

## Chapter 4

### Audience Interpretations of Thai and Filipino Television Soap Operas

Two *lakorns* and two *teleseryes* which are popular in Vietnam were chosen in order to see interpretations of audiences on Thai and Filipino series regarding the aspects of family values and gender. For the aspects of third-sex issues, cultural characteristics and national images, audiences gave their comments and observations based on not only those selected dramas but also on many other series in accordance with their memory.

The four dramas were selected based on ratings given by staff from the TV channel Let's Viet and answers about the favorite dramas among the audiences. Moreover, those *lakorns* and *teleseryes* are updated both on TV and on the Internet. As mentioned previously, cable TV channels in Vietnam attempt to import and broadcast new Thai and Filipino dramas to attract more audiences and increase their competitive strength. The drama *My Wife's Sister* was broadcasted between November 2012 and January 2013 in Thailand, and then aired on Let's Viet at the end of 2014. The drama *Secret Love Online* was aired in 2015 in Thailand and at the same time was subtitled as well as uploaded on ChuonChuonCanhSen face-book page and YouTube page. *Losing Heaven* was premiered during 2011-2012 in the Philippines and imported to broadcast on Today TV in 2013. The series *Be Careful With My Heart* with three seasons were broadcasted in the Philippines from 2012 to 2014. In Vietnam, on Today TV, the first season of this *teleserye* was aired in 2013, then the second season was in 2014 and the last season is now airing and would last until September 2015.

It can be seen that the *lakorns* and *teleseryes* that impressed audiences are in the period from 2012 to present. This period is not too long and the audiences still can remember contents, episodes and characters in the dramas. Therefore, choosing the series had many advantages when the researcher could hear interpretations of audiences relating to the series in details, especially in the aspects of family values and gender. Furthermore, those TV dramas told stories with context of modern societies, which was

to serve the researcher to explore the perceptions of audiences towards Thailand and the Philippines in the contemporary period.

**Table 4.1 Features of Thai TV dramas**

Name of Dramas	Original Broadcasting Channel	Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam	Rating	Content
My Wife's Sister (Nong Mia)	CH8	Let's Viet	Excellent	<p>It tells a story about a triangle love between two sisters who have the same father but different mothers and a handsome, kind man. Ngamnek - the elder sister and Fuengfa - her younger sister are both involved in a romantic relationship with Ekkapop. Fuengfa is always jealous of her sister and intentionally robs Ekkapop from Ngamnek's hand even after Ngamnek and Ekkapop get married. The relationship between Ngamnek and Ekkapop encounters more challenges with the appearance of Kanta – a rich woman who is also interested in Ekkapop</p>

**Table 4.1 (Continued)**

Name of Dramas	Original Broadcasting Channel	Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam	Rating	Content
				<p>and Mawin, who is Ngamnek’s boss and always stays beside her when she is in difficult situations.</p> <p>(Source:<a href="http://letsviet.vn/vi/detail/phim/em-vo-moi-tinh-tay-ba-oan-nghiet-.230/">http://letsviet.vn/vi/detail/phim/em-vo-moi-tinh-tay-ba-oan-nghiet-.230/</a>)</p>
<p>Secret Love Online (Abb Rak Online)</p>	<p>CH3</p>	<p>Chuon Chuon Canh Sen YouTube Page</p>	<p>Popular</p>	<p>The series follows the story of Saya, a marketing manager in a financial brokerage firm, who falls in love with one of her new younger staff members, Pranon. She creates an online chat name called “Khun Abb Rak” or “Miss Secret Love” to communicate with Pranon without seeming unprofessional. Lipda, whom Saya has worked for over 5 years, is actually secretly in love</p>

**Table 4.1 (Continued)**

Name of Dramas	Original Broadcasting Channel	Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam	Rating	Content
				<p>with her. Nonetheless, Lipda tries to put aside his own feelings and helps Saya when he finds out that she secretly admires Pranon. Meanwhile, Praow, who is the Pranon's colleague tries her best to get closer to Pranon to separate Saya once she knows that Saya is his secret admirer. However, Praow's plan backfires on her when she actually begins to fall in love with Pranon. (Source: <a href="https://timetravellingtofu.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/thai-drama-abb-ruk-online/">https://timetravellingtofu.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/thai-drama-abb-ruk-online/</a>)</p>



**Figure 4.1** Poster for *My Wife's Sister* on letsviet.vn

**Source:** <http://letsviet.vn/vi/detail/phim/em-vo-moi-tinh-tay-ba-oan-nghiet-.230/>



**Figure 4.2** Poster for *Secret Love Online* on [www.facebook.com/ChuonChuonCanhSen](http://www.facebook.com/ChuonChuonCanhSen)

**Source:** <https://vi-vn.facebook.com/ChuonChuonCanhSen>

**Table 4.2 Features of Filipino dramas**

<b>Name of Dramas</b>	<b>Original Broadcasting Channel</b>	<b>Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Content</b>
<p>Be Careful With My Heart (Alalayan Ang Puso Ko)</p>	<p>ABS-CBN</p>	<p>Today TV</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The series tells the story of the life adventure of Maya dela Rosa. She dreams to become a flight attendant but she has to work as a tour guide to earn money in her hometown. In order to help her sister to pay a large medical bill, Maya goes to Manila to find a chance to work overseas; but she discovers that the woman who had offered work overseas had cheated her. Maya is stuck in Manila with no money or place to go. A handsome and wealthy widower Richard Lim working in the airline industry helps Maya by offering her to become his youngest daughter's temporary nanny. Moving to live in the Lim home, Maya recognizes that since his wife died, the family's joy died with her, which.</p>

**Table 4.2 (continued)**

Name of Dramas	Original Broadcasting Channel	Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam	Rating	Content
				<p>causes them problems. While fulfilling her duties, Maya falls in love with the Lim children and, admittedly, with Richard (Source:<a href="http://showpage.abs-cbn.com/Be_Careful_with_my_Heart/page/synopsis.html">http://showpage.abs-cbn.com/Be_Careful_with_my_Heart/page/synopsis.html</a>)</p>
<p>Losing Heaven (Kung Agawin Mo Ang Langit)</p>	<p>GMA</p>	<p>Today TV</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The series tells a story of two close high-school friends - Ellery and Bridgitte who are both involved in romantic relationship with Jonas, a charming bachelor. Bridgitte falls in love with Jonas at first sight while Jonas only has eyes for Ellery. After getting married to Jonas, Ellery discovers that she cannot conceive a child, so Ellery and Jonas ask Bridgitte to help them do implement fertilization. However, Ellery unluckily</p>

**Table 4.2 (Continued)**

Name of Dramas	Original Broadcasting Channel	Broadcasting Channel in Vietnam	Rating	Content
				<p>has a car accident which leaves her in coma. Several months after Ellery's accident, Bridgitte gives birth to the baby while Ellery is still unconscious on her hospital bed. Grasping this opportunity, Bridgitte forces Jonas to marry her for the sake of their child. However, Ellery awakens from her unconscious state then. She knows that Bridgitte is trying to steal everything from her; and thus, they wage a battle for love (Heart/page/synopsis.html) both legally and morally. (Source:<a href="http://www.gmanetwork.com/entertainment/shows/kamal/photos">http://www.gmanetwork.com/entertainment/shows/kamal/photos</a>)</p>





**Figure 4.3** Poster for *Be Careful With My Heart* on todaytv.vn  
**Source:** [todaytv.vn/chuong-trinh/phim-trai-tim-be-bong-626.imc](http://todaytv.vn/chuong-trinh/phim-trai-tim-be-bong-626.imc)



**Figure 4.4** Poster for *Losing Heaven* on todaytv.v  
**Source:** <http://todaytv.vn/chuong-trinh/phim-thien-duong-lac-loi-298.imc>

## **4.1 Interpretations on Family Image**

### **4.1.1 Family Values**

With the question: “What do you think about the image of family portrayed in Thai and Filipino TV series”, all of the interviewed audiences indicated that in those series, the family plays an important role in characters’ lives and is the core unit of the societies. Main characters are always attached to their families, and their families are involved in important decisions related to the characters’ lives and careers. Stories in the series of *My Wife’s Sister*, *Be Careful With My Heart* and *Losing Heaven* take place inside families and around families, concerning their social relationships.

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

“I see that in Thai and Filipino dramas, family and connections between family members are exposed similarly to Vietnam. Thais and Filipinos also respect their parents and keep close contact with their siblings. For example, in the Thai *lakorn My Wife’s Sister*, after getting married Ngamnek - the lead female moves to live with her husband’s family. Moreover, even though Ngamnek has her own family, she still takes care of her younger sister. Or in the Filipino series *Be Careful With My Heart*, Maya decides to work abroad to help her sister and her mother; and although she lives in Manila she always keeps in touch with her family in her hometown.”

Mrs Ngoc, a 30 – year - old female, clothing sale assistant, remarked as follows:

“Watching Thai and Filipino dramas, I see that Thais and Filipinos respect family values, like the Vietnamese. Thus, I feel familiar, so it is easy to follow their series. In the dramas such as *My Wife’s Sister*, *Losing Heaven* and *Be Careful With My Heart* stories happening to different families are told and the stories are extended along with social relationships of the family members”.

### **4.1.2 Relationship between Children and Parents**

Most of the audiences realize that in the relationship between children and parents in Thai and Filipino families, children have more freedom and more independent with their parents. In the series of *My Wife’s Sister*, *Be Careful With My*

*Heart and Losing Heaven*, parents are portrayed as the people who give advice and suggestions to their daughters and/or sons. They do not intervene too much in their children's love and career decisions.

Ngoc Anh, a 19 – year - old female student, recognized that in Thai and Filipino dramas, daughters and sons respect their parents and parents also respect their children when they listen to the opinions of their kids. Sons and daughters are expected to obey their parents but they still can speak their opinions. Kim Anh, an undergraduate female student, indicated that children are more independent with their parents in Thailand and the Philippines than in Vietnam. From the dramas she has watched, she observed that although children show respect and are encouraged to obey their parents, they still have some freedom to make decisions about their education, their career and their love lives. Mrs. Ngoc, a clothes seller agreed with the point when saying, “In Thai and Filipino dramas, if sons and/or daughters do not agree with their parents they can talk to their parents. However, it is not the same in Vietnam when sons and/or daughters may have to absolutely accept their parents’ opinions without any arguments.”

## **4.2 Interpretations on Gender**

### **4.2.1 Traditional Gender Roles**

In order to find out audience interpretations of gender roles depicted in *lakorns* and *teleseryes*, the researcher asked two questions:

“What do you think about the role of women in Thai and/or Filipino dramas?”

“How do you think about the men’s role in Thai and/or Filipino dramas?”

All interviewed Vietnamese audience members agreed that in Thai and Filipino soap operas, men are portrayed as “the pillar” in the family who provide the main source of income for the household while women are portrayed as having the role of housewife and mother. Phuc, a 23 year-old teacher in Ho Chi Minh City pointed out that Thai women in reality and what portrayed on screen are generally similar (about eighty percent) in that they spend lots of time taking care of their families and are a spiritual prop for their children. She notably accentuates that Vietnamese dramas also portray the same image of mothers but the acting skill of Vietnamese actresses is not really good, so they cannot transmit genuine feeling to the audience. Phuc graduated majoring in

Thai studies and hence has a deep understanding of Thai culture and due to her opportunities to meet with many Thai lecturers as well as her many Thai friends. Thus, Phuc can compare and analyze the role of Thai women based on her real experiences in Thailand. However, for the other interviewees like Linh – an 18-year-old student and Phuong – a 23-year-old English teacher, who did not learn and graduate in Thai Studies and have never met Thai people in reality also have the same interpretations on Thai women after watching Thai soap operas. They indicate that even though Thai women work out of their household, they still prioritize taking care of their families and their children.

Loan, a 27-year-old female, officer in a private import-export company commented as follows:

“In Thai and Filipino dramas, men are more dominant than women. In the series like *My Wife’s Sister* or *Be Careful With My Heart*, men go out and earn money to support their families while women focus more on looking after housework. In *My Wife’s Sister*, although the lead female also works, she is not the person who provides the main source of income for the family. In *Be Careful With My Heart*, the lead female also works as a stewardess, but she concentrates more on taking care of her family while her husband gets a high position in his work and is the main source to provide income for the family.”

Hue, a 23- year-old female, student majoring in Thai Studies, commented as follows:

“*Lakorns* depict Thai women as those who are good at endurance when they both work and take care of their families. For Filipino women, after getting married, they also work but focus more on taking care of their family. It is obvious in the series *Be Careful With My Heart* that even though the lead female (Maya) who works as a stewardess, after marrying and giving a birth, she concentrates more on taking care of her family and her children. The drama especially focuses on telling stories which happen within Maya’s family more than those taking place out of her family, such as postpartum depression that Maya encounters after having a baby, or clashes between Maya and her husband about the education of their children. The tasks that Thai and Filipino women have to do are similar to

Vietnamese women. Thai and Filipino men (like Vietnamese men) are responsible for providing the main source of income for the family. In the series with content heavily inclining to family stories like *My Wife's Sister*, *Be Careful With My Heart* or *Losing Heaven*, men are always dominant with the role as 'the pillar' of their household."

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

"I see that Thai and Filipino women both work and look after their family, but they prioritize their family, which is generally proximate with women in Vietnam. However, Filipino women are more similar to Vietnamese women in the way that most of them are tightly attached to their families and usually are under the pressure of traditional ideas that they need to be devoted to the family and children without any arguments, and they do not have much freedom after getting married. In *Be Careful With My Heart*, after marriage, Maya works as an air hostess but she still concentrates more on looking after her family. In comparison with the lead female in Thai *lakorn My Wife's Sister*, Maya is more attached and has more burdens with her family."

#### **4.2.2 Gender Equality**

According to the audiences' descriptions, women in Thailand and the Philippines, on the one hand, implement their traditional role of being a mother and taking care of the family. On the other hand, they are more free and independent than Vietnamese women when they are not under much pressure to be tightly attached to the family and are active in their lives. For men, most of the audiences agreed that in the series Thai and Filipino men are "lady-killers"; they respect women more than Vietnamese men and also are less patriarchal than Vietnamese men.

Kim Ngan, a female, 26-year-old bank clerk noted as follows:

"Thai and Filipino women dynamically both work and look after their family. Nowadays Vietnamese women are also the same. However, Vietnamese women are not active in their love lives as they are bonded with traditional idea that women should not be active in love. In contrast, Thai and Filipino women are initiative in love. They actively pursue the ones they fall in love with. For

instance, in *Secret Love Online*, Praow is active in following Pranon, the guy she loves. In *Losing Heaven*, the second lead female is active in grasping opportunities to have the guy she loves although she uses many bad tricks.”

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

“In Filipino dramas that I have seen, Filipino women basically respect family values and implements their roles in the family by looking after children and doing housework after marriage. Nonetheless, most of them are Westernized, so they have strong characteristics and are more open than Vietnamese women. They are quite free to do what they like and not too dependent on their parents. Moreover, Filipino women are active in love, and in some dramas there are female characters even having many affairs. For example, in *Losing Heaven*, Bridgett’s aunt advises Bridgett to end all actions that hurt her best friend Ellery, but Bridgett does not stop and she still tries many ways to keep Ellery’s husband staying with her for the reasons that she gives birth to his daughter with Ellery and then her son with him, and he decided to divorce Ellery before Ellery was awake, and the most important thing is she loves him. Thus, Bridgett would fight for her love. Filipino men in the series are depicted as the ‘pillar’ in the family, but they still respect their wives. Ellery’s father in *Losing Heaven* is such a man. Even though he is the head of the family, he does not press his wife to agree with him. Instead, he always shares and listens to his wife’s opinions on all matters. I also witness those characteristics in Filipino men in other dramas.”

Phuc, a female, 23-years-old teacher of the Thai language observed as follows:

“Thai men in dramas respect women, but I am more impressed with Filipino men, especially the image of father in their soap operas. The father is a better prop for children to lean on than their mother. The father usually loves his daughter and/or son more than their mother. For example, in *Losing Heaven*, Ellery’s family adopts Bridgett when her parents pass away, and Ellery’s father loves Bridgett as his own daughter. When he finds out that Bridgett gets cancer while staying in prison to wait for the day to be sentenced in court, he persuades his wife and Ellery to withdraw the petition to prosecute Bridgett for trying to

kill Ellery's mother that his family submits to the court before. Ellery's mother does not agree with his decision and gets angry when she finds out that her husband and Ellery both agree to withdraw the case against Bridgett.”

Thu Hang, a 23- year-old female, student majoring in Thai Studies, stated as follows:

“The women in most Thai dramas I have seen are more open and have more freedom than Vietnamese women. They are not restricted too much by housework as Vietnamese women are. This can be seen in *My Wife's Sister*; when the lead female knows that her husband gets involved in a relationship with her sister, she cannot endure the pain because of her husband's affair and thus decides to divorce him. The lead female is active in her live. I think in Vietnam not many women would do the same thing because they are encouraged to sacrifice for the happiness of their family. Especially, those who have children will live for the sake of their kids. They do not want their kids grow up without a father; thus, many of them try to endure and find ways to make their husbands detach relationship with affairs. They are willing to forgive their husbands' wrongdoing. For Thai men, I see that they are “lady-killers”. In the same series, the lead male character always says that he loves his wife but act otherwise when he still cannot refuse the attraction of his wife's sister and gets into a relationship with her.”

Thao, a 23-year -old female, Thai-Vietnamese translator observed as follows:

“Watching Thai dramas I see that Thai women usually wear lots of make-up, whereas Vietnamese women prefer natural beauty without much make-up. In addition, Thai women are quite modern and free to work outside of their family. They do not get married early. Now I am watching the latest series called *Secret Love Online*. Looking at Saya, the marketing manager of a brokerage company, she has her own career. She has not yet married even the female character she acts in the drama is quite old. She does not face any pressure that she needs to get married quickly. It is the opposite in Vietnam. Women are usually encouraged to get married early. For Thai men, as what is shown in dramas, they take care of their appearance more than Vietnamese men. Moreover, they are not

patriarchal and care for their girlfriends/wives more than Vietnamese men. For those who get married, they also share housework with their wives. Also in *Secret Love Online*, the Awatsaya's boss still helps her to pursue Pranon, her inferior staff, while he himself has fallen in love with her for a long time. He always cares about Saya's feeling."

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

"The women in Thai dramas are more independent than Vietnamese women. Most of Thai women do not accept to endure unhappy lives with their husbands. The lead female character in *My Wife's Sister* is an example. When she knows her darling husband has a relationship with her younger sister and her husband is surrounded by other women, she decides to divorce him. She does not endure her pain along with tiredness in order to preserve the marriage between her and her husband. Women in *lakorns* are usually portrayed as the ones who have successful careers, and care more about their career than marriage and giving birth. Therefore, they can gain accomplishments and equal status with men. This contradicts the situation of Vietnamese women as they are often encouraged to get married and give birth early in their lives. Taking examples from the series *Secret Love Online* that I am following now, the two lead females, Saya and Praow, are quite free to choose the way they live and the job they want to do. Looking at Saya, she is around 33 to 35 years old and she is very beautiful, but she has not yet married and she has a successful career as the manager of a brokerage company. People do not pressure Saya to get married and start a family. Praow is similar when her age is around 28 years old and she is also nice, but she has not married either and still keeps striving with her work. It is not like that in Vietnam. For women at the age of 28 and over 28 in Vietnam, if they have not married yet, their parents, relatives and friends urge them to get married as soon as possible because most people in Vietnam think that women who are 28 and over 28 are quite old and it is not good for them to get pregnant and have a baby. To Vietnamese people, women are conditioned to thinking that having a family and children is a must and it is difficult to accept the women



who choose to live single with no kids. In addition, some parents say to their daughters who are at the margin age of 28 or above but have not married yet or still have not had any plans for marrying that getting married is not only for the daughters but also for the parents because the parents do not want to hear people saying that they have a ‘spinster’ daughter in the family.”

Phuong, a 23-year-old female, English teacher commented as follows:

“Women in Thai *lakorns* are portrayed as strong and decisive people. They are less attached to the family than Vietnamese women. Sometimes Thai women in the dramas are very dreadful and tricky. Like in *My Wife’s Sister*, Fuengfa tries to steal her sister’s husband. She is jealous of her sister and uses many tricks to implement her plan. For Thai men in dramas, they are not as patriarchal as men in Vietnam, and they also take care of their girlfriends/wives than Vietnamese men do.”

#### **4.2.3 Third-sex Issue**

Responding to the questions: “Did you see any third-gender characters in Thai and Filipino dramas?” and “What do think about the characters portrayed in the series?” all of the interviewees realized that minor third-sex characters appear frequently in Thai and Filipino dramas.

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

“In most of the Thai soap operas that I have seen, there are always third-sex characters. I also see third-sex character in Filipino series, but not many as in *lakorns*. For me, watching third-sex characters in dramas is fine, but it is not for my parents. It is difficult for them to accept those who are third-sex. I remember that when my parents saw a sex scene between two men in a Filipino drama, they switched to another TV channel.”

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

“I think that Thai and Filipino people are quite open toward third-sex people because I usually see third-sex characters appearing in their dramas.”

Phuc, a 23-year-old female, Thai language teacher noted as follows:

“There are always third-sex characters in *lakorns*. They make dramas funnier. I have many Thai friends, and they told me that in former times it was difficult for Thai people to accept their children or their relatives belonging to a third-sex, which is the same as Vietnamese society nowadays. However, later Thai people recognized that having good nature is the most important. If their third-sex children or relatives live morally, such as treating parents well and studying well, that is more important. Thus, third-sex people were gradually accepted into Thai society. Today, Thai people are open with this issue.”

Members of the SIAMovies.com.vn page observed as follows:

“There are always third-sex people in Thai dramas. Attitudes of other characters in *lakorns* toward the third-gender ones are quite comfortable. We also know that in reality, Thais are now generally open to third-gender people.”

#### **4.3 Interpretations on Cultural Characteristics**

The researcher asked the questions: “Do you think that Thai and/or Filipino dramas reflect Thai and/or Filipino culture? Can you illustrate some cultural features of Thailand and the Philippines after watching?”. All of the interviewed viewers agree that Thai *lakorns* more obviously and successfully portray Thai culture than Filipino *teleseryes* portray Filipino culture.

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

“Through watching Thai *lakorn*, I know that Thai people also follow the lunar calendar and go to the temple to pray for peace, luck and happiness. Their lifestyle is not much different from Vietnamese lifestyles. However, watching Filipino dramas, I see that the majority of Filipino people are Christians. When any character in the series feels sad, they usually go to the church to pray. Likewise, in the events of Christmas Day or New Year’s Day, they have bigger celebrations than in Vietnam. In addition, Filipino people usually have Western style meals with Western food.”

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

“In Thai dramas, I am most impressed by the way they greet people. They put their palms together, which is very reverent. In Filipino series, their culture seems to mix with Western culture. For example, I see in one Filipino soap opera that the characters produce wine like Westerners.”

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

“Thai series can show parts of Thai culture. I see that Thai people in dramas have a unique greeting way. Their traditional wedding customs are also interesting. People joining traditional weddings often splash water on the couple’s hands or heads and they also use white powder (which I do not know what it is) to dot on the couple’s foreheads. I guess it is to congratulate the couple and pray for their happiness.”

Thanh Huyen, a 22-year-old female, student in the linguistics discipline, observed as follows:

“I can see some features of Thai culture in their dramas. I am impressed with the way Thai people greet each other. They join two hands and bow down their heads, which is very respectful.”

Loan, a 27-year-old female, staff member in a private import-export company, said as follows:

“Thai dramas depict their culture better than Filipino series. Watching Thai *lakorns* I can see that there are many traditional festivals in Thailand; I really like their *Songkran* Festival. On the other hand, I cannot recognize Filipino culture after watching their dramas.”

Phuong, a 23-year-old female, student majoring in Thai Studies, said as follows:

“Watching Thai *lakorns*, I can see their culture with many traditional festivals such as *Loy Krathong*, *Songkran*, and also their traditional clothes. I am also interested in their wedding customs.”

Minh Nguyet, a 23-year-old female, student majoring in Thai Studies, stated as follows:

“In *lakorns*, the first thing that can be seen is the deferential greeting between people. When characters in Thai dramas or people in reality go to temples, they always wear polite and discreet clothes as Thailand has requirements for clothes that people should wear when going to temples. In Vietnam, there are also requirements for clothes which should be worn for going to temples, but they are not as strict as in Thailand. Additionally, listening to conversations in *lakorns* and referring to my experience, Thai people have a polite communicative culture. In Vietnamese dramas, sometimes there are still impolite exchanges in conversations between characters.”

Phuong, a 23-year-old female, translator staff member at the cable TV channel Let's Viet, observed as follows:

“One of the most dominant aspects of Thai culture is the way to greet people by placing the palms of two hands together. This point is very clear in all *lakorns* when characters always do as such when they are being introduced or greeting someone. When I studied Thai at university, the first thing I had to learn was how to greet people in accordance with Thai culture. Thai people have different ways to do the palm greeting action depending on age and relationship. The greeting way as such can show sincerity. Moreover, in *lakorns*, it is often seen that women sit with their two knees kept in one side. This is also a touch of Thai culture.”

Van, a 25-year-old female, translator staff member also working for Let's Viet channel, added more features of Thai culture depicted in *lakorns*:

“In *lakorns*, when couples have a wedding ceremony following Thai traditional customs, they always wear traditional dresses both for males and females. This is not the same in Vietnam. Although in reality Vietnamese also hold wedding ceremonies according to our traditional customs; and both the bride and groom are encouraged to wear traditional dress, it is still optional. Especially for the groom; he can wear traditional clothes or a Western suit.”

Phuc, a 23 - year – old female, Thai language teacher, remarked as follows:

“Thai *lakorns* feature dominant touches of Thai culture such as the way to greet people or traditional wedding customs. As I studied and graduated Thai major in

university, I have experienced the customs depicted in *lakorns* before. For instance, in all the Thai series which have wedding scenes, they always screen their wedding customs. One of them is that participants one by one splash water on the bride and groom's heads or on their palms in order to send their best regards to the couple. In contrast, I cannot see Filipino culture in Filipino dramas. Their wedding ceremonies take place in a church, totally in Western style. When characters in Filipino series feel sad or spiritual insecurity, they go to church to pray. In comparison with Filipino series, Thai dramas can portray more local cultural characteristics."

Tam, a 23-year-old female, translator for Filipino series, said as follows:

"I watch both Thai and Filipino dramas. However, as I work as a translator for Filipino series, I notice more about Filipino culture. Both in *teleserye* and in reality, most Filipino people follow Christianity. They have many festivals, and most of them are related to Christianity. As far as I know, Filipino culture is mixed due to the fact that Spain and the United States have had strong influences on Filipino culture because the Philippines was historically ruled by the Spanish and Americans. For *lakorns*, although I do not notice much Thai culture, I see some Thai cultural features such as Thai people often going to temples to pray or images of Thai traditional wedding customs."

#### **4.4 Interpretations on National Images**

Replying the question: "What do you think about the images of Thailand and/or the Philippines filmed in their soap operas?" the interviewed audience members pointed out that although Thai and Filipino dramas are similar to Korean dramas showing high skyscraper buildings, modern cars and cellphones; they are not always as "luxurious" and "sparkling" as in Korean series. They do not advertise fashion clothes and cellphone brands as in Korean dramas, and they still depict images of markets and rural areas with paddy fields and rough roads which many Vietnamese audiences feel close as they can easily see in their everyday lives. For the audiences living in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the modernity in Thai and Filipino soap operas are not too far from them when they can see a similar part of that modernity in the two biggest cities in Vietnam

even though urban areas in Thailand and the Philippines are assessed as more developed than in Vietnam by most of the viewers.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

It is clear that one of the basic questions which needs to be addressed in media research is how soap operas contribute to the audience's conception of reality that flows logically from the content of the soap operas (Ahmet and Khalid 2012). Analyzing interpretations of Vietnamese viewers on Thai and Filipino series assists in knowing how the audiences perceive reality about the two ASEAN countries in connection with images and content in their TV series even though the interpretations are differentiated among audiences based on their cultural backgrounds and socio-economic backgrounds.

The interpretations generate understanding for Vietnamese viewers both about Thailand and the Philippines. Although it is said that soap operas are often fictitious, TV dramas "in their faithful portrayal of all the happiness and the sadness, the triumphs and the prejudices, the successes and the failures in their characters' lives-prove once more that today's soap operas are indeed a reflection of life". (Ahmet and Khalid 2012: 5). Thus, consuming Thai and Filipino TV series can truly provide perceptions of reality about these two ASEAN nations for Vietnamese audiences, which help to promote the people-driven integration process attributed to the efforts of citizens in the region.

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