Therefore nowadays, Vietnamese audiences can watch a diversity of series imported from Korea, China, Thailand, Philippines and India on television. In addition, it is indicated that the quality of Vietnamese TV series has not yet been appreciated by domestic audiences who find the content boring, the stories undramatic, the action unskillfully executed, the name uninteresting, and the soundtrack unattractive (www.vhttdlcv3.gov.vn 2010). This contributes to a tendency of Vietnamese to consume better quality foreign dramas, and leads to competition between TV channels to import and air foreign dramas in order to satisfy the demand of the audiences.

3.3 The Emerging of Transnational Thai and Filipino Media Products in Vietnam

It can be found that Thailand and the Philippines have their own systems to encourage the export of their media products for regional consumption. This is a necessary condition for Thai and Filipino cultural products entering transnational markets. A sufficient condition depends on the situation and demand in destinations where their products are imported. Vietnam is a destination where Thai and Filipino TV series have recently gone. The Vietnamese government supports the development of

⁵ THVL is a local channel in Vinh Long province – a deep southern province in Vietnam. The channel belongs to Vinh Long Television Station which is managed by Vinh Long province's People's Committees.

⁶ HTV7 is a channel belonging to Ho Chi Minh City Television (HTV).

⁷ SCTV14 is a channel in the system of Saigon Tourist Cable Service Company (SCTV).

media (television and internet) in order to encourage the media to implement its functions of serving citizens' cultural demands and broadening the understanding between countries as stated in the Law for Media in Vietnam. It creates opportunities for people to approach and consume foreign cultural products, and also opens competition in the field of media to satisfy the cultural demand for people. The government's encouragement leads to the booming of cable, satellite and terrestrial television and internet along with the situation that the quality of domestic cultural products has not yet been able to please domestic audiences. These are the sufficient conditions which make it advantageous for Thai and Filipino dramas to enter Vietnam and are why such dramas are currently known among a number of audiences in the nation.

Remarkably, the current cultural context in Vietnam has changed when the powerful Korean Wave is no longer "hot" to audiences. The Korean craze has been indicated as to be cooling down and is predicted to decline over the next few years (www.koreatimes.co.kr 2015). According to a survey done by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE), sixty percent of 3,600 people asked in nine countries, including China, Japan, Thailand, the United States and France, believe that it is difficult for the Korean Wave to keep up its international success (www.koreatimes.co.kr 2015). The decline can be attributed to foreign audiences' tiredness of "standardized content" in Korean music, movies and dramas (www.koreatimes.co.kr 2015). The Korea Times (2015) elaborately shows that K-pop "idols" and teen singers expose similar hypersexual dancing, lyrics and clothing. Korean series repeatedly tell stories such as adulterous affairs, revenge and secrets about the birth or identity of characters.

As other countries in Asia, Vietnam has been under the influence of the Korean Wave as many Korean media products have been broadcasted on TV channels for a long time. However, like audiences in other Asian countries, Vietnamese audiences now are no longer interested in the "standardized" content shown in Korean cultural products. Therefore, the Korean Wave has gradually lost its unique status in Vietnam. In addition, the entertainment taste of Vietnamese audiences has rapidly changed with a demand for consuming more new and creative cultural products. TV channels in Vietnam quickly catch this trend to establish competitive strategies in order to capture

more viewers. This is an advantageous condition for Thai and Filipino dramas to flow to Vietnam.

3.3.1 Thai and Filipino Dramas on Television

Thai and Filipino TV series first emerged in Vietnam in 2011. Nowadays they are broadcasted on many pay-TV channels such as Let's Viet-VTC9, Today TV-VTC7, or Gaiatri TV-VCTV1, etc. However, according to the information provided by informants who watch those series on television, all of them see Thai *lakorn* on Let's Viet and Today TV and follow Filipino *teleseryes* only on Today TV. Let's Viet does not import Filipino dramas while Today TV imports both Thai and Filipino soap operas. Mr. Lam Chi Thien – Director of International Media Joint Stock Company (IMC) which is responsible for exploiting, developing and managing content aired on Today TV indicates that while Singaporean TV dramas portray a mix of Western and Chinese culture, Korean series repeatedly show stories of rich families and love between rich and poor people which is not really close to the daily lives of Vietnamese audiences, and many channels are already full of Chinese series; Thai and Filipino TV soap operas are the answer for Today TV when their stories are close to the daily lives of the majority of the audience and they depict many cultural similarities (www.doanhnhansaigon.vn 2015).

It can be seen that Let's Viet and Today TV give specific airing times for Thai and Filipino TV series every day which make it advantages for audience watch and follow those dramas in their leisure time. However, the show times for Thai and Filipino series are variably scheduled monthly or yearly according to the broadcasting plans of those two channels. Currently, Thai and Filipino soap operas can compete with Korean TV series to be broadcasted on primetime at 19:30 on Let's Viet and at 20:00 on Today TV.

According to the observation of Phan Hieu, a 19-year-old female from Hanoi, Thai *lakorns* aired on Let's Viet are more updated than those aired on Today TV. In fact, before Thai dramas are brought to audiences, both Let's Viet and Today TV have to implement translation, dubbing and post-production for the series. The processes usually take time, and this causes the series to be old and out of date when they are aired on those two channels. Sharing the same opinion of the situation, Linh, a 28-year-old female, translator working for Let's Viet revealed that:

“The dramas are new when they are imported by Let’s Viet. However, after finishing translation dubbing and post-production those series may be old by the time they are broadcasted on the channel. In addition, the series aired on the channel need to be in order according to the broadcasting plan announced by the manager before. For instance, after a drama ends there may be two other series waiting to be aired next. The two series are arranged to broadcast in a certain order. The first expected soap opera for next airing may be older than the second one. Nonetheless, it is impossible to skip the first one. The first scheduled series is still broadcasted in accordance with the plan passed previously.”

Other translator members working for Let’s Viet show that the import of Thai dramas is a strategy to diversify foreign TV series programs on the channel, which contributes to an increase in the number of viewers for the channel. The staff emphasizes Thai *lakorn* as an alternative choice for the audience as they become increasingly bored with Korean soap operas. One of the staff, Phuong, a 23-year-old female, shared how her mother preferred to watch Thai series more than Korean ones. Phuong’s mom felt difficulty relating to Korean dramas where everything looked modern and luxurious with many giant houses and different brands of cars and cellphones. She found that Thai series depict a more relatable living context with the weather in Thailand being hot like Ho Chi Minh City, market images being quite similar to those seen in Vietnam, and especially everything not being too “sparkling” as it is in Korean series. The closeness in the living conditions (hot weather) is one of the factors that makes Thai *lakorn* more popular in the south of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City) than in the north of Vietnam (Hanoi), according to the point of view of Let’s Viet staff. Moreover, the staff members also added that Thailand promotes its image as an attractive and very interesting destination for international travelers. Many Vietnamese people go to travel in Thailand and get to know about the country; hence it is easier for them to welcome Thai *lakorn* when it is aired on the channel. As the information provided by Van who also works for Let’s Viet shows, the rating for Thai dramas on this channel is quite good; but sometimes it fluctuates because it depends on the taste of audience. Van emphasizes that the Thai dramas which gain high ratings are the ones which are very dramatic and can be exemplified as having situations were women rob

boyfriends and husbands from other women and women fight each other for one man. Additionally, according to Linh's information, Thai dramas imported and shown on Today TV are more dramatic and fit better with the audience's taste than those on Let's Viet. This is a partial cause for the rating fluctuation of Thai series on Let's Viet.

Remarkably, this year Thai *lakorn* were aired on VTV3- one of the free-to-air national channels in Vietnam. It aired two series: *My Darling Fake Husband* (*Khun Samee Karmalor Tee Ruk*) and *A New Glib Man* (*Pla Lai Pai Daeng*). *My Darling Fake Husband* was first aired on 11th February. This series had 33 episodes and was on shown at 12:00 a.m. from Monday to Friday every week. After the drama ended, *A New Glib Man* was introduced to audience. It had 34 episodes and was aired from 2nd May. It was also shown during the same show time as *My Darling Fake Husband*.

For Filipino dramas, the interviewed audiences see these dramas only on Today TV because this channel concentrates on importing a number of Filipino series and is considered "a pioneer" in discovering and bringing those dramas to Vietnam. Similar to Let's Viet, Today TV focuses on the import of Filipino soap operas aiming to diversify foreign drama programs and increase competitive strength in attracting more viewers. Moreover, they give many different show times for Filipino series every day which are convenient for audiences to comfortably choose their own watching time. According to the statement of the Director of IMC, Mr. Lam Chi Thien, at the time Today TV started importing Filipino dramas none of the TV channels in Vietnam had exploited those series before; Today TV hence has been able to choose good Filipino series with acceptable prices. The importing of Filipino dramas to Vietnam and their broadcast on Today TV contribute to making this channel "distinctive" among a number of pay-TV channels in Vietnam. According to Mr. Thien, a rating statistic provided by market researching companies in Vietnam states that Today TV captures 80 per cent of audiences in the big cities of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, and Can Tho; and on the national scale the number of audiences watching Today TV in primetime is only less than VTV3 (www.doanhnhansaigon.vn 2015).

Talking about the import of Filipino dramas of Today TV, Tam, a 23-year-old female, working at Master Service Company which co-operates with Today TV and takes responsibility for translating Filipino series aired on this channel, shared that:

“Today TV imports many Filipino series because the time for assigning the dramas is longer than Korean and Thai soap operas. For example, when the channel buys copy right of a series it will have a contract between Today TV and their partners. In the contract, there is an article which regulates the length of time the series is permitted to show on the channel. The time is included the time it takes Today TV to implement translation, dubbing, and post-production for the series before showing it on the channel. If Today TV cannot accomplish all of the processes for the drama to be aired according to the time mentioned in the contract then the channel will have to give up broadcasting the series and bear with the money lost for buying copy right of the drama. Normally, the time for assigning Filipino soap operas between Today TV and their partners is around two years, counted from the buying to airing point of times. The length of time as such is sufficient for Today TV to do translation, dubbing as well as post-production for the dramas; and they can be shown on time on the channel as in the agreement. As such Today TV will not lose the money for buying copy right of the series. Therefore importing Filipino dramas is an economic choice for the channel.”

As discussed previously, Filipino broadcasting companies such as ABS-CBN or GMA focus on promoting their series in foreign countries including Vietnam. Their attempts to advertise their media products are given an advantage when they are supported by Today TV since this channel began importing Filipino dramas to Vietnam. The channel has many strategies to promote those soap operas to Vietnamese viewers. Besides showing the dramas on primetime and co-operating with the Filipino broadcasting firms to bring their actors and actresses to meet with Vietnamese audiences, Today TV holds award categories for “Favorite foreign series” and “Favorite actor and actress” in the Green Star Award⁸ to honor Filipino dramas and actors. In

⁸ Green Star Award is created by Today TV and Cinema Magazine in Vietnam. This award has categories to honor: Best Vietnamese Film and TV Series, Favorite Vietnamese TV Series, Creative Vietnamese Film, Favorite foreign TV Series, Best Vietnamese Actor and Actress, Prospective Vietnamese Actors and Actresses, Favorite Vietnamese Actor and Actress, and Favorite Foreign Actor and Actress. These awards are assessed and voted on by a committee of experts and audiences. www.thanhvien.com.vn (2014). “Green Star Award: Truong Ngoc Anh and Kim Ly are honored as the 2014 favorite actress and actor”, (Online) <http://www.thanhvien.com.vn/van-hoa-nghe-thuat/giai-thuong-ngoi-sao-xanh-truong-ngoc-anh-kim-ly-duoc-yeu-thich-nhat-519531.html>

2014 – the first time the Green Star Award was held, Filipino actor Richard Yap and actress Jodi St. Maria were honored for “Favorite actor and actress” and the drama *Be Careful With My Heart* that they participated in was prized as “Favorite foreign series” (www.thanhnien.com.vn 2014).

Thai and Filipino soap operas on Let’s Viet and Today TV are dubbed in Vietnamese. As the main offices of Let’s Viet and Today TV are located in Ho Chi Minh City, the teams dubbing Vietnamese for Thai and Filipino dramas are from this southern city and the dubbing sound is speaking in the accent of southern people. It may make some difficulties for northern audiences (Hanoi) who are not familiar with the accent from the south to understand when they watch those series on the two channels; but surprisingly, all interviewed northern audiences assess that the dubbing is sufficiently good and clear. However, many of them prefer to watch the dramas with subtitles which can help them get to know the native languages used in Thailand and the Philippines and also get “authentic” feelings and emotions of characters in the series.

3.3.2 Thai and Filipino Dramas on the Internet

Besides watching Thai and Filipino series on television, audiences can also follow those dramas on the Internet. The audiences who watch *lakorns* on the Internet are up to date with new series, and viewers of *lakorns* and *teleseryes* can see series previously aired on TV that they could not watch or fully follow because of not having free time. Thai and Filipino dramas broadcasted on TV previously are then uploaded on different web pages. The interviewed audiences watch Thai and Filipino soap operas via websites such as You Tube, xemphimso.vn, phim14.vn, or Kite.vn. Especially, some pages like Kites.vn, SIAMovies.vn and ChuonChuonCanhSen have their own teams to translate and make subtitles for new *lakorns*. The team of Kites.vn translates and makes Vietnamese subtitles for various music videos, movies and series from Hollywood, Japan, and Korea; and subtitled Thai series have appeared on the website for around three years. For SIAMovies.vn and ChuonChuonCanhSen, they do translations and subtitles for only Thai media products. SIAMovies.vn website was established in 2013; and they subtitle for both Thai film and *lakorn*. Nonetheless, currently, they hardly translate and subtitle any films or series because most members in their team are students and are very busy with their studies. Now they attempt to maintain the page by

updating information about new films, new lakorns and activities of famous Thai actors, according to Dat, male, 23 years old, and administrator of SIAMovies website.

ChuonChuonCanhSen is a facebook page which was set up in 2014. They subtitle for only lakorn and sometimes Thai music videos. Quang, a 26-year-old male, and administrator of ChuonChuonCanhSen said as follows:

“Our page translates and does subtitles for selected *lakorns* which all members like and suggest and share them via internet on our own YouTube page. We expect that we can bring understanding about Thailand to those who watch and follow the page”.

In the beginning, Quang did subtitles for Thai MV clips, and then was interested in making visual effect subtitles for *lakorn*. Because he majored in Information Technology; he loves doing this and hopefully can make people more enjoy watching dramas uploaded on the page. Quang is also the leader of ChuonChuonCanhSen’s subtitle team. His responsibilities includes doing general management for the page, making posters for promoting new *lakorns* and ordering elaborate tasks for members doing translations and subtitles. Now there are 46 members in the team. Quang and his team are happy and motivated as ChuonChuonCanhSen has become quite popular among audiences who enjoy watching Thai soap operas. According to his statistics, there are around one million people who have viewed Thai dramas subtitled by his team and uploaded on ChuonChuonCanhSen’s YouTube page, as well as around 4,000 registered followers to the face-book page, and a number of invisible followers, the amount of which Quang does not know. Now in Vietnam there are many fan pages of specific Thai actors and Thai couples, such as: the fan page of Jame Jirayu, the fan page of couple Nadech and Yaya, and the fan page of Mark and Kimberly. These fan pages also have their own subtitle team, but they just translate and do subtitles for the *lakorns* that their idol actors or couples participate.

Filipino soap operas are also uploaded on internet, but all of them are broadcasted on television before (Today TV). They are not updated as Thai series. Additionally, the dubbings implemented by the channel are maintained for the uploaded Filipino dramas. Tam – a translator for Filipino series working at Master Service Company indicated as follows:

“Thai *lakorns* are updated and subtitled because their fans can find sources to do translations and subtitles for new *lakorns*. Oppositely, there is no available source which facilitates Filipino dramas’ fans translating the series. Filipino broadcasting companies who own their TV channels do not upload their series on internet; and when they do upload the video quality is low. In contrast, Thai TV channels upload *lakorns* on the internet, or fans in Thailand upload Thai series on internet for foreign audiences to watch; and the quality of uploaded video is quite good. This is the source for fans in Vietnam to translate and subtitle for Thai dramas.”

In fact, in Vietnam there are also fan pages of Filipino actors and couples such as the fan page of actress Marian Rivera, the fan page of actor Dingdong Dantes and the fan page of the couple Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla. However, unlike fan pages of Thai actors, fan pages of Filipino actors update news and activities of their idols but they do not make subtitles for the dramas in which their idols participate.

Tam also elaborates more difficulties which provide obstacles to translating and making subtitles for Filipino soap operas. Before working for Master Service Company, Tam was a member in ChuonChuonCanhSen page’s subtitle team and did translation for Thai series. In her experience, new Thai *lakorns* uploaded on internet usually have English subtitles, which make it easier for English translators such as herself. Those who can translate directly from Thai to Vietnamese find it the dramas easy to translate because Thai actors speak Thai without mixing in English. However, it is not the same in Filipino dramas. In their series, Filipino actors speak both Tagalog – their native language and English. Even one sentence can be half in Tagalog and half in English. According to Tam, when Filipino broadcasting firms sell copy right of their series for Today TV they provide the dramas with full English subtitles for Today TV. Therefore, Tam and her colleges work with the Filipino *teleseryes* which are already subtitled with English, not the raw series.

It can be seen that the development of cable, digital and terrestrial TV and internet considerably contributes to the emerging of Thai and Filipino TV in Vietnam. Although they have not been shown for long in Vietnam, they have been welcomed by Vietnamese audiences and today are quite popular among audiences. Among the

audience, there are people who watch both Thai and Filipino soap operas, but also people who see only Thai *lakorn* or Filipino *teleseryes*.

3.3.3 Reasons for Watching Thai and Filipino Dramas

Most of the audiences agree that Thai and Filipino dramas primarily attract them as there are many beautiful actresses and handsome actors with good acting skill participating in those series.

Viet My, a 19-year-old female, student majoring in Chinese Studies stated as follows:

“I like watching Thai dramas primarily because actors and actresses in the series are handsome and beautiful. Especially the actresses’ beauty looks more natural than those from Korea who look beautiful mostly because of plastic surgery”

Hieu, a 22-year-old male, student majoring in Information Technology shared as follows:

“When I choose series to watch I prioritize the appearance of actors. It is not necessary for them to be beautiful but at least be good-looking. Generally, Filipino actors look nice, and also act well.”

Kim Anh, a 19-year-old female, student majoring in Mass Media observed as follows:

“Actors in both Thai and Filipino series are beautiful. Especially, I am very impressed with the beauty of female Filipino actors when they have “Western” features on their faces. Moreover, actors in Thai and Filipino dramas act skillfully. They act more special and emotional than Korean actors.”

Mrs. Ngoc, a 30-year-old female, cloth-seller shared as follows:

“I watch both Thai and Filipino series but actually I watch Thai soaps more than Filipino ones. Watching their dramas, I see that their actors and actresses are nice. They have remarkably good acting skills. In many crying scenes, they act really emotionally. They act as if they truly were the characters in dramas. Those who play roles as good people can really portray the character on screen; and those who play opposite roles of bad or cruel people also can do the same thing.”

It can be seen that the nice appearance of Thai and Filipino actors has made good visual impression on the audience. Moreover, content of those dramas is also a factor that contributes to attract the viewers.

Ngoc Anh, a 19-year-old female, student majoring in Japanese Studies observed as follows:

“Content in Thai series is more diverse than Filipino dramas. Especially, stories in Thai and Filipino dramas have practical endings, not always happy endings as in Korean TV series. This makes me feel more interested when watching Thai and Filipino series than watching Korean dramas with predictable happy endings”

Thanh Huyen, a 20-year-old female, student studying Linguistics remarked as follows:

“Stories in Thai and Filipino soap operas are close with daily life. Moreover, there are many funny episodes, especially in Thai *lakorn*. Characters in Thai and Filipino dramas are not too “fictional” as in Korean series. Main characters in Korean soap operas are usually perfect in all aspects.”

Thuy Linh, a 19-year-old female, student majoring in Mass Media said as follows:

“Stories in Thai and Filipino dramas are not as Korean series which mostly portray “triangle love. Therefore, they bring a new entertainment taste to the audience. I like episodes in Thai series which take place fast and fascinating.”

Ngoc Linh, a 20-year-old student pursuing the foreign trade discipline shared as follows:

“Stories in Thai and Filipino dramas have many climax sequences which attracts viewers. I see that there are more climax sequences in Filipino soap operas than in Thai *lakorns*.”

In the last episodes of Thai and Filipino dramas, the main couple usually gets married or seem to not have any threats to their happiness, but then there will be a suddenly dangerous case which threatens the main couple’ life. For example, a boy’s ex-girlfriend or a girl’s ex-boyfriend may come back at the end to revenge on the couple by kidnapping the girl or child of the couple. This situation happens more in *teleserye*

than in *lakorn*. When audiences see the main couple marrying, they always think that it is a happy ending for the couple after overcoming many previous difficulties and expect to see their future life. However, there is still an obstacle that the couple has to overcome to live happily. This climax makes audiences curious until the end to know whether or not the couple can really overcome that final difficulty or cope with more hurt. Moreover, most of the audiences emphasize that the new thing in Thai and Filipino soap operas is the depiction of “third-sex” characters and stories about their works and their daily life, which is not seen in Korean dramas. The audiences see more “third-sex” characters in *lakorn* than in *teleserye*. They also show that “third-sex” characters bring more fun to the series.

However, there are many audiences who indicate that stories in Thai and Filipino series are quite similar with Korean soap operas in the way to depict a love relationship between poor and rich people. It is clear that the success and popularity of the Korean Wave in Asia caused the Korean Wave to be a model for other cultural industries in the region. This provides an explanation why for the content in Thai and Filipino dramas is partially affected by Korean TV series.

Phan Hieu, a 19-year-old female, student majoring in Japanese Studies indicated as follows:

“Thai and Filipino series’ content is quite similar with Korean, quite fictional. There are always poor, foolish and little crack-brained girls loved by a rich and handsome guy.”

Kim Anh, a 19-year-old female, student in mass media discipline commented as follows:

“The story in Thai and Filipino dramas is similar with Korean dramas. The leading male character meets and falls in love with the leading female character who is pretty but silly and has to cope with her poor live.”

Tam, the translator for Filipino dramas at Master Service Company illustrated that Filipino series are much more fictional than Thai *lakorns*. Although Thai dramas like Korean soap operas portray many stories which are unlikely to happen in reality, the fictionality is reasonable. Nonetheless, the fictionality in Filipino *teleseryes* is not reasonable. She exemplifies that in one Filipino series which she cannot remember

name of there is an episode where a pregnant woman is beaten by a snake, and then the woman gives a birth a child with a snake image on his back and whenever the child gets angry the snake is released from his back. Another drama portrays the existence of many mermaids under the ocean in relationship with the modern life of normal people. Moreover, characters in Filipino series are usually in the extreme directions of too good and innocent or too bad and cruel. Good characters are harmed by bad ones many times. After the first time they get harmed the good characters never seem to learn their lesson, and do not improve or find any way to protect themselves from being harmed next time. This is too illogical in normal life.

Additionally, most audiences realize that make-up for actors and cinematographic techniques in Thai soap operas are better than in Filipino series. They could not elaborate on technical points, but according to their visual sense, they see that the image of Thai actors on screen is clearer and more beautiful than those in Filipino dramas. Linh – a translator staff member of Let's Viet could see that Thai producers applied the techniques of make-up and cinematography of Korean dramas; and therefore both Thai actors and filmed sceneries in their *lakorns* looked beautiful. This can be a result of Thailand developing itself as a production and manufacturing center for audio-visual products (Siriyuvasak 2010). It is also one key factor which contributes significantly to the development of the Thai cultural industry. For instance, Technicolor, well-known as one of the major US film laboratories, bought Cinecolor Lab, a Thai film printing laboratory in 2003; and since then Hollywood films produced by famous producers such as: Disney, Dream Works, Universal, Lion Gates and New Line have been printed at Technicolor (Thailand) and distributed for Hollywood's Asian markets (NECTEC 2008). Kantana Group is another corporation which provides post-production services for audio-visual and film printing; and it started production in the early 2000s (Siriyuvasak 2010). By becoming a production and manufacturing center for audio-visual products, Thailand can accumulate good production technologies and professionalism in producing its cultural products. Moreover, many foreign producers choose Thailand as their cinematographing destination, and hire Thai production labors because the cost for the labors remains cheap in Thailand (Kanjaruek 2009). This also helps Thai production labors learn more innovative techniques, and when they work to

make Thai cultural products, they can apply the techniques which contribute to make Thai products more professional and attractive with international audiences.

3.4 Conclusion

The mobility of dramas from Thailand and the Philippines to Vietnam is contra media flows which now exist and compete with other dominant contra flows from Korea and China. It is evidence to prove and strengthen the idea that the two-way movement of global media flows not only from the West to the rest of the world but also may originate in the less powerful regions of the world (Thussu 2007, Kavoori 2007). According to Moeran (2001), the most important factor for the acceptance of media products in any markets is to meet the local demand, desires, orientation, preferences, and curiosities of the population. The transnational flows of Thai and Filipino soap operas to Vietnam are facilitated by those elements.

Both Thai and Filipino governments establish policy supporting the development of their cultural industries, which create a good base for improving the quality of their cultural products. It contributes to an increase in the competitive strength of their products and opens opportunities for them to enter regional media flow. In Vietnam, the government also encourages citizens to widen their understanding of foreign countries through media. Hence, the government promotes the development of media technology (cable, digital and terrestrial TV and the Internet) which brings many advantages for people to approach and consume a diversity of foreign cultural products. This strategy along with the fact that cultural industry in Vietnam has not yet been able to provide enough quantity of products and their quality has not yet been appreciated by domestic consumers makes for strong competition in media field. TV channels are in a “running-race” to satisfy the diverse entertainment demand for a wide number of people which help them to get more and more viewers. Many websites for watching foreign films and series help diversify the source where an audience can consume foreign media products. The problem of Vietnamese TV dramas’ quality leads to a situation that transnational media flows are not equal between Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. While Thai and Filipino soap operas have been imported for 3-4 years and now quite popular in Vietnam, Vietnamese TV series have not yet been exported to other Southeast Asian countries. In an article on citinews.net (2013), Mr. Tran Minh Tien,

CEO of Lasta Co., elaborates that before 2011 Filipino soap operas were sold for the low copyright price of 150US\$/per episode but not many TV channels in Vietnam bought them. However, since 2013, surprisingly, some TV channels in Vietnam have been willing to pay 1,500 US\$/per episode to buy the copyright of Filipino dramas. As such, around 2010 Vietnamese audiences did not know about Filipino series but now Filipino dramas are broadcasted on many channels and attract a large number of viewers. The situation obviously shows that the quality of Vietnamese dramas has not yet sufficiently developed, according to Mr. Tien (citinews.net 2013). He also questions how Vietnamese series can attract and be sold to other countries in the region when they cannot even satisfy domestic viewers. Mrs. Bich Lien, director of Song Vang Co., also shares the same opinion. Her company attempted to translate some Vietnamese dramas into English and advertised to foreign partners with a low copyright price of 150-250US\$/per episode, but did not have any success in exporting the series (citinews.net 2013). Mrs. Lien points out that the quality of Vietnamese series is still relatively low in comparison with other regional countries, and foreign film import companies generally access that Vietnamese dramas are not competitive in both content and production technology (citinews.net 2013).

Although the media flows are not equal among the three countries, they contribute to motivate intra-regional economic integration in preparation for the coming of the AEC. The target of AEC is to encourage free flow of goods and services among ASEAN countries. Cultural products are considered to be a kind of commodity when they can be sold and bought (Strinati 2004). They create economic benefits and makes connections between involved sides. The movement of cultural products from Thailand and the Philippines to Vietnam magnifies the regional market for culture and economically promotes the circulation of cultural goods in the region because before coming to Vietnam Thai and Filipino dramas had been exported to other Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, the transnational flows of cultural commodities help to widen regional economy, contributing to the top-up policy committed by ASEAN leaders toward the establishment of AEC. At the same time they create an opportunity for bottom-up regionalization when facilitating co-operations between organizations (TV channels or TV broadcasting companies) in the three countries. Both Let's Viet and Today TV have chances to find and work with broadcasting or entertainment firms from

Thailand and the Philippines who can provide the source of dramas for import. For example, Today TV can buy copy rights of Filipino series directly from big television broadcasting companies in the country such as ABS-CBN and GMA as they are drama producers and they have the right to actively sell their products; while Let's Viet can buy copy rights of the series "Hormones 2" from GMM who is a big entertainment company in Thailand and has ownership rights to the series, and monopolizes airing the drama on their channel in Vietnam (tv.zing.vn 2014). Notably, copy right prices for Thai and Filipino dramas are cheaper than for Korean dramas (phunuonline.com.vn 2013). This helps the two channels diversify their entertainment programs and get economic benefit by paying less money for imported dramas while still attracting more viewers with Thai and Filipino series which have content with cultural features which are quite close to the taste of Vietnamese audiences (citinews.net 2013).

Today in Vietnam the audiences can conveniently enjoy new tastes of TV series coming from Southeast Asian countries after a long time familiarly with consuming Korean dramas. As mentioned above, both Thai and Filipino TV series are somehow recognized to be under the effect of Korean dramas. Korean cultural products have been popular in Asia for more than one decade and the "soft power" that the Korean Wave has gained in Asia through exporting its products internationally makes the Korean cultural industry become a model for other Asian countries. Hence, it is not too difficult to understand why Thai and Filipino series expose features similar (content, make-up art and cinematography) to in Korean dramas. Nonetheless, Thai and Filipino dramas not only absorb techniques used in Korean series but also show their own characteristics such as natural-looking beauty or Western-mix beauty of actors, or stories with many climax sequences. Thus, *lakorn* and *teleserye* can bring "new tastes", attract larger audiences in Vietnam, and compete with Korean soap operas. On the other hand, it needs to be mentioned that although the Korean Wave is being largely degraded, it still retains influences in many Asian countries, including Vietnam. Therefore, despite of being able to compete with Korean dramas, Thai and Filipino soap operas cannot totally replace Korean series. Tam, a 23- year-old viewer, said that if she herself orders the level of attraction among dramas of the three countries in Vietnam, it would be Korean – Thai – Filipino. The staff members working for the TV channel Let's Viet indicated the similar point that Thai and Filipino soap operas contribute to diversify entertainment

taste for audiences. The consumption of Thai and Filipino series makes for the people-driven regionalization contributed by citizens. Vietnamese audiences can build up understanding about Thailand and the Philippines through interpretations of images, ideas and social messages embedded in their products. The interpretations play an important role in the construction of proximity of perceptions and identities among different communities within a geographical domain broader than a nation-state (Otmazgin 2013).



ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
Copyright© by Chiang Mai University
All rights reserved