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BEYOND ROMANCE: THAI BL SERIES, SOFT POWER, AND INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS IN CHINA

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Abstract

This study investigates the rising popularity of Thai Boy Love (BL) series in China, examining their role in intercultural communication and Thailand's soft power projection. Rooted in Japanese Yaoi culture, Thai BL series have emerged as significant cultural products, blending themes of love, identity, and acceptance within Thai narratives. Employing qualitative methods, including content analysis, viewer surveys, and in-depth interviews, this research explores how these series contribute to cultural exchange, shape perceptions of Thai society, and create opportunities for Thailand's creative economy. Findings reveal that the Thai BL series resonates with Chinese viewers due to their incorporation of local cultural elements, despite limited acceptance of LGBTQ+ themes in China. The study highlights the strategic use of digital platforms in expanding the reach of Thai BL content and fostering intercultural understanding. Furthermore, it argues that Thai BL series serve as a component of soft power, facilitating intercultural communication and promoting Thailand's creative economy in the digital age. These findings offer insights for cultural diplomacy and creative industries seeking to leverage media for cross-cultural engagement.

Keywords: Boy Love (BL), Intercultural Communication, Creative Economy, Soft Power, Digital Media Convergence

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Introduction

The phenomenon of Thai Boy Love (BL) series has transcended its local origins to become a cultural and economic force in East Asia. Rooted in Japanese Yaoi culture (McLelland et al., 2015), Thai BL series, often referred to as “Y-series,” depict romantic relationships between male characters, blending narratives of love, intimacy, and emotional resilience. While primarily targeted at heterosexual female viewers, these series have attracted diverse viewership across borders, including in China, South Korea, and Japan—countries with distinct socio-cultural contexts and historical engagement with media content related to gender and sexuality (Bunyavejchewin & Thavornnyutikarn, 2024). The popularity of the BL series in East Asia is not merely an entertainment trend but a cultural dialogue that bridges different values, traditions, and ideologies. Thai BL content incorporates elements of Japanese conventions, including the seme-uke dynamic (Levi et al., 2010), while infusing local storytelling styles and social norms (Prasannam, 2019). This unique adaptation allows Thai BL to resonate with viewers across East Asia, fostering a form of intercultural communication that challenges traditional gender norms and broadens discussions on sexual diversity and identity. Moreover, the success of Thai BL series has been fuelled by strategic production and distribution models that leverage digital platforms, enabling accessibility and global reach (Baudinette, 2019). This genre has been popularised by Thai Y series like *Love Sick the Series* in 2014 and *SOTUS the Series* in 2016. Since then, this industry has grown to produce more than 70 Y series a year by 2022. The appeal of the genre is based on the romanticised relationships between males, usually in a school or university environment, and is most attractive to the female viewer who considers themselves as “fujoshi” or “Sao Y” (Y girls). As the series gains traction internationally, it offers a lens through which to examine the interplay between media consumption and cultural exchange.

Thailand is one of the few nations that have expressed positive sentiments towards the LGBTQIA+ community and considers itself as a role model in the region when it comes to acceptance. This is especially true in the entertainment sector, which already has a wide acceptance of LGBTQIA+ narratives, especially in the BL series. While in many countries, even the depiction of same-sex relationships is a topic of debate, Thailand has made way for an inclusive media environment which goes in line with the global trends of diversity and representation (Chen & Lo, 2021). The social and cultural change that has taken place in Thailand has made it possible to embrace sexual and gender diversity is another factor that has contributed to the success of Thai BL content. The change in the perception of Thai society is also well reflected in *SOTUS*, the change and media in 2gether, which society indicates (Amnesty International, 2022). This makes Thailand stand out because of the relatively liberal environment for the representation of the LGBTQIA+ community in the storytelling, with no such restrictions that are present in other countries. This allows the Thai producers to address the issues that are close to the hearts of the global viewer, including coming out, parental acceptance, and relationships (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Furthermore, entertainment productions have become an important part of Thailand’s soft power strategy, which has contributed to the growth of the entertainment industry. The acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals is an important factor in this regard, which has enabled Thailand to connect with the global viewer. By selecting stories that are culturally relevant yet universally understandable, Thai BL has emerged as a popular product that defines Thailand as a welcoming and productive society (Chao et al., 2020). As a result, Thailand has emerged as a global leader in BL content production and LGBTQIA+ representation in media. This success sets Thailand apart from many other countries.

The “Y Economy,” which includes BL productions, generates significant revenue through streaming, licensing and fan events, leading both the Thai government and entertainment sector to recognize and support this growing market. Thai BL series has found success both

domestically and internationally, particularly in other Asian markets like Japan, China, and South Korea. This has become part of Thailand's soft power strategy, helping position the country as a creative and inclusive society.

Consequently, this research aims to study cross-cultural communication with the help of the viewership of Thai BL (Boy Love) series in East Asia, focusing on China. China was selected because the country was the largest consumer of the Thai BL content in the region, providing a diverse social, cultural, technological, and economic context to analyze, and was overlooked regarding how it perceived Thai society through media consumption. The study also examined how many ways the Chinese viewers came into contact with the Thai culture, traditions, lifestyle, food, and tourist attractions via the BL series, since Thailand is Asia's leading producer of BL content.

As for research focus, the study explores the formats of content presentation utilized by BL series producers in Thailand, examining how these approaches effectively engage viewers both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, it investigates the components and factors of cross-cultural communication strategies embedded within the Thai BL series. By analyzing these strategies, the research aims to identify their role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and knowledge among viewers in China. Ultimately, the study seeks to determine how these insights can be leveraged to promote Thai culture on a larger scale, highlighting the potential of the BL series as a cultural export. The objectives are to study the content presentation formats of BL series produced in Thailand and to explore cross-cultural communication strategies employed in BL series, focusing on the components and factors that contribute to building knowledge of cross-cultural communication through Thai BL series in China, with the ultimate goal of promoting Thai culture on the global stage in forthcoming future. The findings of this research will help in understanding cross-cultural communication and will help in the growth of the Thai BL industry in promoting the Thai culture internationally. The paper is structured as follows: first, section two reviews the relevant literature and is followed by an explanation of the theoretical links under investigation. Sections three and four present the methodology and findings. Section five concludes the paper with a discussion on academic and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Theoretical Approaches to the Literature Review

This section aims to discuss the theoretical framework of the research and relevant studies that may relate to cross-cultural communicational strategies through the Thai BL (Boy Love) series in East Asia or all over the world. Key topics include intercultural communication, public diplomacy, soft power, and the influence of the entertainment and creative industries on the world stage, and its impact will have on the cottage industry that promotes Thai culture on the world stage.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication studies the process of interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds, focusing on the challenges and strategies. The concept introduced by Hall (1959) in the book *The Silent Language* highlighted how context, time, and space play a role in communication. To understand how message interpretation is influenced by cultural nuances, Hall's theories on high-context and low-context communication is always used. In addition, more tools are used to examine cultural values and characteristics, including Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1988) and Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (2010), including high and low power distance as well as individualism and collectivism dimensions. These theories can be used to explain how Thai BL series meet with East Asian viewers by conveying cultural messages to local preferences.

Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

Nye (1990) defines soft power as the ability to use culture, values, and policies to convince and persuade others rather than coercion. Public diplomacy leverages soft power to strengthen the image of a country internationally. Cultural exports such as films and literature are very critical in this process. However, the influence of such cultural exports can be complex in markets with sociopolitical restrictions. For instance, although Thai BL series are popular in China, their themes often contrast with state policies that limit LGBTQ+ visibility. This paradox highlights the nuanced role of media as a form of soft power that operates beyond formal diplomatic channels, subtly challenging cultural norms through entertainment. In this respect, the Thai boy love (BL) series is a good example of soft power that presents inclusivity, diversity, and romance. The relationships of LGBTQ+ can be depicted in alignment with global movements contributing to equality, making them appealing to international viewers. Nye's (1990) framework underlines how cultural products shape perceptions and foster goodwill between nations.

The Thai Entertainment Industry

Thailand's entertainment industry has grown significantly, driven by advancements in digital technology and global distribution platforms. The Thai BL series has emerged as a distinct genre, attracting viewers in East Asia and beyond. Initial successes, specifically *SOTUS* the Series and *2gether*, paved the way for a robust BL industry, characterized by high production values and storytelling relating to the viewers. Also, the industry's success is attributable to fan engagement strategies, particularly social media campaigns and merchandise sales. This participatory culture reinforces loyalty and expands market reach, while the performances of young, charismatic actors appeal to global viewers.

Creative Industries in East Asia

East Asia's creative industries, particularly in Japan, South Korea, and China, offer insights into Thai BL's success. Japan's yaoi genre, South Korea's Hallyu Wave, and China's increase in middle class illustrate the importance of cultural assets, innovation, and strategic investments in content creation. Specifically, Japan's yaoi genre provides the foundation for cross-cultural appreciation of similar narratives. For South Korea, the entertainment industry encourages content creators to drive economic growth, while China is showing a greater interest in diverse narratives, which paves the way for an opportunistic market for Thai BL series, amidst regulatory challenges.

Promoting Equality through Creative Industries

Creative industries embrace social change and inclusivity. Thai BL series pose challenges to traditional norms while advocating for greater acceptance of diverse identities, in accordance with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 10 on reducing inequalities. This means media representation significantly influences public attitudes. A 2020 GLAAD study found that inclusiveness encourages empathy and minimises prejudice. The Thai BL series contributes by normalising same-sex relationships while catering to the demand for diverse content.

Global Perspectives on Boy Love (BL) Media

BL media acts as a cultural bridge, fostering common understanding. McLelland et al. (2015) explore how yaoi and BL genres transcend cultural boundaries, while Jenkins (2006) premises participatory culture, emphasizing fan contributions through fan fiction and online discussions.

Cultural Adaptation in Media

The importance of customizing content to local contexts is under researched. Straubhaar (2007) refers this to cultural proximity, which influences viewer preference for culturally familiar media. Thai BL's combination of universal themes and culturally specific elements highlights the success of this approach.

LGBTQ+ Representation in Media

GLAAD's reports mark the benefits of inclusive storytelling. Scholars like Gray (2005) argue that visibility in media defies stereotypes and fosters acceptance. Some examples of Thai BL series are the trend with slightly different portrayals of LGBTQ+ relationships that resonate globally. In restrictive environments like China, this representation can generate both cultural resonance and institutional friction. While audiences may embrace inclusive narratives, governmental media policies may restrict distribution, leading to a tension between viewer demand and regulatory limitations. This tension is essential to understanding the limits and potential of cultural soft power through creative industries.

Conceptual Framework

East Asia's creative industries particularly China offers insights into Thai BL's success. China's increase in middle class depicts the importance of cultural assets, innovation and strategic investments in content creation.

Japan's yaoi genre laid the foundation for cross-cultural appreciation of similar narratives. When Thailand has adapted this, China's growing interest in diverse narratives makes it a promising market for Thai BL series, despite challenges from the regulations. In this study, the Thai Boy Love (BL) series serves as a medium for cross-cultural communication and cultural promotion. The framework includes:

- 1) **Intercultural Communication:** Examining cultural dimensions and communication styles in Thai BL narratives.
- 2) **Public Diplomacy and Soft Power:** Assessing how the Thai BL series enhances Thailand's cultural influence internationally.
- 3) **Creative Industry Dynamics:** Exploring fan engagement, digital platforms, and market strategies.
- 4) **Cultural Representation and Inclusivity:** Analyzing how these series promote understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities.

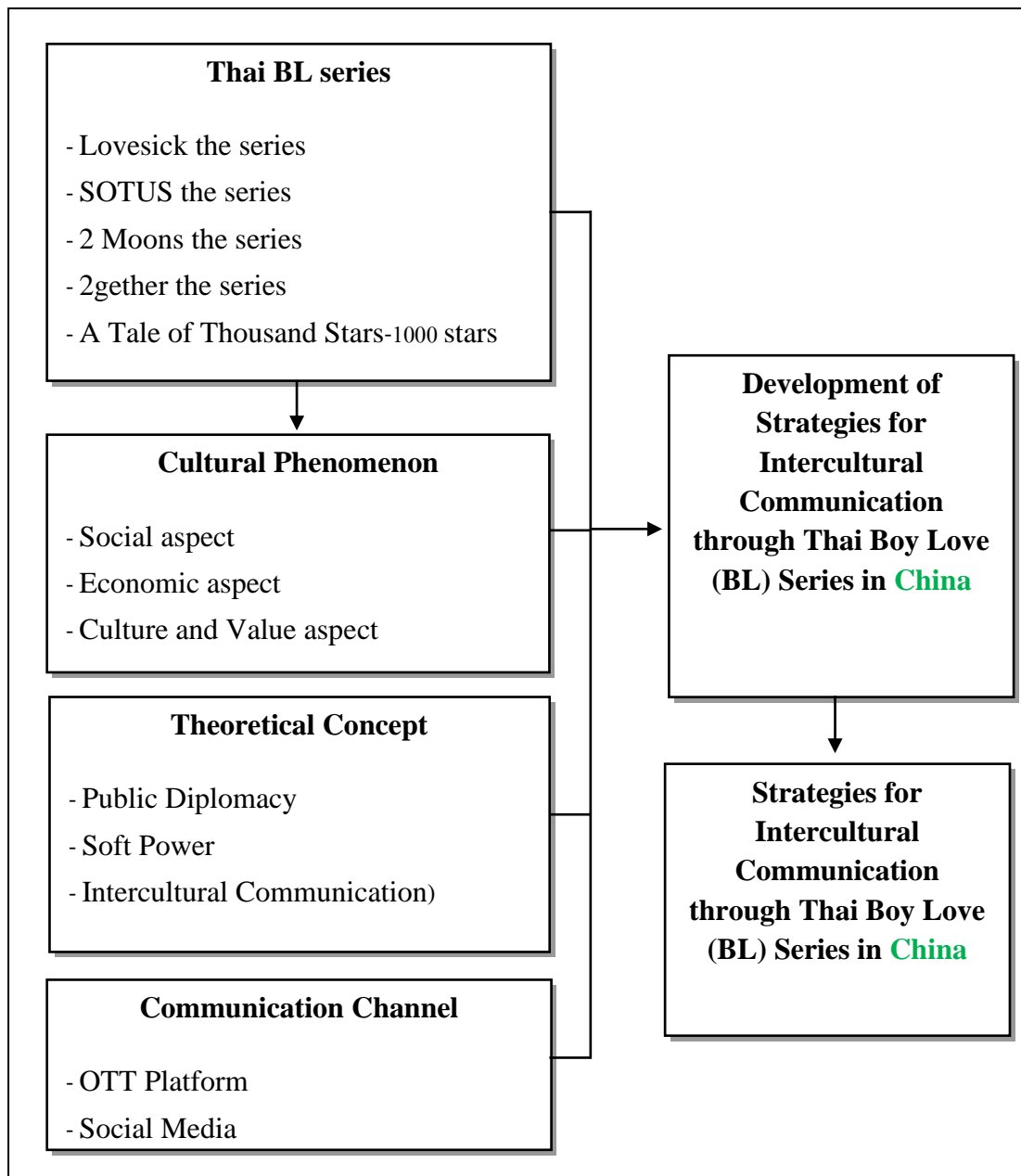


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

According to the Conceptual Framework, this study examines the content presentation strategies in five prominent Thai BL series: (1) Lovesick the Series, (2) SOTUS the Series, (3) 2 Moons the Series, (4) 2gether the Series and (5) A Tale of Thousand Stars - 1000 Stars. The literature review posits that the content of these series significantly influences cultural phenomena across three dimensions, including social, economic, and cultural values. The conceptual framework connects several variables and factors to explain the development of strategies for intercultural communication through the Thai Boy Love (BL) series in China. At the core are Thai BL series, including Lovesick, SOTUS, 2 Moons, 2gether, and *A Tale of Thousand Stars*, which serve as cultural products influencing multiple dimensions of cultural phenomena. These series have significant impacts on social, economic, and cultural aspects, shaping behaviors, generating financial contributions to industries like entertainment and tourism, and propagating Thai cultural values. The dissemination of these series occurs through communication channels such as OTT platforms (e.g., Netflix and YouTube) and social media, which amplify their reach and foster interactive engagement. The framework is

grounded in theoretical concepts like public diplomacy, soft power, and intercultural communication, which highlight the role of the BL series in promoting Thailand's global image, utilizing cultural influence, and bridging cultural gaps to foster understanding. Ultimately, these interconnected elements inform strategies to enhance intercultural communication, leveraging the popularity and reach of the Thai BL series to strengthen cultural dialogue and collaboration in China. These dimensions comply with the development of cross-cultural communication strategies tailored to three East Asian countries with special reference to China, South Korea, and Japan. The key communication channels that drive these strategies are OTT Platforms (e.g., Netflix, WeTV) and Social Media (e.g., Twitter, TikTok, Weibo). In sum, this study applies theories of intercultural communication, public diplomacy, and soft power as analytical frameworks. The ultimate goal is to develop a comprehensive body of knowledge on cross-cultural communication strategies through the Thai BL series, advancing Thai culture on the global stage and promoting its soft power internationally.

Research Methodology

Documentary Research

The study titled Intercultural Communication through Thai Boy Love (BL) Series in China is a qualitative research endeavor aimed at examining the presentation styles of BL series content by Thai producers and identifying the components and factors of intercultural communication strategies embedded in these series. The goal is to establish a body of knowledge on intercultural communication through the Thai BL series in East Asia. The study is structured into the following areas.

Table 1 Documentary research

| Research Problem | Instrument | Theoretical Concept |
|--|---|--|
| 1) Content Presentation Format How is the Y series of the Y series producers in Thailand? | Content Presentation Format How is the Y series of the Y series producers in Thailand? | - Thai Entertainment Industry - Creative Industry in East Asia - Ideas on Promoting Equality through Creative Industry |
| 2) What are the components and factors of intercultural communication strategies through Thai Y-series that lead to the creation of knowledge on intercultural communication through Thai Y-series in East Asia to push Thai culture to the international level? | Documentary Research Content Analysis In-depth Interview Focus Group | - Intercultural Communication Theory - Public Diplomacy and Soft Power - Creative Industry in East Asia |

Extensive data were collected from related documents including academic articles, research articles, research reports, textbooks and various documents as well as related websites related to international marketing communication through the creative industry specifically Thai Y-series both in Thailand and abroad in order to study the development of intercultural communication strategies through Thai Y-series in East Asia. The information and data were content analyzed. As a result, a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire was developed to collect information through in-depth interviews and a focus group about the following areas of investigation:

1) Content Presentation of Thai BL Series:

- Questions exploring narrative elements, character development, and production quality.
- Respondents were asked to evaluate factors influencing viewer engagement and cultural resonance.

2) Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies:

- Items assessing the effectiveness of communication styles adapted for international audiences.
- Questions targeted perceptions of Thai cultural representation and its impact on international viewers.

3) Audience Perceptions and Cultural Promotion

- Open-ended and Likert-scale questions examining the audience's awareness of Thai culture after consuming the BL series.
- Inquiries about emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to BL content

Primary Research

Once the documentary research was conducted extensively, which helped in designing a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire to collect primary data from key informants, the study selected five prominent Thai Boy Love (BL) series based on their cultural, social, and international impact to provide a comprehensive understanding of their role in cross-cultural communication. These series include:

1) Lovesick the Series (2014): This series was chosen as it marked the inception of the Thai BL genre, being the first to air on free TV and setting a precedent for the industry. Its success garnered several awards, such as the EFM Awards for Popular Drama, and led to sequels and fan meetings, establishing its influence on Thai and international audiences.

2) SOTUS the Series (2016): Known for its accolades, including the Attitude Award and KAZZ AWARDS, this series was instrumental in expanding the BL genre's appeal. It conducted fan meetings across Asia and Southeast Asia, reflecting its wide acceptance and popularity.

3) 2 Moons the Series (2017): This series received recognition for its iconic "Best Kiss Scene" at the LINE TV Awards and successfully expanded into spin-offs and international fan meetings. The actors further boosted the series' influence by transitioning into other entertainment avenues, such as a boy band.

4) 2gether the Series (2020): A landmark series with significant international reach, 2gether was broadcast in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Japan. It received numerous awards, including the Tokyo Drama Awards, and created global social media trends like #Kangoo. Its widespread recognition solidified Thai BL's position in international media.

5) A Tale of Thousand Stars - 1000 Stars (2021): This series was selected for its critical acclaim, winning awards like the Content Asia Awards for Best LGBTQ+ Programme. It also gained international recognition with accolades such as the Special Award for Foreign Drama at the Tokyo Drama Awards.

Data Collection and Sample

The study included two main approaches: in-depth interviews and a focus group, each with specific populations and methods of data collection and analysis. For the in-depth interviews, the study targeted 15 key informants selected through purposive sampling. These informants included three directors of Thai BL series, three cultural experts specializing in BL culture, three authors of Thai BL novels, three international marketing communication experts, and three specialists in creative industry promotion: the aim was to gather insights into the strategies for intercultural communication through Thai BL series. For the focus group, the sample comprised 7 participants from China. These participants were selected using snowball sampling, based on their familiarity with and interest in Thai BL series. The participants resided in Thailand during the study period, were proficient in either Thai or English, and represented diverse perspectives on the global reception of Thai BL content.

Data collection for the in-depth interviews was conducted both face-to-face and online, ensuring flexibility and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi-structured interview questions guided the discussions, beginning with general inquiries before focusing on specific strategies for intercultural communication. Similarly, the focus group discussion was conducted online to accommodate safety protocols. The semi-structured questions, translated into English, facilitated in-depth discussions on participants' perspectives on the Thai BL series and their expectations for future developments in promoting Thai culture through this series.

The data analysis for both methods used thematic analysis, incorporating theoretical frameworks such as intercultural communication theories, public diplomacy, soft power, and principles of equality in creative industries. The analysis categorized findings into themes aligned with the study's objectives, focusing on strategies to promote the Thai BL series and integrate Thai culture into a global context. This structured methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how the Thai BL series can serve as a medium for intercultural communication and cultural promotion.

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To enhance methodological robustness, future research should incorporate quantitative approaches such as large-scale survey data from diverse Chinese audiences. This would complement qualitative insights and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, comparative analysis with other Asian markets like Japan and South Korea could provide broader perspectives on intercultural communication strategies across the region. Moreover, thematic analysis of public discourse on Chinese digital platforms such as Weibo would offer valuable insights into viewer sentiment and reception of Thai BL content. To increase transparency and allow better application of this study's research process, table 2 provides an overview of the key characteristics of the respondents in both the in-depth interviews and the focus group.

Table 2 Overview of Research Participants

| Method | Number of Participants | Role/Expertise | Age Range | Gender | Nationality Detail | Average Duration |
|--------------------|------------------------|---|-----------|--------|--|------------------|
| In-depth Interview | 15 | BL Series Directors (3), BL Authors (3), Cultural Experts (3), Creative Industry Experts (3), Marketing Experts (3) | 30-55 | Mixed | Thai (15) | 45-60 mins |
| Focus Group | 7 | Chinese BL Viewers residing in Thailand | 20-35 | Mixed | Mainland Chinese (5), Malaysian-Chinese (1), Singaporean-Chinese (1) | 60-75 mins |

Data Analysis and Thematic Coding

The data obtained from in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion were analyzed using thematic coding. All transcripts were manually reviewed and initially open-coded. Codes were then grouped into broader categories and refined into overarching themes, following Braun & Clarke's (2023) six-phase approach. Recurring concepts such as "cultural relatability," "emotional engagement," and "digital access" emerged across both datasets. Points of agreement among interviewees were identified to enhance analytical consistency. For example, all cultural experts emphasized the role of local storytelling in fostering intercultural appeal, while focus group participants commonly highlighted the importance of BL narratives in challenging gender norms. These patterns were used to construct the core themes discussed in the findings section.

Research Results

The analysis of data and findings for this study was centered on examining the Thai Boy Love (BL) series as a medium of cross-cultural communication and the potential for promoting Thai culture in East Asia. The analytical process employed content analysis in a systematic manner to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and communicative dynamics of these series. The five selected Thai BL series (*Lovesick*, *SOTUS*, *2 Moons*, *2gether*, and *A Tale of Thousand Stars*) were analysed for their narrative structure, representation of relationships, and cultural elements. Key findings indicated that the lead actors, storyline, and production quality significantly influenced audience engagement. The narratives avoided traditional gender stereotypes, presenting characters with depth and relatability. Storylines were grounded in contemporary contexts, often reflecting university life and modern relationships, which resonated with young, urban audiences.

Social Media and Communication Channels

X (Twitter) emerged as a dominant communication platform, playing a critical role in promoting the BL series. The platform's global reach and the use of hashtags facilitated widespread engagement, discussion, and viewership. Other channels, including Instagram and word-of-mouth, also contributed to the visibility and popularity of the series.

Audience Insights

The primary viewer for Thai BL series consisted predominantly of women, particularly younger viewers from Generation Z and Millennials. These viewers were drawn to the series for their unique portrayal of LGBTQ+ relationships, high production values and emotional storytelling. Moreover, international fans especially from China, Japan and South Korea appreciated the cultural authenticity and universal themes of love and acceptance.

Cultural and Economic Impact

The Thai BL industry demonstrated its potential as a soft power tool. The increasing international popularity of these series has bolstered Thailand's image as an inclusive and progressive society. Economically, the industry generated significant revenue through content licensing, merchandise, and fan events both domestically and internationally.

Key Results

The findings highlight the cultural adaptability and universal appeal of the Thai BL series, which aligns with the principles of intercultural communication. The integration of modern and traditional Thai elements into storytelling made these series highly relatable and appreciated by diverse audiences. Additionally, the industry's innovative marketing strategies and effective use of digital platforms have amplified its global influence. These insights underscore the potential of the Thai BL series not only as a form of entertainment but also as a strategic medium for fostering intercultural understanding and promoting Thai culture on an international stage. The results also provide a foundation for developing targeted communication strategies to expand the reach and impact of this genre.

Conclusion and Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The analysis and results of this research shed light on the interconnectedness of intercultural communication, public diplomacy, and soft power, particularly in the context of the Thai Boy Love (BL) series and their impact in China. Drawing from theories such as Edward T. Hall's (1959) high- and low-context cultures and Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimensions, the study reinforces the notion that effective cross-cultural media strategies must align with the cultural preferences of target audiences.

The findings also highlight the significant role of media as a tool for cultural promotion and identity shaping, resonating with Joseph Nye's (1990) concept of soft power. Thai BL series, through their nuanced storytelling and representation of LGBTQ+ themes, serve as vehicles of public diplomacy, subtly showcasing Thai values of inclusivity and cultural richness to international audiences. Moreover, the study emphasizes the dynamic interplay between cultural adaptation and global media consumption. The success of the Thai BL series in East Asia underscores the importance of cultural proximity, a concept explored by Straubhaar (2007), where the blending of universal themes and localized elements fosters emotional resonance with diverse audiences. This reinforces the adaptability of Thai creative industries in responding to regional and global cultural trends. Through this lens, the study contributes to broader discussions on cultural hybridity, illustrating how cross-cultural media facilitates cultural exchange and mutual understanding. These insights align with the goals of global communication studies (Nye, 1990; Straubhaar, 2007), advocating for media that bridges cultural divides while preserving unique cultural identities.

Recent scholarship highlights the evolving role of the BL series as digital cultural products that travel across borders and negotiate sociopolitical constraints (Baudinette, 2023). These works contribute to understanding how Thai BL content becomes both an emotional and political resource in restricted markets like China.

In sum, the theoretical framework validates the potential of the Thai BL series as a model for leveraging media in cross-cultural communication, offering practical implications for the development of cultural strategies aimed at promoting inclusivity and fostering international collaboration.

Managerial Implications

The findings from this research offer valuable insights for practitioners in the media, entertainment, and cultural promotion sectors. Managers and producers of the Thai Boy Love (BL) series can leverage these insights to enhance their strategies for content creation, marketing, and distribution, ensuring greater international success and cultural resonance.

1) Targeted Content Creation: The study highlights the importance of blending universal themes of love and acceptance with localised cultural elements to appeal to diverse audiences. Producers should continue incorporating Thai cultural values, settings, and traditions into BL series while ensuring narratives resonate with the target demographics, particularly in China. This approach fosters both global appeal and cultural authenticity.

1.1) Digital Distribution Strategies: OTT platforms and social media emerged as critical channels for reaching international audiences. Managers should invest in partnerships with global streaming platforms like Netflix, iQIYI, and WeTV to increase visibility and accessibility. Additionally, leveraging platforms such as Twitter and TikTok for fan engagement and marketing campaigns can amplify the series' reach, create viral trends, and foster a loyal global fanbase. Recent research suggests that partnerships with OTT platforms such as Tencent Video and Bilibili are effective in bypassing formal censorship through segmented content (Zeng, 2024).

1.2) Audience Engagement and Community Building: The participatory culture of BL series fans underscores the importance of community engagement. Managers should facilitate fan

interactions through events such as virtual meet-and-greets, fan conventions, and exclusive content offerings. Supporting online communities and engaging with fans through social media can strengthen brand loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth promotion.

1.3) Merchandise and Ancillary Revenue Streams: The success of the Thai BL series as soft power tools also opens avenues for revenue generation through merchandise, such as branded apparel, collectibles, and themed experiences. Developing cross-promotional opportunities, such as licensing series-related products or organizing tours based on popular series locations, can expand revenue streams while promoting Thai culture. Studies show that fan-driven e-commerce in Asia contributes up to 25% of annual revenues in niche cultural sectors like BL (Salathong, 2024)

1.4) Cross-Cultural Collaboration: To further their international impact, managers should explore co-productions and partnerships with companies in target regions, such as China, South Korea, and Japan. Collaborative projects can foster mutual understanding, increase market penetration, and create content that reflects a fusion of cultural elements, enhancing both relatability and market appeal.

1.5) Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity: The Thai BL series has gained recognition for its representation of LGBTQ+ themes, resonating with global movements for equality and inclusion. Managers should continue to prioritize diversity in casting, storytelling, and production teams to reinforce their commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that their content remains socially relevant and widely appreciated.

By implementing these strategies, managers in the Thai BL series industry can strengthen their global position, promote Thai culture effectively, and contribute to the industry's economic growth. These implications also provide a framework for leveraging the success of the Thai BL series as a model for cross-cultural communication and soft power promotion.

1.6) Navigating Policy Challenges and Strengthening Cultural Diplomacy: Given the restrictive media environment in China, particularly regarding LGBTQ+ content, Thai BL series face significant regulatory hurdles in terms of accessibility and distribution. These censorship policies limit the formal airing or streaming of content deemed inappropriate, despite the high demand from Chinese viewers. To address these challenges, Thai media producers should explore adaptive strategies such as creating alternative narrative versions that retain core cultural messages but comply with local policies. Additionally, establishing formal partnerships with Chinese media platforms and content reviewers can facilitate smoother distribution. On a broader level, Thailand's cultural diplomacy efforts can benefit from promoting intercultural exchange through government-supported soft power initiatives, such as cross-border creative industry dialogues and regional media forums. These policies could help sustain Thai cultural presence while maintaining respect for host country regulations.

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of the Thai BL series in cross-cultural communication and cultural promotion, it is not without limitations. The research focuses on China - the largest consumer of Thai BL series in East Asia - which, while a significant market, excludes other countries in Asia as well as countries in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. This geographic limitation reduces the generalizability of the findings. The sampling approach, though purposive and relevant, may not fully capture the diversity of audience perspectives, particularly among less active or marginalized groups. Furthermore, the study reflects a specific moment in time, and the rapidly evolving media landscape could affect the applicability of its findings in the future. In addition, the exclusive focus on the BL genre may limit the transferability of the insights to other cultural products such as mainstream films or music. Future research should expand the geographic scope to include other global markets and adopt longitudinal methods to track evolving trends. Comparative studies with cultural products from other countries could further illuminate the

unique appeal of Thai BL series. Finally, exploring the socio-political implications of these series particularly their influence on LGBTQ+ rights and cultural perceptions, would deepen understanding of their global impact.

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